PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 410 (Part 1)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2002–03

COMPRISING PERIOD
8 September—6 October 2003

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8 September 2003

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTY-SECOND YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 410**

SEVENTEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2002–2003

House of Commons

Monday 8 September 2003

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Eurofighter

2. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): If he will make a statement on the date of entry into service of the Eurofighter. [128418]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): As I announced in my written statement on 30 June, Eurofighter Typhoon achieved type acceptance on that day, triggering the process of bringing the aircraft into service with the Royal Air Force. That process is going well. Test flying is now under way to establish the safety parameters for RAF pilot training, and we hope to start operational evaluation activities next month.

Miss McIntosh: I thank the Defence Secretary for that answer. He is aware of the tremendous contribution of those based at RAF Leeming and RAF Linton, and in Dishforth air brigade and Alanbrooke barracks in the conflict in Iraq. Will he assure the House that the commitment to purchase 232 Typhoon aircraft will be carried out in full and will be delivered on time? When does he expect those aircraft to enter into service at RAF Leeming?

Mr. Hoon: I join the hon. Lady in paying tribute to all members of the armed forces based in her constituency who have served in Iraq, and all those who have supported those who have served in Iraq. I give her the assurance that there will be no changes in the Government's plans for procuring Eurofighter Typhoon. We anticipate changes to the way in which those aircraft are configured, but those matters will be set out more clearly in the forthcoming White Paper.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): My right hon. Friend will be aware that many of my constituents work on the Eurofighter in Lancashire. I am sure that he would wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the workmanship of the employees of BAE Systems for their work on the Eurofighter Typhoon and on the Hawk jet advanced trainer. May I thank him for the recent order for trainers for our armed forces, as a result of which there has been an order from the Indian Government for those planes? The fact that those orders have been given shows the skill and integrity of our work force.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am tempted to say that he has left me little to add to his comments. Lately, I have been in regular negotiations with BAE Systems, and one of the strongest arguments put forward by the company is the quality, consistency and reliability of its work force.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): What consideration has been given to the marinisation of the Eurofighter to enable it to fly off the two new aircraft

carriers? If the specification of the aircraft carriers is to be reduced, will the Eurofighter still be an appropriate plane to fly off them?

Mr. Hoon: That was the subject of a significant discussion that took place when options for those aircraft carriers were being considered. Those issues were resolved largely by our decision to purchase the joint strike fighter. If the hon. Gentleman considers carefully the way in which an aircraft could be made suitable for flying off a carrier, he will realise that it is not merely a question of adding a few nuts and bolts here and there to convert it. It becomes a completely new aircraft, and that was not possible.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): Hawk aircraft are essential to train pilots for the Eurofighter. The recent Government announcement was welcomed by my constituents who work at BAE Systems in Brough. What action does my right hon. Friend intend to take further to promote Hawk aircraft internationally to secure those jobs at Brough for the long term?

Mr. Hoon: Well over 2,000 jobs have been sustained at Brough as a result of the decision to which my hon. Friend referred. She is right to pay tribute to the quality of the work force at Brough. We are already seeing the benefit of the decision on the purchase of Hawk 128 with the welcome news of the Indian Government's order for Hawk as their advanced jet trainer. I anticipate that that will be the first of many further orders for Hawk.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): In echoing the remarks of the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow), and given the Secretary of State's reply to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh), may I ask him when he expects the decision to be made on the signing for tranche 2? People are busy on tranche 1, but they want to know that there will be continuity for the Eurofighter, and a response on tranche 2 would be appreciated.

Mr. Hoon: That decision is on track, and I shall inform the House as soon as it has been taken.

Iraq

3. **Mr. Andrew Mackay** (Bracknell): If he will make a statement on troop levels in Iraq. [128419]

6. **Mr. Clive Soley** (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): If he will make a statement on the peacekeeping role of UK troops in Iraq. [128423]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): As this is the first opportunity for the House to consider the situation in Iraq since mid-July, I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will understand if I give a detailed response.

Security in Iraq remains a significant priority for the coalition provisional authority. Coalition forces have continued to sustain losses and injuries, including the deaths of a further seven United Kingdom servicemen. In addition, we have seen a disturbing increase in terrorism directed against civilian targets, in particular the despicable attacks on the Jordanian embassy and the UN headquarters, the bomb in An Najaf on 29 August and the most recent killing, of a British mine disposal expert.

The House will want to extend its condolences to the families and friends of those, military and civilian, who have died trying to provide a better future for the people of Iraq.

Long-term security is the key to building a politically stable and economically secure Iraq. The coalition has already trained the Iraqi police force, now 37,000 strong, the 14,000 members of the facilities protection service and the 2,500-strong Iraqi border police. Efforts are also under way to accelerate the recruitment and training of 18 battalions of the Iraqi civil defence corps. Those important new Iraqi security structures are crucial for the country's future stability, and we aim to increase substantially the numbers of all of those over the coming months in order to free coalition troops for more dynamic security-related operations.

In addition, British forces continue to make a crucial contribution to maintaining security and peace in Iraq. We currently retain more than 10,000 UK servicemen and women in the country, taking part in a wide range of operations from the borders of Iraq to the southern interior. Those include both traditional military security-related tasks and supporting the civilian-led reconstruction process.

Following a formal review, the UK divisional commander in theatre has requested that we bolster the capabilities available to him. There is an immediate requirement for two battalions and some additional specialist personnel. As I made clear in my written statement to the House today, those additional troops, the majority of whom will be contributed by 2nd Battalion the Light Infantry and 1st Battalion the Royal Green Jackets, will be deploying for two specific reasons. First, they will allow commanders in theatre to increase their proactive efforts to improve wider security across the area of operations. Secondly, they will allow them to respond appropriately to the increasing demands resulting from the accelerated reconstruction programme being undertaken by the Department for International Development and the coalition provisional authority.

That essential programme will deliver—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister is making a statement.

Mr. Mackay: May I put it to the Secretary of State that his overlong answer is a good illustration as to why there should have been an oral statement? [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] It is a disgrace. In my 20 years in the House, I have never known a Secretary of State for Defence not give an oral statement to the House when so many troops have been deployed. Is not the simple truth that post-conflict Iraq is a shambles because there was no proper planning, which means that although we won the war we are in danger of losing the peace, due to the incompetence of the Secretary of State and his colleagues?

Mr. Hoon: I do not accept that for a moment, and I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman takes that view.

Given that Defence questions are taking place today, that the Foreign Secretary is making a statement on the situation in Iraq immediately afterwards, and that there is a defence debate tomorrow and a further one on Thursday, there is ample opportunity for Members of the House to debate the situation in Iraq.

Mr. Soley: My right hon. Friend will recall that the British armed forces have a remarkably successful track record not only in peacekeeping but in training the armed forces of other countries. Has not it been clear for some considerable time that the most urgent task is to train an Iraqi army to take over security in that country? Will he make sure that any additional troops that we deploy are used for that purpose because that is the key to this difficult area of policy?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend is right to emphasise the importance not only of preserving security by using coalition forces but of using them so well to train a range of security forces in Iraq. He is right also to emphasise the need to train an Iraqi army, but in addition, as I indicated to the House a few moments ago, it is important to have an effective, growing police force, with static patrolling, as well as the various border police who are being trained. We want to see, as soon as possible, the transfer of security responsibilities to Iraqis, so that they can take responsibility for their own affairs. That is a matter of urgency for the Government.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I join the Secretary of State in paying tribute to our armed forces in Iraq and elsewhere. In particular, I pay tribute to those who have given their lives since the House last met to discuss these matters.

I fully concur with my right hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. Mackay). In the absence of a full oral statement to the House of Commons, it is we, the Opposition, who have tabled a motion to discuss these matters tomorrow, in Opposition time. We had to do so because Thursday's debate is entitled "Defence in the UK", which will not give us the opportunity to discuss matters in Iraq.

This reinforcement underlines the fact that the Government's policy in Iraq is a shambles. Moreover, today's written statement says that the Secretary of State may yet send further reinforcements. He still does not have a plan that is fully formed. We were reassured before the conflict that plans were already in place for the reconstruction of Iraq. Can he tell the House why that has gone wrong, or does he not recall attending any meetings about the reconstruction of Iraq?

Mr. Hoon: The plan is the plan set out clearly by the Major-General who has responsibility on the ground. He has carefully reviewed the military situation and judges it necessary to have more troops given the present situation.

It is important also that we make urgent progress on improving infrastructure in southern Iraq, especially the availability of electricity, fuel and water. Those basic, essential commodities of life have been threatened not by resistance to our presence in Iraq but largely by criminal elements in that country. We want to see significant and sustained improvement in that infrastructure. It will therefore require protecting if it is to have an impact. I should have thought that all right hon. and hon. Members would support such an approach.

Mr. Jenkin: I certainly agree that further troops are required to be deployed, but the reason for that is the Government's failure to implement the reconstruction programme to which the right hon. Gentleman refers. It is not good enough for him to hide behind his military advice. Does he know what the military objectives of UK forces are? What are the benchmarks for their success? What are the target dates for the achievement of those benchmarks, or is this part of a Foreign Office-led initiative that was leaked last week? For once, will the right hon. Gentleman take responsibility for what is going on in his Department, or is he still playing the part of the "Not me, guv" Secretary of State?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman has just asked the same question again. Tempted though I am to repeat the answer, I shall not do so. It is important that all Secretaries of State take military advice, not substitute their own judgments in the way in which the hon. Gentleman appears tempted to do. Secondly, it is important to ensure that that is part of a co-ordinated plan—that is co-ordinated not only with Government Departments in this country but with our ally, the United States. I would be interested to know whether the hon. Gentleman's criticisms of the situation in Iraq extend to the United States.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is it not important for agreement to be reached in the Security Council for troops to come from many other countries, including Muslim ones? Should not such an agreement, if it be reached, mean that the countries sending troops will have a political say in the future of Iraq? Surely we want to get rid of the notion that only Britain and the United States are deciding the future of that country.

Mr. Hoon: I agree with my hon. Friend to the extent that the United Kingdom, together with the United States, has led the effort to promote a new Security Council resolution on Iraq. I anticipate that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will be dealing with that in more detail in a moment. I would not want my hon. Friend or the House to leave with the idea that only British and American forces are deployed in Iraq. The forces of some 25 countries are in Iraq already, and the forces of about seven of those countries are playing a full part in the United Kingdom's area of responsibility in the south.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): I begin by adding our support to the new forces for Iraq announced by the Secretary of State, and we join in the condolences for those recently killed. Whatever reservations we had about the conflict, if our commanders on the ground require additional forces, they should be sent.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that the additional troops being sent into theatre today will receive the desert equipment and transport that they require so that they will not have to rely on locally hired vehicles? Does he anticipate any future call-up of reservists in the near

future for help in Iraq? We welcome the emphasis that is placed on training local Iraqi forces, but on reflection was the coalition wrong to disband the Iraqi army?

Mr. Hoon: As for transport, I anticipate that not only will there be extra forces but there will be appropriate extra equipment as requested by the theatre commander. We have recently made an announcement about the call-up of reservists. I anticipate that, consistent with the usual practice, we have sent out more notices than the number of reservists that we will require, given the numbers of those who will be exempt on appropriate grounds. It is important that we develop a properly trained and modern Iraqi army to deal with the present situation, and not an army that clings to the past and to the regime of Saddam Hussein.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): Does my right hon. Friend accept that no reasonable Member could object to the reinforcements necessary for the security of our troops in that sector? However, does he also accept that those of us who had doubts about whether it was wise to go into Iraq in the first place have not had those doubts removed by today's announcement? Was my right hon. Friend aware of the reservations of his defence intelligence staff about the September dossier—for instance that the 45-minute claim was based on nebulous intelligence? If he was, how was it that the House and the Cabinet were presented with a dossier that did not reflect the reservations of his own intelligence experts?

Mr. Hoon: As for reinforcements, I accept that for people like my right hon. Friend who had reservations about the deployment at the time, it may well be that such reinforcements are not persuasive. All I would say is that given the situation on the ground now and the importance of resolving it, I hope that he and those who had doubts will join me in hoping that those reinforcements will be the first step to rebuilding Iraq as a peaceful, successful and prosperous member of the international community. As for the question of intelligence, he knows from his previous responsibilities that intelligence questions of that kind are resolved, as they are required to be resolved, through the Joint Intelligence Committee machinery—something set up as long ago as the late 1950s. If hon. Members look carefully at the situation that arose after Suez, they will see that those intelligence matters were resolved by the JIC, not by departmental discussion.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): The Secretary of State will be aware that I, too, share doubts about the grounds on which we went into Iraq. It was almost inevitable that doubts about legitimacy would make the peace much more difficult. While I welcome the arrival of more troops and hope for their safety, does the Secretary of State not understand that until we get political legitimacy in Iraq right, our troops will be vulnerable? Will he try to reassure the House that measures are being taken to bring in Pakistani, Indian, Egyptian and Turkish troops, which will depend on a political resolution in the United Nations?

Mr. Hoon: There are two aspects to political legitimacy. There is the aspect to which the hon. Gentleman referred—the importance, as I have said already, of a new Security Council resolution involving a still wider coalition of international forces. I have no argument with that, but, equally, political legitimacy depends on ensuring security in Iraq is sufficient to allow Iraqis themselves to engage in the process of government. Significant progress has been made on that, but we want more, and we want the Government of Iraq to be handed over to the Iraqi people. We want that to happen as quickly as possible. That, too, is an aspect of political legitimacy.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): To avoid a further slide into instability, clearly these immediate reinforcements are necessary. Surely, however, we also need to look beyond the existing coalition partners and the seven key countries that have provided troops thus far. What is my right hon. Friend's estimate of the time that it will take from the making of a decision to bring in other countries—India, Pakistan, Morocco and Turkey—so that they can make a full contribution to Iraq's stability?

Mr. Hoon: My right hon. Friend is right to sound a note of caution—there is always a delay between a political agreement and the consequential deployment of forces. However, I am confident, given the progress that we have made so far in preliminary discussions in the United Nations, that a further resolution will be forthcoming. It will then be the task, not least of the United Kingdom, to persuade a number of other countries to deploy their own forces in support of that resolution.

Sir Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that there is a continuing concern about heat-related illness in theatre? Is he satisfied that our serving forces are adequately protected, and how long will it be before 100 per cent. of our serving soldiers have some access to air conditioning?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise that issue. I know that other right hon. and hon. Members are similarly concerned. The deployment takes place on the basis of the best possible medical advice and determined efforts are made to ensure that that medical advice reaches every last serviceman and woman, and appropriate steps are taken. Where there is a concern that a soldier is suffering from the effects of heat, that person is withdrawn from theatre, if that is judged necessary.

Cyprus

10. **Mr. Nick Hawkins** (Surrey Heath): If he will make a statement on the threat from terrorism to UK forces in Cyprus. [128427]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): All threats to United Kingdom forces in Cyprus are carefully monitored and contingency plans are in place to handle a range of eventualities, including the possibility of terrorist attack.

Mr. Hawkins: As the Minister is well aware, I have many constituents serving in the Royal Logistic Corps and other regiments stationed on the sovereign bases on Cyprus or working as troops under UN command. Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that there are many of us in all parts of the House who take an interest in Cyprus and who are concerned at the potential risks to our forces there? Is he prepared to meet those of us who take an interest in Cyprus to discuss those concerns? Will he confirm that the Government intend to keep in regular touch with President Tassos Papadopoulos and the Government of the Republic of Cyprus on any terrorist threats to the sovereign bases or to the Republic of Cyprus?

Mr. Caplin: I know of the hon. Gentleman's interest in the matter, and the interest taken by the entire House. There are many parliamentary groups that represent the interests of Cyprus. Clearly, the important thing for us is protection of our armed forces, and I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that that is one of our highest priorities in Cyprus. I will be happy to meet him and other colleagues, as I am sure would others in the Ministry.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Cyprus is one of the countries that last year's Iraq dossier clearly implied could be attacked at 45 minutes' notice. How does that square with John Scarlett's evidence to the Hutton inquiry that the 45 minutes referred to battlefield mortars and small-calibre weaponry—clearly not weapons of mass destruction capable of reaching Cyprus? So to which weapons was the Prime Minister referring in his own preface when he stated that Iraq's military planning

"allows for some of the WMD to be ready within 45 minutes of an order to use them"?

Perhaps the Secretary of State's special adviser might be able to give us a more accurate answer.

Mr. Caplin: We stand by our assessment in the dossier of 24 September. That element of the threat has been significantly reduced by the recent operations in Iraq.

Balkans

11. **Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip-Northwood): If he will make a statement on the security situation in the Balkans. [128428]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The overall security situation in the Balkans remains stable.

Mr. Wilkinson: Can the Minister then explain why the European Union has not yet taken over control of the peacekeeping elements of the Alliance in Bosnia? Why has NATO maintained its command structure in that area? Does the Minister foresee a change in the current arrangements?

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman is aware that the autumn periodic mission review is being carried out by NATO and that will condition our thinking about the NATO posture in the months ahead. The close relationship between NATO and the EU looking towards the future structure in Bosnia will continue and we will work in harmony to achieve that end.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Following the assassination of Zoran Djindjic on 12 March in Belgrade, a state of emergency was declared and more than a thousand people were detained by the Serbian police. There have been widespread allegations that torture is being used to extract information from those who have been arrested. Could the Minister tell the House what observations and knowledge he has of that?

Mr. Ingram: I can give my hon. Friend an absolute assurance that where there is any breach of human rights in any of the areas where we have an interest and personnel on the ground, we would carry out the actions required to ensure full compliance with human rights. I point out to my hon. Friend that it is not just a matter of the United Kingdom's interest in the matter—it is the United Nations and all the other nations that are trying to make sure that the Balkans and Bosnia come into the comity of nations as part of the overall objectives that we are seeking by our presence on the ground there.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): How long has the badly overstretched British Army been in Kosovo, and how long does the Secretary of State expect it to remain there?

Mr. Ingram: Until the job is done.

Afghanistan

13. **Linda Gilroy** (Plymouth, Sutton): If he will make a statement on the security situation in Afghanistan. [128430]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): We and our allies in NATO, in the coalition and more widely, continue to work to help the Afghan people bring greater security to their country. The United Kingdom's contribution to that effort is significant. We are an important troop contributor to the international security assistance force in Kabul. We lead the provincial reconstruction team in Mazar-e-Sharif and we are active in support for security sector reform.

Linda Gilroy: Given the tragic death of the two American soldiers in August, and given the attacks on non-governmental organisations such as Save the Children, may I press my right hon. Friend to say more about how the provincial reconstruction teams can be enabled to provide security throughout Afghanistan?

Mr. Hoon: I share my hon. Friend's concern about the deaths of not just members of the armed forces but of

those working for NGOs—working hard to reconstruct Afghanistan. The whole point of the provincial reconstruction teams, however, is not just to provide a degree of military security but to bring together representatives of the Department for International Development and the Foreign Office so that they can unite in development work, and enable people in places such as Mazar-e-Sharif to feel reasonably confident that there is an international interest in development—and, crucially, that there is a central Government in Kabul who are responsible for the entire country.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Does the Secretary of State think it fair to say that the interim Government in Afghanistan have a reasonable amount of control over the metropolitan areas, but no influence or authority in the south-east? If that is so, does he accept that, while NATO has control at present—which I personally welcome—it is essential that the United States forces remain part of that NATO force?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman's description of the situation in Afghanistan might have been accurate six months ago, when there was concern about the inability of the Government in Kabul to extend their authority elsewhere in the country. During those six months, however, the situation has improved steadily, and there are now clear signs that the Government in Kabul are extending their authority around the country. I accept that the south-east is experiencing some of the problems that are the most difficult to overcome—remnants of the Taliban remain in parts of the area—but there has been significant progress during those six months.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): Does my right hon. Friend believe that the position of women in Afghanistan and their human rights are now better than they were before the confrontation with the country?

Mr. Hoon: Their position is undoubtedly better than it was in the days of the Taliban. Schools have opened, women are being educated, and a much fairer, more tolerant society is developing. That is not to deny that there is still considerable progress to be made.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the Pakistani and Afghan Governments' continuing concern about the number of al-Qaeda terrorists who are allegedly operating from Pakistan back into Afghanistan? Has he been asked to provide any extra special forces, and will he support the Americans in their endeavours to deal with this acute problem?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight a particular area of difficulty. The border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan has been a source of difficulty not just since this particular conflict, but for hundreds of years. It provides a safe haven for terrorists who move from one country to the other to escape the security authorities on both sides of the border. What we need, and what we have been encouraging, is action by the two Governments working closely together, and working closely with coalition forces. We continue to try to bring that about.

Strategic Defence Review

14. **Ms Dari Taylor** (Stockton, South): What measures are being taken to improve the ability of Britain's armed forces to be more rapidly deployable as set out in the strategic defence review. [128431]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The 1998 strategic defence review established the concept of the joint rapid reaction force to provide more capable, more deployable and better-supported joint forces. In order to ensure its deployability, we have greatly enhanced our strategic air and sealift capability through the leasing of four C-17 aircraft and the phased acquisition of 25 new C-130Js and 25 A400M aircraft, six ro-ro vessels and a number of new ships to support amphibious and sea-based operations. The landing platform helicopter, HMS Ocean, together with our two new carriers planned to be in service in 2012 and 2015 respectively, provide a valuable additional capability in support of rapid deployment operations. All that represents a significant enhancement of the current and future mobility of our armed forces, the value of which has been demonstrated time and again, most recently in Sierra Leone, in Afghanistan and obviously in Iraq.

Ms Taylor: In thanking my right hon. Friend for that frankly excellent reply, may I ask him as he prepares the defence White Paper to ensure that the new structures for the armed forces, if there are to be such structures, and the equipment provided for them are the best available? We ask our armed forces to do an increasingly complex task and they deserve the best. In his considerations, will he look at language training for the armed forces, particularly the infantry? I think that that is more and more of a requirement. Finally, does he agree—

Mr. Speaker: Order. That makes two questions.

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend will recall that when I announced the £3.5 billion extra spending in the defence budget last year, I said that the additional resources for defence were a mandate for accelerating the modernisation and evolution of the armed forces. I am sure that that extends to language training as well. I have set out to the House on many occasions the need to adapt our armed forces to changes in the strategic environment and technology. In doing so, we need to apply the lessons of recent operations, focusing on what can be achieved—on the effects—and move away from a rather outdated approach that simply counts the number of platforms and units.

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup): Is the Secretary of State content with the quality and availability of kit deployable at company and battalion infantry level in the theatres in which our troops are now working? Despite whatever difficulties he is experiencing at the moment, the jury on supplies and services to our front-line troops will be very harsh on him indeed if he continues to behave as he is and send men and women into active theatre without decent and serviceable equipment.

Mr. Hoon: I simply do not accept that that has been done. While there is always a necessary trade-off

between efficiency and delivery, I assure the hon. Gentleman that no decisions are taken to allow our forces to go into dangerous situations without the appropriate equipment. What is important is that we reach our destination quickly. If we simply wait for every last piece of equipment to be available, the rapid deployability that I described will not be such a strong feature of our armed forces and so envied by other countries.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): In assessing the Secretary of State's observations, it would be helpful to know the background when we took office in 1997. How much force were we able to deploy rapidly in 1997? Did it differ significantly from zero?

Mr. Hoon: It did differ from zero. I accept that the United Kingdom has always had the ability to deploy certain forces rapidly—that was a hallmark of those forces. What has changed since 1997 is that that has become commonplace for our forces and in all three services, as well as the support systems that they require. There has been a very significant step change in the ability of our armed forces to deploy rapidly.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): The Secretary of State says that it is outdated to count platforms, yet he must be aware that the First Sea Lord has expressed concern that the 32 frigates and destroyers that he currently has available may not be enough for the tasks in hand. Will the Secretary of State give the House an assurance today that he has no plans to cut further the numbers of frigates, destroyers or submarines? If he will not give that assurance, will he tell us by how many he intends to cut those classes of vessel? If he does not want to answer directly, will he undertake to brief the MOD press office to give the right answer to any journalist who comes up with the right numbers?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman is obviously an assiduous reader of *The Sunday Telegraph*. Unfortunately, in reading *The Sunday Telegraph* he should not be seduced into thinking that he is reading the news. The interview in yesterday's newspaper, to which he refers, was conducted on 21 January this year and published on 7 March. The article has an invented headline and contains a purported quotation that is extracted from several different parts of that interview. It omits various quotations from the First Sea Lord, such as:

"I think the Royal Navy is in a very good condition . . . I think . . . the Navy has an equipment programme in progress that is its biggest since I joined the Royal Navy 37 years ago."

A whole series of selective extracts are used to create the quotation in *The Sunday Telegraph*.

The reality is that we have set out clearly to the House the importance of ensuring the availability of equipment to do a particular job. If the hon. Gentleman wants simply to count platforms, he will no doubt include HMS Victory in that.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): My right hon. Friend will be aware that during recent weeks we have heard several rumours emanating from Opposition Members to the effect that we are about to lose a number of our regiments. Quality regiments such as the King's Own Scottish Borderers and the Cheshires have been put very much at the forefront of people's minds. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that they are nothing more than rumours, and can he scotch the whole notion of dispensing with some of our quality regiments? Does he agree that that does nothing to assist the morale and recruitment of those regiments?

Mr. Hoon: I can confirm to my hon. Friend that those observations are no more than rumours. Speculation about the loss of infantry battalions is certainly damaging to those in the regiments that he mentioned, to their families and to their morale. I encourage people not to repeat such speculation.

Angus Robertson (Moray): In that case, will the Secretary of State give a categorical assurance to the House that none of the historic regiments in the UK armed forces is set to be amalgamated or disbanded? If he is not prepared to give that assurance, how on earth can he argue that it would improve the deployability of the armed forces?

Mr. Hoon: I find it rather surprising that the Scottish nationalists should take such an astonishing interest in defence given that, as I understand it, their policy remains to withdraw from NATO and from any kind of international defence organisation—in which case, there would be no regiments left to defend.

Arctic Medal

15. **Mr. John Randall** (Uxbridge): If the Government will award a medal to British veterans of the Arctic conflict in the second world war. [128432]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): Service on the convoys to northern Russia during the second world war was recognised by the award of the Atlantic star. The qualifying criteria, which were published at the time, were quite specific and included service in Arctic waters. I have no plans to revisit that decision.

Mr. Randall: I am rather disappointed by that, and I ask the Minister to reconsider the matter, particularly in view of the welcome announcement of the decision to award a medal to Suez veterans. Perhaps Suez is more on his mind at the moment. Can the Minister give an assurance that veterans awaiting Suez medals will not have to wait several years, as has been reported?

Mr. Caplin: I do not think that it is appropriate to draw a comparison between the two medals. The Suez medal is being awarded following consideration by the honours and decorations committee. Action is being taken to ensure that once final decisions are made on the Suez medal, those awards—[*Interruption.*] Perhaps the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) should reflect on what the Speaker often says to him: "Keep calm, keep calm." Medals will be made available as soon as possible. I hope that some will be available for Remembrance Sunday; certainly, all will be distributed within the next two years.

Mr. Neil Turner (Wigan): May I say how disappointed I am by my hon. Friend's response? The

climatic conditions imposed unique privations on those who served in the Arctic convoys. Moreover, they faced unique military situations in that they were attacked by forces above the sea, namely the Luftwaffe; on the sea, by German heavy units; and below the sea, by U-boats. The Royal Navy recognised that in the way in which it responded with heavy units of the home fleet, fighting destroyer escorts and escort carriers.

None of those was part of the Atlantic forces. May I suggest that my hon. Friend reconsiders the matter and appreciates a unique position that should be honoured by a unique medal for the people who served in those convoys?

Mr. Caplin: I say to my hon. Friend that I do not in any way undermine the role that those men played and their efforts in the second world war. At the time, the commander-in-chief requested a medal, but there was no conclusive evidence that the case was ever fully considered. The honours and decorations committee ultimately made the decision.

Gulf

17. **Roger Casale** (Wimbledon): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of logistic support to sustain British forces in the Gulf region. [128434]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The Ministry of Defence is in the middle of a comprehensive analysis to identify lessons from operations in Iraq. That includes an assessment of the effectiveness of logistic support provided to our armed forces across the Gulf region. Our initial findings were published in early July in the MOD report, "Operations in Iraq 2003: First Reflections", copies of which are in the Library. We plan to publish a fuller report before Christmas.

Roger Casale: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Through involvement in charitable work in Kosovo, I have seen at first hand the logistic support that is provided to British troops in other fields of conflict, and I therefore have every confidence that such support and equipment in the Gulf region and Iraq are remarkably successful, despite press reports to the contrary. However, what is the Ministry of Defence doing to learn lessons quickly from the difficulties and problems that have arisen? What further measures is my right hon. Friend taking to improve logistic support for our troops?

Mr. Ingram: My hon. Friend makes a range of interesting points. He is right that our achievements in a short period—by everyone in the logistic supply chain, whether civilian or military—are remarkable. People excelled themselves and I pay tribute to them.

In my earlier reply, I said that we intended to give a fuller response by Christmas. That should give my hon. Friend encouragement that we will provide an in-depth analysis of what happened, where the weaknesses, if they exist, lie and how we can remedy them.

For the air and land logistic support supply chain, we have put in place a comprehensive study, the "End to End" study, which covers £11.2 billion of expenditure and 105,000 personnel, roughly split 60:40 between military and civilian. It is an intensive study to ensure that everything that we do in the supply chain fulfils the top requirements of the front line. That must be our objective at all times. Iraq will condition our thinking, as previous conflicts have done.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Does the Minister agree that the availability of logistics depends on that of money? Will he confirm that the enhanced troop enhancements in Iraq run at approximately £200 million a month, on top of the £1 billion already spent, according to the Ministry of Defence? Since the Chancellor's £3 billion war budget is likely to be spent before the end of the financial year, what other defence cuts might have to be made to fund it?

Mr. Ingram: None, because all the money to which the hon. Gentleman referred comes from the reserve. We have made it clear time after time that we are determined to get the job done.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): May I endorse my right hon. Friend's comments about the success of logistic support in Iraq? I refer particularly to the many examples of British logistic support for our United States allies, especially in southern Iraq, and the Royal Air Force's support for the US air force.

Will my right hon. Friend also acknowledge the invaluable role of third-line reinforcements and the surge capacity within that during the Iraq conflict, and the inherent dangers of pushing it on to operational stations, where there will be no transparency of cost and it will be much more difficult to measure efficiency?

Mr. Ingram: That is a very technical question. I acknowledge my hon. Friend's points, and that is why I referred to the "End to End" study. We must consider the four levels of support that are currently provided. Those lines of support were put in place to deal with a threat different from the one we face now; that was part of our forward-facing posture towards the cold war and the threat that was envisaged.

We have to examine whether what we are doing now is appropriate, which is why I mentioned the size of the budget and the numbers of people involved at all levels. The matter will be subject to full consultation.

I recognise my hon. Friend's constituency interest in the Defence Aviation Repair Agency establishment in St. Athan; this must be the first time that he has asked me a question without mentioning it. I have given him due recognition that I know where he is coming from and I pay tribute to him for all his efforts.

Army (Manning)

18. **Mr. Julian Brazier** (Canterbury): What the manning shortfall is in the (*a*) Regular Army and (*b*) Territorial Army. [128435]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): As at 1 July 2003, regular whole Army strength stood at 102,520, representing a shortfall of 4,220 personnel against the current requirement and Territorial Army strength stood at 37,650, representing a shortfall of 3,550. The Territorial Army strength figures include personnel mobilised in support of operations.

Mr. Brazier: Will the Under-Secretary confirm that we are still five years away from the point at which the Government estimate that the Regular Army will come up to strength? It is not acceptable to shift the desperately heavy burden on the Regular Army still further on to the reserves, in some cases by threatening reservists with a second six-month compulsory call-out when some have done a voluntary six-month call-out before their first compulsory one. The whole House is proud of the territorials who have gone out to serve, including my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), but there is a limit to how much of the burden reservists can take. The fact is that we do not have enough troops for the jobs the Government are giving them.

Mr. Caplin: I am certainly looking forward to the return of the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne). Recruitment and retention measures introduced by the Government for the Regular Army and the TA are starting to pay dividends, in that we have at last stopped the downward trend in recruitment to both the Army and the TA. That is why strength is now improving.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Is it not the case, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown) said, that recruitment and retention is made worse by some of the scare stories that are put around? Is it not about time that we had responsible comments from the Opposition, although I know that that is not the Under-Secretary's job? Will he join me in praising the work of the Cheshire regiment in attempting to retain and recruit new members for the regiment?

Mr. Caplin: I should be happy to put on record my support for the work of the Cheshire regiment, which does an excellent job. I hope to be in the north-west next month and may well take the opportunity to visit it.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): The Under-Secretary is only too well aware that recruitment and retention into the Regular Army and the TA relies upon those involved having confidence in the MOD and the system in which they are working; in particular, those deployed in the Gulf and elsewhere, and their families, depend on a duty to care. Does the Minister believe that members of our armed forces and their families have been impressed by what has happened at the Hutton inquiry, in which the Secretary of State—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot have every question coming on to the Hutton inquiry. [*Interruption.*] I am telling the hon. Gentleman. I allowed the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) to speak on it; perhaps I was a bit slow on the uptake. I am not allowing the question. Does the Minister wish to try to answer?

Mr. Caplin *indicated dissent.*

Armed Forces (Logistic Support)

19. **David Wright** (Telford): What recent steps he has taken to enhance the cost-effectiveness of the logistic support to the armed forces. [128436]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The Defence Logistics Organisation is responsible for logistic support to the armed forces. A comprehensive programme of change is in train to improve both the effectiveness and the efficiency of the Defence Logistics Organisation. This change programme is being managed by the head of the Defence Logistics Organisation, the chief of defence logistics, as part of the wider defence change programme.

David Wright: Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking the people of Telford for the tremendous work that they have done in defence logistics over the last 12 months to support our troops in theatres of conflict? Is he aware, however, that there is growing concern among the people carrying out such work about the review of future defence supply chain initiative processes? Will he reassure them that in-house bids will be taken seriously, and that private sector bids will not automatically be considered to be more competitive?

Mr. Ingram: I was grateful to my hon. Friend for raising some of those issues at a recent meeting with me, at which I was able to give him certain assurances. I can now give the assurance publicly to the House that every effort will be put into achieving the best in-house solution by the Ministry of Defence. We will work closely with the unions to achieve that, because we want a proper level playing field.

I have had the opportunity to meet many of those who are employed in the supply chain, at Telford and elsewhere, and been able to pass on to them my personal appreciation of all that they have done in the Gulf conflict and the conflicts that preceded it, as well as what they will undoubtedly do in what may follow on. They are an integral part of what we do, but, of course, industry and the private sector have partnership roles—individual roles—to play in meeting that supply chain demand. I can, however, give my hon. Friend the assurances that I gave him in that meeting, and I have also been able to give them to the staff concerned.

Iraq

21. **Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): When he last discussed the security situation in Iraq with the US Secretary of Defence. [128438]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): There are continuing close consultations between the Ministry of Defence and the US Department of Defence on the security situation in Iraq. I last spoke personally to Donald Rumsfeld on 29 July.

Mr. Osborne: The US Defence Secretary has categorically ruled out placing US troops under United Nations command, whatever kind of UN resolution is

drawn up. Will the Secretary of State give a similar categorical assurance that UK troops will not serve under UN command?

Mr. Hoon: In recent operations, such as those in Afghanistan and Sierra Leone, we have not chosen to place UK forces under UN command, and I do not anticipate any need for that to occur.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): Are we not sending more troops to Iraq only because the US has asked for that to happen? Does not more troops mean more targets and more cost? How long are they going to be there, and at what cost? Is not sending more troops the first step towards a Vietnam syndrome, in which we send more and more troops for less and less result?

Mr. Hoon: I do not accept that. As I have already set out to the House, we are sending the extra troops for two specific reasons: first, to give the operational commander on the ground more flexibility in carrying out security responsibilities; and secondly, to ensure that urgent reconstruction tasks can be carried through in order to avoid the temptations posed to criminals in southern Iraq to steal the very equipment that we are providing to help the people of Iraq.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): As one who supported the decision on 18 March and who does not have regrets, may I just express my slight surprise that the Secretary of State has not spoken to Mr. Rumsfeld since 29 July?

Mr. Hoon: I did have arrangements to meet the US Defence Secretary during August, but, unfortunately, I received an invitation that I felt it was probably best not to resist.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Although the American position on the United Nations' power in Iraq has been somewhat finessed of late, it is still fairly clear that the United States believe that their forces should not come under UN control. The British position on our forces is not clear, however. We all hope that the new forces going in will help to solve the problem, but what if that does not happen? What if we get mired even further in? Where is the British bottom line?

Mr. Hoon: I am obviously not going to speculate as to the long-term future. I am confident, however, from the military advice that I have received, that this present force will be sufficient to carry out the two tasks that I have just set out to the House. It is also important that we gain support from other countries willing to deploy their forces, so that we can significantly increase the number of forces in Iraq for the purposes of reconstructing the country and ensuring that it is safe and secure for its people.

Territorial Army

22. **Mr. Robert Syms** (Poole): If he will make a statement on his plans for the future size of the Territorial Army. [128439]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have heard the figures that I gave to the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier). The Territorial Army will continue to support its regular counterparts on operations, as envisaged by the strategic defence review and the SDR new chapter. We expect to increase the current requirement by around 700 posts, in support of the enhanced capability in home defence that we outlined in the new chapter.

Mr. Syms: Will the Government now acknowledge that major cuts a few years ago in the TA, including the 2nd Battalion, the Devonshire and Dorset Regiment, were a mistake not only because they reduced our reserves but because of their impact on recruitment from the TA to the regular armed forces, which are suffering with shortage of manpower?

Mr. Caplin: As I said previously to the House, there have been recruitment and retention problems in the Territorial Army for some years now but thankfully those problems are being put behind us and we are seeing an increase in the numbers joining the TA.

Mr. Frank Roy (Motherwell and Wishaw): I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that those TA members serving in Iraq have proved their professionalism time and again. However, is he aware that those same Territorial Army personnel are at risk of losing their full-time civilian jobs, because they have been told that when they return from Iraq they still have to carry out their six weekends' camp or a 14-day continuous camp? Surely that is wrong and will put an intolerable strain on the relationship between the TA member and their employer.

Mr. Caplin: We are in constant discussion with employers to ensure that that type of thing does not happen. If my hon. Friend has a specific case, I would welcome him writing to me about it.

Children's Green Paper

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Charles Clarke): With permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to present to the House the children's Green Paper, "Every Child Matters". It is published alongside a detailed response to the Victoria Climbié inquiry report and a report by the social exclusion unit into the educational achievement of children in care.

I want to begin by thanking my colleague the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the Minister for Children and officials across Whitehall for the excellent work that they have done in preparing the Green Paper. The Chief Secretary's personal commitment to the central importance of inter-departmental partnership working was crucial to achieving these proposals.

The Green Paper sets out reforms covering children and young people from birth to 19 living in England. Our goals are both to protect children and young people and to ensure that each child has the opportunity to fulfil their potential. The death of Victoria Climbié exposed shameful failings in our ability to protect our most vulnerable children. On 12 occasions over 10 months, chances to save Victoria's life were not taken. Failings occurred across all services at all levels. While no society can entirely eliminate the risk of children being damaged or exploited, our society has a duty to give priority to the protection of children and to tackle the tragic and avoidable failures that occurred in Victoria Climbié's case as well as in other cases.

From past inquires into the deaths of Maria Colwell and Jasmine Beckford to recent cases such as Lauren Wright and Ainlee Walker, the list of problems is familiar: unwillingness of some of the most senior people in agencies to accept their own accountability; poor coordination across agencies; insufficient sharing of information; front-line workers who are often over-loaded and under-supervised. But these issues do not just afflict the 80 children on average who die each year from abuse. Weak accountability, poor integration and work force pressures are all critical barriers to improving the lives of all our children. Too many children fall through the net only to reach a crisis that could have been avoided. Too many children are passed around the system only to end up in care, in prison, or worse.

Lord Laming in his admirable report makes it clear that nothing less than fundamental reform will address those issues. No single change alone is enough. National standards, inspection, information sharing, training, national and local structures, all need to change if we are to achieve real changes in culture and practice. Radical reform is needed to organise our services around the needs and priorities of children. I believe that the proposals that I am publishing today meet the reform challenges identified by Lord Laming. Our task is properly to put them into effect.

The central theme of the Green Paper is that every service, every professional, every community and every family must take responsibility for the protection of children. Child protection must not be ghettoised and seen to be the responsibility of only one profession — social work. It must be the responsibility of everyone, and so must be at the heart of all public services.

Equally, it is vital that every organisation has a positive vision of young people and high expectations for all of them, whoever they are, and wherever they live. Every Department is already trying to tackle the reasons why children are held back, whether through poverty, poor schooling, violence in communities, lack of activities for young people, or lack of access to health care, and I can confirm that we will continue this drive, rightly shifting the emphasis to prevention.

The Green Paper sets out comprehensive reforms to ensure that this approach is carried through. I believe that they extend the principles of our sure start programme, which have been widely welcomed, to all areas of child care in this country.

There are four main areas of reform, the first of which is supporting families and carers. We all know the critical influence that parents have on children, yet in the past we paid insufficient attention to the crucial role of families in improving children's lives. By bringing children's policy and family policy together within my Department, we will start to see how we can support families more effectively.

The Green Paper involves consultation on a long-term vision to support families through universal services providing information, advice and support, and through more targeted services. As a first step, we have created a parenting fund to build capacity in the voluntary and community sector, and we will introduce proposals to roll out nationally the current level of home visiting support provided by home start.

The second main area of reform is early intervention. For the majority of children, the combination of support from their families and schools is enough to enable them to thrive, but for a significant minority more help is needed. The potential of hundreds of thousands of young people is wasted, because help too often comes too little, too late. A child may be known to several services, but nobody shares the warning signs, so the necessary action is not taken. Children can be passed from agency to agency. They may be assessed again and again. They may be known to lots of professionals, but all are based in different places, working to different bosses and budgets, and — most damaging of all — with no one in overall charge.

We need to build a system that ensures that children receive help at the first onset of problems. Early intervention requires new forms of integration on the ground: information sharing systems; a common assessment framework; a lead professional co-ordinating packages of support; and professionals working together in multidisciplinary teams, based in and around the places where children and families spend their time — schools, children's centres and doctors' surgeries.

The Green Paper includes proposals to develop better early intervention on all those fronts, including legislating to ensure that professionals share information more effectively. We will always have to strike a balance between individuals' right to privacy and the need to share information to protect children, but I believe that the balance needs to be shifted towards sharing information better so that problems can be identified more rapidly and more effectively.

The third area of reform in the Green Paper is accountability and integration. Integration in practice means integrating our institutions, structures and

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professions. That is the real focus of the Green Paper, tackling the underlying barriers to improving our services. Lasting change requires new institutional arrangements, not new initiatives.

Let me set out the key changes aimed at delivering clear accountability and integration in serving the needs of children. First, we will legislate to create the post of a director of children's services, accountable for local authority education and children's social services. As Lord Laming made clear, we must have a clearly named person in overall charge of children's well-being and protection in every part of the country. Secondly, to ensure clear accountability politically, we will create a lead council member for children.

Thirdly, in the medium and long term, our aim is to integrate key services for children and young people under the director of children's services, as part of children's trusts, bringing together the local education authority, children's social services, health services, and potentially others, including Connexions and youth offending teams, in a single organisational structure.

Of course, as Members of Parliament for our own constituencies, we all know the very real difficulties in joining up across boundaries. Our approach is to seek to break down boundaries altogether, and to organise services around children, at the core of our overall services.

Fourthly, there will always be some organisations outside the new children's trust, such as the police. We will therefore require the creation of local safeguarding children boards, to bring together all agencies to improve child protection. As part of this approach, we will also legislate to place a duty on all services to safeguard children. We must ensure that our children's safety is a priority across all services.

Fifthly, we will support local changes through national change, including the development of an integrated inspection framework, led by Ofsted, to ensure that all services are judged on how they work together.

Finally, where national standards are not met and our inspection system indicates failure, we must be tough on delivering changes. We will therefore create within my Department a strong focus on sharing effective practice and intervening in areas that are falling below national standards. In addition, I can announce that the Government will legislate at the earliest opportunity to create a children's commissioner to act as an independent champion for children. The commissioner will develop effective ways to draw on children's views, locally and nationally, and make sure that they are properly fed into policy making.

The final area of the Green Paper is work force reform. The reforms set out in it have two aims, the first of which is to tackle the recruitment and retention problems that are particularly acute in social work by making working with children an attractive, high-status career. Secondly, to improve the skills and teamworking of the work force, we need to ensure that our professionals work together with shared goals, shared values, shared language and shared priorities. We intend to introduce a package of changes to develop this: new career pathways to enable staff to acquire new specialist skills, to enable sideways career moves, or to enable remaining in front-line services; a leadership programme to support the first generation of children's directors and their senior staff; a common core of training for those who work with children; reduced bureaucracy and work load pressures; and more flexible and attractive training routes into working with children, including expanding work-based training routes for graduates. To deliver this, we will work with employers and staff to create a sector skills council for children and young people.

I believe that the reform programme that we are delivering will mark a turning point in child protection. The legislation and institutional change that we are proposing will genuinely put children first. Reform will take time and will require commitment across government. Perhaps most critically and most difficult, it will require a process of cultural change, to build a society in which protection is embedded in all communities, professionals and services, locally and nationally. Our aim is to build a society in which truly every child matters, and in that spirit I commend these proposals to the House.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I am, as always, grateful to the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement and of the Green Paper, which results from one of the most horrible cases of the torture and murder of a child that any of us can remember. The Victoria Climbié case—following other terrible cases such as those of Lauren Wright, John Smith and Ainlee Walker—showed the need, as the Secretary of State said, for radical improvement in our ability to protect our most vulnerable children. We should all be grateful to Lord Laming for his very thorough report on the Climbié case.

All those cases teach that that level of horrendous cruelty is, thankfully, unusual, but, appallingly, not very unusual. That is why the delay in the Green Paper's publication has been so damaging, especially as the only reason for it seems to have been the protection of the new Minister for Children. Can the Secretary of State confirm weekend press reports that the Green Paper was ready for publication in early July, and that the measures in it—many of which will be welcomed on both sides of the House—have therefore been delayed for two months entirely for reasons of ministerial convenience?

That delay has been particularly harmful for the local authorities whose practices most need to change as a result of the Laming recommendations. In July Councillor Alison King, the chair of the Local Government Association social affairs and health executive, described the delays as "frustrating and disappointing". Since then we have wasted another two months.

The centrepiece of the announcement is the creation of a children's commissioner. Opposition Members hope that it proves to be an effective step forward and we certainly welcome measures that will raise the profile of child protection issues.

The Secretary of State spoke about legislating at the earliest available opportunity. Will he confirm that legislation will be introduced in the next Session? Can he also tell the House how the commissioner's

independence from the Government will be maintained, as that will be essential to preserving confidence in his work? Will he also confirm the wisdom of the view expressed by the Welsh children's commissioner this morning—that although a new commissioner will be useful, the real changes must come at local level among those who deliver the services?

The Secretary of State talked about early intervention, which we fully support, and about the need to share information better. Again, that is absolutely right. Does he accept that changes to the Data Protection Act 1998 will have to be made, and will he legislate to achieve them? He knows that what really matters for children at risk is the number of social workers, their training, local knowledge and ability to fit into a wider network of professionals. In that regard, how does he propose to deal with the issue raised by the chief inspector of social services when he said that another 50,000 staff were necessary to meet Government targets and revealed that 80 per cent. of some social work teams in some London boroughs are agency staff? With the best will in the world, they cannot be expected to have detailed local knowledge and sensitivities. Without that essential base, all the initiatives launched in the Green Paper will not be effective. Two years ago, the then Secretary of State for Health uttered similar words to those that we have heard today about attracting more social workers. Nothing happened before, so why should it be different this time?

One key message from Laming that I am glad to see the Government have taken on board—I hope that the Minister for Children, who has decided to leave our debate on this important document published under her responsibility, also accepts it—is the need for clear lines of accountability within local authorities and between national and local agencies.

Of course, we all hope that, after the changes, it will be necessary to identify much less often who was ultimately responsible for a failure of children protection. However, we also know that the buck must stop with an identified individual and everyone must know who it is. Can the Secretary of State confirm who the person will be and whether local authorities will have any say in establishing it? The response of local authorities will be key. From what the Secretary of State has told the House today, it seems that local authorities will have no freedom to decide how best to meet the need for clear lines of responsibility. It seems that they will have to adhere to his central blueprint, even when they are well advanced in changing their structures. Does he believe that top-down centralisation is the best way forward?

On children's trusts, how standardised does the Secretary of State want them to be and how will clear lines of accountability be established? What will be their role in the key task of sharing information between professionals and monitoring how effectively it has been done?

On the responsibility of schools and teachers within the framework, will teachers take on any extra responsibilities under the proposals? Will they require extra training, and what effect will it have on the work load agreement, by which the Secretary of State rightly sets so much store? What will be the schools' responsibility for children who seldom, if ever, turn up? Many of them will be precisely the children most vulnerable to long-term abuse.

The Secretary of State mentioned the police. On the necessary changes to police practice, the Laming report dealt with the level of priority given to child protection issues. Can he explain whether any new lines of responsibility have been created? Specifically, what authority will the children's commissioner, or the Minister for Children, have over police priorities? Is child protection now a priority for the police?

Can the Secretary of State clarify the role that he sees for the many excellent children's charities that have built up so much expertise in helping vulnerable children? Will they be engaged in a genuine partnership, and not just used to fill the gaps in professionally provided services?

Everyone, both in this House and outside it, wants the Green Paper to lead to a rapid and visible improvement in our system of child protection. That improvement will be measured not by the headlines or the number of initiatives, but by a thousand small local changes in information sharing, professional practice and the sensitivity of intervention. All the welcome intentions of the Secretary of State will come to nothing without the right people working where it matters. The Opposition hope that it works, and we give all our support to the social workers, health care professionals, teachers and volunteers who will help to make it work.

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman raised nine questions that I could identify. His first point was about the timing of publication. As we said in the House in July, his points were entirely specious, and I hope that the substance of the proposals will be the basis of the debate. Since July the proposals have, in my view, been improved, and we have used the time well.

The hon. Gentleman's second point was about the children's commissioner. That is an important issue, which I want to get right, but it is not the centrepiece of the proposals. He is right to say that it is an important part of the proposals, but the centrepiece is the overall integrated approach. The hon. Gentleman cited what the Welsh commissioner said this morning, and he is right to say that what happens locally is by far and away the most important thing.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, in accordance with convention, I cannot comment on what legislation may or may not be in the Queen's Speech, but I can confirm that we seek early legislation on this matter if possible. I can also confirm that the independence of the children's commissioner is essential: he or she will report independently and will report to the House entirely freely on what he or she has to say.

The hon. Gentleman's third point was about early intervention and data sharing, and the Data Protection Act. I can confirm that legislation to enable data to be shared is a high priority. I cannot tell him of the precise implications for current legislation, including the Data Protection Act, but I can tell him that the first requirement will be to ensure that data can be properly shared.

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The fourth point was about the social services inspector, and I agree with her that the high proportion—in some places, the very high proportion—of agency staff is an unacceptable state of affairs, which has to be changed. That is why the document gives such a high priority to work force reform and all the issues associated with that. This is not simply a question of pay, although some people argue that it is; it is a question of training, status and esteem, and in particular it is a question of the team-building approach that I have tried to highlight today.

The hon. Gentleman's fifth question was about where responsibility ends. Local authorities will not have a choice about whether there should be a director of children's services. It is right that in every local authority in every part of the country it should be clear that there is one individual who bears full responsibility for every child involved. Where there will be flexibility is about precisely what is the best way to get there; that will be part of the consultation process. As we said in the debate that the House had on these matters in July, there are some quite difficult dilemmas about the role of current directors of education, directors of social services, chief executives and so on. I acknowledge that it would be a mistake to take a particular blueprint for a solution and impose it on every local authority in the country. Equally, it would be utterly mistaken to allow local authorities to evade setting a key responsibility in the way that I have set out.

The hon. Gentleman's sixth point was about standardisation of children's trusts. I do not envisage that they will be standardised in every respect. The bids in our pilot—I think that there were 26 of them—had a variety of different formats and approaches. Again, I would expect local circumstances to inform the best way of putting it all together, but I expect that in every local authority there will be a consistent drive to develop the kind of integrated regime that I have described under the children's trust approach.

As for teachers' training and responsibilities, there is a need across the board for a common core of training among professionals; that is set out in the Green Paper. Children who turn up rarely are principally the responsibility of educational social workers in the local authority rather than that of individual schools—but as the hon. Gentleman said, they too need to be part of the team.

The eighth point concerned police responsibilities. The setting of priorities for the police is and remains the responsibility of the chief constable in consultation with the police authority, and nothing we do can override that. We propose to place the legal responsibility to give priority to child protection on every service, including the police service, and we think that that will properly reflect the need for priorities to be set.

The final question was on children's charities. I strongly agree with the hon. Gentleman. I take this opportunity to express my respect and admiration for the work of many children's charities up and down the country. We very much welcome a partnership with them. It is fair to say that many of them welcome these proposals as a means of building those partnerships in the right way.

Jean Corston (Bristol, East): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and thank him for it. I warmly congratulate the Government on bringing forward legislation to establish a children's commissioner for England. He will know that the Joint Committee on Human Rights, which I have the privilege to chair, published a report on 12 May this year entitled "The Case for a Children's Commissioner for England". Members of the Committee will be delighted that they have helped to persuade the Government of the rightness of that course of action.

The Committee recommended

"the establishment of a children's commissioner who would be a champion for the children of England, independent from but working closely with central government and other agencies. The commissioner would use the principles of the"

convention on the rights of the child

"as a guide and measure in considering delivery of services to children by government and public authorities, and would involve children as much as was appropriate in its work."

Does my right hon. Friend recall that one of the most telling findings of Lord Laming was that Victoria Climbié's murderer—her great aunt—time and again had interviews and assessments with professionals, but not one person thought to ask that little girl what was going on in her life? Does he agree with me that the establishment of the post of a children's commissioner will at long last give our children the protection and advocacy that they need?

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Her commitment on this subject, with which I am familiar, and the commitment of the Committee that she has the honour of chairing, have been important to the Government in coming to the view that they have. I pay tribute to the Committee for its report for the reason that she gave. Children need a voice, and her Committee's report referred to

"a champion for the children of England",

which is precisely what we need. One of the most depressing things for anyone in my position is the feeling that people sometimes do not listen to children enough. We must listen to children and understand what they say, and that applies right across the public services. I hope that the children's commissioner will help us all to do that better.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I rise on behalf of the Liberal Democrats to welcome much of the Green Paper and much of the Secretary of State's statement, especially the proposals to make local responsibilities clearer, and to establish a children's director at a local level and a children's commissioner in England. The Liberal Democrats have long called for the establishment of the post of children's commissioner for England.

In response to the Victoria Climbié case, it is right and vital that we acknowledge that responsibility does not lie just with the services and agencies, but that a response is required from the whole society if we are to ensure that the tragic death of that little girl is not just one of many in the future.

Will the Secretary of State say a little more about how he intends to ensure that at a local level all the agencies responsible for child protection policy and practice are genuinely working together? Will he institute a review of targets at a local level to ensure that agencies are not distracted from working together by targets that actively discourage them from doing so? Could not the children's director be charged with that responsibility at local level?

Will the Secretary of State explain why, having established pilots for children's trusts—which the Liberal Democrats have welcomed—he now seems to be prejudging that process by announcing an end-date by which most local authorities will have to have moved to such a model? Why has sure start not been referred to as one of the things that could be included in children's trusts?

I welcome what the Secretary of State said about the arm's-length nature of the children's commissioner. How will the commissioner report to the House, and how will he or she be accountable to children, so that they can have a say in what the commissioner does?

The Green Paper talks in terms of services for children and young people, and of responsibility for adults and service providers, but it says nothing about children's rights. Why does it say nothing about the proposal of the Joint Committee on Human Rights to incorporate the UN convention on the rights of the child, so that this country has a clear foundation of rights as the basis of law to protect our children?

I welcome the fact that we are seeking to make sure that there is a clear information flow, free and confidential, between agencies, but what about the rights of children and young people to have access to that information to ensure that it is correct? Will that information survive once the child becomes an adult, or will it be destroyed?

How will the consultation that the Green Paper launches ensure that the views and aspirations of children and young people are actively sought? The Green Paper does not say how that will be done; indeed, it makes only two references to involving children and asking their views.

Liberal Democrat Members welcome many of the proposals and will actively work with the Government to support them when legislation is introduced in the House. There have been too many delays in publishing this Green Paper and as a result too many children have died. We must end those deaths and take measures that can reduce the risk of such deaths in future.

Mr. Clarke; The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that there have been too many deaths. As I said, there has been a steady average of about 80 deaths from abuse each year for the past 28 to 30 years. That is a staggering figure and an appalling state of affairs. That is why I argued in my statement that it will not be a particular initiative or stunt that will solve the problem but the ongoing development of practice.

I agree very much with what the hon. Gentleman said at the beginning of his remarks about the need for a whole society response. I am influenced by the observation of the workings of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which many police described as one of the most successful legislative measures that they had experienced. That is because the Act makes it absolutely clear that crime is not the responsibility of the police alone; it is the responsibility of the whole of society working together to solve the problem.

Exactly the same is true in child protection, where social workers have felt beleaguered and pushed from pillar to post, having to make hard, almost impossible, choices between intervening too much and intervening too little, with disasters and tragedies occurring time after time. It is critical that the whole society approach that the hon. Gentleman described is part of how we operate.

There will be joint work at local level. That is why we have a director of children's services and it is why we are establishing children's trusts and the local safeguarding children boards. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that that may require a review of the targeting regime, both nationally and locally, to ensure that targeting is correctly focused.

On the pilot scheme and the end-date, we have, as the hon. Gentleman said, had a wide variety of submissions on children's trusts, and we have looked at those carefully. Nevertheless, we need a basic national structure of children's trusts. I mentioned the sure start approach at the beginning of my statement because I believe that its principles are very important—too important to be left to the relatively small number of sure start areas in the country—and need to be in the mainstream of everything that we do.

I will take the hon. Gentleman's question about how the children's commissioner will report with his final point about consulting children. Obviously, the report has to be made to the House, but it will be made to children as well. We will encourage discussion with children's commissioners in other countries to see how that can best be done. We specifically want children's responses to our proposals; in fact, one of the documents that we published today, "Every Child Matters—What Do You Think?", is a digest of the Green Paper which is directed at children and young people and aims to encourage them to respond to the proposals through their various organisations. I agree that children and young people must be involved in what we do, so I take this opportunity to encourage as many of them as possible to read the digest and respond to it.

On children's rights, I heard what my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Jean Corston), the Chairman of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, said in welcoming the Green Paper. Let me make one fundamental point that follows from Lord Laming's report. The catalogue of key failures that lead to these avoidable deaths are failures in the practice of a wide variety of our public services.

I make no apology in saying that putting those things right is my priority. That is where we have to be. No right has meaning unless it is backed up by agencies and public services that can deliver. The right to live is the most fundamental of all rights. That does not need to be restated. We are failing in too many areas, and putting that right is my No. 1 priority.

I hear what has been said about access to data, but I want to treat the matter with care. I am aware of a case where a child died as a result of a failure of the probation service and the social services department to share data

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because of perceived blockings on the sharing of data. It was an appalling case. It was not a question of the young child having access to the information, important though that is. The key thing is to ensure that professionals know where the problems occur and can intervene properly in the right sort of way.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): May I inform my right hon. Friend—I do not want to take away anything from the Chairman of the Human Rights Committee—that I represent a constituency where Brian Jackson, who wrote "Education and Social Class" many years ago, campaigned for 20 years for a children's Minister and a children's commissioner? This is a happy day for me, as a trustee of the charity that Brian Jackson set up, because something that he campaigned vigorously for has come about after so many years.

In welcoming the children's commissioner, I would point out that there is one way of giving him or her more independence, and my right hon. Friend knows well what I am about to say. The commissioner will have more independence if we make him or her responsible not to my right hon. Friend but to Parliament through the appropriate Select Committee. It would be an important step if my right hon. Friend made that announcement as soon as possible.

My last point—I know that many Members want to ask my right hon. Friend questions on this important statement—is not only to welcome the statement but to say that we will not eradicate deaths and other terrible things will happen to children in our country. Those of us who knock on doors in our constituencies know that poverty, drug addiction and the lack of a family—not the presence of a family—so often make our children vulnerable. I see the voluntary sector—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. I thought that the hon. Gentleman was about to put a question, but he has not, and I do not think that the Minister need respond.

Mr. Sheerman: Sorry.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): I broadly welcome the restructuring of local authority services that the Secretary of State has announced this afternoon, which will result in statutorily reinforcing co-operation between education and social services. I note also that in the creation of local children's safeguarding boards the right hon. Gentleman expects to net in police authorities. Will he tell the House whether that proposal will also, in his view, net in health authorities? Can he give the House more details about the practical role of the children's commissioner? We need—I believe that he shares my view on this—services that do what they are supposed to do to protect children and not, as Lord Laming said, another commentator.

Mr. Clarke: I can confirm what the right hon. Lady says about health authorities, but I can say a bit more. As for mental health services and primary care trust services, there is a division of children's services within those responsibilities. It is entirely imaginable and feasible that in certain areas the PCT or the mental health trust will commission out their children's services so that they are within children's trusts more generally, so that they are even more intimately involved. Where that is not the case, they will be caught more directly, as the right hon. Lady implies, by the safeguarding children arrangements that I have described. We felt that we could not go so far as to say that every PCT or mental health trust should hive off its children's services into children's trusts, even though there might be logic for that, because lifelong responsibilities and serious bureaucratic issues are involved.

On the right hon. Lady's second point about the children's commissioner, I can confirm that the approach that we take to the commissioner is designed to ensure that he or she is the champion of children's rights, and is ready to intervene constantly on every point that I have already outlined. The precise way in which the commissioner works will be a matter for general discussion once we have established the necessary legislation.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): In welcoming every syllable that my right hon. Friend has uttered this afternoon, may I congratulate him and the Government on rejecting one aspect of Lord Laming's report and standing up for the independence of a children's commissioner, thus putting themselves in a position where they could be criticised by someone who had such independence? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the participation of children and young people in decisions that affect their lives both locally and nationally is the key to developing the radical transformation of services that he set out today? Will he explain how the national service framework for children fits with what is in the Green Paper?

Mr. Clarke: The national service framework is, and will continue to be, part of the overall arrangements that we have established. As for the participation of children and young people, I agree very much with my hon. Friend. It is important that in schools and children's services children's voices are heard and reflected in what happens. Of course, that will take place in various ways, and I do not wish to appear too prescriptive. However, we are right to be prescriptive in one sense—the establishment of a children's commissioner is meant to signal as strongly and clearly as possible that in every service the voice of children and young people should be heard and reflected in the way in which those services are run and organised.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): With a Green Paper published in September which was originally promised in the spring, it will be no surprise to the Secretary of State if we focus on issues of timetabling. According to the written text of the statement, the Secretary of State was going to say that "in the long term" services would be integrated into children's trusts. However, when he delivered the statement he said "in the medium to long term". Perhaps he will now elaborate on the prospective timetable for children's trusts because, in the absence of such an explanation and of legislation providing a framework

that services can use in coming together at a local level, there will be a degree of planning blight and uncertainty which may last for years.

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman is right to focus on timetabling in general. However, I modified the written statement with the words "medium to long term" because in politics and life generally the phrase "the long term" tends to imply a time that is a long way away. The message that I wanted to send was that we need to move more quickly. As the hon. Gentleman knows, progress has already been made in some parts of the country—I want to encourage and extend that. We will therefore publish a timetable. It is important for the reasons that I gave earlier about the way in which we operate that we consult properly on the timetable with everyone who has to put it into effect, and that is what we will do.

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): I welcome my right hon. Friend's recognition of the fact that the potential of literally hundreds of thousands of young children is wasted because, as he put it, help is too little and too late. Does he agree with two things? First, if there is to be information sharing, it must be sufficiently good to track children as they move around the country, and not simply operate in each individual local authority area? Secondly, if we are concerned about hundreds of thousands of children, it will not be good enough to aim to refer them all to specialist services. We will need to bend some mainstream funding within schools, the health service and social services to enable the professionals to intervene much earlier. Indeed, we will save money if we intervene when a child is five, six or seven, rather than wait until they are a criminal, a drug abuser or have an unwanted pregnancy at 14, 15 or 16.

Mr. Clarke: I agree with both points made by my right hon. Friend. First, on tracking children as they move across the country, I am sure that he is correct about that. As a former Minister with responsibility for the police—an experience which I share—he will know that even without the complication of tracking movements around the country, there is not sufficient sharing of data between agencies. Even without addressing the point that he made, there is an enormous amount to do if we are to get things right but, of course, he was correct in what he said. As for specialist services, I focused on the need to generalise the sure start experience because it is universal in every relatively small community where it operates. It ranges from early intervention, even before birth, to early co-operation between various professional services. We must extend that model to every aspect of what we do.

My right hon. Friend is quite right that that does mean bending mainstream services to deal with particular people. One of the problems is the definition of risk, so to speak, in how we operate. There is a vast hierarchy of work that he, when he was responsible for the children's fund, led in highlighting the types of risk that exist. We must consider the matter from that universal base, targeted on the particular risks that cause the most danger.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): As the Secretary of State has recognised the need for widespread change, what plans does he have for improving education in schools so that at an early age, children are taught the value of marriage and the stable family?

Mr. Clarke: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the first aspect to which I drew attention when reporting the areas of action for the Green Paper was strengthening the role of children and families. That is a key aspect. Whatever the form of family relationship, a stable family background is the key foundation for any child to move forward. The bringing together of services as proposed will enable that to happen in a much more focused and stronger way. The focus that we have given to ethics and morality in school is important and right, and should move forward. The extended school approach that is already beginning to roll out gives a real possibility of creating such an overall approach. My fundamental answer is that I agree with the hon. Gentleman, but it is not simply a matter of an exhortation or a statement of principle. It is a matter of establishing services that put strong families, strong parenting and strong communities at the core of every child's education.

Diana Organ (Forest of Dean): My right hon. Friend rightly mentioned the importance of the sure start programme. It is a disappointment to many of us that we do not have a sure start programme, as we have seen elsewhere how successful it has been in ensuring that every child can develop its potential. Is a timetable set in the Green Paper for sure start or a similar model to be rolled out to every area, urban and rural?

As regards my right hon. Friend's concerns about protecting children and the exchange of information, in Gloucestershire we had a considerable report after the West case. One of the findings after that inquiry was that not enough information was gleaned from the domestic violence network information and the refuge information. Will that be included in the collaboration between agencies to protect children?

Mr. Clarke: I think that sure start is an outstanding programme. The reason why it has been focused—rightly, in my opinion—on the communities where there is most deprivation is precisely to intervene in the cycle of decline that can be so damaging in so many different areas. It is critical to establish the principles of sure start in every community in Britain. We cannot do that simply by adding to the number of existing sure start programmes and multiplying by a factor. We must change the practice, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) was suggesting, of education and social services more generally. I am extremely committed to that approach.

Ideas such as children's centres and extended schools are a central part of that approach. We will publish a timetable for achieving that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Diana Organ) mentioned. I discussed that in July with a major conference of people working with children, and they welcomed that approach. However—this is a tough message, but a true message—unless the culture of some of the public services involved in looking after children is changed in the way that I described in the Green Paper, we will not achieve the aim that my hon. Friend and I share.

[Mr. Clarke]

On domestic violence issues, yes, we will seek to exchange information widely. It is one of the tragedies of the West case as I recall it that a number of those who lost their lives were people whom the system lost in the gap between primary and secondary education. The idea of a proper school record is a key element in trying to address that problem.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I appreciate that this is a very important topic, and it is one to which the House will no doubt take the opportunity to return in future. We must now move on to the next statement.

Middle East

4.19 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): With permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to make a statement on Iraq and the middle east.

Let me begin with Iraq. When I last updated the House, on 15 July, we had witnessed the formation of the Iraqi governing council and successful military operations against elements of the old regime. In late July, there were the deaths of Saddam Hussein's two sons. The reaction to that in Iraq, including the Sunni towns north of Baghdad, spoke for itself. The political process was advancing too. On 14 August the Security Council adopted resolution 1500, which welcomed the establishment of the governing council and created the United Nations assistance mission for Iraq.

As the House is well aware, however, those positive developments have since been overshadowed by a series of atrocities. There was the bombing of the Jordanian embassy on 7 August, which claimed the lives of 17 people. That was followed on 19 August by the attack on the UN headquarters in Baghdad, which caused the deaths of UN special representative Sergio Vieira de Mello and 21 others. Then on 29 August there was the assassination of Ayatollah Hakim in Najaf in a car bombing that killed more than 100 other worshippers.

Altogether, nine Britons have lost their lives in Iraq since the House rose on 17 July. In the south of Iraq, three separate attacks on 14, 23 and 27 August caused the deaths of five British soldiers from the Queen's Lancashire Regiment, the Royal Military Police and the Lowland Regiment of the Territorial Army. Last Thursday Ian Rimell, a British mines clearance expert, was murdered in northern Iraq. I know that I speak for the whole House when I say that our deepest condolences go to the families of the British victims and to the loved ones of all those killed by terrorists in Iraq, whether they be soldiers, international civil servants, Iraqi political leaders or Iraqi civilians going about their daily lives. I pay particular tribute to Sergio Vieira de Mello, who was an outstanding international diplomat.

I know that the House will also wish to join me in offering our deepest sympathy to the family and friends of Fiona Watson, who died in the bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad. Many colleagues in the House will recall that Fiona was a highly regarded officer of the House, who worked as a senior researcher in the international affairs and defence section of the Library between 1992 and 1997. Her subsequent work for the UN secretariat was recognised as being of the highest quality. She will be greatly missed both by former colleagues here and by her fellow officials at the UN.

Investigations are under way to bring the perpetrators of those and other acts of terrorism to justice. The attacks appear to come both from supporters of the Saddam regime and from terrorist groups from elsewhere in the region. What is clear is that those groups decided to target the UN and people like Ayatollah Hakim who were working so constructively and courageously for a new Iraq precisely because they could see the progress that the UN, the coalition

provisional authority and the Iraqi Governing Council were making. They wished literally to blow the process apart.

The threat from terrorists is now not just to the coalition forces, but to the Iraqi people and their future. That is now increasingly recognised by the international community. Whatever view was held about the military action itself, there is a determination throughout the civilised world that we must all ensure that the terrorists fail in their objective. For our part, we will not be deterred from our overall goal: to hand sovereignty to the Iraqi people as quickly as possible in conditions allowing them to build a secure and prosperous country. [*Interruption.*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the Foreign Secretary, but we really cannot have electronic devices going off in the chamber. May I urge Members either to leave them outside or switch them off?

Mr. Straw: I was talking about sovereignty. Sovereignty can only be fully exercised in a climate of security. That is why the continued presence of coalition troops is vital if Iraq is to manage the transition to representative government, and to build a society based on tolerance, human rights and the rule of law.

At present there are 140,000 United States troops and more than 10,000 British troops in the country. Another 15,000 troops have been provided by 25 other nations, including 5,500 from five existing European Union member states and 2,300 from five accession countries.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence told the House earlier today, we will be deploying additional troops in the near future to the UK area of operations in south-eastern Iraq. This deployment will give extra capabilities to our commanders in theatre and increase our capacity to help to rebuild Iraq's infrastructure.

Urgent action is also being taken to build up Iraq's own security forces. Police numbers now stand at 37,000, and it is planned that that figure will rise to some 70,000. The training of the new Iraqi Army has begun with a target of three divisions by the middle of next year. An Iraqi civil defence corps of 14,000 is being trained and rapidly expanded to take over many guarding and patrolling duties, freeing up coalition forces for more demanding tasks.

On the question of further evidence relating to Saddam's illegal weapons programme, the Iraq survey group continues its work, albeit in a difficult security environment. It is a long-term task, and the survey group will make a progress report at an appropriate time.

I do not, in any way, underestimate the scale of the security and other problems that we face. They are very serious, but we should not lose sight of the effective work of the coalition provisional authority under ambassador Bremer and coalition forces and that of Iraq's governing council and Ministers. This week, Sir Jeremy Greenstock, our former ambassador to the UN, will be going out to Baghdad as the British Government's special representative. Last month, Sir Hilary Synnott, our former high commissioner in Pakistan, took up his post in Basra as the regional co-ordinator for the CPA in southern Iraq. I know that the House will join me in sending them our good wishes.

The international staff in Iraq—including many Britons—are doing vital work in difficult circumstances. The delivery of essential services is gradually improving, food distribution systems have been restored and all 240 hospitals in Iraq are functioning. With the help of UNICEF, more than 22 million doses of vaccines have been provided—enough for 4.2 million children.

By the end of June, most schools in Iraq were open. We have launched an upgrade of school facilities, and 70 million revised textbooks will have been printed by the end of December. Universities have been operating as normal.

The water sector is obviously one of our top priorities. Projects are in hand in Baghdad and elsewhere to upgrade treatment plants and to build new ones to serve 11.5 million people. The network has, however, been badly hit by organised sabotage, exacerbated by shortages of parts and chemicals.

Electricity and oil supplies have also been targeted by the terrorists. In response, an Iraqi force is being trained and armed to guard Iraq's oil and power facilities as well as its bridges and dams. Iraqis are helping coalition troops to secure the 19,000 km of power lines and the 7,000 km of oil pipelines in Iraq.

Our Department for International Development is moving quickly to allocate new funds for emergency infrastructure programmes in southern Iraq.

One of the immediate consequences of the bombing of the UN building on 19 August has been the scaling down of the UN presence in Iraq. We are in close touch with the UN about the implementation of further security measures to help it to restore its activity.

Over as short a time scale as possible, our overall goal is to create the conditions in which the Iraqi people can take responsibility for the governance of their country. Two months after its formation, the Iraqi governing council is heavily involved in key economic and political decisions. On 3 September, it appointed 25 interim Ministers. From now on, Iraq's government ministries will be led by Iraqi politicians, who will be responsible for implementing policy and for managing their budgets. Along with the governing council and the CPA, the Ministers enjoy full rights to initiate policy. The overall effect of those important changes has been a significant transfer of responsibility from the CPA to the Iraqis, a process that should accelerate from now on.

On the international front, I have been working closely over recent weeks with Secretary Powell and my colleagues within the EU and elsewhere to strengthen the UN mandate in Iraq. A draft text of a resolution is being discussed at the Security Council. Let me set out its central elements. The draft reaffirms the UN's support for the work of the governing council. It calls on the governing council to submit a timetable and programme for the drafting of a new constitution for Iraq and for the holding of democratic elections. The United Nations will itself be heavily involved in preparing the electoral register and other electoral processes.

[Mr. Straw]

The draft also proposes a United Nations-mandated multinational force under existing unified command arrangements. That should help to facilitate the provision of troops by other countries so far not involved in Iraq.

Finally, the text refers to next month's conference in Madrid, which will be attended by a number of potential donor countries and the international financial institutions, and calls upon UN member states to help the Iraqi people by providing resources for rehabilitation and reconstruction. Discussions on the draft resolution will resume in New York later today. I will of course report any outcome to the House and make available to it any published text.

Let me now turn to the situation in Israel and the occupied territories. I very much regret, as I am sure does the whole House, the resignation of the Palestinian Authority Prime Minister, Abu Mazen, over the weekend. We had confidence in him and we supported his efforts to deliver the Palestinians' implementation of their road map commitments in a difficult climate of violence and uncertainty. It was Abu Mazen's appointment in April that triggered the publication of the road map, which set out the aim of a secure state of Israel alongside a viable Palestinian state and how we achieve that.

But Abu Mazen's resignation must not be allowed to send the peace process back to square one. The Palestinian leadership must unite around a clear commitment to road map implementation. It needs to take firm action to stop the terrorists planning and executing attacks—such as the appalling 19 August bus bombing in Jerusalem—from territory under Palestinian Authority control.

The speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council—Abu Ala—has now been nominated to take over from Abu Mazen. Abu Ala is a Palestinian leader with a long track record of efforts for peace. If his appointment is confirmed, we will judge him by his commitment to the peace process.

Similarly, we shall continue to encourage Israel to meet its obligations. Israel must create a climate within which moderate Palestinian leaders can prevail: by freezing settlement activity; by removing outposts, which are illegal even under Israeli law; by restoring Palestinian freedom of movement, so allowing economic activity to restart; by ending so-called targeted assassinations; and by ensuring that the security fence does not encroach on Palestinian land.

The House will wish to know that this morning I spoke to Nabil Shaath, the Palestinian Authority Foreign Minister, to Secretary of State Colin Powell and, shortly before making this statement, to Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom.

The responsibility of the international community is to do everything that we can to hold both sides to their commitments under the road map and to isolate the terrorists, and we shall continue to play our part. I welcome the fact the European Union is taking a lead in that respect. At the meeting that I attended on Saturday, European Union Foreign Ministers unanimously agreed that the Union should freeze the assets of Hamas.

In respect of both the middle east peace process and the situation in Iraq, Britain is seeking, in partnership with others, to bring its influence to bear on a region that has suffered unimaginable torment for decades. In recent months, thanks in part to our actions, the people of the area have had reason to believe that a peaceful and prosperous future might be within reach. That prospect must be kept alive against those who would plunge the region into chaos. We are determined to work with the international community to establish peace and security across the whole region. Despite the setbacks of recent days and weeks, that is the course that we shall continue to pursue.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I thank the Foreign Secretary for his lengthy and detailed statement and for advance sight of it.

I, too, deeply regret the resignation of Abu Mazen, which is an enormous blow to the middle east peace process. I fear that he has been let down by all sides. Abu Ala has shown in the past that he is prepared to work for peace in direct dialogue with the Israelis. If his appointment is confirmed, I hope that he will be given a fair chance to deliver on the principles of the road map, sufficient power by the Palestinian Authority to deal with the problems of terrorism, and a stronger adherence to the road map by the Government of Israel to enable him to show tangible benefits for the Palestinian people.

The news from Iraq is more grim than it was when I was in Baghdad at the end of July. I, too, pay tribute to the members of our armed forces who recently lost their lives. They died in the service of their country and the people of Iraq, whose lives they were trying to make better. Our thoughts are with their families and the families of Fiona Watson and Sergio Vieira de Mello.

Despite criticism of what we are doing in Iraq, I have nothing but praise for the performance of our troops in and around Basra and our team working with the CPA in Baghdad. Peacemaking and nation building are never easy, and they are all doing a remarkable job. I, too, wish Sir Jeremy Greenstock and Sir Hilary Synnott well in the challenging posts that they have undertaken.

On weapons of mass destruction, does the Foreign Secretary still agree with the Prime Minister that concrete evidence of such programmes and their product will be found? In May, the Prime Minister said that such information existed and would be published in due course. To restore public trust, would it not be a good idea to publish it now?

The latest draft United Nations resolution is welcome. There must be a single chain of command and control, which, given the circumstances on the ground, should logically be America-led. Will the Foreign Secretary tell his French colleague to stop posturing and start helping people to get on with what urgently needs to be done?

In Afghanistan and Bosnia, the UN has a significant role to play on the political and humanitarian front in co-ordination with NATO and American forces, but without controlling them. Why should it not do the same in Iraq?

I note what the Foreign Secretary said about Iraq's own security forces. The police numbers are encouraging, but is it not the case that the numbers in Baghdad, where some of the greatest difficulties arise, are still woefully low?

The greatest threat to security now is targeted terrorism, designed, as recent targets clearly demonstrate, to destabilise and undermine the reconstruction of Iraq. Oil, water, political leaders and international institutions are classic terrorist targets, and I fear that they will not be the last.

Does the Foreign Secretary agree that such terrorism must be pursued and ruthlessly eliminated with the help of the Iraqi people as a whole? Does he share my concern that the Iraqi people are, as I learned in Basra and Baghdad, increasingly resentful at the lack of urgency in restoring basic amenities such as water, electricity and sewers? They cannot understand why that is taking so long. They are incredulous that countries that put men on the moon 30 years ago cannot get the lights working in Iraq in four months. Such frustrations will only make Iraqi people less co-operative in fighting terrorism and, as recently seen in Basra, a source of instability.

This is certainly not the fault of our armed services. Indeed, as senior British military sources in Iraq told me, additional troops will achieve little if civilian reconstruction remains stagnant.

It is now clear that there has been a culpable failure of planning for post-war Iraq, for which the Government cannot this time escape blame. Ministers assured us that all this was in hand, so what went wrong? What plans were made to ensure the swift rehabilitation of basic amenities and utilities once the war was over? What plans were drawn up for the speedy signing of contracts? How many reconstruction contracts are in place and how many are in preparation? What on earth has the Department for International Development been doing, and is it not about time that the Foreign Secretary took a grip?

The coalition urgently needs to show that it has a clearly defined strategy and that Iraq will be restored as soon as possible to the Iraqis. I therefore welcome the appointment of Iraqi Ministers by the governing council, but that, too, will be an empty gesture if major reconstruction work does not start soon.

What we did in the war was right. What we must not do now is squander the peace for lack of political direction. Yesterday, President Bush demonstrated a clear determination to make reconstruction work. This Government should get their act together and do the same—and this time announce it by a direct oral statement in Parliament and never again, as last week, by leaked memo. After the events of the last few weeks, that should be a totally discredited practice.

Mr. Straw: On the middle east, I note what the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) has to say. As I came into the Chamber there was no information confirming the appointment of Abu Ala as Prime Minister. I have indicated to the House that we will do all that we can to support the process and to encourage all sides to stick to their obligations under the road map, because the simple fact is that it remains the only viable path to peace for millions of Israelis and Palestinians.

The situation on the ground in Iraq is more serious than when the right hon. Gentleman was there on 27 July and there is one reason for that. He asked me whether I would tell my good friend Dominique de Villepin to "stop posturing". I was reminded of the parable of the beam and the mote at that point. On that specific piece of advice on diplomacy, I do not wish to take his advice because I had constructive conversations with Dominique de Villepin at the weekend and we are looking forward with all other EU foreign Ministers to a constructive outcome to the discussions to provide an enhanced and strengthened role for the UN in Iraq.

I understand the difficulties of the official Opposition, who fully backed the military action that we took. However, it was not a shortage of planning that led to the atrocity against the UN on 19 August, or the even worse atrocity on 29 August against over 100 worshippers in Najaf; it was terrorists. If the right hon. Gentleman fails to understand that difference, it is not surprising that his analysis is so poor.

I ask the right hon. Gentleman a question that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence put to the Conservative defence spokesman: if we are now being told that the planning has been totally inadequate—a point on which his right hon. Friend was totally silent when he visited Iraq on 27 July; I checked on Conservatives.com just to see—and that this is a total shambles, is that also a criticism of President Bush and Donald Rumsfeld, who have the greatest responsibility for Iraq? I look forward to the right hon. Gentleman making clear at whom his criticism is directed. *[Interruption.]* Yes, we take responsibility for what is happening in the south, but he must understand that by general agreement what has happened in the south has been more satisfactory than what is happening in many other areas, thanks precisely to those whom he is praising, who have done the planning and implementation with political direction. He needs to spell out—let this be heard very clearly in Washington—whether these criticisms from the neo-cons' friends also extend to the American Administration in Washington.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me two other questions. He asked about concrete evidence in respect of weapons of mass destruction. Plenty of concrete evidence of weapons of mass destruction was put before this House in successive documents *—[Interruption].* Well, it was sufficient to convince Opposition Members and others on 18 March. If they are now saying that the 173 pages of the weapons inspectorate's reports were not sufficient, I am surprised that they did not say that during the debates on 17 and 18 March.

As for further evidence, the Iraq survey group is doing its job in more difficult circumstances than had been anticipated because of the situation caused by terrorists. At the appropriate moment, details of their work will be published.

On a unified command, we agree with the right hon. Gentleman that there should be a unified command of a multinational force under the United Nations mandate, and I do not anticipate very great difficulties in achieving that.

Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): May I begin by associating myself with the Foreign Secretary's expressions of sympathy and condolence, especially in relation to Fiona Watson, who was formerly my constituent and whose parents still live in Pittenweem in north-east Fife? The whole community was saddened by her death.

[Menzies Campbell]

It is clear that there is broad agreement between the Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) and me on the middle east, so let me confine myself to two specifics. First, following the events of the past week, is it conceivable that there can be any lasting settlement that does not in some way involve Yasser Arafat? Is not the ever-extending so-called defensive wall an increasingly insurmountable and political obstacle to peace?

Secondly, I hope I might be forgiven the observation that the indignation of Conservative Members about Iraq might ring a little more true if there had been a little more scepticism before the conflict.

I was much impressed—indeed, persuaded—by the memorandum attributed to the Secretary of State, which somehow found its way into the public domain last week. Is it not clear that if additional troops from the United Kingdom and elsewhere are to be provided, they will be made available by capable nations only if a fresh United Nations mandate allows the UN a greater role in security and reconstruction than the draft resolution currently contemplates? Indeed, a vital role in precisely the language used by President Bush and Prime Minister when they held a press conference in Northern Ireland before the outbreak of the conflict.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful for the tone of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's remarks. I repeat my condolences to the family and friends of Fiona Watson. I know from direct contact with the family how devastating it has been for them and for the whole community in the right hon. and learned Gentleman's constituency.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked two questions about the middle east peace process, the first of which was whether there can be any lasting settlement that does not involve Yasser Arafat. If we ever secure a lasting settlement, it will be for historians to judge what positive or negative contribution Yasser Arafat made to it. Our position is that we deal with Heads of Government, and that includes Yasser Arafat. For that reason, among others, on 23 August, having spoken to Abu Mazen about the security situation, I spoke on the telephone to Chairman Arafat.

On the question of the security fence, I have made the British Government's position clear.

On the question of the United Nations mandate, a large number of countries have provided, or are providing, good troops on the ground, with 8,000 troops being provided by 10 other European Union members states or accession countries. Other countries might require a further mandate, which is one of the reasons for considering a further resolution, which I believe we will secure.

Under Sergio Vieira de Mello's leadership, the United Nations was playing an increasingly vital role, which is why I believe that terrorists decided to target the United Nations. Had the UN not been playing that role—had it been an irrelevance—it would not have been a target. The attack was launched precisely because, despite all the scepticism, the UN, the CPA and the governing council were making progress. The United Nations has been doing a very good job, but I hope that the negotiations will further strengthen what it can do in this profoundly important country.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): Nobody can possibly derive any satisfaction from the situation on the ground in Iraq, which is grave and seems to be becoming graver, but does my right hon. Friend believe that his comments about the "Iraqisation" of the process are fundamental? At present—I do not intend these comments to be construed as aggressive—Iraq has a form of colonial government, and until such time as the Iraqis can see that there is an Iraqi Government of competence and capacity the difficulties of the present situation will continue.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is correct. Of course, I was insistent that we described ourselves, with the US, as the occupying power in the first resolution because we were, and I thought that there should be no dubiety about it. But I also believe, as the whole House does, that we have to move swiftly to moving sovereignty to the Iraqi people. That is one of the aims of part of the draft text that is now being discussed: to get the governing council, along with the United Nations Secretary-General and the CPA, to establish a clear timetable for moving from where we are to a fully representative Government by Iraqis for Iraqis with elections. I think that, once we have got that, with those signposts, along with other progress we hope to see made, the situation may well improve.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): With hindsight, what should have been done differently to prepare for the aftermath of the war in Iraq?

Mr. Straw: I think that there could have been more effective preparations to deal with the possibility of terrorism. I do not for a moment suggest that everything was got right; that is palpably not the case. Certainly, one of the things that was not anticipated was the speed with which the Saddam Hussein regime would fall and the power vacuum that would be left. That said, when the shadow Foreign Secretary visited Baghdad in late July, there was gradual improvement—as I had seen in early July—across that country. It is not as a result of any defects in planning but as a direct result of terrorism that progress has been set back.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On the leaked memo, I agreed with the Foreign Secretary when he said:

"The lack of political progress in solving the linked problems of security, infrastructure and the political process are undermining the consent of the Iraqi people to the coalition presence and providing fertile grounds for extremism and terrorism."

Some of us forecast that that might happen. Will he tell the House how 2,000 more of our troops going into the gravest danger will stop that? Should he not be telling the House what the Government's exit strategy is and when we will bring the troops home?

Mr. Straw: Paradoxically, putting in more troops now and taking other action with the coalition forces and the coalition provisional authority to secure and then improve the situation is the route by which we will be able to hand over control of Iraq to the Iraqi people

and then safely leave that country. That is what we want to do and what the Americans want to do, and we want to do so as quickly as possible, but we have very clear responsibilities not to create a vacuum there. I am fully aware of the frustrations of the Iraqi people—frustrations that existed in greater number under the Saddam regime but which of course could not be voiced because of the reign of terror that was operated. Of course I am aware of their frustrations, but Iraqis are the last people who wish coalition forces to leave tomorrow, as it were. They want a phased process of a handover of control of their country as quickly as possible to the people of Iraq.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): I remind the Foreign Secretary that quite a few Conservatives did not vote with the Government on 18 March. Does he agree that there is little point in sending thousands more troops so long as the project is being interpreted, however unfairly, as some anti-Muslim crusade? Instead of trying to get thousands more troops from France and Germany, could not the Government concentrate on trying to get some of the responsible Arab countries to participate? For example, would he consider approaching countries such as Egypt and Libya, which have behaved very responsibly in recent years and that could make a huge difference if they were seen to be participating in the Iraqi venture?

Mr. Straw: Countries round the world, including in the region, have an important role to play in respect of Iraq, not necessarily only in providing additional troops but in political support, which I hope will be another element in the resolution that is finally agreed from the discussions in New York. It was palpable around the whole region before 18 March that Saddam Hussein was unloved not only by his own people but by one leader and one set of peoples of the middle east, and it was they who were very pleased to see the back of him.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The US Administration recognise that they need allies, and are converted—at least in this area of policy—to multilateralism. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we have a special role in seeking to converge with the French Government to ensure that the EU divisions before the conflict do not spill over into the task of reconstruction, which is in all our interests?

What is my right hon. Friend's preferred timetable for restoring Iraq to the Iraqis and giving them a legitimate government?

Mr. Straw: I agree with my right hon. Friend's first point and I was much heartened by my conversations with EU Foreign Ministers at the weekend.

On the timetable, we all want this done as soon as is safe and possible, but the details of the timetable should come from the representatives of the Iraqi people on the Governing Council. It should not be initiated by the British Government.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Should we not put it on record that many of the forecasts of those who voted against going to war on 18 March have not come to pass? Should we not realise that it is not surprising that it takes a little longer than five months to replace dictatorship and anarchy with democracy? May I express the hope that those who are working for us out there are given our total support here?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's comments. He has been consistent in his approach and has stood by the position that he took up to 18 March. I only wish that hon. Members on his Front Bench had followed a similar --

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): Exemplary.

Mr. Straw: Exemplary? I remind Opposition Front-Bench Members that the hon. Gentleman said that he was ashamed of them.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Did not Mahmoud Abbas's position become unsustainable when he was asked to deliver, in terms of suppressing terrorism, what he was not physically capable of doing while the Israelis are provoking terrorism by targeted assassination and by building the wall? Does he agree that there is no chance whatever for middle eastern peace as long as the Israeli Government are allowed to do whatever they think fit while Palestinians live in poverty and despair?

Mr. Straw: I spelled out clearly the Government's position on targeted assassinations and the security wall. We in the international community want the Israeli Government to follow that approach. On the discrete point about what brought down Abu Mazen, there was first the bombing by Hamas on 19 August, which killed a large number of entirely innocent men, women and children. There was a deliberate decision by Hamas, without any justification, to try to destroy the road map and undermine the authority of the Palestinian Authority.

The second problem that Abu Mazen faced was a lack of clarity about whether he was responsible for security forces in Gaza and, later, as it was hoped, on the west bank. The fact that there is such confusion, with some forces controlled directly by Chairman Arafat and some by the Palestinian Authority, is wholly unsatisfactory. In my conversation earlier today with the Foreign Minister Nabil Shaath, I spelled out the imperative of ensuring that there is clarity in respect of the security arrangements, and then that the Palestinian Authority take steps that they are obliged to take under the road map—and that they have pledged to take—to deal with terrorists operating in their territory.

Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): May I first declare an interest, in that I recently returned from visiting Israel and Palestine with the Labour Middle East Council? We met Abu Mazen, who made it very clear to us that he felt that he was not being cut enough slack by the Israeli Government, that he did not have the opportunity to produce on the ground the results that the Israelis and the international community were expecting, because that Government were not doing their part with regard to settlements, for example. What steps is the right hon. Gentleman taking to ensure that the Israeli Government give enough room for manoeuvre to a future Palestinian Prime Minister, and have the UK Government given

[Simon Thomas]

any consideration to providing direct assistance to security forces on the Palestinian Authority side, to improve their detection of terrorism?

Mr. Straw: As I said, I have already been involved today in detailed discussions with the Foreign Ministers from Israel and the occupied territories, and with Secretary Powell. We stand ready to do everything we can. On the issue of providing further equipment for the security authorities in the occupied territories, we are certainly ready actively and positively to consider such requests, but we have to be assured about who will use such equipment and how it will be controlled. In our view, it will have to be controlled by the Palestinian Prime Minister and cabinet—specifically the Interior Minister. They must be people in whom the international community has confidence. If that does not happen, the current spiral will continue downwards.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Now that the Foreign Secretary is in plain-speaking mode, as evidenced by his attack on the shadow Foreign Secretary, will he extend that a little further and tell George Bush that he was a bit naïve and inexperienced when he flew on to an aircraft carrier on 1 May and said, "The war's over"? Will the Foreign Secretary also take the following into account? I heard him remark that he is meeting different people such as the French Foreign Minister to try to mend some fences with the United Nations. We tried to do that before the war began, and if there is any grovelling to be done to the United Nations, he should tell George Bush and his Republican guard to do the grovelling.

Mr. Straw: I know that the White House makes heavy use of the House of Commons website and *Hansard* reports.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Has not the Foreign Secretary been far too indulgent towards the attitude of the French and German Governments? On the issues of a United Nations resolution that can help with the reconstruction of Iraq, and of finding a framework for the operation of an international peacekeeping force, have the French and Germans not merely displayed schadenfreude but done damage to the prospects for peace in Iraq itself, and prejudiced any possibility whatsoever of a common European foreign policy, let alone of a single European Foreign Minister from either France or Germany?

Mr. Straw: I do not accept what the hon. Gentleman says. I have spoken week by week by telephone, and in meetings, with Dominique de Villepin and Joschka Fischer, the two Foreign Ministers in question. Of course, they held a different position in respect of military action in Iraq, and we should respect that, just as some people did in this House. But they have shown a constructive approach to the security and reconstruction needs of Iraq, and conversations with them in New York and in other capitals continue.

On the issue of a common foreign and security policy, all of this emphasises the need to keep the matter an intergovernmental one in principle. One area about which I have been speaking today—Iraq—has been the subject of a divided approach within Europe. The other area—the middle east—has been the subject of a common foreign policy. I should tell the hon. Gentleman that our own position has been greatly strengthen by the fact that we have the European Union with us, and I shall give one practical example. We could have taken action here to freeze the whole of Hamas's fundraising activities, but the fact that we were able to get the other 24 member states on board greatly strengthens the effectiveness of that action. The hon. Gentleman needs to address the question of whether he wants us not to seek to co-operate with our European Union partners. My view is that we should co-operate where we can. Often, co-operation achieves success, and where it does not, well, we take our own decisions.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): Despite the existence of a recent opinion poll in Iraq showing overwhelming support for the strategy and record of the coalition in recent months, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is still far too early to judge either the success or, indeed, the failure of the current strategy? Does he share my confidence that in one, two or five years' time we will be able to look back on the difficulties that face us today, and on the sacrifices that are being made, as stepping stones towards the successful re-establishment of a free and independent Iraq?

Mr. Straw I do not think that there is any doubt that the vast majority of Iraqis overwhelmingly wish to see not only the end of Saddam Hussein but, obviously, the establishment of a representative Government in a stable and secure society. There are profound frustrations at the moment in some areas—not all—that we have to understand, but it is certainly too early to judge whether or not we have been successful. What I can pledge to the House is our determination, along with that of the coalition authorities and other countries working there, to do everything that we can to secure this goal of a secure, prosperous and stable Iraq.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Does the Foreign Secretary recall that many of us who voted against the war did so because we felt that no weapons of mass destruction would be found that posed a threat to this country? Indeed, we argued that this invasion would make terrorism worse, not better, and that is precisely the situation that we face now. Does he agree that we are in danger of being sucked into a Vietnam-type vortex whereby we will be constantly told that more troops are being provided? Is not the solution to try to re-engage the international community, and is it not about time that the American Administration and ourselves made active efforts to re-engage the French and the Germans? There is no point talking about the accession nations of eastern Europe. We have to deal with major international powers that have the ability to move the UN forward. Is the Foreign Secretary prepared to take the necessary steps to get us out of the morass?

Mr. Straw: Terrorism in a terrible form existed before 18 March and I do not accept for a second the hon. Gentleman's analysis of the causes of terrorism in Iraq today. As to re-engaging with France and Germany, and other key partners, we have been engaged with them throughout and, as I have already told the House, I am

greatly encouraged by the constructive atmosphere in which I have held many discussions with my French and German counterparts in recent weeks.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): My right hon. Friend has always been particularly candid about the difficulties that we face in the reconstruction of Iraq, but can I ask him to re-examine the position of the Iraqi army? I believe that it was a major mistake to stand down that army and we should reconsider the possibility of it serving the country again. I spoke this morning to someone who had been a general at a military academy, who told me that he could provide between 50 and 100 people to help the coalition to bring about security. We should think more about the contribution that Iraqis themselves can make to the stability and security of their own country.

Mr. Straw: The answer to my hon. Friend is yes. As I announced earlier, the Iraqi army is being rebuilt and the aim is to have three brigades—about 40,000 men—by the middle of next year. I shall certainly take forward my hon. Friend's specific suggestion with the coalition provisional authority.

Mr. Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): Will the Foreign Secretary tell us what additional non-military British and foreign resources will be made available for the reconstruction of Iraq, so that our Army does not have to spend time training police, running the banking system and supervising contractors? Will he have discussions with the Russians about the rebuilding of power stations, because they built them and they understand them best?

Mr. Straw: On additional funds, the Department for International Development has committed £198 million altogether this financial year. Within that overall figure, an allocation of £20 million was recently made for short-term infrastructure projects in the south of Iraq.

I accept the hon. Gentleman's point that we should, as quickly as possible, shift some responsibility from the military to civilians. That is why additional troops have been sent. The more quickly they can help the security environment, the easier it will be for civilians to do the job themselves.

I am familiar with the hon. Gentleman's argument that many power stations in Iraq were built by the Russians, and therefore have Russian parts and Russian dimensions. I have already witnessed what can only be described as serious sales pitch by representatives of the Russian power supply industry about the need for them to be in Iraq. I very much hope that they will be able to secure a fair proportion of the contracts.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): In the light of current evidence, does my right hon. Friend believe it possible that the UK Government and their allies may have overestimated the extent and immediacy of the threat from Iraq—for example, in respect of a restarted nuclear weapons programme, biological and chemical weapons stocks, the quantity and range of missiles and their speed of deployment?

Mr. Straw: On some of my hon. Friend's detailed points, I await the judgment of Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee, which will shortly appear. I can tell my hon. Friend, however, that the decision taken by an overwhelming majority of the House on 18 March to take military action is as justified today as it was on that day. I remind the House that the principal reason why it took that decision was the continued defiance by Saddam Hussein of the will of the UN and a judgment that he would continue to defy that will unless military action was taken. I also say—and we all have to think about this—that had we not acted as we did, the world would be a very much less safe place. The House needs to think about this: we would have seen a re-empowered and emboldened Saddam Hussein, who would have been a real and profound source of long-term instability in the region.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): Since no occupying power in the Mesopotamian area over the past 1,000 years has succeeded in persuading the Sunni, the Shia and the Kurds to co-operate, and if, as one of the Foreign Secretary's hon. Friends sensibly suggested, he is looking for an exit strategy, may I suggest the exit of the present Labour Government?

Mr. Straw: No, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): My right hon. Friend has not referred to the search for weapons of mass destruction. Can he explain how it has been possible to offer rewards for information leading to the arrest of Saddam Hussein and members of his regime, but no such rewards have been offered to those with information leading to the location of weapons of mass destruction? I have a strong feeling that the money would be quite safe.

Mr. Straw: I think that the factual basis of my hon. Friend's question is not quite correct. I know that the Iraq survey group and the military authorities have been seeking the active co-operation of all those who unquestionably were involved in Iraq's weapons programmes.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Given the welcome aim of involving the United Nations more and effecting a rapid transition to Iraqi self-government, does not the Foreign Secretary think it a good idea to suggest a date by which there would be total withdrawal of our troops, to provide a stimulus for those trying to create an Iraqi Government, and to send a clear message to the terrorists that we do not wish to have an army of occupation there for long?

Mr. Straw: It is sensible to set a timetable for the transfer of responsibility and sovereignty to the Iraqi people, but it would be irresponsible for us to do that without taking the lead from the Iraqis, and without making a judgment day by day and week by week about whether the security situation justifies a withdrawal.

Chris McCafferty (Calder Valley): The whole House will join the Foreign Secretary in sending condolences to the families and friends of British victims in Iraq—but in view of the continual newspaper reports of the killing of ordinary innocent Iraqis because of the over-zealous reaction of American forces, can the Foreign Secretary

[Chris McCafferty]

tell the House how many ordinary Iraqi men, women and children have died since the peace began—and if not, why not?

Mr. Straw: The reason why not is that I do not have the estimate to hand. Some of the estimates are very difficult to come by, but I shall see whether I can get an estimate and place it before the House.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Can the Foreign Secretary confirm the reports that a significant number of Wahabi fundamentalists have crossed into Iraq from Saudi Arabia since the war, and are a major contributory factor to the violence? Are the Saudi Government helping or hindering in dealing with that problem?

Mr. Straw: It is true that a number of extremists have come into Iraq from a number of the neighbouring countries. The Saudi Government have given excellent co-operation to the coalition provisional authority and the coalition forces, and I think that they will continue to do so.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Will the Foreign Secretary remind the House that 500,000 children died as a result of the failed policy of containment, and that the Saddam preservation society on the Lib Dem Benches, who would have done nothing to get rid of Saddam, and the carping critics on the Tory Benches, should recollect that the policies that they supported in the past would have led to far more deaths of Iraqis this year to add to the 300,000 bodies that have already been dug up from the mass graves?

Mr. Straw: Terrible though those calculations are, I think that my hon. Friend is correct. Containment was not working. If we had not brought this matter to a head, my guess is that those who favoured some kind of deal with Saddam would have won the argument, and Saddam would have been re-empowered and emboldened to maintain and increase his reign of terror over his own people, in which it now turns out that hundreds of thousands—an estimated 300,000—died, as well as over the rest of the region.

The situation in Iraq today is not satisfactory, but we are working hard to improve it. However, in my judgment it is on any basis significantly better, and will be judged over time to be significantly better than under Saddam.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): All commentators refer to the increasing alienation of the Iraqi population because of what they see as the slow pace of reconstruction and the heavy-handedness in the response notably of the Americans. If there are increasing numbers of foreign troops and different nationalities in Iraq with many of whom the Iraqi people have no historical links, what steps will the coalition take to ensure that they understand that that is helping the reconstruction of their country and not merely helping to solve our military problem?

Mr. Straw: I pay tribute to the British troops operating in the south of Iraq, who have shown great felicity and courage in getting alongside Iraqi people to try to build up their confidence, as they have in other theatres. On the whole, that is working. Sometimes they are engaged in straightforward conflict with particular groups of Iraqis because of criminals or terrorists operating against them. The most important things we can do to meet the aspiration to which the right hon. Gentleman referred is to secure a rapid transfer of power to the Iraqi people. That process has been started. As I spelled out to the House in my statement, 25 Iraqi interim Ministers have now been appointed and there is a governing council that is far more representative than any government under Saddam Hussein and which will increasingly take responsibility for the services that make a difference in the Iraqi people's day-to-day lives.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): After five months of occupation, and now an increase in the deployment of British troops in Iraq, does the Foreign Secretary think it is now time to reconsider the closeness of British foreign policy to that of the Bush Administration, and perhaps declare some independence in our foreign policy, rather than following George Bush from war to war?

Mr. Straw: I could go through the areas with regard to which we fully support the United States and the European Union and those with regard to which we have differences of opinion, but I do not think that there would be any point. The simple fact of the matter is that in some areas of the foreign policy proposed by the Government and supported by the House, such as our approach to Iran and to Chairman Arafat, we happen to have disagreements with the United States, but even my hon. Friend would be well advised to recognise that overall for the security of the international community it would not be wise for Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States to get too far apart. His own constituents would suffer if we did.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): The Foreign Secretary said that real progress on the ground in Iraq is being overshadowed and undermined by the atrocities. Does he agree that it is being underplayed by some people in the United Kingdom? He mentioned that all 240 hospitals in Iraq are functioning. The remarkable political pluralism that is represented by the governing council, if it is successful, could have an effect not just in Iraq but well beyond its boundaries. The last time my right hon. Friend made a statement mentioning these positive developments I looked in the newspapers the next day but there was no report of any word of it. Does he hold out any hope of it being reported tomorrow morning?

Mr. Straw: I live in hope.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): Labour Friends of Israel also visited the region before the recess and we met Abu Ala. We were impressed by his commitment to peace and his track record on that. At the time, there was great hope about the ceasefire on the Israeli side, but also scepticism that it might be an opportunity for the terrorists to regroup and strike again. Unfortunately, that fear was realised, and the terrible thing is that it reinforced the scepticism on the Israel side.

Does my right hon. Friend agree with me that it is vital for the Palestinian Authority to clamp down on and prevent terrorism—not to stamp out every incident, but to convince the Israelis that that is its intention? That is also vital for the Palestinian Authority, because it must be in control of its area. It is the first function of any Government to protect their civilians and to be in charge of their area.

Mr. Straw: Yes, I do. As I spelled out, the Palestinian Authority have a clear responsibility to do that, and we hold them to it, but the international community and the Government of Israel have a responsibility for the climate that is created in which these things can happen.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Involved in Saddam Hussein's totalitarian control of the Iraqi people was the domination and subversion of three major sets of organisations: youth organisations, women's organisations and trade unions. Now that those are free, they can help to bridge the ethnic divisions in Iraq and to build democracy. What is being done to facilitate those organisations' work in achieving that?

Mr. Straw: A good deal is being done to build up civic society in Iraq. Obviously in the last month the prospects for doing that have been set back by the terrorist outrages, which have created straightforward insecurity in the areas where they took place and an atmosphere of insecurity across wider Iraq. Already, however, the fact that so many newspapers have been founded and are being published and that so many political parties are being formed shows that, to pick up on the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for just south of Ayr—

Mr. Foulkes: Come on. Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley.

Mr. Straw: Yes, Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley—near Ayr. That shows that Iraqis are already, even in these circumstances, enjoying freedoms of action and thought undreamt of during Saddam Hussein's regime.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): My right hon. Friend said in his statement of Abu Ala: "We will judge him by his commitment to the peace process." Having been fortunate enough to meet Abu Ala, may I tell my right hon. Friend that I believe that he is absolutely committed to the peace process and is a leader of wisdom and pragmatism? However, he needs to be able to demonstrate that he is his own man if he is to have any credibility with Israel and the Quartet. To that end, would it not be a good first step if he could persuade the Palestinian security chief, who resigned at the same time as Abu Mazen and showed that he was not only paying lip service to the aim of dealing with terrorism but was doing something about it, to change his mind and come back on board? That would go some way to meeting some of the concerns expressed in Israel that the Palestinian Authority have to act as one against terrorism, not just paying lip service to that idea, but doing something about it.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is not for us to get involved in the internal politics of the Palestinian Authority or any equivalent authority. However, I would say that Abu Ala has a very distinguished record as one of the architects of the Oslo accord, and he is a man of peace. It is crucial that he is given authority by Chairman Arafat and that he has the security forces under his control, in a co-ordinated command that enables him to carry out the key task facing any Government in the occupied territories: establishing their authority over the terrorist groups, eliminating them and making the occupied territories secure. If they are able to achieve that, and the Israelis and the international community have an important part to play in that, confidence will build up and, with a bit of luck, we will return to the virtuous circle that existed before Hamas set about blowing up the peace process on 19 August.

Point of Order

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It has emerged in the last week that Mr. Andrew Gilligan, who was a witness before the Foreign Affairs Committee, was briefing Liberal Democrat and Tory Members of that Select Committee. That appears to be an abuse of the House. Will you look into it?

Mr. Speaker: I will write to the right hon. Gentleman.

Orders of the Day

Water Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. I also inform the House that there is an eight-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

5.24 pm

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Elliot Morley): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Government are committed to sustainable development. In "Directing the Flow", published nearly a year ago, we set out our strategic vision for the future direction of water policy and firmly established the place of water among our broader sustainability objectives. The high level of importance that the Government attach to water sustainability is shown throughout the Bill.

I shall outline the three main aims of the Bill. First, it improves water resource management and conservation by building upon existing legislation. Secondly, it addresses the issue of better regulation of the water industry, strengthening the voice of consumers and putting their needs at the centre of the regulator's responsibilities, equal in standing with the companies. Thirdly, it provides an increased opportunity for competition, benefiting large non-domestic consumers in the first instance.

Part 1, along with elements of part 3, is about the long-term sustainable use of water resources. This objective is set against a background of increased water demand and the uncertainties of climate change, and it reflects a major aim of the water framework directive.

Sustainability is about striking a balance between these potentially conflicting demands. The Bill strikes such a balance. It starts by placing a direct duty on the Secretary of State to encourage water conservation and an enhanced duty on the water industry. It sets up essential tools to manage water resources to help balance the conflict between the availability of resources and increasing demand. Water resource management plans and drought plans that are detailed in part 3 will help water companies to forward plan, ultimately protecting their interests and those of consumers, while ensuring that any potential environmental damage is limited.

Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): On the protection of consumers, in the House of Lords the Government set their face quite strongly against the rights of the new consumer council to make publicly available information that it felt was in the public interest. Why did the Government take that stance? Will there be an opportunity during the Bill's passage through this place to reconsider these matters and to reflect that consumers' interests would be greatly strengthened if consumer councils had the right to operate in accordance with, for example, freedom of information legislation?

Mr. Morley: I confirm that there will be an opportunity during the Bill's passage through this place

to discuss such issues, both in Committee and on Report. As for the availability of information, I assure my hon. Friend that we want to ensure that the maximum amount of information is available to consumer bodies and is available to be put in the public domain. Water Voice will have the opportunity of appealing to the regulator if it feels that information is being unreasonably withheld. The argument is about just how far consumer bodies can go, and to ensure also that the way in which Water Voice is treated is consistent with the treatment of other consumer bodies that represent other utilities. That position was taken in the other place. There will be an opportunity to discuss the balance during the Bill's passage.

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): Will the hon. Gentlemen tell me how far his Department, including the Secretary of State, have had discussions on forward planning with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister? I am thinking particularly of the issue of water in the south-east.

Mr. Morley: That strays beyond the Bill's remit, but I am happy to answer the question. With major developments, there are planning issues. In the case of the south-east, there is the Thames gateway, which is a significant potential development. A joint committee has been set up by the Government, so that there is discussion between my Department, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Department for Transport about the demands that a large-scale development in areas such as the south-east will produce. Water resource management is one of those issues. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we take such issues seriously. We are addressing them in terms of future strategic planning and housing developments in the south-east and in other areas.

Water undertakers already produce plans voluntarily, but the Bill makes them compulsory and enforceable. Greater accountability is the key to the Bill, enhancing Environment Agency powers to apply the "polluter pays" principle to water abstraction and increasing the level of information available to the public on water resources.

If we are serious about sustainability, we must not assume that things can carry on in the same way forever. It means making sure that we fully understand the levels of resources and demand, which is very much the point made by the hon. Gentleman.

We will limit activities where necessary, based on sound judgment and good reason. The Bill therefore brings some previously exempt abstractions into the licensing system. We are moving to a system where exemptions from licence control are linked to purpose—one where exemptions are linked to impact via the new threshold of 20 cu m a day, which can be varied as necessary. The control of all types of abstraction gives us the ability to manage and rebalance as necessary the allocation of water between various classes of abstracter and the environment.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the concern of quarry producers in my part of the country and elsewhere about the effect of the new abstraction arrangements on their activities, particularly below-water table abstractions. Can he enter into further dialogue with them, because I am sure that that their concerns can be met, and that we can have an adequate planning regime that deals with mineral permissions without a mismatch between the mineral permission on the one hand and the abstraction licence on the other?

Mr. Morley: I shall come soon to that very point.

However, mine dewatering has an impact on the environment and the water table. It is therefore perfectly legitimate to bring mine dewatering within the Bill's remit. Of course, I appreciate that there are issues relating to capital investment and long-term planning to which we are sensitive. We are adopting a reasonable position, and recognise both the needs of the industry and the need for proper resource management. There will be an opportunity to discuss that during proceedings on the Bill. It is a question of balance, and I believe that the balance set out in the Bill is about right.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Morley: I come now to dewatering, and if hon. Members wish to make points, I shall be happy to deal with them. Under the Bill, transfers for quarry dewatering are brought within the system. It is claimed in some quarters that quarry water is returned to the environment and is not consumed. However, dewatering has caused problems for other abstractors in the area who rely on water in the same strata, and it has caused damage to nature conservation sites. We need a safeguard for the activities but, of course, each activity should be treated on its merits.

Tom Levitt (High Peak): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that explanation. No one would deny that controls are needed on the quality of water returned to the environment by dewatering, but time limits and the effect on investment are causing the problem. Ministers in another place have give verbal assurances, but why is there an objection to including the possibility of exemptions in either the Bill or guidance?

Mr. Morley: As a general principle, the time limit is 12 years. Nevertheless, the Environment Agency in certain circumstances can provide longer time limits, depending on individual circumstances. It therefore comes back to the point that I made earlier—it very much depends on the circumstances of a particular application and the particular need. I fully expect the Environment Agency to be reasonable in the way in which it addresses that.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): The hon. Gentleman knows that the Environment Agency already has powers to intervene where there are environmental difficulties. Would it not be more sensible, when allowing dewatering licences to be coterminous with the quarrying permit, to reinforce the powers of the Environment Agency to intervene in cases where there was a perceived environmental problem? That would get over the difficulties of investment and uncertainty.

Mr. Morley: I accept the point that the right hon. Gentleman is making, and it is not unreasonable. It is a question of balance. The problem is that some mineral

[Mr. Morley]

extractors have permission that runs for a very long time, so the time limit for the abstraction licence has to be restricted. There is a presumption of renewal in the Bill and there is some flexibility for the Environment Agency, as the right hon. Gentleman rightly states. There is an argument about balance, but I think that the balance in the Bill is right.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): The Minister is obviously aware that this is causing a great deal of concern throughout the industry. Will he take the issue away after today's debate and consider whether 12 years is the right length of time? There is a great argument—apparently, it has even been accepted by the Prime Minister—about the amount of extra bureaucracy put on to businesses. This is one more layer that they could do without.

Mr. Morley: It is true that there is a new restriction, but I repeat that I believe it is justified as it relates to extraction from the water table and can impact on other abstractors, their businesses and their needs, and can cause environmental damage. We are not taking a dogmatic position. It is a question of the balance between the needs of long-term investment in mineral extraction, and the needs of proper resource management. I believe that we have achieved the right balance, but that will be subject to the scrutiny of the House in Committee and on Report, and we will listen to the reasoned arguments put forward.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): On a slightly wider point, if we consider business needs in relation to bottled water, such as at Tŷ Nant in my constituency, or mines water, the issue is investment decisions and how the licensing regime interacts with those. What can the Minister say about the new water services authority, and how much emphasis will be placed on business needs, sustainability, job creation and employment in the deliberations of the authority and of the Government on the Bill?

Mr. Morley: Those concerns are more than adequately addressed in the Bill. First, there is the presumption of renewal. Secondly, even where potential problems are identified, Environment Agency officials will sit down with the abstractor to discuss ways of resolving the problem. They will not go straight in and start taking people's licences off them without first trying to resolve the problem in a satisfactory way, recognising the needs of investment and social and business issues.

Those are all presumptions in the Bill. They are recognised. The Bill aims at proper resource management in a balanced way, taking into account the conflicting demands in a reasonable and legitimate way. The points that have been raised about long-term investment—in mineral water, for example—are understood and taken into account.

Diana Organ (Forest of Dean): Many quarry owners are concerned because of the commitment of long-term investment. If the Environment Agency is to revoke a licence, there is no right of appeal under the Bill. In any other planning application where one loses the right to continue development, there is a right of appeal. It seems undemocratic that we are not allowing quarry owners the right of appeal once their licence has been revoked.

Mr. Morley: There is in the Bill a right of appeal to the Secretary of State, so that safeguard exists in relation to licences that are withdrawn.

Part 2 aims to provide a new and better regulatory environment for the water industry and its consumers. The new regulatory arrangements set out in the Bill reflect the need to balance consumer and industry interests highlighted in the 1998 White Paper "A Fair Deal for Consumers—Modernising the Framework for Utility Regulation". Water is unique among utilities. Environmental and public health issues mean that regulation of the water market needs the close involvement of environmental and drinking water regulators. There is also the ongoing need for large-scale and long-term capital investment.

The aim of the new regulatory framework is to improve quality of service by strengthening regulatory consistency and transparency and promoting consumer interests. The Bill replaces the existing director general of water services with a regulatory authority, as recommended by the Better Regulation Task Force. It places consumers at the heart of regulation with an independent consumer council for water, whose sole purpose is to promote the interests of consumers, undertakers and licensees. The new council will have the power to investigate complaints and to carry out investigations into consumer issues, public advice and information. To help it with these tasks, it has the power to demand information from the regulator and undertakers.

Both the new regulatory authority and the council will have a duty to contribute to sustainable development, ensuring that the economic needs of the industry are balanced against the social concerns of consumers and important environmental issues linked with a finite resource.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): My hon. Friend spoke about the need for balance. Is he aware of the upcoming price review, and has he seen the indications of the demands of the water companies for a 12 or 13 per cent. a year increase in water prices? That is not real balance, is it?

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend is trying to divert me from the subject of the Bill. What I can tell him is that I am well aware of the current price review, and that these are very early days.

Part 2 also deals with competition. The benefits of genuine open competition are well known and widely supported. In the case of water, however, the potential for more innovation and improved service must be balanced against public health, the environment and affordability. That is coupled with another wider Government objective—to safeguard consumers' interests by ensuring that the water industry continues to provide water efficiently and effectively for all.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Competition is the best way of guaranteeing better quality and better

supply. Many businesses are being ripped off by the water industry monopolists at present: prices are high, there is no specification that they want, and there are not the necessary volumes. Will the Minister consider lowering the suggested limit from 50 to 10 megalitres to allow most businesses to benefit from competition, and also allowing competition to all domestic consumers, who will otherwise be ripped off in the way described by the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping)?

Mr. Morley: There are potential downsides to competition in the domestic water system. The Bill does introduce competition, but I think it right to adopt a cautious approach and, initially, to set a level that will benefit the very large consumers. Once experience of the competition has been gained and we are certain that it is not interfering with the environment, consumer protection and affordability, it will be possible to review the threshold in due course—I think a period of three years is being considered—to establish whether extending it can be justified. However, I feel that when we are dealing with something new that is as important as water supply, it is important to set an appropriate threshold.

The Bill gives new entrants opportunities for competition, allowing them to supply large commercial and industrial consumers that use more than 50 megalitres of water a year. That signals a new approach, and, although limited, the measure will give us a chance to assess how the extension of competition in the industry can best work. We would expect a review of the competition framework by the three regulators no more than three years after the provisions came into effect, which would include reconsideration of the 50-megalitre threshold. The Bill provides a power to alter the threshold if that is considered appropriate.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): How does the Minister square one of the likely effects of the limited competition that he is introducing—a reduction in the price of water to very large companies—with his stated desire to reduce consumption?

Mr. Morley: Although efficiency of use may encourage consumption, I do not think that encouraging competition and lower prices necessarily encourages increased consumption. It is obviously in the interests of large water users to establish that reduced consumption and therefore reduce their costs.

The Bill contains a number of miscellaneous provisions, including provisions helping to enhance the protection of people and property. They include amendments to the Reservoirs Act 1975 to improve reservoir safety, and measures to enable flood defence organisation and funding to be streamlined.

The issue in part 3 that is likely to attract the most attention is water fluoridation. Including fluoridation in the Bill will enable local communities to make decisions about it. The current law gives water companies discretion on whether to agree to applications from strategic health authorities to add fluoride to local water supplies. That places too much responsibility on water companies to decide on what is essentially a public health issue when they do not feel qualified to do so. The Bill would place responsibility firmly in the hands of strategic health authorities, which would engage in consultation with local communities.

I emphasise that we are not seeking to put in place a central, national fluoridation programme. On the contrary, we believe that the choice should be made locally and that people should have that choice.

I understand from talking to Members that there are strong opinions and feelings on both sides of the argument. Reflecting that, I make it clear to the House that there will be opportunities on Report to discuss the issue and to vote on it. I assure the House that because of the strongly held views it will be a free-vote issue. Members will be free to listen to the arguments both for and against and to make up their minds accordingly.

Mr. James Wray (Glasgow, Baillieston): Can my hon. Friend tell me where chronic fluoride poisoning, dental fluorosis and skeletal fluorosis come from? Which substance causes them?

Mr. Morley: The Medical Research Council, York university and other countries have conducted a number of detailed studies on that issue. On Report, I will be joined by one of my hon. Friends from the Department of Health because this is a health issue. Hon. Members will have the opportunity to examine the evidence, put their arguments and listen to the arguments for and against. They can raise their questions at the appropriate time.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way, and I am very pleased that he has put it on the record that there will be a free vote. Some of us feel that it is inappropriate to discuss fluoridation in this Bill. If people are to vote on health authorities having the right to impose their will on water authorities, can he assure me that the reverse will also be true—that people who already have fluoridation will have the right to vote against fluoridating their water?

Mr. Morley: I am sure that all health authorities will listen carefully to the majority opinion in their areas. I speak as someone who lives in an area where the water is already fluoridated and has been for a very long time.

Norman Baker (Lewes): I can confirm that there will also be a free vote on the Liberal Democrat Benches. The Minister wants local communities to decide the issue, but the decision rests with the strategic health authority. Being strategic, the health authority is not a local body. Moreover, the health professions have, by and large, already declared themselves in favour of the measure. That is not an independent, neutral position. Surely he should involve elected local councillors, who already have scrutiny powers at county council level, if local communities are going to decide such matters.

Mr. Morley: Where strategic health authorities decide to consult, I am sure that the views of elected members and authorities will be taken into account along with other interests, which include the medical profession. The medical profession's views are important and should be heard. Many of its members are in favour because they have examined the evidence and considered the advantages and disadvantages of fluoridation.

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): Can the Minister say why the Government have changed

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their position from that set out in the White Paper published on 6 July 1999, which stated that the matter should be transferred from strategic health authorities to local authorities?

Mr. Morley: An amendment was moved and carried in the other place. The issue will, of course, be considered in Committee. That might help those Members who wish to intervene. I do not want to go on for too long because many Members want to speak. There will an opportunity to debate the matter on Report, when Members can make their feelings known. I am also sure that there will be an opportunity for them to vote.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I am grateful to the Minister for the indication that he gave of the conduct of the later stages of the Bill. We hope that there will be time for a proper debate on that question on Report. Would not Government and therefore public money be better spent on NHS dentistry, not on mass fluoridation? In my constituency, there is a remarkable lack of NHS dental surgeries. I hope that the Government will concentrate on that issue between now and Report rather than on the policy behind clause 61.

Mr. Morley: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be able to look at the figures on the effects on children's dental cavities in areas where water is fluoridated and in those where it is not; he can make his mind up accordingly.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): As always, the Minister's generosity gets the better of him; I am grateful. Given that a draft Bill has been in existence for nearly three years, how, in all candour, does he explain or defend the concentrated ambiguity of clause 89 on the subject of consultation? Just to give us a taste, can he tell us whether he thinks that it will be similar to, or very different from, the sort of consultation that the Government recently announced on constitutional reform?

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman has been around for long enough to know that a Bill that starts in another place is amendable. The Bill has been amended as part of the democratic process, and right hon. and hon. Members will consider it properly in this House. As for consultation, that is matter for strategic health authorities in partnership with their local communities. I am sure that that can be dealt with in further detail in due course.

The Bill received general support in another place. We considered points that were raised there in the course of its passage, and important changes were made in respect of several issues, including fluoridation. The Government accepted the Opposition's recommendation that water conservation should be promoted across the public sector; consequently, clause 85 now includes a new duty on public bodies to give consideration to that matter. It was also agreed that the Environment Agency's existing duty to ensure that our water resources are used efficiently should be made explicit through what is now clause 75.

It was agreed that the economic, social and environmental considerations of water services are central to consumer interests. Therefore, the remit of the consumer council for water, which is covered in clause 38, has been extended to include a duty for the achievement of sustainable development. It is envisaged that the new consumer council will have a key role in decision making on water issues, and the Government accepted an amendment to clause 46 placing a duty on the authority to consult the council in relation to the exercise of its functions where appropriate.

Diana Organ: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Morley: I am trying to make some progress because I do not want to delay hon. Members who wish to speak.

Clause 55 now imposes a duty to promote co-operation between regulators. That amendment encourages the exchange of information and the consistency of treatment of matters of common interest to regulators while having regard to protecting individual remits and the independence of each regulator.

Clause 57 now gives powers to the Competition Commission to decide on a fair allocation of the burden of costs of appeals between the customer and the shareholder. That is intended to ensure that companies with fewer customers do not pass on disproportionate costs to households and businesses in their water bills.

We did not make changes in response to all the points that were made. That was not because we were not prepared to listen, but because careful consideration of the arguments led us to conclude that amendments would not meet the need to balance the interests of all concerned, including the environment, consumers, water companies and other abstractors.

It is worth making it clear that the Bill is not intended to cover all areas of water policy. It builds on existing legislation with measures that deal with water conservation, water resources and the water and sewage industry. It is essential, however, that it fits in with the broader strategic vision set out in "Directing the Flow".

The Bill is consistent with the aims and objectives of the water framework directive. The Government remain of the view that it is appropriate to use the European Communities Act 1972, rather than the Bill, as the vehicle for transposing the directive. That is the approach that we took in the draft regulations, which were published for consultation last month.

The issues associated with existing private sewers are being covered by separate consultation. A public consultation exercise is under way, and we must await its outcome before considering what legislative changes, if any, are needed. We should not pre-empt the outcome in the Bill.

I note, of course, that the official Opposition have tabled an amendment. They clearly found very little in the Bill with which to disagree, however, because the amendment seems to be completely irrelevant to what we are discussing. It says that the Bill

"fails to provide the strategic framework to meet the challenges posed by the European Water Framework Directive and to ensure the long-term provision of safe, clean water across England and Wales".

I might point out that the application of EU directives under the European Communities Act was introduced by the Conservatives. Apparently, it was all right for them to use it in applying directives when they were in power, but now we are supposed to change that. Moreover, a great deal of consultation on the water framework directive remains to be done. The Bill plays an important part in introducing its measures, which we take very seriously, but it is not appropriate to introduce it fully at this stage.

We want sustainable development to be at the heart of our water policy and the water and sewage industry. We want an industry that provides a quality service that responds to consumers' needs. That is the intention of the Bill, and I believe that it gets that difficult balance right. We are, of course, prepared to listen to all Opposition Members when the Bill goes through Committee. It is an important measure, and it deserves better consideration than is allowed for by the amendment, which is at best irrelevant and at worst a bit of petty politicking that ignores the serious issue of proper, sustainable resource management. That is at the heart of the Bill, which is why I commend it to the House.

5.56 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I beg to move, To leave out from "That" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Water Bill [*Lords*] because it fails to provide the strategic framework to meet the challenges posed by the European Water Framework Directive and to ensure the long-term provision of safe, clean water across England and Wales; does not make adequate provision for water resources in areas such as the south east of England where new housing is planned; undermines current customer structures; and fails to make proper provision for water conservation and flood prevention."

I suppose that I should first thank the Minister for introducing the Bill on Second Reading and remark that it is a pleasure to see him supporting and endorsing a Bill that takes as a given the fact that the water industry remains in the private sector. Although we cannot yet, perhaps, count him as an ardent disciple of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) or my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), at least he may be inching in our direction in this respect.

It is certainly true that the privatised water industry and the water regulators can point to considerable successes since privatisation. There have been marked improvements in water quality, fewer serious incidents of water pollution, better standards of drinking water, and about £50 billion of capital expenditure on environmental improvements. However, as the Minister said, the water industry faces important challenges. Demand for water is rising—it is up by some 40 per cent. over the past three decades—and the Government's recently announced housing plans will add dramatically to that demand, especially in the driest parts of this country. European Union figures show that the United Kingdom has the fourth lowest fresh water resources in the Community. Those are average figures that conceal big regional variations. In particular, southern and eastern England are relatively arid, with rainfall at about half the average of the UK as a whole, yet they are also the regions where the population is most densely settled and pressure on demand is greatest.

Climate change is likely to mean more extreme weather conditions in future, including the risk of more frequent floods and droughts. At the same time, public opinion and, perhaps above all, European legislation, demand still tougher environmental standards. However, improving those standards requires money for capital investment, and people who wish for environmental improvements also worry about the level of water charges that they face each year and each month. As the Bill passes through the House, we shall judge it in terms of how well we believe that it will help our country to tackle those important challenges.

If we examine the range of measures, we can welcome some of them. They include the exemption from licensing of small-scale abstractions, the provision in clause 89 to make it easier to return contaminated land to use and the new rules on lateral sewers. On other matters, we want to press the Government to explain in greater detail the course that they advocate. Much of part 2 falls into that category. I have no great ideological objection to replacing the director general of Ofwat with a regulatory authority but it is not obvious why three or more people, all appointed by the Secretary of State, should be more effective, impartial and independent of the Secretary of State than the current director general. To some extent, I agree with the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Tony Lloyd) about councils' right to obtain and publish information. I hope that that can be explored later.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): My hon. Friend points out that the Bill needs careful consideration. How does he believe that that can happen if it has to leave Committee on 21 October?

Mr. Lidington: As with other measures, the Government are attempting to shoehorn a Bill through Parliament in a time that suits Ministers and are not prepared to provide adequate opportunity for full parliamentary challenge and scrutiny.

We are sceptical about some provisions, including the abolition of local flood defence committees and the power to revoke abstraction licences without compensation. Like the Select Committee, I question whether that will comply with the Human Rights Act 1998, which the Government introduced.

Conservative as well as Labour Members will have a free vote on fluoridation. I believe that it is wrong to give the state the power to insist on putting medicine in the public water supply. The arguments of some advocates of fluoridation, such as "Let the people drink Malvern", are unsatisfactory.

Andy Burnham (Leigh): Does the hon. Gentleman disown the water fluoridation legislation that his party introduced when in government?

Mr. Lidington: The hon. Gentleman asks me about legislation that was introduced some years before I became a Member of Parliament. I therefore accept no

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responsibility for it. I am stating my view of the Bill. It will guide my approach not only to the measure but to any other Bill on the subject in the time that I serve here.

Tom Levitt: Does the hon. Gentleman take the same attitude to folic acid in flour or iodine in salt? Does he want them removed?

Mr. Lidington: Water consumers should decide whether they wish to have fluoride, which they can easily obtain through numerous toothpastes and other products. Consumers should have the right to make the decision.

Mr. Simon Thomas: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is deeply ironic that the Government try to ban natural herbal supplements and limit the amount of vitamins that we can take yet want to put fluoride in our water?

Mr. Lidington: For once, I agree completely with the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend has been remarkably patient with the minority view in this country, which has been expressed too loudly in the House, that fluoride must be forced upon us. I am delighted that he is so robust. Many of us are with him and I urge Labour Members to join us if they do not want their view on the subject to be as unpopular as that on herbal medicines.

Mr. Lidington: I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention.

The Government's course entails some genuine practical difficulties. Little, if anything, in the Bill suggests how strategic health authorities are supposed to gauge public opinion. It is unclear what will happen if public opinion, having perhaps first favoured fluoride, were subsequently to switch, through, for example, the production of new scientific evidence. Would fluoridation be ended? The hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) made that point earlier.

What happens if communities with different health authorities, but served by the same water company and therefore the same network of pipes, reach different conclusions about fluoridation? In those circumstances, it would be impractical for the water undertakers or suppliers to send fluoridated water to one set of customers and unfluoridated water to the other. They would have to choose which set of customers to disappoint.

The basic problem with the Bill is its failure to provide a coherent strategy to deal with the challenges that face the water industry and its customers. For all the slogans and spin about sustainable development and joined-up government, water policy is still too often decided in a disjointed or piecemeal fashion.

I agreed with the Minister's comment that we need to strike a balance between the interests of the environment and those of not only water companies but their industrial and domestic consumers.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lidington: No, I wish to make progress and I am conscious that many hon. Members wish to speak.

As the Minister acknowledged, the Government have recently signed up to the European water framework directive, which will be effected later this year. It has enormous financial and regulatory implications for the Government, the water industry and water users. Until the House of Lords defeated the Government over what is now clause 2, the directive was not mentioned in the Bill. Clause 2 does little more than state what the Secretary of State will be legally obliged to do under the directive.

The directive's requirements appear certain to affect the regulatory regime that the measure embodies. For example, let us consider water management. The directive requires water policy to be framed in river basin management plans, which are drawn up on a six-year cycle. However, the Government have given no clear account of how the six-year cycle will relate to the five-year cycle of periodic reviews that determine the investments that companies should make and how much they should be allowed to charge their customers. The Bill contains no proposal to synchronise those two timetables, yet without such synchronisation, it is difficult to understand how we can form a coherent policy for water management in the United Kingdom.

The directive is sure to require new investment. Water UK, to which the hon. Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping), alluded, talks about expenditure of £20 million. Yet the Government's regulatory impact assessment, which was published last month, gave figures for costs of up to £4.2 billion for sewage companies. Paragraph D.141 of the same document states that the directive may lead to the imposition of stricter limits on abstraction and make it more expensive. I presume that if abstraction becomes more expensive, the extra expenses are likely to be passed on to water consumers.

Lord Whitty said on 8 April in column GC 16 of the Lords *Hansard* that some investment schemes might need funding not in the distant future but between 2005 and 2010. That period is covered by the review, which, according to the Minister, is currently under way. The Bill is silent about the directive's impact on abstraction policy. A question mark remains over the Bill's compatibility with the directive. My reading suggests that the directive requires all abstraction licences to be subject to some sort of review. However, the Bill assumes that licences granted in perpetuity will continue without any such review or time limit.

I hope that we will not take primary legislation through this House to do one thing and then find that the rules have been changed by the back door as a result of regulations to implement a directive with which the Government had previously assured us their Bill was compliant. There may be the need under the directive for

a draconian use of the controls applied by the Bill to meet the environmental standards that the directive requires.

As has been pointed out, the Bill does not tackle the total lack of co-ordination between planning policy and water and flood management. The Government are currently proposing—perhaps "instructing" would be a more accurate description—that half a million new houses should be built in the most arid parts of England. Yet the Deputy Prime Minister's policy document—laughably entitled "Sustainable Communities"—did not mention water. The Environment Agency told an inquiry by the relevant Select Committee into the Thames gateway project that it had not been consulted by the Deputy Prime Minister about the impact of his plans on water conservation, or on the risk of flooding. The Government appear to have woken up to this after they published their plans and issued their edicts to local authorities.

The Environment Agency may now find itself having to use ever tighter restrictions on abstraction—using the powers that the Bill proposes should be given to it—and doing so at a real cost to consumers to mitigate the harm being wrought by the Government's perverse housing policies.

We are worried also about the centralising direction of some of the measures in the Bill, which contains a host of additional powers for the Secretary of State and the Environment Agency, many of which we shall want to explore in greater detail in Committee and on Report. By contrast, powers are removed from local flood defence committees and from local authorities. For example, we see powers for the Secretary of State to insist on changes to water resources management and drought plans.

I am disappointed that the Government have thrown away the opportunity to consider and, perhaps, introduce pilot projects for economic measures that might work to bring about water conservation and better water management from the bottom up, rather than being wedded so much to a top-down approach. The Bill does not address the possibility of tradeable permits for discharges or differential charging for abstraction rights, even though the Environment Agency is reported be considering those issues and even though the Bill includes a mechanism for transferring discharge consents.

A market-led approach—piloting approaches based on differential pricing—might, for example, provide a greater incentive for worthwhile conservation measures such as trickle irrigation, giving them a market advantage over other methods of using water in agriculture and horticulture.

I want to deal briefly with the question of water bills, which are already a heavy burden on consumers, especially pensioners and others on low or fixed incomes. As the hon. Member for Sherwood pointed out, the industry says that it would need a £15 annual increase in bills to meet its obligations under the water framework directive. That £15 is an average figure; there would be wide variations in the increases proposed between different regions of the country. The Bill's proposals on abstraction could end up making the cost to consumers higher still.

The six or 12-year limits on abstraction licences that were debated in the House of Lords would mean those licences lasting for a much shorter period than the investments for which they were supposed to provide water. The costs would have to be recovered from consumers over a shorter period unless the investment programme was to be scrapped entirely. The logical consequence of that is that we will see even sharper increases in water charges as a result of the policy of time-limiting over the relatively short period that the Government are proposing.

During the Bill's future stages, I will want Parliament to explore further the opportunity that the Government rejected in the House of Lords at least to relate the time given to a particular licence to the lifetime and economic importance of the investment that that abstraction supports.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): The Minister said that the 12 years was an adaptable period, but companies that have spoken to the Environment Agency have been told clearly that the 12 years will be a fixed period other than in very exceptional circumstances. To that extent, what the Minister said was slightly wide of the mark.

Mr. Lidington: My hon. Friend's intervention reinforces the need for us to look more closely in Committee at the balance between industry and the environment.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: Has my hon. Friend noticed that the Government's own regulatory impact assessment of the competition proposals in the Bill—together with the opinion of the water industry—is that this measure could lead to consumer prices going up even if prices for large companies go down?

Mr. Lidington: I have read that assessment and it appears that the limited competition offered by the Bill will cut prices for a handful of very large industrial consumers of water, but seems unlikely to provide much benefit to other consumers. It is also being made clear by potential investors—companies such as Centrica—that the limited competition regime will not provide them with sufficient incentives to enter the business and offer alternative sources of water supply to the existing companies.

Clearly, geography and the design of the current infrastructure impose limits on how much competition is practical now but I am puzzled as to why the Government did not extend competition further than the 50 megalitre limit that they are currently proposing, allowing those business and domestic consumers who would be able, in practice, to take advantage of competition to do so.

Dr. Starkey: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way before he concludes. Will he clarify whether the views that he expressed on fluoridation were his personal views or the views of the Conservative party, whether he has consulted the shadow spokesman for health on the matter and whether the Whips will impose a three-line whip on his colleagues?

Mr. Lidington: When the hon. Lady studies *Hansard* tomorrow, she will find that I opened my remarks on

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fluoridation by making it clear that there will be a completely free vote among Front-Bench and Back-Bench Conservative Members. I have talked to my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), the shadow Secretary of State for Health, about the matter. He knew what I was proposing to say. I know his view and he is perfectly capable of expressing it as robustly as ever. I very much look forward to him doing so.

Mr. Wray: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Lidington: The hon. Gentleman's request to me that the Minister give way makes it tempting, but I want to conclude to allow other hon. Members to speak.

Water bills are being kept unnaturally high by the increased level of bad debt that water undertakers have to carry. The Government decided to abolish the right of water companies to disconnect customers who consistently refused to pay their bills, and one understands their motive for making that decision. Now, however, nearly one fifth of households do not pay their bills.

Diana Organ: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lidington: No, I will not. I hope that the hon. Lady will get the opportunity to speak later.

Most hon. Members know, through their constituency correspondence from pensioners and others who struggle to pay the bills demanded of them, that those people find the current level of water payments difficult, and even oppressive. It is unfair on those people who are struggling to pay their bills that we should be prepared to tolerate deliberate—I stress that word—non-payment. Estimates were made during the debate in the House of Lords that an average of up to £9 is added to every household's water bill to cover the cost of those citizens who refuse to pay their bills. I regret the fact that the Bill has taken no steps to address those problems.

The Bill will not deliver all the benefits that the Minister and the Government claim for it. It fails to address many of the important problems now facing the water industry. Our amendment gives the House the opportunity tonight to register its dissatisfaction with legislation that is badly flawed, and I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to express their scepticism about the Bill by joining me in voting for the amendment this evening.

6.22 pm

Mr. James Wray (Glasgow, Baillieston): It has been quite some time since I raised this issue in the House, but I have spent a great deal of time on it. I am very interested in water and where it goes, and I was very much against the privatisation of the water industry. When it went into private hands in Scotland, one of the reasons—

Stephen Hesford (Wirral, West): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I seek your assistance? Is it right that the Bill, and particularly the fluoridation proposals, do not apply to Scotland?

Mr. Wray: I am here as a Labour Member of Parliament, a Westminster Member of Parliament. I am not here to vote on Scottish issues.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman will make clear his intentions as his speech continues.

Mr. Wray: I was saying that the last time that I raised this issue was in Scotland, and that I was very concerned about it because there was a restriction on borrowing by local authorities. That is when all the peddlers moved in to get hold of the water, because it is a very profitable industry. They came in with their meters in the commercial sector, and now they are waiting to get full control so that they can meter domestic water, and I am very much against that. They have made millions by transferring the business from various companies all over the country.

One thing that really bothers me is the way in which the Government have introduced clause 61, in which they propose that health authorities should be given new powers regarding fluoridation. Obviously, some people think that they know better than others. When I first came across the issue of fluoridation of public water supplies, I wrote to people in various countries for two years before I took the matter up, because I wanted to know more about it. I then decided, 25 years ago, to entice one of my constituents to take the matter to the Court of Session, because the Strathclyde regional authority wanted to spend £75,000 on machines to help the chemical industry. It certainly was not going to help the people. We all know that we get fluoride anyway, from our tea and our bread and from the fresh air that we breathe. It is also very difficult to measure one part per million. We undertook that case from a moral aspect, as well as from a medical and a legal aspect. We won it on the legal aspect because it was outwith the remit of a medical engineer to treat the people who drank the water. It was his job to treat the water and to make it wholesome for drinking.

Ministers have obviously not done their homework on this issue. A committee was set up which could not reach a conclusion one way or another. It is claimed that fluorides are not a medicinal product, but section 130 of the Medicines Act 1968 states clearly what a medicinal product is. Fluorides are claimed to be a medicinal product under European Union legislation. The Medicines Act defines a medicinal product as a substance mixed with another and used to treat an animal or human being to cure a disease. Dental fluorosis is not a disease. I did not create the terms "skeletal fluorosis", "dental fluorosis" or "chronic fluoride poisoning"; they come from fluoride.

Fluorosilicates are banned in Europe, and fluoridation is a criminal act under the Poisons Act 1972. If the Minister looks up all these various Acts, he will find these measures. They even exist under legislation relating to the protection of children. The new measures target children. In Birmingham, which has had fluoridation for 25 years, there are more dentists than in any other part of the United Kingdom. I do not know how those children get mottled teeth, but this is certainly a breach of civil liberties so far as the people of Britain and other parts of the world are concerned. That

is why I am against these proposals. The fluoride is not self-administered; this involves mass medication, which people are getting against their will.

The Government should accept and respect the decisions made in various other countries that have voted on this issue and decided against such measures. They should respect people such as Dr. Moolenburgh in Holland, who carried out double-blind tests by splitting the country into two, one part of which was fluoridated, the other not. He became a Member of Parliament, because the whole country was split over the issue of the mass medication of people.

This is a matter of individual choice. People can take fluoride in tablet form or in milk form, or in toothpaste. Even toothpaste manufacturers realise, however, that big claims could be made against them. Who would have the right to indemnify against such claims? Will this Government indemnify anybody if a case is brought against a pharmaceutical company? I do not think that they would, once the problem began, even though they say that they would.

The easiest way to get rid of one's wife, if one wanted to do so, would be to go to a city with fluoridated water, and boil a kettle two or three times a night. That would produce a film in the kettle because of the high concentration of fluoride. If one were to stir a spoonful of that substance into her tea, she would be dead within 10 seconds.

That is the danger. That is the problem.

Fluorosilicates gather in cast iron pipes, which have been neglected over the years; they have not been repaired, and that has made it very difficult for the consumer.

Why accept the medical profession's view on the matter when there is a split and a big question mark? Those who support water fluoridation should not think that they are right. During my time here, people have regularly written letters to me about fluoride—some against it and some for it. Those who are against do not want to accept that there is no real medical evidence. I hope that, when it comes to the vote, the people will vote against it.

6.30 pm

Norman Baker (Lewes): I agree with the bulk of that contribution, although perhaps the suggested method of dealing with one's wife should not be given too much publicity outside the Chamber.

Water is a precious resource. It needs to be dealt with carefully and differently from other utilities and, indeed, from other aspects of life. It is worth remembering that more than 1.1 billion people globally do not have access to safe water. More than 2.4 billion people have no proper access to adequate sanitation, resulting in the yearly deaths of up to 3 million people, mostly children under five. By 2025, up to 3 billion people will live in countries that have less than 1,700 cu m of water per capita, the quantity below which people start to suffer from water stress. That is the problem that we have internationally, which will be worsened by climate change and the other factors that are affecting the world, such as the increase in population

We have those factors in this country—albeit, fortunately, to a lesser degree—but we have climate change, an increase in population and a concentration of population in the south-east, where the Deputy Prime Minister is keen to build lots of homes. Therefore, we have problems. We need to manage our water carefully and responsibly.

My colleagues and I welcome the Bill because it will, by and large, improve the management of water resources. It will, by and large, improve consumer representation. It will, by and large, improve a number of small problems that have been lingering for some time. The Minister referred to some of those in his contribution but, again, as with the Waste and Emissions Trading Bill, it is what is missing from the Bill that is a disappointment rather than what is in it. A range of things are missing, some of which are in the reasoned amendment tabled by the Conservatives.

I disagree with the Conservatives on one major point. The Bill is beneficial, although it may have lots of things missing. It is difficult to see why we should vote against a Bill that moves us in the right direction. It is a great pity that it does not move us further but, because it moves us in the right direction, I am recommending to my colleagues that we vote for it on Second Reading at least, although we will wish to table many amendments in Committee and on Report to try to fill the gaps and to improve the Bill.

The Bill is missing in many ways, which is a pity given how long it has been in gestation: it has been around for about three years. In many ways, it is simply a replication of measures that were pulled from the Utilities Bill. I was on the Utilities Bill Committee when suddenly, because of a disagreement between the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Department of Trade and Industry—we were not told that that was the reason, though—the water measures in the Bill were withdrawn. Lo and behold, many of them appear unaltered in the Water Bill, so in the past three years it has simply sat on the shelf.

Mr. Simon Thomas: It got stuck in the pipe.

Norman Baker: Yes.

The Minister said that the water framework directive needs to be dealt with under secondary legislation. That is curious.

Mr. Morley: It is normal.

Norman Baker: The Minister says that it is normal, but I refer him to a letter written by his predecessor on 3 March 2000, which says:

"As we have been developing the draft Water Bill"—

it has been a long time coming, has it not?—

"it has become increasingly clear that it makes more sense to tackle all the changes we want to see made to the regulatory framework for water in a single piece of new legislation."

The reason we were given for the water provisions being pulled out of the Utilities Bill, and for the fact that there was no Water Bill for three years, was that everything was coming together in a co-ordinated, joined-up fashion. If only that were true. It is not true and the water framework directive is not being dealt with in the Bill. It is mentioned in the Bill. That is thanks not to the Government but to my colleague in the Lords, Baroness

[Norman Baker]

Sue Miller, with support from the Conservatives, who arranged for it to be mentioned. Otherwise, it would not be mentioned at all.

It is a great pity that the opportunity has been missed to bring together in a coherent piece of legislation the provisions in this Bill and the water framework directive because they impinge on each other and relate to each other. It makes sense to deal with them in one piece of legislation.

We will come back to the water framework directive. I say in passing that, whatever the precedents have been, it is perhaps not satisfactory—let us put it no stronger than that—for a major piece of European Union environmental legislation to be dealt with by secondary legislation. We should debate it on the Floor of the Commons as part of primary legislation. It is a great pity that we are not doing so.

Also missing from the Bill are any proper references to what the consumer will pay for water and the charging regimes, and that was referred to in passing by the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington). It is true that water prices are now increasing dramatically—the Minister says that the recommendations may not go through but they are there. It is also true that pressure will increase on the water companies, particularly in the south and south-east, because of shortage of supply, the requirement to build lots of new houses and the failure to consult the water companies and to take adequate notice of the problems that they have in supplying water not simply to all the new houses but to existing houses, when water consumption per head of population is increasing.

It is also true, sadly, that the building regulations that apply to new houses have not been altered to require best practice in new dwellings. We still have very poor building regulations for new dwellings, and sorting that out should be a priority for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. It is also true—it is perhaps a controversial point—that we should move to a water charging system that is clear, fair, understandable and has environmental benefits. I refer to water metering, for which the principle has been established.

The Conservative Government introduced water metering in the Water Act 1989. Initially, it was optional, but of course it is not optional for people who move into houses where meters are already in place: they have no option to remove them.

The Government are conniving with the introduction of water metering by stealth. Water metering is being introduced slowly, gradually, across the country and I have no doubt that we will see it in 20 or 30 years' time. I have no doubt that the Government think that we will get there. They simply do not want to have an argument about it in public now. They are happy for the water companies and individuals to move slowly along that path and hope that no one notices.

There are significant issues about water charging. It is becoming indefensible to have water charging for the majority of people based on the theoretical amount of money that a person could get from renting out their house in 1973, which is what the present arrangements are. It is difficult to justify a situation whereby people pay different amounts for water, some on what they consume and some on what they do not. It is also difficult to justify in terms of equity and environmental good practice when people can use as much water as they wish and pay no more for the privilege, even if they are profligate with that vital resource. We do not apply that to electricity and gas. People might leave their lights on all day if they paid no extra for the electricity. We charge them for what they use. I cannot see why water should be any different.

I understand that Norway and Ireland are the only two countries in Europe that do not have metered supplies, so we are very much in the minority in that arrangement. I think that the Government want metering, but they want it by stealth. They should come clean and introduce it as part of the Bill. It is central to the Bill, or should be, not simply in terms of fairness for the consumer—it would reduce consumption and benefit the consumer in that way—but in terms of environmental good practice. Less water would be used, which would mean less call on scarce natural resources, particularly in areas such as the south-east. If water consumption drops, and the water metering trials in the Isle of Wight and elsewhere demonstrated a 10 per cent. drop in water consumption, which has been maintained—I spoke to Southern Water only last week to check that fact—the need for major capital investment is obviated, which in turn keeps the price of water down.

Of course, I would not pretend that there are no problems with metering. We have to ensure that poor people with large families are properly protected. The vulnerable groups regulations are wholly inadequate and need to be significantly revised. It is important to have a realistic time scale, so that implementation can be done properly over 10 or 20 years. If we have metering, it must be done by rising tariffs, starting cheap and becoming more expensive, and vulnerable groups must be protected.

Diana Organ: I gather that the hon. Gentleman is very much in favour of water metering, but he did not say how those poor and vulnerable members of society who might consider not using enough water for health and hygiene purposes are to be protected. I am thinking in particular of poor families and those caring for elderly people who might need to do a lot of laundry. He said a lot about the environment, but not about what should be done from the social angle.

Norman Baker: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to press that point. It is the key argument against metering and must be resolved before it is introduced.

The vulnerable groups regulations introduced by the Conservative Government offer reductions for people in exactly the circumstances that the hon. Lady described. It so happens that the regulations do not work properly—there is a terrible take-up rate, of about 1 per cent.—so they need to be wholly revised, but the principle that such people could have help with metered bills has been established in legislation.

Also missing from the Bill is how to deal with people who do not pay their water bills. The hon. Member for Aylesbury was right to point that out. The water companies tell us that there is a clear distinction between people who have genuine difficulties with their water

bills—they must be protected from disconnection, and it would be completely improper to return to that practice, whatever the Conservative line on it may be—and those who know that no disconnections can be effected and take advantage of that situation. I frankly confess that I do not know the solution to that major problem.

My hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) recently conducted a survey of water companies, and they all made that point. Bournemouth and West Hampshire Water said:

"A large problem remains with those who can pay, but won't pay. This problem is increasing due to the ban on disconnection."

United Utilities said:

"sanctions are needed to deal with those who choose not to pay, and adequate must be given for those who cannot pay."

That has to be a sensible policy, although I do not know how it is to be translated into legislation that works. If we do not address the issue, more and more people will refuse to pay their bills simply because they know that they will not be disconnected.

The Bill says nothing much about leakages. The Minister may say that he thinks that they have been dealt with, and certainly the situation has improved dramatically over the past 10 years, but it has not improved for the section of pipe between the company supply at the stopcock and the householder's tap. Water UK says that a quarter of all leakage is in that section of pipe. The companies have dealt with their pipes, but the consumer, by and large, has not. People may be unaware that there is a leak, because the water is not metered, or they may not have the resources to deal with it. Whatever the reason, there is a major loss of water in that short piece of pipe. The Government must introduce measures to deal with that. Personally, I believe that ownership of the pipe should remain with the householder, but there should be an obligation on the water companies to make a significant contribution to dealing with such leaks. That would be better for the environment as well as making sense for the companies themselves in the longer run.

The Bill contains little on private sewer adopters. The Minister said that he intended to do something about that. It is a big issue that has been around for a long time. Why is it not part of the Bill?

Mr. Morley: Because the consultation is still going on. We take the issue seriously, which is why we commissioned a report by WS Atkins, which produced a number of options that have gone to consultation. When we have had the results, we will consider what is the best course of action.

Norman Baker: I disagree not with the process that the Minister has outlined, but with the time scale. Why has it not been done already? The issue has been around for a very long time, yet the Government, who have been in power for six years, and the Tories before them, did nothing. Why are we only now told, with the Water Bill already before us, that a consultation exercise germane to that Bill is under way?

Mr. Simon Thomas: The Minister tries to hide behind consultation. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Minister's Department undertook a consultation in May 2000 in conjunction with the National Assembly for Wales on the provision of new drains and sewers for England and Wales, which recommended to Ofwat that

"consideration should be given to reforming and simplifying the current arrangement so that property owners' responsibilities for drains and sewers would be limited to those on their land only"?

That is not in the Bill, so we can see that nothing was done in the intervening three years.

Mr. Morley: It is in the Bill.

Norman Baker: We will have to have that argument in Committee.

Mr. Simon Thomas: It is not fully in the Bill.

Norman Baker: I cannot mediate between the hon. Gentleman and the Minister.

I have spoken at length about what is not in the Bill—there is more not in it than there is in it—so let me now deal with what is in the Bill, and by and large offer it my support. The Government are right to grasp the nettle of abstraction licences. I well understand the issue about investment, which has been put to me by several industry bodies as well as individual companies. It is right that we should explore that.

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): Is my hon. Friend aware of the considerable concern of the watercress growers in Dorset and Hampshire?

Norman Baker: I assure my hon. Friend that they have been in touch with me, and my thoughts are always with them.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): And the watercress growers of Wiltshire have been in touch with me.

Norman Baker: Well, they have not been in touch with me, so I am grateful to learn that watercress is also grown in Wiltshire. I shall pay due attention to watercress in Committee.

It is right to deal with abstraction, but we must ensure that we do not have an unwelcome significant impact on certain industries, and it is right for hon. Members of all parties to raise issues of concern in that regard.

I pay tribute to the Government for introducing measures to improve consumer representation.

The issue of flood defence committees has been around for some time, and the Minister will know that, with my experience of floods in Lewes, it is of particular interest to me. What is proposed is an improvement, although it is not quite in line with river basins.

I want to mention fluoride—the dreaded word—and to remind everyone that this is the Water Bill, not the Fluoride Bill. Many important issues in the Bill have been hijacked by that one topic. I am not pretending that it is not important, but it is not the only thing in the Bill. I agree with the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) that this is not the appropriate place for the measure, but since it is here let me say that what the Bill contains relates to consultation, which no one can seriously object to. However, consultation must be

[Norman Baker]

meaningful and local, and people must have a right to say yes or no to fluoridation in their area—including, by the way, the right to have fluoridation removed where it exists.

The strategic health authorities are in no way representative of local views. As a body, they have already decided in favour of fluoridation, so they are hardly neutral. They are not local but strategic, and we do not know how they might consult local people. Presumably, they will send out a questionnaire, and will recommend fluoridation irrespective of the responses. That is not a satisfactory of dealing with a highly complex and controversial issue. If the Minister pursues that line, many people will vote against, irrespective of whether they are in favour of fluoridation. Local people must decide, but that is not what is proposed in the Bill as it stands.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Does the hon. Gentleman therefore think that if even just a bare majority were in favour locally of consultation—by whatever means—their view should prevail over that of the significant minority who were against?

Norman Baker: That is a very difficult question. I am among the body of opinion who do not believe in fluoridation, and who think it wrong to inflict mass medication on the population at large. The purpose of adding fluoride to water is clearly to improve dental health—that is what everybody says. That is medication for health purposes.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): Is the hon. Gentleman therefore against the chlorination of water, which is designed to improve its quality? Is he against fortification of flour because it is now impossible to buy bread without fortification? Is he against the fortification of margarine, which has undoubtedly saved many thousands of children from getting rickets since the last war? Is it Liberal Democrat policy to be against the fortification and improvement of all substances consumed by consumers?

Norman Baker: I am not sure that those are very fair analogies. There is a difference between removing dangerous pathogens from a substance, for example, and adding something to derive a perceived health benefit. As with other substances, people have some choice as to which flour they buy, but they have no choice in the water coming out of their tap—not even in the light of the Bill's competition proposals—so the situation is entirely different. Of course, my colleagues will not necessarily be swayed by my arguments; there is a free vote and they will make up their own minds. Nevertheless, we are all united on the important point that there must be proper consultation.

The best thing that I can say about the Bill is that it is good as far as it goes and we support the measures in it, but what a pity that the Government have yet again failed to introduce environmental legislation in a coherent and proper manner. Yet again, they have failed to take an overall view; yet again, they have failed properly to incorporate EU directives into domestic legislation. That is a great pity, and yet again the Liberal Democrats—and doubtless the Conservatives as well, on this occasion—will try to remedy that in Committee to make the Bill rather better than it is.

6.52 pm

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): Although the Bill is in part to be welcomed by the House, because in many cases a complete overhaul is needed, I am opposed to slipping in the fluoride issue on the basis of an amendment made in the Lords. This issue divides all parties in this House, and as someone who has passionately opposed fluoridation for many years, I want to make my contribution on the basis of some simple aspects of fluoridation.

In the 1970s, when I became chairman of a local health council, there was an enormous debate about the whole question of adding fluoride to the water supply. We rejected the idea, but because we were not democratically elected we passed the issue to the local councils to determine whether they thought it a good thing. The message came back loud and clear that they were opposed to the whole question of fluoridation.

Many arguments have been presented in respect of fluoride, but I have resisted any temptation to wander into the science arguments. I shall stick to the simple argument, which is based on the question of mass medication. I shall explain why I am opposed to mass medication. Problems may be engendered in Scotland by virtue of the declining population. Given that a diminishing number of people are staying in Scotland, who is to say that, in 10 years' time, if such things are allowed to enter the water supply in Scotland, we will not add a substance such as viagra? Who is to say that that option will not be open to us? *[Interruption.]* Perhaps there are those in this House who think that a great idea—I see that many are smiling—but that could be the basis for mass medication all over again. Similarly, in certain areas of the country where there was a population explosion and schools were overwhelmed, might not bromide be added to the water supply? Who is to say that such things are not possible, if we start talking about adding substances to the water supply that do not actually improve the quality of the water itself?

Reference was made in a previous intervention to certain substances that are added to the water supply, but which all improve the quality of the water. The difference between fluoride and any of those other substances is that fluoride does nothing to the quality of the water.

Dr. Stoate: Does my hon. Friend not accept that the use of fluoride is being proposed to improve people's dental health? Its use is designed to improve the quality of life of children, who otherwise might suffer painful extractions and decaying teeth.

Mr. Donohoe: As I said earlier, I am not willing to go down the road of the sanctity argument. I am advancing the simple argument, which my hon. Friend cannot dispute, that fluoride is not added to the water supply to improve its quality. That is the case that I want to argue.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Donohoe: I shall move on because I am conscious of the time.

I intervened on the Minister to ask why the Bill makes no mention of local democracy playing its part; indeed, the Government have presented no arguments in that regard. The White Paper "Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation", which was published on 6 July 1999, states:

"And to ensure that the extent and validity of that public support is beyond all doubt we envisage transferring from health authorities to local authorities the requirement to undertake public consultation on fluoridating the local water supply."

What has that proposal apparently been dropped? I want to know the answer to that question, because it is extremely important.

On 9 July in another place, the Government introduced an amendment that will oblige all water suppliers and undertakers to fluoridate water supplies at the request of the health authority. Why are we talking about health authorities? What right have health authorities—which are in any case appointed by the Government themselves—in this regard? Many years ago, I was a member of a health council and I watched health authorities in action. They are not accountable; they are divorced from the surrounding population. That was why we argued forcefully in the 1970s for the need for local democracy and local accountability. The Government have not dealt with that issue at all in the Bill, and that worries me greatly.

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend is making an impassioned defence of the importance of democracy in such matters, but if we leave things as they are, these important decisions will be in the hands of plcs. What right do they have to decide whether a community such as Greater Manchester should or should not benefit from fluoridation? Surely such issues should be in the hands of the people, not of plcs. The status quo cannot be defended on any grounds.

Mr. Donohoe: Local authority representatives are democratically elected, and I charge them with this responsibility. I expect the Government, on the basis of the White Paper, to allow local authorities to be the agents that determine whether fluoride is added to the water supply. No one else should be given that job.

Mr. Parmjit Dhanda (Gloucester): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Donohoe: I cannot because I have little time and I am about to sum up.

I want to conclude by asking the Minister why a particular part of the Bill refers to Scottish Water. As you pointed out in an earlier ruling, Madam Deputy Speaker, it will not cover Scotland, so why does that provision refer to Scottish Water? I want the Minister to answer that question this evening, given that this legislation is not intended to impact on Scotland.

I expect assurances. I want the Government to take on board all the arguments that many people have presented to me in the past few months. As vice-chairman of the all-party group on fluoridation, I have received dozens of requests from people that their voices be heard in this Chamber, which is why I am speaking today. I congratulate the Minister on allowing a free vote, and I am glad that he pointed that out in his statement. For that reason alone, I shall not vote against the Bill tonight, but I seek assurances that my concerns will be addressed in the Bill, and will become part of the Act.

6.59 pm

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) and his impassioned plea against fluoridation, but the Bill deals with much wider issues. As I feared, fluoridation has dominated the debate, but I believe that all sensible Members should avoid it. We all know that if we say one thing about fluoridation, we will receive a host of letters; if we say something else about it, we will receive a host of letters from elsewhere. I shall therefore avoid the issue in my brief remarks, except to say that in the north-east of England fluoride is found in water as a natural course. In Hartlepool, for instance, the natural supply of fluoride is equal to the amount recommended by the British Dental Association. That is probably why the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) has such good teeth.

Mr. Butterfill: Is my hon. Friend suggesting that because a substance occurs naturally in certain regions, even though it may be offensive in itself, it should be added to the water everywhere else?

Mr. Atkinson: I am adopting a very liberal position on the matter in not saying whether I am on one side or the other.

I want to return to the question on which the Minister earlier took interventions: the effect of the 12-year limit on transfer licences. It is a serious issue for the extractive industry, the mining industry, even—I learned only today—the watercress industry and perhaps the bottled water industry. There are nine quarries in my constituency, six of them substantial, making up a multi-million pound business, which provides many jobs—directly and indirectly—in the rural parts of Northumberland. It is a key industry. Open cast mining is another huge industry with enormous capital investment, but it is very difficult for companies to make the investment unless they are certain that they will receive a licence along with their planning consent.

The Minister said that it was all a question of balance. One quarry in my constituency, the Barrasford quarry, has recently been given a 30-year extension of its rights to extract winstone. The company has spent millions of pounds on a long new road, moving the infrastructure about, and on an enormous number of environmental improvements. It even voluntarily relinquished, because of environmental concerns, certain areas that it had permission to quarry. It is a multi-million pound investment, but the Environment Agency could, at a stroke, eliminate the business if it failed to extend the licence.

It is all very well saying that there should be a presumption for the Environment Agency to extend the licence, but I do not trust the Environment Agency or believe that multi-million pound investments should depend on its whim. During the foot and mouth disaster, which badly affected my constituency, the Environment Agency was one of the least co-operative bodies. We were faced with an enormous quantity of

[Mr. Atkinson]

unburied, unburned animal carcases, but the Environment Agency said that action could not be taken because of the risk to the water supply. It caused a real headache by being over-zealous in administering that viewpoint. I therefore believe that it is wrong to ask large companies to trust the Environment Agency, and I urge the Minister to nail down the problem in Committee and on Report in order to give confidence to the large investors and make it clear to them that it is worth opening a coalmine or a quarry and worth investing in the infrastructure.

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): My constituency, too, contains numerous sizeable quarries. One company expressed to me its concerns about applications being wholly determined by an officer of the Environment Agency with no rights of appeal, no transparency and probably no compensation in the event of a refusal. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the Bill can be amended to deal with those problems?

Mr. Atkinson: I certainly hope so and I urge the Minister to clarify the position and sort out the problem, which is important for the economies of many constituencies.

Clause 35 poses another intriguing issue. It is an obscure little clause, which deals with the rights to extract water that are given to armed forces visiting this country. It does not explain why the Government have taken Crown immunity away from British forces, which is implied in the clause. Nothing else in the Bill clarifies it, but it could have an effect on my constituency—for example, in respect of military training in the Otterburn or other training areas when the armed forces, particularly the RAF, need to extract water. They will now have to go through a licensing system in order to continue to do so.

I said that I would be brief, but the Bill is long and complicated, raising many difficult questions that will need to be debated at later stages. Yet there are no later stages, save for two weeks in Committee. I understand that the Bill will not have its Committee stage until next Tuesday—a week tomorrow—providing just four days and eight sittings for us to consider the whole Bill before the conference recess, after which a bit more time will be provided. That is a wholly inadequate time for debating the Bill. It is not particularly controversial, but it touches on all sorts of key issues, not least fluoridation. It is wrong to allot the Bill such a paltry time in Committee. Doing so adds to the Government's reputation for forcing through ill-considered and badly debated legislation.

7.6 pm

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): First, I welcome the announcement of a free vote on fluoridation. Before that announcement, there were frankly ominous signs that Parliament was about to be bounced. The fluoridation proposal was not in the draft Bill put before the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee where expert witnesses could have examined it. A long time afterwards, the proposal was not in the Bill presented to the House of Lords for Second Reading. It was not in the Bill in Committee or even on Report in the other place. Rather, it went into the Bill through a special procedure of recommittal to Committee, coupled with a Third Reading. It was then bounced on the House of Lords, which had little or no time to consider it. One is bound to ask what on earth changed so dramatically that it became essential to dragoon the proposal before Parliament just five sitting days before we rose for the summer recess.

The Minister says that it is a public health issue. Yes, but that is to demean it, because it is not only a public health issue. More importantly, it is a matter of the fundamental individual rights of the citizen, and the House exists to protect those rights. It does not matter if the rights of only one citizen are being abused by the Executive; we are here to defend those rights. In this particular case, however, millions—not dozens or thousands—of people will be denied their right to refuse compulsory medication. They are going to be force-fed fluoride. Entire local populations will be compelled to take it irrespective of whether they want it or need it.

Mr. Simon Thomas: Does the right hon. Gentleman share my concern that in the Welsh context it is not just local populations that are affected? It is a decision for the National Assembly for Wales and a whole country will be either fluoridated or not fluoridated on the basis perhaps of a narrow vote, a 2 per cent. turnout in a referendum or whatever. Does he agree that that flies in the face of any democratic control over the health and medication of a population?

Mr. Williams: The hon. Gentleman wanted the Assembly and now he has it.

Mr. Thomas: No, the right hon. Gentleman wanted an Assembly, I wanted a Parliament.

Mr. Williams: Would it have been any different if it were a Parliament? The same issue would have arisen.

What is so appalling is not only that it is being done by edict—the edict of Parliament is bad enough—but in a way that no individual can possibly avoid. It is being done through the water system. One cannot live or survive without water, or are Marie Antoinettes on either side of the House going to stand up to say, "Let them drink Perrier"? When something is in the water system, everyone has to take it whether they want to or not.

The justifications put forward for that are spurious, and I have heard some of them today. The British Medical Association, for example, likened fluoride to iron and calcium and said that we see fit to make up for deficiencies in iron and calcium, so fluoride should be treated in the same way. However, need for iron and calcium is decided by the individual doctor for the individual patient; iron and calcium are not pushed through the water system so that everyone has to take them whether they want to or not.

We have also been given the spurious example of chlorine. The Minister in the other House cited that example, but then he destroyed his case by saying that although chlorine was toxic, it was put in to disinfect the water. That is the important point. Chlorine is there to

make the water drinkable and to remove a risk, not to add a possible risk that need never be there. That is the fact that my colleagues have to face.

Dr. Stoate: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Williams: I am sorry, but if I did I would be denying other people their opportunity to take part in the debate.

We are devolving to a quango the duty to carry out consultation—what the Minister in the House of Lords described as a consultation of the whole population within an area. When he was asked how that could be done, he could not tell us—but what he did say for certain was:

"The word 'referendum' never passed my lips".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 July 2003; Vol. 408, c. 651.]

As a Welshman, I well understand why it did not.

In this consultation, is there any guarantee of a level playing field in the presentation of a case? Perhaps the Minister will answer that question in his concluding speech. The Minister in the House of Lords admitted that public funds intended for the health service could be used by the health authority to conduct its campaign in favour of fluoridation. Money could be taken from a proper legitimate medical use and used improperly. Will similar moneys be available for those who oppose the idea? I very much doubt it.

On spurious grounds of interpretation of evidence—from the York committee, for example—the idea has been put forward that fluoridation is necessary and is no danger. That claim so infuriated Professor Trevor Sheldon, who was the chair of the advisory group for the review that he wrote:

"It is particularly worrying then that statements which mislead the public about the review's findings have been made in press releases and in briefings by the British Dental Association, British Medical Association, the National Alliance for Equity in Dental Health and the British Fluoridation Society."

He then dealt with the errors. He ends with this remark:

"there is a dearth of reliable evidence with which to inform policy. Until high quality studies are undertaken providing more definitive evidence, there will continue to be legitimate scientific controversy over the likely effects and costs of water fluoridation."

There are doubts about fluoridation in practical terms—and I do not think that there are any doubts about it at all in constitutional terms.

7.13 pm

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): I wholeheartedly agree with the sentiments expressed on the vexed subject of fluoridation by the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington). It seems to me that in the 21st century there has to be a more civilised way of dealing with the acknowledged problem of tooth decay in children than in force-feeding the many for the sake of the few. Some of the spin put on the issue both by the Department of Health and the British Dental Association has been deplorable. It is nonsense to claim that the York review conclusively proves that fluoridation is a good thing.

I would also like to add a word about something that I do not think that the Minister has looked into—but perhaps we shall hear about that later. We know that there is a huge debate about the impact of fluoridation on human health, but more work needs to be done on the effect on aquatic ecology of putting a registered poison into our water systems. No work has been done on that, and we are entitled to an impact assessment before any decisions are taken. To go ahead without that assessment would amount to negligence.

Dr. Starkey: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that toxicity is a factor not only of the substance itself but of the level? To suggest that a substance is a poison and so would be poisonous at any level is a gross distortion of reality.

Mr. Ainsworth: That is not what I suggested. I am merely saying that we need an impact study of the likely level and the likely impact on aquatic ecosystems. Shamefully, that work has not been done, and it should be done before any final decisions are taken.

The Bill is a bit of a mixed bag. I fear that, as some of my hon. Friends have said, it is somewhat disappointing, even a little half-hearted. Nobody denies that in recent years good progress has been made in cleaning up the aquatic environment, but many sites are still threatened. The organisation Plantlife International, of which I should mention that I am a director, reckons that over half the species covered by species action plans are threatened by poor management, and 80 per cent. of lakes designated as sites of special scientific interest are currently polluted.

Those issues are to be dealt with under the water framework directive procedure, not under the Bill, and it is regrettable—although I understand the reasons for it—that the Government have not been able to dovetail those processes more completely.

I said that there was a strain of half-heartedness running through the Bill, and that is nowhere more evident than in the part dealing with competition. The Department's own regulatory impact assessment predicts that the maximum number of customers who could benefit from the measures is 2,000, which is a mere drop in the ocean—I am sorry about that unintended pun. The assessment also admits that the price for everybody else will rise. It is a strange piece of competition regulation that brings down the price for large companies but puts up the price for small consumers.

That raised another issue. I thought that we were supposed to be discouraging large-scale users of water from using so much, but if we bring down the price, we will inevitably remove the pressure to reduce consumption. The amount of water used by large corporations can be staggering. I came across some figures provided by the BBC, and I am going to use them—not that I intend to knock the BBC; all credit to it for providing the figures. It is interesting to note that last year every person who worked for the BBC used an average of 30 cu m of water. That is a total of 534 cu m—enough to fill 2.7 million baths—*[Interruption.]* They are a very clean lot at the BBC. Disturbingly, there had been a 20 per cent. increase in the water used since the previous year.

The BBC has owned up to the problem—perhaps we would expect an organisation run by a man call Dyke to take water seriously. It has even installed something

[Mr. Ainsworth]

called a waterless urinal, the details of which are unclear to me, but I gather that it suffers from technical problems, which I hope will be swiftly resolved.

It is not clear whether the BBC falls into the category defined in clause 85 as

"any other public body of any description".

Indeed, it is not clear either whether it matters if it does fall into that category, because clause 85 is woefully inaccurate. It is an example of the sort of inadequacy that spoils the environmental purposes of the Bill. It requires public authorities to

"take into account, where relevant, the desirability of conserving water".

How binding is that? Who decides the meaning of "where relevant"? Are public bodies not likely to be among the lucky 2,000 beneficiaries of the competition measures provided in the Bill? Will not the relevance of cheaper water be competing with the relevance of conserving it?

That is an issue of great importance, because water is a scarce resource.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury touched on that issue. I was astonished to discover that parts of the south-east have less rainfall per head of population per year than Ethiopia or the Sudan. That is a staggering fact, yet the south-east is where the Deputy Prime Minister in his wisdom has decided to impose massive house building targets without reference to the Environment Agency or the water companies, which are being asked to provide the water supply. Where will that water come from, and where will it go? The addition of half a million new homes equates to an additional demand for 85 million litres of water a day. The water is just not there. Nothing in the Bill prepares the water companies or consumers for the consequences of unsustainable population growth in parts of the country where water resources are already stretched to the limit. In the unlikely event of the Deputy Prime Minister performing a successful rain dance, the consequence would be flooding, because there is nowhere for that water to go. Asphalt is not noted for its porous qualities.

The Bill does nothing to address these serious and fundamental problems. It acknowledges a problem, because it moves to tackle abstraction, which is important. I welcome those parts of the Bill that are designed to do that. However, I agree with English Nature that aspects of the regime as planned are not sufficiently robust. The Government should accept English Nature's advice that the gradual conversion of environmentally damaging licences towards 2012 should be accompanied by milestones and progress reports in 2006, 2008 and 2010, which would be in line with the habitats directive and with Government policy, and it would also bring certainty to those who currently own and operate licences.

We in this country should recognise that we have a great deal to be thankful for, as many millions of people in the world live in chronic drought conditions. Our usage of water has increased by 70 per cent. in the last 30 years. I fear that we are taking water for granted, and we do so at our peril and to the detriment of the natural environment on which we all depend. I am afraid that the Bill will do little to address these issues, and little therefore to tackle some of the underlying problems that we are storing up for our children.

7.22 pm

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): I am pleased to take part in this debate. The Water Bill has been a long time coming, but it is worth waiting for as it deals with some important regulatory issues. It also delivers on the Government's aim to put customers at the heart of the regulatory process. I shall not discuss fluoridation, as I want to talk about water abstractions rather than dental abstractions.

It should also be said that the Bill does not deal with the big issue that affects many of those who elect us to this place, which is the size of the bills coming through letterboxes. I understand that that is a matter for the periodic review, but I regret that it is not in this legislation, because we cannot ignore the issue.

Last month, the water companies submitted their draft plans to the Office of Water Services as the periodic review was about to begin. In Cornwall, where people already have the largest water bills in the country, bills could rise £15 above inflation each year between 2004 and 2009. The average water bill will account for significantly more than 10 per cent. of a weekly pension. It is an unwelcome milestone, and it is fundamentally wrong. The Government should address the issue.

I am not blind to the successes of the industry in recent years. We now have cleaner rivers and beaches, and companies have improved their management and favour a sustainable approach. However, sustainability must be linked to affordability. We must be conscious of the situation of the most vulnerable—the large family who cannot benefit from metering or the many pensioners who face the problem of fuel poverty that the Government have done so much to address. In effect, they suffer water poverty.

The fact is that in the south-west, as every school child will tell you, 3 per cent. of the country's population pays for the management of 30 per cent. of our coastline, which many millions of people enjoy every year. We welcome those visitors, but the nation does not pay for those attractions, as it does for the national museums. It is local people in a low-wage area such as my constituency who pay.

We all agree that water is a precious resource, and environmental degradation of sites of special scientific interest and other beauty spots cannot be a good thing. Managing our water and the environment is the central thrust of this legislation. We should all welcome a Bill that updates the hopelessly anachronistic rules on abstraction. It is not unkind to say that the system of licences as it stands is a complete and utter shambles.

Some major abstractors currently hold licences as of right. Abstraction is estimated to affect several hundred sites that have been designated as SSSIs or are protected under European directives. The Bill is welcome in extending the use of time-limited licences from 2012, revoking licences of right when necessary and converting existing licences. It is an opportunity to deliver an efficient regulatory regime and to give the Environment Agency the power that it needs to manage our water properly.

Some of the debates about abstraction are incredibly technical. When the all-party water group, which I chair, held a meeting to discuss the Bill a few months ago, we entitled it "abstracting the truth", with an eye to the great weight of the technical clauses and the sizeable regulatory package. Amendments have been suggested about who is excluded and who is not. However, we should not confuse the important protection offered by licences by making exception after exception. Water is a precious resource and must be managed sensibly.

I hope that we will have the chance to debate these more technical questions in Committee, and that one issue does not dominate the whole Committee process. We should broadly welcome the approach set out in the Bill, and recognise that it is a long overdue revision of the system following the 1998 review.

Other regulatory changes are to be welcomed. The proposed changes at Ofwat and the creation of a regulatory board are sensible and bring the structure in line with that of other bodies. Ofwat is now overseeing the next periodic review. We all know how important that process is for all stakeholders, and the various pressures on and arguments that will be put to the regulator. Getting the structure right is vital.

The proposed consumer council for water offers a chance to reinvigorate the customers' voice in the process. It could be an effective advocate for the consumer. If we can get a duty of sustainability, that will enable it to approach the whole question of affordability in a measured way, as part of the broader debate that links profits, tariffs and the environment.

Other issues attract my attention. Surprisingly, clauses on contaminated water and water from coal mines have relevance to my constituency. In parts of Cornwall, people have to be careful where they walk, otherwise they may fall down a tin mine shaft. What about the discharge from former tin and copper mines that may cause pollution? I would hope to explore that issue in Committee.

We also need to ensure that new regulation is consistent with existing directives, especially the water framework directive, which must be enacted by the end of this year. Clarity and consistency of working could save much head-scratching, not to mention lawyers' fees, in the future. Various suggestions will be put to the Committee, and I hope that Ministers will listen carefully.

I hope that this issue is not used to confuse or delay this important legislation that, in one way or another, has had many delays already. Now that it is in the Commons we should welcome the chance to improve the management of a precious resource in the interests of all.

It would be churlish not to recognise some of the water industry's successes in recent years. However, with climate change, the need to meet the highest environmental standards and rising bills, many of the old debates have come back. Indeed, in the south-west they never went away. The Bill is a welcome chance to consider wider issues and specific changes, as we create a sustainable and affordable future for the industry and customers.

7.29 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I certainly want to speak about fluoridation, but first I shall deal with the central principles of the Bill, which tries to address the country's needs but falls short of doing so.

Surprising as it may seem, my county of Ceredigion has a water shortage. Wet Wales is short of water. Because we store only 2 per cent. of rainfall, we do not have a great ability to deal with periods of drought or climate change. As a result, the south of the county has a severe water shortage of about 1.7 million litres a day, which is equivalent to the usage of 2,800 households. By 2005, with the expected growth in the county which reflects that in south-east England—we have a similarly contentious housing plan, albeit on a smaller scale—we could have a shortage of 3.5 million litres a day. That, as I said, is in what is generally thought of as a wet country and a wet county.

I therefore welcome the Bill's underlying principles, which are that the abstraction and use of water need to be reconsidered in light of sustainable development, that we need to reform the licensing system and that we need to try to establish a level playing field for different users, rather than favouring one type of user over another. However, I feel that the Bill will not achieve those aims.

Wales has also experienced severe effects on special conservation areas similar to those mentioned by the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton), who referred to the effects on sites of special scientific interest. Extraction from an important river, the Afon Teifi, is affecting a habitat that Europe recognises as a candidate for special conservation area status. Conservation, water preservation and water use cannot be taken for granted. It is essential that the Bill gets things right for the long term, so that there can be investment to build a proper water industry and ensure affordability.

On a related issue, we must ask whether the Bill takes the right approach to the whole industry. It will penalise some water users more than others. Let us look at the bottled water industry in Wales, which is tremendously important. The House sells Brecon Carreg water, and Tŷ Nant, in my constituency, is the source of one of the most famous mineral waters in Wales. It comes in the famous blue bottle, and the company employs 35 staff. Like many other industries in Wales, the water industry cannot be moved abroad—companies depend on the water from the area. Although many of them are no longer locally owned, they provide local employment.

I shall use Tŷ Nant as an example of how companies may be affected by the Bill. The company recently increased its turnover by 20 per cent., thanks to the introduction of a new bottled water in a fully recyclable plastic bottle. It expects 50 per cent. growth next year, but that is the result of a one-off investment equivalent to 70 per cent. of its annual turnover. The company posed me a question that I want to ask the Minister: if a water bottling company has to invest 70 per cent. of its annual turnover over a 10 to 15-year pay-back period, how can a six or 12-year licensing framework give it, and the banks and the backers, the assurance that it needs to continue with that investment and employment?

We have to bear it in mind that the annual production of the whole of the UK bottled water industry is equivalent to the amount lost from mains leakage in

[Mr. Simon Thomas]

nine hours. If we are trying to establish a level playing field, we must be careful not to break the back of some companies when the faults lie elsewhere. Treating bottled water companies the same as those that perform mains extraction would be like imposing the climate change levy on a scooter and lifting it from a power station.

Another issue that I want to tackle is private sewerage. I hope that there will be an opportunity to consider the matter in the Standing Committee, of which I hope to be lucky enough to be a member. The hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) made the important point that the Bill represents a missed opportunity to deal with private sewerage. I recognise that, as the Minister said in an intervention, there is some redress in the Bill for new private sewerage. However, in many estates in rural areas that were built in the 1970s, the 1980s and even the 1990s, sewerage has been installed to the minimum building standards. That is not good enough for adoption by water companies—they will not touch it. Only a couple of weeks ago, I visited Gelliwen in Llechryd in my constituency—a large estate that was built in the 1970s and has pitch pipes, which are not now suitable for adoption.

The question that the Bill must answer is whether it will be feasible or possible in future to build private housing estates with sewerage pipes that are not suitable for adoption. It would be ridiculous to pass an Act that allowed that situation to continue, and we would miss an opportunity to ensure that every sewerage pipe put in the ground after the Act was passed was of an adoptable standard and would be adopted straight away. If we do not take that opportunity, we will store up huge ecological, environmental and social problems for the future. Clauses 97 and 98 are not adequate, so I hope that we will have an opportunity to investigate the matter further in Committee.

Finally I turn to the contentious issue of fluoridation. I think that the measure is in the Bill because of the Prime Minister's words at the 1999 Labour party conference, when he said that everyone will have access to an NHS dentist. The Government's utter failure to ensure that that happens has allowed compulsory fluoridation to raise its ugly head again. I am opposed full stop to compulsory medication. I am opposed to putting folic acid in flour and to putting iodine in salt. If one goes to France, one can buy salt without iodine, and the French do not seem to be much more ill than we are; in fact, they live longer.

I am particularly opposed to compulsory medication in respect of which we cannot control the dosage. We cannot control how much water people drink from the tap or the way in which they use that water. We cannot control the dosage where naturally fluoridated water then has fluoride added. This is an excuse for a dental health policy, and this Bill is the wrong vehicle for it. Fluoridation is a cop-out and a tacit acknowledgement that our NHS dental provision is failing those who need it most.

The fluorides used are silicofluorides, which are not recognised by the Medicines Control Agency, which refused to classify them as a medicine product. We cannot buy them over the counter, but we are prepared to put them in our water. That is a crazy and unacceptable situation, and I very much hope that, on a free vote, the House will turn it down.

7.37 pm

Mr. David Crausby (Bolton, North-East): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this debate, especially on the question of water fluoridation. The most significant question is who should decide what our water supply contains, because therein lie extremely important issues about the addition of fluoride or indeed anything else that science might consider to be in the best interests of our health. For me, this is one of the most significant questions concerning freedom of choice.

At this point I am not concerned with whether fluoride is good for the health of the nation. It is not for me to prove that it is unsafe; it is for those who advocate its addition to demonstrate its safety absolutely beyond doubt. They have not done so, and in those circumstances the public are reluctant to put themselves in the hands of scientists and those who refer to themselves as medical professionals. The public are right, because to do so would be foolish in the extreme.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Crausby: I shall not give way because there is not enough time.

The public should resist those who assume that they know what is good for us. Telling people, "This is in the public interest" is the starting point for every tin-pot dictator. Whether fluoride is good or bad for the health of our teeth is irrelevant. What is pertinent is that we should all be able to choose what we swallow. It is too easy to utilise the supply of what we drink to manage the population.

In Britain we take our water for granted—we just turn on the tap and it rushes out. Elsewhere in the world, water is life and death.

The public should therefore decide what may be artificially added to this vital resource, and every one of them should have their say.

I acknowledge that there are scientific arguments both for and against the benefits of fluoride. What I do not accept is that those in favour of fluoridation have a monopoly of scientific wisdom—nor do I accept that as soon as anyone mentions the health of poor children's teeth, we must all jump into line and support whatever the so-called experts tell us.

I know about poor children's teeth. I was a poor child, yet I still have a mouthful of my own teeth. That is not because I was forced to consume fluoride but because, although both of my parents worked extremely hard, we were still sufficiently poor not to be able to binge on sweets, chocolates and soft drinks at every opportunity.

I went to school after the second world war. The fact that sweets were still rationed may also have helped. However, I do not hear a cry from any hon. Member to the effect that we should bring back ration coupons for confectionery in the interests of children's teeth. I am irritated when I hear sanctimonious talk from members of the dental profession about the dental health of the

poor. It makes me even more suspicious about fluoride. Dentists are not exactly known for their generosity. Too many of them are falling over themselves to get out of national health service dentistry in pursuit of wealthy private patients for them to be taken too seriously.

I believe that the people should decide. I mean that they should actually decide. They should not be consulted, listened to and then completely ignored because those who have the power to make a decision think they know better. The British people must be able to choose what their children drink. The prime responsibility for children's health lies with parents, and that includes poor parents—or to use a more politically correct description, the socially deprived. To treat the poor differently is patronising.

For a long time, the public have been kept on the edge of this debate. They have not had an opportunity to take a real part in it. As long as the decision whether to fluoridate is kept out of the public decision-making arena, the debate will rightly continue to be condemned as one conducted by powerful lobbies such as dentists, the British Medical Association, health authorities, water authorities, social workers, councillors and local government officers—everyone except those who write to me to say that they do not want fluoride in their water.

The only democratic way to come close to achieving a fair representation of public approval or disapproval on this issue must be by way of a referendum, and that itself is incredibly imperfect. However, if it is right that we need a referendum to decide what currency we have and on what money we spend, it must be equally right that the question of what we drink should be decided in a similar way.

To its credit, Bolton borough council made arrangements for just such a referendum in 1968. It was held on the question of adding fluoride to water supplies after the council had made a decision. When the results were announced, it was found that 27 per cent. had voted for fluoridation and 73 per cent. had voted against. Eighty-two per cent. of the electorate voted. There were 402 spoiled ballot papers. More than 100, 000 people took part in that referendum. Since I was elected in 1997, my mailbag has increased every time the issue has been raised. I have received hundreds of letters about fluoridation from my constituents over the years and only two letters in favour of it.

One of my constituents, a dentist, recently wrote to me making the point that children hardly ever drink tap water these days, and that there are other means such as the administration of a controlled amount of fluoride in tablet form as part of their diet, or added to appropriately labelled milk or other soft drinks, that would be much more effective. I believe that he is right. Compulsory medication—that is what this is—is bound to be controversial and emotive in any democratic society. It is—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

7.45 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I mind very much about water, about the use of water and about its disposal, and so do my constituents. My acquaintance with the River Avon, which flows through my constituency, started very early. In 1948, when I was three, I fell in. Surprising as it might seem, but all the best stories are the true ones, I was fished out of the river by the Bishop of Bombay. I digress. However, the river in my constituency has been important to me all my life. Over the past 20 years in particular, while serving in the House, I have seen a number of measures relating to water and I have been waiting for the big moment, for this sort of Bill to come along to address many of the outstanding issues. I am convinced that we continue to abuse our most vital national resource here.

We are not talking about a national ring main—some people advocate it—whereby the people of Manchester can generously give a lot of water to the people of the south-east. We are talking about piping water around, often in the wrong places. In my area of south Wiltshire, we are piping water from a low-rainfall chalk countryside to dense populations down in Yeovil and up in Chippenham. It is not for our own use. It is simply being transported. The impact on the river basin is huge in terms of low flows, a disturbed ecology and sewage flooding in the winter, as well as ordinary flooding, and water shortage in the summer.

I have no difficulty in supporting the Opposition amendment tabled in the names of my right hon. and hon. Friends, because it points out some of the deficiencies that have not been addressed in an otherwise sensible Bill.

It is argued that the water framework directive would normally be dealt with in another way by perhaps the European Scrutiny Committee or by means of a statutory instrument. I accept that, but the trouble is that we would have only a short debate on the European water framework directive. We might be allowed two and a half hours. There might be only a one-and-a-half hour debate. There would be no substantive votes on the issue. There would be some general patter, but we shall never have a proper debate on the water framework directive unless we can have it while discussing a Bill of this sort.

There are other areas where the Government should go much further. My hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) was right to point out the impact of new housing and industry on abstraction and sewerage. The demand for water is unsustainable. The planning authority cannot say no on the ground that there is not enough water or not enough sewerage capacity. The water and sewage companies cannot say no on the grounds of sewage flooding or low flows. We are told, "This is not a planning Bill. Come on, that would have to be in a planning Bill." Motion 5 on the Order Paper is precisely a programme motion on the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill, but that Bill does not say anything about water and the water framework directive, nor about planning implications, and nor does the Bill that is before us. That is a frustrating situation.

I move on to the general water efficiency duty. When the Government produced their consultation paper entitled "Taking Water Responsibly" they stated at paragraph 9.27 that they would bring forward legislation when parliamentary time allowed

"to place all other abstractors under an enforceable duty to use water abstracted under authorisations in an efficient and effective manner."

[Mr. Robert Key]

That is not what is said in the Bill. I am delighted that my noble Friend Baroness Byford successfully introduced what is now clause 1. However, that does not really go far enough and I would wish to see that explored in Committee.

Then we have the water conservation duty for public bodies, to which my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) was right to draw attention. Clause 85, which deals with water conservation by public authorities, says:

"In exercising its functions and conducting its affairs, each public authority shall take into account, where relevant, the desirability of conserving water".

That should be a duty, not an option—the provision does not go far enough.

There are also problems, on a micro-scale if one likes, with water abstraction. In my constituency, people are concerned about the impact of the new regulatory proposals on what some call flooding and others warping—it simply means the old water meadows. Extraordinarily, DEFRA is giving grants of taxpayers' money for the restoration of our heritage of water meadows on the one hand but, on the other, says that it will charge for that. That is crazy, and I hope that we will sort it out in Committee.

Secrecy is also a problem. There have been moves towards disclosure, which I very much welcome, but it really will not do to go on pretending that this is all hugely commercially sensitive and we cannot tell the wider public how many litres are being extracted from which borehole. I do not even see why the Ministry of Defence should hide behind Crown immunity so that it does not have to tell us what is happening in water abstraction. I asked a parliamentary question on Monday 24 February. In question 110, I asked the Ministry of Defence to tell us the daily abstraction rate for the Army's 24 boreholes on Salisbury plain. I was told by the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie), the then Minister, that the

"abstraction rate from individual boreholes has security implications and I am therefore withholding it under exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information."—[*Official Report*, 8 April 2003; Vol. 403, c. 145W.]

However, the hon. Gentleman generously told me that all the boreholes on Salisbury plain were taking an average total abstraction of 10,169 cu m. That is a sizeable river. It is secret, and it is absurd that it is.

Watercress growers were mentioned earlier, and they face a genuine problem. I received a letter from my constituent, Mr. K. D. Hitchings of Broadchalke, who wrote:

"I am the fourth generation to farm here at Broadchalke"—

I know that he is, as I have visited his farm, which is wonderful. He continued:

"I expected to have licence of right to the water for at least my generation as did my father, grandfather and great grandfather."

Mr. Hitchings wants me to try to persuade the Government, for the sake of his family's future and the future of the whole industry, to introduce a statutory code of conduct for the Environment Agency in its use of powers granted by the Bill so that businesses with long-lived assets of that type can rely on, for example, 24 years' warning of change.

That is a lot to reflect on. Some people argue that trickle irrigation is dangerous, but agriculture takes only 4 per cent. of the water in this country, which is not very much. There is a peak in demand at certain times of year, notably the summer, when flows are low. However, in our neck of the woods in Wiltshire, we have low rainfall in the winter months as well. Let us not blame farmers for irrigation when they are using only 4 per cent. of the water—what is really needed is a change in attitude by all of us.

Water is not free. We choke the atmosphere with carbon emissions, so we even affect the rainfall. We all have a responsibility in our homes not to waste water.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

7.53 pm

Andy King (Rugby and Kenilworth): I very much welcome the Bill, which comes before the House at a time when the importance of the water supply throughout the world is increasingly understood by all of us. It is also timely because of climate change, which was referred to earlier. We must all learn to be far less wasteful with the precious resource of water.

The vital importance of conservation is clear in my own constituency. Before today's debate, I visited Brandon marsh with English Nature and the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, where I learned an important lesson. That site fulfils a central role in raising the awareness of communities around Coventry and Warwickshire of the role that ecology plays in everyone's lives. Conservation is extremely important, but it must be considered alongside the needs of the extraction industries. Brandon marsh is an old quarry site and next to the marsh there is an active quarrying undertaking. The quarrying industry and the conservationists both appreciate the importance of each other. The Bill must ensure that a balance is struck between the needs of industry and the importance of wildlife conservation.

The Bill will reduce the impact of abstractions on such important wildlife sites, and provides an opportunity to achieve sustainable management of water resources across the country. The reforms in abstraction licensing are a huge step in the right direction, allowing for time-unlimited licences, many of which have existed for over 40 years, to be varied or revoked after 2012. Similarly, the new powers for the Environment Agency to enter into water resources management schemes with abstractors and issue enforcement notices, the duty to ensure that abstractors use water efficiently, and the corresponding duty on all public bodies to plan water conservation are welcome steps in conserving our water supply.

However, I would welcome clarification from the Minister of the way in which the regulations will work in practice and can be strengthened if necessary. I hope that he will expand on that while the Bill is before the House. This is also a timely opportunity for him to confirm the Government's strategy to give permanent abstraction licences time-limited status. About 90 per cent. of all licences are permanent and, despite the policy of voluntary conversion since 1999, not one has been converted. The water framework directive requires the

regular review of abstraction licences, and that is perhaps one of the most important areas in which the Government should set clear targets along with the mechanisms to achieve them. I am also concerned that the term "serious damage" is open to dispute by lawyers. That would make the process of revocation or modification after 2012 complex and lengthy. I hope that consideration will be given to using the term "significant damage" instead, which would ensure consistency with the habitat regulations.

I shall now move on to the adoption of sewers, an issue that has already been raised several times in our debate. The Bill begins to address that extremely important matter, which is of concern to many of my constituents and myself. I must declare an interest because, 25 years after moving into my house, I found out that the sewers were unadopted. If we carried out a survey in the Chamber, we would probably find that many Members and their families have been caught in the same trap. It is important that we begin to address that serious issue. It is a scandalous situation, and leaves people who have been unaware of their responsibility for up to 50 or 60 years liable for the costs of maintaining sewers.

The Minister rightly said that he has undertaken an important consultation, and W. S. Atkins has produced a report for consultation, which is due to end on 23 September. I hope that every Member who is affected, and every local authority in England and Wales, will respond to that important issue. The problem is extensive, to say the least. Unless action is taken by the Government, it is a public health time bomb, for both the affected householders and the Government.

The provisions of the Bill in that regard are welcome, ensuring that lateral drains must be of adoptable standard to be connected to a public sewer and addressing the problem of properties built between the 1995 amendment of the Environment Bill and the publication of proper planning guidance in 1999. The Bill does not, however, make private sewers the responsibility of water and sewage companies, and the undertaker still has the final say on adoption of existing laterals and sewers.

We must take any opportunity to shift the balance in favour of the consumer. The Bill provides one opportunity to do that, in addition to the welcome provisions that it contains. Alternatively, the 2004 water price review, which is already likely to reflect the planned £21 billion investment by the industry, could take into account the additional costs of adoption and provide a timely opportunity to implement an acceptable solution. I very much hope that the Department's ongoing consultation will present its recommendations as soon as possible, so that we can finally take action to end a terrible problem for those affected.

Another aspect of close interest to all my constituents will be the proposed regulatory framework and how it will protect consumers. I welcome the creation of an independent consumer council for water, but we must ensure that it has adequate powers and resources to improve the representation of consumers in what will remain a monopoly for the supply of ordinary households.

Finally, I should like to address the issue of fluoridation. That is an issue—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman will not finally have the chance to do that.

8.1 pm

Sue Doughty (Guildford): The Bill represents an opportunity that was nearly lost. During its passage through the Lords, important amendments were made to the Bill, which has had a long gestation. Consultation could have taken place, and issues such as unadopted sewers and the European framework directive have not been incorporated into the Bill as we would have wished. There has been delay and, as has been pointed out, there will be an ungainly scamper to get the Bill through the House by the end of the Session. In Scotland, the Executive worked to take account of the European directive in a constructive way. It is difficult to see the logic of running the Bill in parallel with implementing the European directive.

The Bill is about getting the water that we need and getting rid of the water that we do not need. It is about ensuring that the environment is protected, which must be done in an affordable way. For some of us living in the London area where our water bills are among the lowest, it is sometimes hard to understand the problems of the people in the south-east where water bills are the highest, despite the fact that they have such low incomes. There is considerable injustice in the way that people are charged for water. I hope that in the debate and subsequently in Committee, we will start to see the answers to some of the problems that we face, but there are some questions that the Bill does not seem to answer.

Water is a precious commodity. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) pointed out the problems that exist internationally, such as the shortage of water in other parts of the world—even in parts of Europe. When I was on holiday, I came across people who were sharing an apartment on a Greek island. The children left the tap on—English children, not knowing any better—and as a result the apartment was without water for three days, because water was delivered to the island by boat. We share the responsibility for tackling such problems.

We face the problems of climate change and droughts and the floods that often follow. There is an urgent need for environmental action. Our water systems have improved: the return of the otter to many parts of the country is widely welcomed. When I worked in the water industry many years ago, that was just a hope, but now it is being realised. But there is the problem of licensed over-abstraction. A licence may have allowed for too much abstraction, which damages the balance of watercourses, the chalk infrastructure and the winter bournes that rely on water rising and falling. We are losing species where the water does not return in the winter as expected. Animals such as the water vole are being lost. Careful management of abstraction and of river basins is vital if there are not to be further losses.

Sixteen out of 45 biodiversity action plan habitats in the UK are threatened by water abstraction. Again, close management is needed. I share the worries expressed by other hon. Members about the

[Sue Doughty]

interrelationship between the European framework directive, the time scales that it envisages, and the fact that it deals with river basin management plans, whereas the regions manage flood defences. We should take a holistic view because the climate problems arise from increases in water in some areas and lack of water where it is needed.

We discussed earlier whether we should hold water in water meadows, and whether we do that to sustain species or as part of an integrated water management plan introduced in conjunction with DEFRA. Those important issues need to be considered as a piece, and I am worried about how the Government will integrate them.

Nothing is being done about licences for abstraction from navigation authority reserves. Navigation authorities have a part to play and, although there is a view that such areas are enclosed, they have an effect on watercourses. Canals feed into rivers, and rivers sometimes feed into canals. There are reservoirs associated with navigation systems that provide habitats for important species, and they need protection from damage caused by changes in the water level. We need to consider abstraction there, and the need for licences. Other lakes, ponds and reservoirs that fall under the description of discrete waters will be excluded, leaving several sites of special scientific interest without protection. We need to know how all the sites that require protection from the damage that unregulated abstraction can cause are to be included in the licensing system.

We support the Environment Agency as a competent body for flood defence, but it would be much more effective if that responsibility were handled by river basin management committees rather than regional committees. After all, water drains according to gravity, not bureaucracy.

On the vexed problem of housing in the south-east, the question on everybody's lips is where the water will come from. We are not hearing any answers, but we are getting a little more news. The information that we received today that a Joint Committee is looking at major developments, particularly the Thames gateway, is welcome, but it does not provide the answer. That development is in an area of water shortage and if the water is not produced locally, how will it reach the area? Occasionally we hear talk of a national grid for water, but these are not simple matters. They have been examined time and again over the years. I remember when I was working in the water industry and we discussed the problems of water shortages in Yorkshire. It would be easy if one could ship water up and down the country, but that is not simple.

Soft water being discharged into a hard water area causes major problems with species. In lead or other pipes where calcification has sealed joints, soft water erosion can cause leakages. There can be problems with turbidity and direction. Once the water has been through sewage treatment, it may be discharged into a river that is not compatible, which can cause difficulties. We need to consider what the planning guidelines provide for. There are many issues that we need to examine in Committee relating to the ability to pay and why people on limited incomes who struggle to pay effectively subsidise those who choose not to pay. There is no justice in that, but the Bill says nothing about it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has had her time.

8.9 pm

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): Various Opposition Members have tried to recruit the known water shortages in eastern and south-eastern Britain as an argument against the additional housing proposed by the Government. I assume that that means that the Opposition are happy to see house prices continue to rise in those areas, and for people such as my constituents to be increasingly priced out of the market.

In my area, Lord Rooker is convening a board involving a number of public bodies, including the Environment Agency, to consider the implications of the housing growth that is proposed in Milton Keynes and the south midlands, and to plan now to ensure that all the necessary infrastructure is there to support it. I applaud such positive action, as opposed to the negative search for any old reason to prevent housing that is needed so much.

I welcome the proposals to reform the system of abstraction licences. As many Members have pointed out, water is a scarce resource that needs to be used carefully. Both domestic and industrial users must begin to realise that although, obviously, it can be replaced by the rain, it is generally not replaced in the areas where it is consumed—and, in any case, the conversion of water into its purest form, for drinking and other purposes, uses energy. We should all be mindful of ways of reducing usage, conserving water and, where possible, reusing it.

I urge Ministers not to give in to the siren calls and special pleading for innumerable exceptions for various industries. Industries that use water must themselves devote energy into thinking of ways of minimising that use, and reusing and recycling water. If they are allowed to slide through the licensing process, they will have no incentive to use a scarce resource sensibly and efficiently. All industries that use water have a duty to the environment and the community not to place an undue burden on that scarce resource, and not to have an undue effect on lakes, rivers and wetlands.

The main subject that I want to discuss is fluoridation. It will come as no surprise that I am a strong supporter of it, for a number of reasons. The public health arguments in favour of it are irrefutable. There is evidence from areas where fluoride is naturally available, and from areas whose water supply has been fluoridated—such as Birmingham—that fluoridation reduces dental caries in children by a factor of about four. Water supply fluoridation is the easiest and safest way of delivering fluoride.

This is about health inequalities. Dental caries is already much more prevalent among children in lower-income families, and the levels among such children are highest in parts of the country where the water is not fluoridated either naturally or by addition. Members who run away from that argument are really saying that they do not care if those poor children continue to have bad dental health when there is an easy, safe way for society to ensure that they are protected.

I urge all parents to take care of their children's health, and to teach them proper dietary habits that will stand them in good stead and make their teeth less subject to caries, but I do not think it right for society to refuse to take responsibility for the teeth of children whose parents are feckless or fickle, and to say that the fecklessness of their parents is tough luck. Given that there is absolutely no danger from fluoridated water, it would be irresponsible of us to leave those children unprotected.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Why does the hon. Lady think fluoridation has been abandoned in Switzerland after 41 years, amidst evidence that dental decay was increasing in spite of it?

Dr. Starkey: The hon. Gentleman is misusing science. Of course fluoridation cannot protect those whose diet is rich in sugar and who do not eat high-fibre foods. As he should know, children in fluoridated areas should be compared with others eating the same food and living in areas where there is no fluoride.

That brings me to the need for Members to understand how scientific research and methodology work. The balance of scientific and medical opinion is clearly in favour of the view that fluoride causes no demonstrable harm to public health, provided that it is at or below the recommended level. The World Health Organisation itself is certain that a level of 1.5 mg per litre poses no significant risk to consumers throughout their lives.

Of course it will always be possible to find a scientist who has expressed and will express a dissident view, but the key is to look at peer reviewed science, the balance of scientific opinion, and the evidence emerging from meta-studies—the accumulated data from a number of different studies. That evidence is clear. It is dangerous to pay too much attention to dissident scientists. We should bear in mind the damage done by Dr. Duisberg, who persisted in propagating the view that there was no connection between HIV and AIDS despite a clear majority of scientific opinion that he was wrong. It is a mistake to cite non-peer reviews or dissident scientists who say that fluoride is dangerous. It is not dangerous: 300 million people worldwide drink fluoridated water, and many communities have been drinking it for up to 50 years.

Opponents of fluoridation also keep describing it as mass medication. It is not; it would be if it were pharmaceutical, but it is supplementation. The analogy with added vitamins in bread flour and margarine and butter is entirely correct.

Those are the main arguments that I wanted to present. This is a public health issue, and I am proud that it has finally been included in a Water Bill. I hope that Members will take account of the balance of medical and scientific opinion and not be led astray by alarmist rumours put about by many people that are based on no scientific reality.

8.19 pm

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): First, I accept the sincerity of the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) in expressing her view. Secondly, I accept that dental caries are unacceptably common in certain deprived communities in this country and that something needs to be done about that.

As the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby) said in his powerful speech, however, there are ways of addressing the problem other than adding fluoride to the water supply. Fluoride treatments can be offered in ways other than through the water supply, and education is also important. I would not object to affected areas being given special subsidies to try to improve the dental health of the children concerned.

I accept the view of the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West on the scientific evidence. I went to the lengths of having my children's teeth fluoridated—one can get a special treatment privately—and buying them fluoride toothpaste. I do not deny—she suggested that some of us who are against fluoridation deny this—that there are benefits to fluoridation and that it is unlikely to be damaging. However, she accepted that there are alternative views. Indeed, some states in America are withdrawing fluoride because of the possibility of class actions.

There is a principle that must be upheld. I am shocked and appalled by the British medical profession's view because I had believed that its ethics were that medicines should not be given to members of the public without their informed consent. Such a practice also breaches the Council of Europe convention on human rights and biomedicine, which states:

"States may not medicate any individual contrary to their wishes except under . . . recognised public health emergencies. All medical interventions must be carried out under proper medical supervision, and in accordance with the patient's needs."

Dr. Stoate: I am the only practising doctor in the House and the hon. Gentleman has attacked the medical profession, so it is right for me to mention the fact that we are talking not about medicating the population, but about a preventive supplement. Fluoridation is exactly the same idea as including vitamins A and D in margarine and folic acid in flour. Those things are included in the public interest and for the public good. Everyone in this country eats medicated flour and medicated margarine, and there is very little debate about it. Why should there be a huge difference between supplementing the foods that we eat and supplementing the water that we drink? The effects are the same—they are preventive measures.

Mr. Butterfill: Fluoride is a medicine, which is precisely why the hon. Gentleman is so keen on it and why it is being treated as a medicine. There are alternative medicines, but there are no alternatives to fluoride in the water supply. Although the Minister thinks that we can all go out and buy Perrier water, I am not sure that the poor, about whom he purports to be concerned, can afford to do so.

Fluoride is a poison under part II of the Poisons Act 1972, and fluoridation violates the Offences Against the Person Act 1861. The Government can, of course, get over that problem by designating fluoride as a medicine, but the use of an unregistered substance for medical purposes would breach EC codified pharmaceuticals directive 2001/83. They would have to register fluoride as a medicine and subject it to full clinical testing, but it has not been registered or clinically tested.

[Mr. Butterfill]

Unfortunately for the Government, fluoridation also breaches the European convention on human rights. That is a serious difficulty, as this country has adopted, either directly or indirectly, a body of legislation that the Bill would breach. If the Government insist on the measure, they must amend the relevant legislation. In some cases, they will need to obtain the consent of the European Community. Water fluoridation violates both articles 3 and 8 of the European convention on human rights.

Water fluoridation also breaches article 35 of the European charter of fundamental rights, which states that

"the right to health care includes the right to refuse health care, for whatever reason. It establishes the individual's right to receive particular drugs or treatments—or to prevent them from having such treatment administered against his/her wishes."

The Government are in breach of both those treaties, and the offer of indemnity is therefore illegal.

The Government cannot have it both ways. They could say that fluoride is a medicine and go through all the procedures to amend the legislation. The Minister is shaking his head because he wants to administer fluoride as a substance, but it is actually a poison. I must warn him that there is no doubt that judicial review will be sought if the Government persist with their approach.

The Minister should take cognisance of the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton), who said that this important Bill should not be hijacked by a completely different issue. Water fluoridation is an important issue that should be debated, and the legislative framework for it should also be properly debated.

As the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Alan Williams) said, the Government introduced the clause under an extraordinary measure in the Lords, where there was not enough time for a proper debate. Indeed, there will not be enough time here for a proper debate. The issue is extremely important and concerns fundamental human rights. The Government are behaving in what I hope I can describe as an uncharacteristically authoritarian way, although authoritarianism seems to be creeping more and more into everything that they do.

The Government should withdraw the clause to allow proper discussion of the important issues contained in the rest of the Bill in Committee and on Report. If they persist with this perverse measure, they will prevent proper discussion and reasoned amendment of this important Bill. I praise them for introducing the Bill, although, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) said, it has defects. None the less, if they persist with the measure, they will face legal action.

8.27 pm

Mr. Denis Murphy (Wansbeck): I intend to deal with two measures in the Bill that affect Waters and Robson, a major employer in my constituency that bottles Abbey Well natural mineral water at source. My concern is based on the proposals for time-limited licences and a maximum period of 12 years. Although the Environment Agency would be minded to agree to further licensing periods, the Bill could still affect the future investment plans of companies that bottle water.

Bottled water is now a £1 billion-a-year industry. Many people prefer it to tap water because it is seen as pure and natural and people who take the Government's health advice and drink two litres of water per day probably drink it. Surprisingly, only 39 per cent. of the population drink bottled water. However, regular drinkers now drink 64 per cent. more bottled water than they did in 1992 and the market is predicted to grow year on year.

I should like bottled water to replace over-sweetened drinks in school vending machines. In fact, Waters and Robson has just developed a plastic bottle that will fit into vending machines that dispense cans.

Despite the rapid growth in bottled water in the UK, we drink much less of it than any other country in Europe. In 2001, the Italians drank most mineral water, consuming 167 litres of it per head per annum, followed by the French, who drank 143 litres per head. People in Belgium, Spain and Germany consume more than 100 litres each per annum. In the United Kingdom, people consume only 26 litres per annum.

Consumption in the UK is forecast to increase at a minimum of 10 per cent. year on year. The UK water bottling industry currently bottles about 1.4 billion litres of water per year, which sounds like a lot of water. However, to put that figure in perspective I shall repeat a statistic that was given earlier: it is equivalent to less than nine hours' leakage from the mains water system.

The bottled water market is very competitive. Imported brands have a strong presence, taking some 25 per cent. of the market. The best-selling and best-known brands in the United Kingdom are, sadly, French. British companies are determined to gain market share, but will need time and substantial investment in order to grow. Investment is needed for equipment, new bottling halls, warehouses and connected infrastructures. The payback on such capital investment is usually calculated at around 20 years. Investing in marketing, advertising and brand promotion is also crucial if UK bottlers are to compete with large continental brands. Marketing incurs a significant financial outlay, and returns are achieved over many years. Banks and other investors will be reluctant to invest in bottled water companies whose business might be curtailed by the length, loss or uncertainty of their abstraction licence.

As a result, English and Welsh businesses—for it appears that this legislation is not to be introduced in Scotland—will have difficulty in expanding to meet projected consumer demand, and imported products will take an even larger share of the UK market. That will lead to job losses, often in rural areas that already suffer above average levels of unemployment. That is precisely the case at Waters and Robson in my constituency. It wishes to expand, but is unable to secure the necessary investment because of the uncertainty of time-limited licences. I therefore urge the Minister to exempt the bottled water sector from time-limited licences—or, if that is not possible, at least to allow them a licence period of 20 years.

Although my first call was for a relaxation of regulation, my second call is for a tightening of regulations to protect existing natural mineral water sources in the form of boreholes. Let me explain a case, as yet unresolved, that could affect the Waters and Robson plant in Morpeth. The Northumbrian Water

Authority Act 1981 granted an exemption on Environment Agency involvement in licensing to any extraction of less than 400 gallons per day or 1 million gallons per year. The Bill expands that concept nationwide in the equivalent of litres—namely, 20,000 litres per day. A new company has just agreed to set up a water bottling plant some 200 m from the site of the Abbey Well borehole. It has applied for planning permission to build a factory and to sink a borehole. As it proposes to extract less than 1 million gallons a year, it did not have to apply to the Environment Agency in order to drill—all it had to do was to seek planning permission from the local planning authority, which, as it freely admitted, had no expertise in this field. Permission to drill for a well that pumps fewer than 20,000 litres a day falls between two bodies—the local authority and the Environment Agency. The local authority sought the view of the Environment Agency, which replied stating that there was a possible risk to Waters and Robson's current extraction.

An important issue arose from the meeting between the planning authority and the Environment Agency's licensing officer: even if the proposed drilling had come under the agency's jurisdiction, it would not cover the protection for the specific requirements of natural mineral water. If the analysis of natural mineral water changes by more than 10 per cent. during one year, recognition could be withdrawn. So if a new drilling project introduces water of a different chemical make-up into a natural mineral water aquifer, thus causing a change in consistency, the mineral water brand extracted from that aquifer would lose its status and the company would effectively cease to exist as its brand would be dead. The Environment Agency has a responsibility only to prevent sources of water from being made unsuitable for drinking. It does not have a responsibility to concern itself with the specific make-up of the water.

In view of that, I ask the Minister to ensure that protection is given to existing extractions that have specific requirements, such as natural mineral water. Any proposed drilling within 1 km of a natural mineral water source must be investigated by the Environment Agency, irrespective of the volume of water to be extracted. Moreover, the special requirements of natural mineral water must be considered in respect of the mineral content remaining constant, not just the water remaining drinkable. I urge the Minister to amend the Bill to include those two protections.

8.33 pm

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): The opportunity to update our laws on a broad range of water issues is timely, not least because water demand has increased by more than 40 per cent. since the 1970s and massive new house building is likely in the south-east, an area of relative water shortage.

Gravel quarrying, and therefore water extraction, is a significant industry in Huntingdonshire. I should like to disclose a non-registrable shareholding in Thames Water.

Recently, there seems to have been a significant change in the way in which the public view water—effectively, from its being a given right, to be used without thought, towards its being a relatively scarce resource or even a commodity. Public education has contributed to that, not least through the effects of drought and the loss of rivers.

Privatisation has played its part, because water is now given a monetary value against which use and investment can be measured. There have been improvements, not least in piping, which, helped by decent rainfall earlier in the year, has contributed to there being no hosepipe ban this summer, for which my garden will be eternally thankful.

I accept that large abstractions need to be controlled for the management of drought and flooding, for environmental reasons and to provide equality between abstractors. I note the Environment Agency's fair point that, in some areas where exempt abstractions operate, licensed operators have been unable to take their valid entitlement. Unsurprisingly, given its significant new powers, the agency has been supportive of the Bill, but it will be important to review how the powers work in practice, not least those in clause 27, which allows the agency to revoke or vary abstraction licences after July 2012 if they cause environmental damage.

However, what is now seen as environmental damage is very different from what it was, say, 10 years ago or what it may be by 2012. I recently visited the airbase at Molesworth and was proudly shown the thriving water colonies of great crested newts, which nowadays would prevent any development on that land. However, given that businesses frequently invest on a 25-year or more basis, how will the Government satisfy businesses on their real concerns about losing the ability to trade, possibly with no compensation?

The system of appeals to the Secretary of State seems weak. As my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) said earlier, the public sector itself is a large user of water. I ask the Minister whether the agency, which is an arm of Government, and the Secretary of State on appeal, are the right people to judge public sector licence applications. Does that not invite political interference, which the Government are rightly changing in their competition decisions?

Furthermore, I am not entirely satisfied with the accountability of the Environment Agency, which will take significant powers under the Bill, mainly from local government elected members. Decisions on licences will no longer be taken by a committee of elected members, but by an officer of the local agency. I have a good relationship with my local agency staff, but that is not the case everywhere, as hon. Members have said. What happens if the agency gets it wrong? Where is the accountability? I should be grateful if the Minister would address that point.

I have fears that the Bill represents yet another example of the Government's frequent desire for centralisation and of their lack of concern for local democracy. Flooding is a vital issue in my constituency, where all four market towns and 25 of the 50 villages are threatened by flooding annually. The issue, although of course requiring a strategic overview, normally comes down to dealing with the nitty gritty of flood defences village by village, if not street by street. Therefore, I fail to see how local concerns will be better served by the far-off distance of the new regional flood defence committees.

[Mr. Jonathan Djanogly]

Many businesses, not least the quarries in my constituency, are concerned about the proposed maximum 12-year licences.

Mr. Morley: I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that the powers in the Bill are to create more regional flood defence committees. Although the local ones are to be abolished, there will be one tier. We recognise that there is an issue about local democracy and accountability. At the moment, there is a limit on the number of regional committees. We intend to remove that, so that we can have more committees to take that point into account.

Mr. Djanogly: I hear what the Minister says; this will be worth further review in Committee. If removing a level of government is the same as what the Government propose for regional government, I shall still have concerns.

Many businesses, not least quarries, are concerned about the 12-year licences. When that issue was debated in another place, the Minister noted that 12 years was the agency guideline, not a maximum written into the Bill. Indeed, this Minister repeated that today. Presumably, a guideline can be changed at any time, but that is little comfort for businesses that wish to have certainty to invest on a 30-year or more basis, particularly when the agency has been making it clear that the 12-year limit will not be extended.

For that reason, I support the view that licences should be issued for the same period as the planning permission. Not only would that provide certainty to the applicant, it would ensure that the local authority and the agency were forced to work together towards the same objectives. Importantly, it would ensure that a degree of local democracy—and, therefore, accountability—would be retained within the process.

The trading of water rights, as consulted on by the Government, would be environmentally friendly and would improve the efficient sharing of water rights. Will the Minister explain why the Bill does not introduce these measures? I know that many of the examples given by the Government as to how the new licences work do not concentrate on the cost of required environmental reports, which are expensive, quite apart from the costs of any conditions on which the agency would have the right to insist. The implications of those extra costs need to be considered more fully in Committee.

Finally, I wish to refer to fluoridation. Have we really advanced so little that the Government need again to tell us what we have to put in our tea? It is sad that, despite the potential for links with other diseases, the Government seem intent on permitting the indiscriminate mass medication of the country when they are, at best, unsure of the potential consequences. Clearly, tooth decay among children is a problem, but I suggest that the Government should worry more about public health campaigns for teeth and for balanced nutrition and against obesity—and that they sort out the lack of dentists in this country—rather than permitting the spiking of our children's Ribena.

Apart from the nanny state principle of mass medication, the clause is riddled with difficulties. There is not nearly enough explanation as to how it will work. How much power would a health authority have to compel a water company to include the chemicals? What penalty will the water company face if it refuses? How much local opposition to fluoridation would be sufficient for it to be considered unwanted? If the Bill passes, we can expect to see a raft of statutory instruments in the next few Sessions as this turns into a general debacle.

Fluoride apart, my view is that the Bill is generally good on direction but short on the fine-tuning. I hope that the Government will listen to the valid comments made during the passage of the Bill as much as they have listened to the Environment Agency during the drafting.

8.42 pm

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): This important Bill has taken a long time to come to the Commons. During the Bill's somewhat chequered history, the Government have listened to views and reacted accordingly. I was delighted when my hon. Friend the Minister said in his opening remarks that he would listen to the comments made in Committee. Against that background, and in the light of the speech we have just heard, it is surprising that the official Opposition have chosen to vote against the Bill on Second Reading. It is also interesting to note that during our discussions this evening, the Bill has been criticised for what is not in it rather than what is. It is inevitable that we shall debate water issues again over the next few years.

We have talked about the need to invest in the water infrastructure where there is a legacy of neglect and liability that needs to be put right. The question is who should pay for it: the consumer or the company. The strident noises from some water companies in the run-up to the price review do not reflect a proper balance and it is important—I take comfort from what my hon. Friend the Minister said earlier—that the views of customers are heard during the debate.

The Bill is important in that, for the first time, it brings competition into the water sector. I am pleased that we are embarking on that in a cautious way, with a 50 megalitre limit to begin with. I hope that, during the three-year period, we will look at reducing that limit to perhaps 20 megalitres or even 10. For big companies, there is a case for competition.

In terms of household supply, and of the domestic customer, I would be far more cautious.

We shall also need to return to water issues during the discussion on the water framework directive. I do not particularly care whether we deal with that matter in primary or secondary legislation; I would simply say that this is a major piece of legislation that will change the way in which we look at water resources. It will mean that we shall have to look at water in a much more strategic way, in river basin management areas. It is, therefore, important that we have a debate and that we take people with us during that debate. The clock is already ticking. We have 15 years in which to implement this legislation and we are already into the discussion. It is important that we pull together all the players and have the debate about the water framework directive.

What attracts me about the Bill is that it reflects the need to change the regulations and the way in which we deal with water abstraction. In north Nottinghamshire, there has been a long-standing problem of over-

abstraction from the Bunter sandstone. The Dover beck, for example, has run dry; people used to be able to swim in it. There have also been problems at Rainworth water. In conservation terms, it is important that we change the way in which we abstract water.

It is also important to listen to the needs of industry. Agriculture in Nottinghamshire is changing from a potato culture to one that produces other vegetables. That means more irrigation. Tony and Mark Strawson, who are big producers in north Nottinghamshire, recently won an award for water conservation. They do not dispute the need to change the legislation, but they know that they have to make capital investments.

The important thing about the Bill is that the Environment Agency will make the decisions. It will have to be transparent and honest, and have discussions with people to build a consensus on the way forward in various areas. That applies to the quarrying industry, too. There are problems there. The Minister said that the Environment Agency would be reasonable, and called for sensitivity. I call for further discussions on this issue.

I am delighted that the Coal Authority is to be given powers under the Bill. It has been operating on a wing and a prayer, but it will now have powers under the legislation. It will also need the resources to do the work. The problem of water discharge is a ticking time bomb. In 30 years, water could emerge out of Radford in central Nottingham. We must sort that out.

We must also sort out private sewers. To our knowledge, 1,440 people in Newark and Sherwood have private sewers. We are making progress: the Atkins report is available and the consultation is taking place. I hope that, in Committee, the Minister will look closely at any amendment that gives enabling powers to take the private sewers issue further. When private sewers go wrong, they cause real hardship for people.

Those are important issues in the Bill. I like the Bill, and I back it, but it is only a first step in relation to water conservation and resources, and we must go much further.

8.48 pm

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): I am here this evening because I am appalled by the arrogance of those who believe that they have a right to require me, my family and my constituents to consume fluoride in water. I oppose that proposal, as did the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe), as a matter of absolute principle, because, however we play with semantics, this is a matter of compulsory medication. We can say that it is not medication but a supplement, but, however we play with the words, this measure is an attempt to affect the health of the population by requiring us to ingest a substance that may or may not be of our choosing.

It is important to look at the matter in context. My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) spoke about the authoritarianism of the present Government. Let us look at some of the other things that have happened in recent years. There has been a debate about whether parents should be required to use the combined measles, mumps and rubella vaccination rather than separate vaccines. At least in that case it was argued that it was necessary and important to create herd immunity, because there was a danger to others.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) spoke about the vitamin supplements directive. The argument on that appears to have moved on one stage: it seems to be that, even where people choose to take vitamins or supplements, the Government or agencies of the Government should be in a position to prevent them from so doing. This evening, we move from the sublime to the ridiculous because, having prevented people from taking supplements that they want to take, the Government are putting before us legislation that could require my constituents to take a supplement that they do not wish to take. All pretence has been dropped: the state knows better than my constituents.

Is it the role of the state, or the role of parents and families to look after the dental health of children? That issue was raised earlier in the House by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he unveiled the new proposals for protecting children. He spoke about the importance of improving support for parents and about the balance between the role of the state and the role of the family. Now we have to ask whether the Government are seeking to support parents, or to take the responsibility for children's dental health out of parents' hands and to put it into the hands of the state?

That is wrong not just because it is being done against people's wishes and because there are worries about the health implications—we could debate the science of fluoride for some time—but because, by the simple act of taking that responsibility away from people, yet another step is being taken towards creating a less responsible society, where parents feel that they can take less responsibility for the health and welfare of their children, where we all become more dependent on others and on the state.

Adding fluoride to water is potentially harmful. Even the British Dental Association accepts that fluorosis is a fact and that it is created by the addition of fluoride to water. Many other claims of adverse health effects are made. We have a fundamental right to the purest water that it is possible to supply. Few things could be more fundamental but, that said, there are even more basic rights and freedoms at stake here: the freedom to refuse medication; the freedom of us all to make our own decisions about our health and that of our families; the right of parents to make decisions for their children; and, crucially, the responsibility to make the right decisions.

The House is here first and foremost to protect the freedoms of our constituents, not to inflict things on them. I hope that, tonight and in further considerations of the Bill, the House will vote accordingly.

8.54 pm

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): We have reached the stage in the Second Reading debate where we are involved in repetition, repetition and repetition. I am afraid that I will have to contribute to that repetition.

I welcome much in the Bill. However, my support for it is at risk due to the insertion of clause 61, which has been well debated this evening. It reintroduces the concept of mass medication to the people.

[Mr. Terry Lewis]

I refer obviously to the proposal to facilitate, largely against the wishes of the public, the corruption of the water supply with fluorosilicates. I shall return to that matter, because I want now to move to a positive note—the Minister will be glad to hear.

The new regulatory framework is not without merit. Short of bringing the water industry back into full public ownership, which is my preferred option, it none the less puts a positive gloss on the Bill. I am especially pleased that Ofwat is to be lined up for the chop, to be replaced by an independent consumer council. I am also attracted to the prospect of increasing the powers of the drinking water inspectorate to institute proceedings and impose penalties for the supply of unfit water or failure to supply information.

I am less than enamoured of the idea of introducing, in clause 59 and schedule 4, the concept of competition in the water industry. However, I will not press that matter, as I would not get very far. Instead, I shall return to my principal objection to the Bill, which is the easing of the way to mass medication of the people.

I object to the principle of adding fluorosilicates to the public water supply, and I object in particular to the way in which Ministers sneaked what is after all a public health measure into a non-health Bill. I hope that, even at this late stage, the measure will be withdrawn so that it can be considered in the framework of public health legislation in due course. My support for the Bill tonight depends on that.

Stephen Hesford: I have listened with care as that argument has been repeated a few times today. Is it not a spurious one, because the power to fluoridate is already contained in the Water (Fluoridation) Act 1985, and the Water Industry Act 1991, which are water Acts? It may be a public health measure, but this is the right place to discuss it.

Mr. Lewis: The 1991 Act has flaws, as water companies cannot be forced to fluoridate, even if the local health authorities want that to happen—so it is my hon. Friend's argument that is spurious, not mine.

The matter should be debated under a public health Bill and taken out of this essentially good Bill that has nothing to do with public health.

Tom Levitt: Does my hon. Friend accept that the compulsory wearing of seat belts is a public health measure, and that was not in a health Bill either?

Mr. Lewis: It was in a transport Bill, which is the right place for it. That really was a spurious argument.

The zealots for fluoridation might better employ their energies arguing for more direct health care, based on ways of improving the nation's oral health. There can hardly be a single Member of Parliament who is satisfied with NHS dental provision in his or her constituency. More and more dentists are declining to do NHS work, and it is almost impossible in some areas to gain access to NHS dentistry. For the many people who cannot afford private dentistry, fluoridation is like offering a drowning man swimming lessons. Should we not tackle that issue first?

It is argued that record numbers of young children suffer from tooth decay and that it is they who will benefit most from fluoridation. The question for me is, how much fluoridated water is needed to prevent tooth decay? I do not know. It could be very little.

My second recommendation to the mass medication lobby is that we should educate parents to stop feeding their kids on sugary soft drinks and other tooth-rotting convenience goodies. Manufacturers of such items should be prevailed on by Government to reduce the amount of tooth-rot that they encourage youngsters to digest.

I am passionate about this argument. My own teeth, although not very pretty, are a full set and are about 64 years old. I attribute that to the fact that my childhood spanned the war years, when soft drinks and sweets were not part of people's diet—a factor referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby). I also recall that annual dental checks were carried out in schools by visiting dentists. All this with a war on. And now, the best that the fourth largest economy in the world can come up with is to mass medicate everybody cheaply, with the unproven benefit of reaching a minority.

Finally, I turn to the public consultation promised in the Bill. I must ask Ministers to be open and transparent about their intentions; it will not be good enough to leave this matter to the strategic health authorities. Any meaningful test of public opinion must be carried out through the medium of local referendums. I hope and anticipate that when the Minister winds up, he will give grounds for comfort on this issue.

9.1 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): When I saw that the Government had added clause 61 to the Bill, I approached the issue with an open mind. I was born and brought up in Birmingham, where water is fluoridated, I experienced no adverse reaction, nor did I know of anyone who did. On the other hand, I instinctively feel anxious about adding something to the water supply, given that those who do not want it have no choice in the matter. So I found myself torn, and approached the issue with an open mind.

I decided to consult my own constituents, in the spirit of clause 61, to discover how they felt about the issue. I sent e-mails to some 1,200 constituents, and sent text messages to dozens of others. I then pointed out in the local press that I was seeking letters from those who were either for or against fluoridation. My e-mails provided links to websites presenting the case for fluoridation—such as the Department's own website and that of the British Dental Association—and to websites presenting the case against, such as that of the National Pure Water Association.

I invited my constituents to make up their own minds on the basis of the evidence before them, but I had little idea what the outcome would be. In fact, they were split down the middle almost exactly. The argument of those who were in favour of fluoridation was based predominantly on two reasons. First, they said that it was a question of democracy, and that the majority should have what they want. That is obviously a very important principle, but it is clear that restrictions are needed on the principle of the rule of the majority. For

me, one such restriction is that the majority should be constrained from imposing something on the minority if, for example, there is another way of delivering what they want, or if the minority are thereby being denied a choice that they might reasonably expect. I accept that local democracy is important, but it should not be unconstrained.

The second reason given by those of my constituents who were in favour was either that they came from a fluoridated area and had good teeth, or that they had given fluoride tablets to their children, who also had good teeth. Such anecdotal evidence, which is all that many people have to go on, suggests that fluoridation is beneficial, but the strongest arguments came from those who were opposed to fluoridation. Indeed, they gave me reasons for their opposition. Lack of choice, which has been mentioned throughout this debate, was central: people who want fluoride can have it now, but those who do not cannot opt out.

As an academic and a social scientist, I thought it important that I look at the scientific evidence. The Government themselves asked York university to review the evidence. I was struck by how the university's conclusions were then spun by everybody who examined them, such that Professor Sheldon—he has already been quoted during today's debate—felt moved to say that he was astonished at the poor quality and quantity of the research, and that there was "legitimate scientific controversy". I fully accept that some of the protagonists in this debate use rather lurid and extreme language and adopt an approach that is not very analytical. But if an eminent professor who has looked into the issue says that there is "legitimate scientific controversy", surely that is not a sufficient basis for adding something to the water supply; rather, it is a very weak basis.

Hon. Members will have been sent copies of the British Dental Association's rather gruesome league table of the number of dental cavities in the teeth of children in their constituencies. Naturally, I looked up the figures for my own constituency and for West Bromwich, East—the constituency in which I was brought up—which has fluoridation. In West Bromwich, East, the average five-year-old has 0.94 decayed, missing or filled teeth; in my own constituency, which is not fluoridated, the figure is 0.9. The fact that the figure for cavities in my constituency, where water is not fluoridated, is lower than that for the midlands, where water is fluoridated, does not mean that I am going to infer that fluoridation does not work. But equally, I object to the argument—made by Members in the media and elsewhere—that because more cavities occur in Manchester, for example, than in Birmingham, fluoridation therefore works.

Those figures prove that a whole variety of explanatory factors—access to dental care, dietary habits, what appears in water naturally, and a raft of other issues—are relevant. If scientists are acknowledging "legitimate scientific controversy" about the issue, how can it be right to impose it on people? Even if a majority in a local community are in favour, a significant minority will not want fluoridation, and they do not have the option of opting out.

Stephen Hesford: The hon. Gentleman well knows—it is one of the more dreadful sub-texts to the arguments against fluoridation, which has gone unspoken so far—that if the measure were passed, his local strategic health authority would, if his cavity figures are right, not ask for it to happen. It will not affect the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but it will affect parts of the country such as Manchester, Glasgow and other inner city areas. The hon. Gentleman is denying the benefits of public dental health to other parts of the country in the knowledge that he does not need it.

Mr. Webb: The children in my constituency as much as anywhere else need good dental health. In fact, if the Government were serious about the problem, they would do much more on the front of NHS dentistry to deal with it. That is where the serious issue about children being denied proper dental health care lies.

Much depends in the Government's approach on how the consultation is undertaken. We know that very powerful lobbies will be in favour and that important organisations are putting one side of the case. If they are resourced far more significantly than the other side, we may well get majorities in favour in my constituency. The resourcing of each side of the argument is relevant. I believe that in this case my role is to stand up for a minority who do not want something imposed on them.

Another interesting aspect of my constituents' replies is how sceptical they are about Government assurances—not only the present Government's assurances—about science. My constituents simply do not trust Governments when they say that something is all right, good for them and safe. The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) made a compelling point that fluoridation amounts to medicine, but it will not be regulated as medicine, so clinical trials will not be undertaken. We simply do not have the safeguards in place. The scientific experts have acknowledged that fluoridation is a matter of legitimate controversy, which provides an insufficient basis for imposing something on people who do not want it. We are currently debating one clause, so I shall reserve my opposition for the separate free vote later in our proceedings. I shall certainly oppose the relevant clause then.

9.7 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh): With permission, I shall also focus my remarks on clause 61.

We may not like it, but Britain is an unequal country—unequal in respect of the spread of opportunity and wealth and consequently of public health. One of the most graphic illustrations of that fact is dental health. Tooth decay is a class issue: the highest levels are found in the most deprived communities and among those on the lowest incomes. Despite general gains in the overall health of the population, the country's dental health divide stubbornly refuses to narrow. Last week, the British Dental Association said that levels of dental disease in some communities were unacceptably high.

The one thing about dental decay that makes it distinct from other diseases is that it is almost entirely preventable. It is not often that we get the chance to pass law to narrow this country's health divide and gain early results, but the Bill provides precisely that. If we fail to take it, we fail millions of children living in our most deprived communities.

[Andy Burnham]

It is approaching 20 years since the House passed the Water Fluoridation Bill 1985 under the Conservative Government, endorsing it in principle as a safe and cost-effective means of improving the nation's dental health. I pay tribute to the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) for bringing that legislation through. However, one offending word—a "may" rather than a "shall"—created a technical loophole, confirmed by judicial review, that thwarted the Bill's intentions. Since then, about 60 requests from health authorities for fluoridation have been rejected. Any attempt to correct the problem is seized on by opponents of fluoridation to open up the whole debate on fluoridation per se. We are witnessing precisely that today, but the fact is that the opponents lost the argument long ago. The will of the House was to give communities the power to choose water fluoridation, but that will is still being thwarted. If nothing else, basic democracy demands that the loophole be closed.

Earlier this year I tabled an early-day motion calling on the Government to use this Bill to do just that, and to require water companies to fluoridate where health authorities requested it on the back of local support. One hundred and forty-nine Members on both sides of the House signed that motion, and it is to the great credit of both the Secretary of State and the Minister that they listened to the arguments, gauged the strength of support and introduced clause 61. As well as giving the country better teeth, that could achieve another huge leap, and restore some faith in the point of early-day motions.

When given the chance to vote, Members of the other place weighed the evidence and came down overwhelmingly in favour of expanding water fluoridation where local communities wanted it. Those in doubt should look no further than the contrast between the west midlands and Greater Manchester. Those are conurbations with a similar social profile, and that is the factor that the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) missed. We must compare places with a similar social profile.

On average, as the hon. Gentleman said, five-year-olds in Birmingham have less than one missing, filled or decayed tooth, but in Greater Manchester the average is three. In other words, children unlucky enough to have dental decay can have as many as six, seven, eight, nine or 10 decayed teeth. What explains the differences? The simple fact that water supplies in the west midlands have been fluoridated for 40 years. Is there any evidence of health problems resulting from that? Not a scrap.

I have twice visited the Manchester dental school to witness tooth extraction under general anaesthetic. It does 1,500 such operations each year, and more than 2,000 are done in Greater Manchester as a whole. I saw one three-year old having 10 teeth removed under general anaesthetic, and it was both upsetting and shocking.

Professor Anthony Blinkhorn, professor of oral health in the Central Manchester and Manchester Children's University Hospitals NHS trust, oversees those family traumas that happen week after week. He tells how children suffer the pain of tooth decay, then the trauma of the operation, then living with missing teeth, and finally the likely damage to permanent adult teeth caused by the operation—and all that is avoidable. As he told *The Guardian* last week:

"When a little boy comes into hospital, he has a smile. When he comes out, it is without one."

When I consider that similar general anaesthetic sessions are simply not happening in Birmingham, because there is no need for them, it makes me wonder what right those who oppose fluoridation, and do not live in Greater Manchester, have to prevent communities there from adopting it. What are their objections? The first is about adverse health effects, and in that context, I shall quote from a note sent by the chief medical officer to peers in advance of the vote in the other place:

"Fluoride prevents tooth decay, which remains a significant public health problem in parts of England. From a public health perspective, fluoridation is the delivery method of choice to bring about population improvements in dental health, and should be considered locally when it is desired to reduce inequalities in levels of dental decay."

That is good enough for me, and I would like to hear from any Member of the House who can give evidence to gainsay that professional opinion.

Opponents of fluoridation bandy about health concerns to create a smokescreen, because their real concern, the civil liberties argument, is not strong enough to stand on its own two feet. Yes, there may be a small cost to civil liberties in adding a negligible amount of fluoride to water, but if the resulting benefit is improved dental health for a whole local population, most people conclude that it is well worth it.

A national opinion poll survey published today by the British Fluoridation Society shows that 67 per cent. of people in Britain think that fluoride should be added to water if it can reduce decay—*[Interruption.]* People may laugh, but that was a totally independent survey carried out by—

Mr. Brady: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andy Burnham: I will not, because other people want to speak.

People talk about choice, but what about the choice of a majority, especially in inner-city communities, to opt for fluoridation? It is time to set aside the bogus science and the scare stories and look at the facts. All the evidence from around the world says that fluoridation is safe and can improve the quality of life for all.

I wish that we lived in a country in which, as hon. Members have described, all parents could afford to give their children a healthy diet, and ensure that they brush their teeth twice a day, but we do not. It is time to stop the vocal minority blocking a progressive change that will benefit millions of people, particularly children, in our most deprived communities. When we know of a safe method of reducing children's suffering, it is morally wrong for us in the House not to give local communities the power to choose it for themselves.

9.14 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I want to refer to three issues: abstraction licences, the competition provisions and flood defence.

First, in my constituency, a good example of the reason why the reform of abstraction licences is welcome is the Fowlmere Nature Reserve run by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. It is an important wildlife site, and an area of open water and chalk grasslands. It is a designated site of special scientific interest, but it is being damaged by public water supply abstraction. I was there four years ago, when we had not had some of the more recent heavy rainfall. The society was contemplating the long-term absence of the spring-fed waters for the Fowlmere site, and it was having to think about bringing water in from south Norfolk to meet the needs of the site. It is not at that level of difficulty at the moment, but even now after the rainfall we have had in the past couple of years one of its most prominent springs is about to dry up.

I was at the reserve a couple of weeks ago. Reform is necessary, but interestingly, about three miles up the road, chalk is quarried by Barrington Rugby Cement. Alongside the wildlife sites that we must protect, there are also the economic purposes for the abstraction of water. That is precisely the balance to which the Minister rightly referred. I share the view that has been expressed. Instead of a presumption in favour of renewal, if the abstraction of water is essential for the economic purposes in question and there is a long-term consent, such as a planning consent, there should be a presumption for a longer term for the licence. It will remain the case that if there is serious environmental damage, there is scope for a modification or revocation of a licence.

Under those circumstances, either there has to be proper compensation or, preferably, before the point at which it becomes a distress purchase, the relevant economic activity has to have the opportunity, through trading of water rights, on which I hope the Environment Agency will make further progress relatively soon, to acquire the capacity that it requires. I hope that we can give those economic processes that depend for their livelihood on abstraction some confidence that they will not be abandoned without an opportunity to remedy their situation.

Secondly, competition must be introduced at a level and to an extent that allows its dynamic effects to work. The issue is not only the threshold but the pricing regime. The threshold has been set. I am not an expert on the extent of water competition—not many people are, because we have seen too little of it. I suspect that the number of customers who will be brought into the marketplace will make it intensely difficult to get the dynamic effects of competition to apply. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) observed, the modelling for the regulatory impact assessment seems to imply that prices will go up for domestic consumers. I think that it will not work quite like that.

As I understand schedule 4, the introduction of the cost regime and the cost principles will apply within a rate-of-return regulatory structure. The decrease in the return to a water undertaking as a result of the loss of some large users would have to be compensated for by an increase to domestic consumers. Under the cost principles in schedule 4, the water undertakers will get from the licensed water suppliers who come into the marketplace precisely the level of return on their assets that they were anticipating. Perhaps I am missing something, but that arrangement seems to me to be designed not to allow competition to work in the industry. There must be a lower threshold, and it must be based on a flexible regime that allows the regulator to impose the cost structures that make sense in relation to the industry as it develops, and arguably as it moves away from the retail sector and from a rate-of-return system of regulation to one that is more flexible to competitive situations.

I want briefly to turn to flood defence. The Minister of State has patiently listened to me on the subject on more than one occasion, and I will not go on. However, I want to mention two points. First, the Bill tackles the reorganisation of regional flood defence committees, and I am happy for that to happen, as long as they are based, in East Anglia, on rivers and catchment areas. The issue, as everybody knows, is what resources the committees will have to undertake the necessary flood prevention and defence schemes.

We have this Water Bill, and the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill is in Committee, but neither, as far as I am aware, tells us what the development connection charge will be and how it will provide resources to the committees. As I understand it, some of the resources on which they will rely from April 2004 depend on that connection charge. I want the charge to be applied locally.

Secondly, we have spoken briefly this evening about new flood storage areas—creating new wetlands of water meadows and the like. Everybody seems to agree that that is right, and the Minister himself has said so. We are giving the Environment Agency new responsibilities. Can DEFRA now set out how a simple scheme for relatively small projects would work? I have at least two, maybe three, in my constituency. We should be able to go to the agency with a worked-up project, and although it probably would not qualify for a big budget, the mechanism to which I am referring would allow us to access agency money. That would probably be agricultural money, because there would be a win-win situation, not only for flood defence but for environmental purposes in agriculture. That money would subsidise the farmer who would probably have to set aside his land for new wet plain purposes and, as a corollary, for flood defence. Such a mechanism does not yet exist, and I hope that we will see one soon.

9.22 pm

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): I am very pleased to be able to say a few words in this debate. I was giving up hope. You may have noticed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that earlier time stood still for quite a while on the Annunicator.

An awful lot has been said tonight about fluoridation, and in many respects I am sorry that I have to continue that debate. This is a very interesting Bill, and if it was not for clause 61, I would have no hesitation in supporting it, but I am afraid that the issue of fluoride is very near and dear to me. I have to admit that some years ago I was in favour of fluoridation. I thought that if dentists said that it was right, that must be the case. I then started to read a little about the matter, and one or two people pointed things out to me, and I changed my mind. For the last 10 or 11 years I have been vehemently anti-fluoridation.

[Mr. Bill Etherington]

I have to declare an interest in that I am secretary of the all-party group against fluoridation of domestic water. I am pleased that there has been so much support tonight for the case against fluoride, because over the years I had gained the impression that the pro-fluoride group was an unstoppable juggernaut. I wondered why, but of course when the pro-fluoride lobby is given state funding, that gives it a tremendous advantage over those who are trying to oppose fluoride.

There are three issues involved here, and we must try to delineate them. There is the so-called scientific argument, the issue of democracy and the issue of human rights. Although we must delineate them, they are all connected. If, for example, we are not satisfied with the scientific argument, the other two issues do not matter. The same is true if we think that human rights or democracy are most important. One of my colleagues said earlier that he was not concerned about whether fluoride was safe as long as the decision was left to the electorate. I cannot agree with that, but I see the logic.

I want to continue from the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), who mentioned the York report.

Many people missed the importance of the report. The publication was distorted to such a degree that Professor Sheldon made a statement in January 2002. I will use his words so that I am not accused of using the wrong words. He said:

"As Chair of the Group, I am concerned that the results of the review have been widely misrepresented."

Later, when nothing had improved, the four scientists who were concerned wrote from the National Health Centre for Reviews and Dissemination in York. They used the word "misinterpretations". There is a tremendous difference between "misrepresentation" and "misinterpretation". In the end, we can leave people to come to their own conclusions.

Much of the pro-fluoride group's argument is about so-called science. In fairness, the Government were concerned enough to set up a proper scientific review. It was not set up by people opposed to fluoridation. Let us consider some of the things that those involved in the review said, not what the British Dental Association is saying, or the British Medical Association, or the Department of Health. In respect of the effectiveness of fluoridation in reducing caries, they said:

"We could discover no reliable good-quality evidence in the fluoridation literature world-wide."

As for effectiveness of fluoridation in reducing inequalities in dental health across social groups, the review stated:

"This evidence is weak, contradictory and unreliable."

When it came to safety of fluoridation, the review stated:

"Apart from an increase in dental fluorosis ... we found no clear pattern among the possible negative effects we examined, and we felt that not enough was known because the quality of the evidence is poor."

That is hardly a ringing endorsement of fluoridation.

The York review asked for proper, decent quality research. We now know from the review that there has never been any good, decent research. Where are the BDA and company coming from? There are Members of this place who say that there is an irrefutable argument in favour of the efficacy of fluoridation.

Quite a lot has been said about the democracy issue. In Sunderland, there was a consultation process that was carried out in, I think, 1996. The Sunderland area health authority held two meetings in rather obscure places at rather bad times. That is not unusual and we have all come across it. We should not be too surprised. However, that process led to quite a lot of concern. The local newspaper, the *Sunderland Echo*, decided to publish both sides of the argument, and for once it did it reasonably well. I thought that it was quite impartial, and I do not always think that.

The *Sunderland Echo* asked people to write or phone in. It has been said this evening that about 67 per cent. are in favour of fluoridation, but in Sunderland in 1996—I know that it was a few years ago—90 per cent. of those involved voted against. It was a decent consultation area. All right, it was carried out by the press, but we take notice of other things that are carried out by the media. We also take notice of the BDA. There has been an absolute travesty.

Things were made worse when not long afterwards the Sunderland health authority took Northumbrian Water to court so that it could enforce what the public had said they definitely did not want. Fortunately, Northumbrian Water disagreed. That led to clause 61, which was introduced in the other place. We cannot go ahead otherwise.

I do not want anyone to think that I am too much against the BDA, but I do not trust it. It has put out a wonderful document about tooth decay in various constituencies, for example, be it high, medium or low. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the figures. Some constituencies sit across health authority boundaries and so an approximation may have been made.

But it is not quite as simple as that. My constituency is not even mentioned, and I do not know what the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), my hon. Friends the Members for Houghton and Washington, East (Mr. Kemp) and for Easington (Mr. Cummings), and my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) think about it. However, I think it is pretty poor. If the BDA is as thorough—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to cut the hon. Gentleman off in full flow, but he has had his time.

9.30 pm

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): There are two issues that I wish to address briefly. The first is an issue that, I believe, should not be in the Bill, and the second is an issue that is not in the Bill but which, I believe, should be.

We have already heard a lot about fluoridation, so I shall try to be brief, but I shall also give some new information. I am not sure whether I should declare an interest, because as a child virtually every back tooth in my mouth was filled. Having been through that, it could be said that I did not like going to the dentist and should be in favour of fluoridation, which is meant to end

cavities and the need for such treatment. However, that is not the conclusion that I have reached. Although I had a number of cavities, it cannot be argued that had there been fluoride in the area where I lived, it would have done anything about the problem—there may have been a raft of reasons for my having a large number of cavities and having to spend a lot of time at the dentist. I make that point to contradict what the hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) said. The examples that he gave were superfluous and quite misleading.

We have heard that fluoridation is the best thing since sliced bread, but we must remember that sliced bread is not necessarily the best thing anyway—*[Interruption.]* We do have freedom of choice—we bake our own. There is evidence that fluoridation is harmful. *Dartmouth News* is not a magazine from Dartmouth in Devon, as glorious as it is, but from a college in Hanover, New Hampshire in the United States. Robert Masters produced a report on his research in which he said:

"Analyzing a survey of over 280,000 Massachusetts children, the investigators found that silicofluorides—chemicals widely used in treating public water supplies—are associated with an increase in children's absorption of lead."

He went on to say:

"Compared to a matched group of 30 towns that do not use silicofluorides, children in 30 communities that use these chemicals were over twice as likely to have over 10 micrograms per decilitre of blood lead."

There is therefore evidence that fluoridation is harmful.

Andy Burnham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Richard Younger-Ross: No, because another Member may be able to speak if I finish quickly.

Other countries do not allow mass fluoridation. France, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Denmark and Holland have all rejected fluoridation. Belgium has gone even further—last year, I am told, the Belgian Government banned the sale of fluoride tablets and chewing gum because of their concerns about safety. However, whether there are health benefits or not, there is the democratic matter of people's right to choose. I would argue that if the Minister were to start selling Coca-Cola outside, and sold both plain Coca-Cola and Coca-Cola with added fluoride, the public would choose to buy the Coca-Cola without fluoride. All the evidence that I have seen is that people do not want fluoride added to their water supply, so they should not be forced to accept it.

I shall now turn to something that is missing from the Bill. Earlier, a Government Member mentioned the high water charges in the south-west. Devon and Cornwall pay the highest water charges in the country because of a mistake made after privatisation, where equalisation measures to meet the costs of improving the beaches and the waterways were not spread across the water companies, but fell solely on the people resident in that area. As a result, 3 per cent. of the population in Devon, Cornwall and other areas have paid for the clean-up of 30 per cent. of the beaches.

When the Minister reflects on charges, will he consider changing the charge regime so that the people of the south-west can be compensated for the high charges that they have paid for the clean-up of beaches that are enjoyed by hon. Members from all parts of the country who, I know, like a holiday in the south-west?

9.35 pm

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): In the two or three minutes that I have, I am glad to give a warm welcome to a Bill that is long overdue. At the world summit in Johannesburg last year, it was made clear that 1.1 billion people worldwide were without clean water and 2.4 billion were without proper sanitation. It is right that the Government are going ahead with the best possible strategic framework for the management of our water in this country. That is good news as regards the River Trent, which goes through much of north Staffordshire.

In the brief time available to me, I shall flag up three issues. The first is that the Coal Authority will get new powers to deal with pollution from mine water. That should have come about at the time of the privatisation of the coal industry. It is long overdue and the measure will be welcomed across mining communities everywhere. It is good that it is in the Bill.

The second issue that I wish to raise with my hon. Friend is one on which I have been lobbied by the ceramics industry in Stoke-on-Trent. Everybody understands the importance of sustainable development and the need for balance. In earlier speeches, hon. Members spoke about how the right balance should be achieved in the legislation. Will the Minister meet representatives of the British Ceramic Confederation to discuss the guidance? There is a difference between the criteria for abstraction licences for water use and those for dewatering. That must be reflected in the detail of the guidance that is to be issued.

Thirdly, there is the issue of private sewers. Like many who have spoken in the debate, I believe that we should be bringing forward proposals for adopting private sewers. That is long overdue, and we have had to wait so long for the Bill. During the Committee deliberations on the Bill, will the Minister introduce proposals to address the problem of all those who cannot afford to deal with private sewers and who do not even know that such sewers belong to them?

If I have time, I should like to remind my hon. Friend of letters that I have written to him. Rats have not featured in the debate so far, but when we are discussing public health issues, there is a clear need for us to give statutory backing to the code on sewer baiting for rats. I know that voluntary guidance was issued by Water UK, but many local authorities have not heard of it. There are rats right across the country. Many of the water companies try to ignore the voluntary code. We could so easily give it a statutory basis in the Bill going through Parliament.

As we approach the magic hour of 9.40 pm, I shall end by saying that it would be a great pity if the Bill were hijacked entirely by the debate on fluoridation of the water supply. As someone with environmental concerns at heart, I want us to adopt the precautionary principle at all times and have a proper debate about how to deal with the appalling dental health care in many deprived parts of the country, including my constituency. I am not yet convinced that fluoridation is the way forward and that it would be compatible with the precautionary principle. I am grateful for the brief opportunity to raise those five issues.

9.39 pm

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): The Bill exemplifies the gulf between the theory behind the Government's best intentions and the reality of their long list of missed opportunities. There are changes to the excellent job that Philip Fletcher has done as regulator that will make it easier for the Government to control the water regulator by dispensing with the individual and replacing him with a board nominated and paid for according to the wishes of the Secretary of State. There are also increases in the power of the Environment Agency, whose board has four members whose political declarations determine that they have previously been members of the Labour party. Perhaps that is why the Government have strengthened the Environment Agency's powers. Indeed, the agency performs so many roles that the enactment of the Bill will make it policeman, accuser, advocate, judge, jury and executioner. There is a major missed opportunity—the opportunity to allow the new board of the water services regulation authority to act as an appeal judge in regard to the Environment Agency's decisions. Sadly, as the Bill stands they will be unchecked.

Of the 25 speakers in the debate, at least 14 wanted to discuss the addition of fluoride to water supplies. Speeches were time-limited, and to an extent the debate was hijacked by that subject. It is a great shame that the Bill did not contain a skeleton measure allowing proper consultation by strategic health authorities with the public. That is one of the biggest omissions: without such a measure, the quality of debate that has been denied to Members will also be denied to the public.

Views on fluoridation differ, but we heard the views of two Scottish Members who were passionate about the subject. I now know how to murder my wife and although the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) mentioned adding Viagra to the water, he is also passionate about the anti-fluoride campaign. The right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) introduced the Welsh angle, and my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) described the problems with fluoride eloquently.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) also discussed those problems, but, more important, he said that only 2 per cent. of rainfall was stored, which had caused a water shortage in his constituency. In a helpful and sensible speech, the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby) said that he should be allowed to choose what he swallowed. He then unfortunately had to own up to the fact that he had not been allowed any sweets because of rationing during the war.

Paddy Tipping: Which one?

Mr. Wiggin: The second world war, I believe.

The hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) clearly had not read the Bill. The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) adopted a scientific approach to the toxic benefits, or disastrous effects—*[Interruption.]* She was clear about the fact that toxic substances were of benefit if added to the water supply in sufficient quantities. What she did not tell us, and what I longed for her to tell us, was whether newborn babies could be given water with fluoride added to it. There is a real danger that that may be so toxic that infants should be given milk diluted with spring water.

The hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis), who made an important speech about the bottling of water, unfortunately said that he would like mineral water to be sold in school vending machines. Although helpful, his speech prompted a question: if fluoride is such an important addition to water, should it not be added to mineral water?

The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) had sent 1,200 e-mails to constituents asking for their views on fluoride. The hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) was passionately in favour of adding it to water, but ignored the fact that others had drawn attention to the quantity of sugar in people's diets, which might have a more significant effect on tooth decay.

The problem that the whole House faces is that there are huge gaps in scientific research. It would have been better if the Government had spent more money, or made more effort with their drafting, to ensure proper research so that the facts came out. Sadly, that has not happened.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has helpfully identified a deficiency in the failure to connect the Bill with the water framework directive. Indeed, the implementation in national law of some aspects of the directive, such as efficient use and water abstraction, is a missed opportunity. Some 16 out of 45 UK biodiversity action plan habitats are threatened by water abstraction, and there may be a need for a water saving trust. Such a body, which would be similar to the Energy Saving Trust, could encourage water-efficient technology, water conservation at home and the use of other methods to ensure that customers change their habits to preserve clean water. Sadly, all those things are missing from the Bill.

Another missed opportunity relates to the improvement of competition in the sector. We all want the benefits of fine pricing and higher efficiency, particularly as water customers cannot practically change their supplier and water companies still occupy a monopolistic position by default. What exactly is a licensed water supplier going to look like and how will it be treated for tax and other purposes? What is to prevent big water users from setting themselves up as licensed suppliers and writing off any losses against tax?

I am in favour of including the domestic customer in all price advantages, because I do not accept that discounts do not benefit home consumers, who are as price sensitive as any company and perhaps even more so. I feel that the Government have failed in their duty to look after the smallest consumer.

The soft drink sector is very successful, but it has high machinery costs and very high standards of cleanliness. The 12-year limit on abstraction licences will have a detrimental effect. About 1.4 billion litres of the 1.8 billion litres of water drunk in Britain is from Britain. Obviously, cutting from 20 to 12 years the period in which costs are offset will make UK-produced water more expensive and detrimental to those companies' competitiveness.

There is a significant lack of proportionality in the Bill, especially in terms of powers allocated to the Environment Agency. It is not true to suggest that

planners ignore the Environment Agency. If that is the problem, surely it is time to include in the Bill an obligation to take account of Environment Agency objections in planning decisions. For example, it could be allowed more influence in seeking to prevent damage caused by drilling into aquifers already used by a mineral water company that could damage water quality. The safeguards in the code of practice for well drilling are clearly inadequate, and the Government have been complacent in ignoring that in the Bill.

I mentioned investment with regard to the bottled water sector. The quarrying sector will now also have to rely on the mercy of the Environment Agency—an issue that many hon. Members raised—which will have the power to vary or revoke abstraction licences. That is a substitute for allowing proper consultation on environmental impact during the planning process. That could have been included in the Bill.

There is a major failure to address the fundamental issue, which is compounded by the right of the Environment Agency to avoid compensating companies when it takes away their ability to conduct their business. That extra uncertainty further undermines investment confidence. Although the habitats directive allows compensation, the Bill does not. There is a presumption that the Environment Agency is flexible. It seems unlikely that it will move away from units of six years when issuing licences to tie in with the catchment abstraction management strategies. I have no confidence that it will issue meaningful licences for more than 12 years. Even if it does so, it will have the power to alter the licences, which will further undermine investor confidence.

The problem with the Bill is that the Environment Agency has a priority for natural water, known as green water, which it will place above blue water or drinking water. The Bill so strengthens the Environment Agency that I have serious fears about the cost implications for domestic customers. Throughout the Bill, the agency is given more power and more opportunity to devise its own method for testing sustainable development. How will its sustainability criteria differ from those used in planning?

The Bill falls short on a number of criteria, mainly because the Government have ignored large groups of interested parties, all of which have clear and valid arguments.

The Bill represents a whole series of missed opportunities, compromises and weak drafting. Despite the fact that water is such an important part of good health, and of life itself, the Bill is incompetent, incomplete and inequitable. It demonstrates that this Government cannot be trusted with even the most straightforward piece of legislation, and I urge the House to make them think again by voting it down.

9.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): We have had an interesting and mainly constructive debate. Many issues have been addressed, and I am sure that hon. Members will want to debate them further in Committee, which will sit for a total of 24 hours, and when the Bill returns to the Floor of the House on Report.

My hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment was extremely generous during his opening remarks in taking interventions. In the limited time that I have, I do not intend to repeat any of his responses, but I shall try to clarify one or two points that he did not have a chance to address because they were raised subsequently.

I start with water resources and housing development. The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) rightly said that rainfall is not always an accurate measurement of water supply. He knows that from his own experience, as do I from droughts in the south-west, which also gets a lot more rain than London and the south-east. On the specific question of adequate water resources where housing is planned, particularly in the south-east, no new provisions are required. Water companies already have statutory duties to supply water for domestic and other purposes, and they already produce water resource management plans that look ahead 25 years in order to reconcile supply needs with likely demand. Clause 65 places those plans on a statutory basis.

The updated abstraction licensing regime means that we will have the tools to sustain our water resources in the long term in the face of climate change and changing demands. As many right hon. and hon. Members made clear, that is always a question of balance. There has been quite a lot of special pleading from Members on both sides of the House for various interest groups, from the ceramics industry to the watercress industry. My hon. Friend the Minister helpfully said that he will be open to representations from hon. Members as the Bill proceeds through the House.

I was pleased that several hon. Members mentioned the impact of the Bill on important environmental concerns such as biodiversity. For example, having recently visited the constituency of the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), I am aware of the problem of water extraction on the River Avon, which passes through his city. That has a negative impact on the positive attempts to restore the historic water meadows that form part of the famous view of Salisbury cathedral. I am sure that that experience will be replicated. Indeed, other hon. Members gave examples from their constituencies of the damaging environmental impact of water abstraction in certain cases. Ending exemptions for abstractors such as trickle irrigators and quarries will result in a fairer system for all abstractors. All abstractors will be subject to the new regime if they abstract more than the new standard threshold of 20 cu m per day. That new threshold means that some 20,000 abstractions, mostly by farmers, will not need to be licensed in future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) and the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross) mentioned costs. As a fellow south-west MP, one would expect that to be close to my heart. We pay the highest prices, and water prices are a burning political issue. The issue is not specifically addressed in the Bill, but I hope that the changes that it introduces to the regulatory regime and to the power of the consumer will help in addressing some of the concerns. Furthering the interests of consumers, as well as those of companies, will become a primary function of Ofwat. At present, the consumer's interests are very much secondary. The Bill also sets up

[Mr. Ben Bradshaw]

the independent consumer council for water, which will be well placed to hold companies and the regulator to account. It replaces Water Voice, which is part of Ofwat.

Fluoridation has dominated much of the debate and I suspect that it will do so in the Bill's further stages. I shall not rehearse many of the arguments that were made today and will be made in future. The Government acknowledge that there are strong views on the issue, and Labour Members will have a free vote on the amendments on fluoridation. In the spirit of openness that Front-Bench spokesmen have demonstrated today, I put it on record that I support fluoridation as a sensible and long overdue preventive public health measure.

Let me make several clarifications on factual matters. It was suggested that fluoridation had been abandoned in Switzerland. However, it has been abandoned in only one small canton on the basis of one piece of research, which, I am told, is contradicted by the wealth of research from other countries and parts of the world.

In an intervention, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) claimed that those who advocated fluoridation were in a minority, but my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) corrected him. He told hon. Members that national opinion polls have consistently shown a majority of approximately 60 per cent. of the population in favour of fluoridation. The right hon. Gentleman is always keen to cite the other place as a true reflection of public opinion. He may be surprised to know that, contrary to the comments of some hon. Members, their lordships passed a Back-Bench—not a Government—amendment, on the subject by 153 to 31. That shows an overwhelming majority in favour of fluoridation.

Fluorine is the 13th most commonly occurring element in the earth's crust. It occurs naturally in water and therefore cannot be compared to a discretionary medicine. No water fluoridation scheme has been introduced without local consultations and we intend to extend their range and content before a strategic health authority can request a water company to fluoridate its water. It may be helpful if I outline some details of the proposed consultation.

The format will be prescribed in regulations and include the dissemination of proposals through press, radio, television and leaflets. It will involve public meetings, discussions in the local media, helplines and websites. There will be objective means of measuring public opinion that will ensure the representation of a wide range of backgrounds. We shall consult those with expertise on the best practice of measuring public opinion. In response to questions by several hon. Members, local authorities will also have a role in the consultation process.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) made a specific point about clause 61, which contains proposed new section 87B, and the Scottish provisions. Subsection (5) allows Scottish water suppliers to transfer water to areas of England that could be fluoridated in the case of serious drought or to cover deficiencies caused by maintenance. There are no routine transfers of water from Scotland to England, such as those that occur between England and Wales. Water is supplied from Wales to England and, in some cases, from England to Wales. There is no fluoridation of water in Scotland and the Bill will not affect the provisions there.

The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) questioned our threshold for competition. Thirty per cent. of major companies' revenues come from non-household customers and we believe that the threshold that we have set is large enough to test the new framework. However, as my hon. Friend the Minister said, the threshold is flexible and only a start. Extending competition at the beginning could have an adverse impact on domestic customers. It is therefore important to proceed with caution.

The Bill builds on and strengthens the existing framework, especially in the Water Resources Act 1991 and the Water Industry Act 1991. It does not exist in a vacuum. Existing legislation has served us well. We have had the warmest and driest summer since 1995 but have managed to avoid the chaos that we suffered then.

The Bill will carry forward the Government's commitment to a sustainable water policy. It provides for the sustainable use of water resources and sustainable regulation of the water industry and will leave us well placed to face the challenges of the future. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 136, Noes 356.

Division No. 297] **[9:59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, rh David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*

Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, rh Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mark Francois and
Mr. John Randall

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary

Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mandelson, rh Peter
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Gillian Merron and
Mr. Jim Murphy

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 62 (Amendment on second or third reading), and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

WATER BILL [LORDS] (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 29 October 2002],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Water Bill [Lords]:

Committal

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Proceedings in Standing Committee

2. Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 21st October 2003.

3. The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

4. Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

5. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

6. Sessional Order B (programming committees) made on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.

Other proceedings

7. Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords amendments or any further message from the Lords) may be programmed.—[Mr. Ainger.]

The House divided: Ayes 350, Noes 135.

Division No. 298] **[10:15 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent

Caborn, rh Richard
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mandelson, rh Peter
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan

Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Gillian Merron and
Mr. Jim Murphy

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Curry, rh David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, rh Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mark Francois and
Mr. John Randall

Question accordingly agreed to.

WATER BILL *[LORDS] [MONEY]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified--

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52 (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Water Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure incurred by the Secretary of State under the Act,

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.—[*Mr. Ainger.*]

Question agreed to

WATER BILL *[LORDS] [WAYS AND MEANS]*

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Water Bill [Lords], it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the extension of charging schemes of the Environment Agency under the Environment Act 1995;

(2) the extension of matters which may be covered by conditions included in an appointment under Chapter 1 of Part 2 of the Water Industry Act 1991 by virtue of section 11(1)(c) of that Act;

(3) the imposition of penalties on companies holding appointments under Chapter 1 of Part 2 of the Water Industry Act 1991, on companies holding licences under Chapter 1A of that Part of that Act ('water supply licences'), and (by virtue of the application of section 111 of the Enterprise Act 2002) on other persons;

(4) the inclusion in water supply licences of conditions requiring the rendering of payments to the Secretary of State;

(5) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—[*Mr. Ainger.*]

Question agreed to.

PLANNING AND COMPULSORY PURCHASE BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 29 October2002],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 17th December 2002:

Proceedings in Standing Committee (recommitted Bill)

1. Proceedings in the Standing Committee on re-committal shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 23rd October 2003.

2. The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

The House divided: Ayes 307, Noes 167.

Division No. 299] **[10:31 am**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Caborn, rh Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, rh Peter
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Straw, rh Jack
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*

Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Gillian Merron and
Vernon Coaker

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mark Francois and
Mr. John Randall

Question accordingly agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9)(European Standing Committees),

Three Communicable Diseases

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 7115/03, Commission Communication on the EC Programme of Action on HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis in the context of poverty reduction; welcomes the update and considers this an important area for reducing poverty; and encourages the Commission to do more work on these diseases, including increasing access to essential medicines and strengthening health systems.—*[Mr. McAvoy.]*

Question agreed to.

NORTHERN IRELAND GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That—

(1) the matter of the future direction of community relations policy in Northern Ireland, being a matter relating exclusively to Northern Ireland, be referred to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee;

(2) the Committee shall meet at Westminster on Thursday 23rd October at half-past Two o'clock; and

(3) at that sitting—

(a) the Committee shall consider the matter referred to it under paragraph (1) above;

(b) the Chairman shall interrupt proceedings not later than two hours after their commencement; and

(c) at the conclusion of those proceedings, a motion for the adjournment of the Committee may be made by a Minister of the Crown, pursuant to paragraph (5) of Standing Order No. 116 (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (sittings)).—*[Mr. McAvoy.]*

MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT CHANGES

Motion made,

That—

(1) Standing Order No. 94 (Scottish Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)) be amended in line 2 by leaving out the second 'Scottish' and inserting 'Scotland';

(2) Standing Order No. 103 (Welsh Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)) be amended in line 2 by leaving out the second 'Welsh' and inserting 'Wales';

(3) Standing Order No. 119 (European Standing Committees) be amended in the table in paragraph (6), as follows:

(a) in line 5, by leaving out 'Transport, Local Government and the Regions' and inserting 'Transport; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister';

(b) in line 12, by leaving out 'Lord Chancellor's Department' and inserting 'Department for Constitutional Affairs (excluding those responsibilities of the Scotland and Wales Offices which fall to European Standing Committee A)';

(4) Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments) be amended in the Table in paragraph (2), as follows:

(a) before item 1 insert

(b) '1 Constitutional Affairs

Department for Constitutional Affairs(including the work of staff provided for the administrative work of courts and tribunals, but excluding consideration of individual cases and appointments, and excluding the work of the Scotland and Wales Offices and of the Advocate General for Scotland).

11'; (b) leave out the item relating to the Lord Chancellor's Department inserted on 27th January;

(c) in item 16, leave out 'Welsh Office (Office of the Secretary of State for Wales (including relations with the National Assembly for Wales))' and insert 'Wales Office (including relations with the National Assembly for Wales)'; and

(5) the Order of 5th November 2001 relating to Liaison Committee (Membership) be amended, in paragraph (2), by leaving out 'Lord Chancellor's Department' and inserting 'Constitutional Affairs'.—*[Mr. McAvoy.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT

Motion made,

That Mr Michael Meacher be discharged from the Environmental Audit Committee and Mr Elliot Morley be added.—*[Mr. McAvoy.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

STANDARDS AND PRIVILEGES

Ordered,

That Tom Levitt be discharged from the Committee on Standards and Privileges.—*[Mr. McAvoy.]*

MODERNISATION OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Ordered,

That Mr Greg Knight be discharged from the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons and Mr David Cameron be added.—*[Mr. McAvoy.]*

Sea Angling

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McAvoy.]*

10.44 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Salisbury may be landlocked, but my father taught me to fish in river, loch and sea. As a teenager, I tied my own flies for trout fishing in the chalk rivers around Salisbury. Family summer holidays were spent sea fishing around the Summer isles, Raasay and the Fal estuary in Cornwall. Now I regularly watch, with envy, the sea anglers of Portsmouth, Southampton and Poole.

In the 1950s and 1960s there was a large supply and a wide variety of inshore fish: not so now. There are many reasons for that, but I am not in the blame game tonight; I want to look firmly forwards.

I am grateful to the British Anglers Sportfish Association—BASS—the National Association of Sea Anglers and the Sea Anglers Conservation Network for their briefing and advice over many months. I speak tonight on behalf of at least 1 million sea anglers who fish the inshore waters of our islands at least once a year, including about 375,000 bass anglers.

Sea fishing is part of our heritage, and an important part of our economy. However, it is no longer basic fishing for the pot. Sea angling is a multi-million pound leisure activity. Today, the angler uses expensive, high-technology tackle, chosen from a wide choice of specialist gear that is available internationally, and today he and she are conservation-minded.

Anglers travel long distances to the coast to fish. Many take their families with them, staying in rented accommodation, bed and breakfast, hotels and pubs, contributing much to the local economy. They support many jobs such as tackle manufacturing, the retail industry, mail order business, boat builders and chandlers, boat hire businesses, marinas, electronics, bait suppliers, clothing and footwear suppliers, a thriving specialist press and media and, of course, tourism. The fact is that recreational sea angling is now far more important economically than commercial inshore fishing.

A decade ago, MAFF's Directorate of Fisheries Research at Lowestoft and Portsmouth university's centre for economics and management of aquatic resources published a report that found that sales of commercially caught bass were worth about £4 million, while 361,000 bass anglers spent £18 million on their activities. In 2000, the National Assembly for Wales commissioned a study that found that sea angling made an economic contribution to coastal Wales of £28 million, whereas commercial inshore fishing netted £9 million and offshore commercial fishing yielded just £12 million.

The study suggested that sea angling had huge potential for growth and that modest, low-risk public investment would stimulate local economies, underpin coastal environmental programmes and encourage conservation of fish stocks. However, the study warned that poor recognition of the economic significance of recreational sea angling resulted in little Government support. It also warned that heavy commercial fishing of some species, especially illegal netting for bass, was undermining the resource base for recreational anglers.

Last year, an independent report commissioned by the Countryside Council for Wales and English Nature put the value of commercial landings in England and Wales at £35 million, while recreational angling generated £140 million for the coastal economy.

Anglers have done their best to make their voice heard during the consultation on the Government's welcome review of the common fisheries policy. I bring their concerns to Parliament as part of that process. I support the view that certain of our fish stocks should be managed principally for recreational sea angling, so please will the Government accord sports fish status to certain species, including bass? As a matter of priority, will the Government intervene to tackle illegal and damaging inshore gill-netting?

DEFRA is currently researching the economic benefits of recreational sea angling. The sea angling community expects that it will confirm that the value of sea angling in many coastal communities today is at least equal to that of inshore commercial fishing, which has existed in many places for hundreds of years. Overseas evidence indicates that when stocks are managed to produce plenty of mature fish, the number of recreational anglers increases proportionately. This activity and its economic multipliers support many livelihoods, afloat and ashore, which are every bit as valid as those within the commercial sector.

The sea angling sector is seeking an equal partnership with the commercial sector and inshore fisheries management and regulation to provide taxpayers who fund sea fisheries committees and the Environment Agency with a sustainable and best value return from commonly owned resources.

I therefore ask the Minister whether, with well over 1 million recreational sea anglers in Britain, the Government agree that the socio-economic impact of recreational sea angling is now at least equivalent to that of inshore commercial fishing? Has he got the message that the sea angling sector is seeking the Government's assistance just to balance the needs of commercial fishermen's livelihoods with those of recreational sea anglers through the sensible conservation of marine resources and sustainable harvesting?

The sea angling community is concerned that committees and groups set up by the Government are overwhelmingly biased at present towards the commercial sector. That case was strongly made by the National Federation of Sea Anglers to the Minister in connection with the strategy unit's current review of British fisheries. I therefore very much hope that when considering the future protection of our marine resources and sustainable harvesting of fish the Government will give consideration to the recreational sector proportionate to the support afforded to the commercial fishing sector.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): I endorse every jot and syllable of the case that the hon. Gentleman has made on behalf of Britain's 1 million sea anglers. May I draw his attention to the fact that there is a commonality of interest between the 2.5 million freshwater anglers, of whom I am one, and sea anglers. The over-fishing of our inland fisheries by commercial interests has led to predators such as cormorants coming inland and fishing out wonderful rivers such as the river Avon and many

others the length and breadth of the country. There is therefore a commonalty of interest between freshwater fishermen and sea fishermen, and there needs to be a commonality of approach to deal with the common problems that both those wonderful sports face.

Mr. Key: Yes, there is such a commonality of interest. I am particularly glad that the hon. Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) is in the Chamber, because I know that he fishes in the river in Salisbury, and is extremely knowledgeable about these matters. He is quite right—there is a commonality of interest. We are all concerned about the impact of the cormorant inland, and there is a huge debate to be had about that, albeit perhaps not tonight. However, the hon. Gentleman is correct, and I endorse what he said. I might add that the sea angling community is distressed that it has taken a Member of Parliament from an inland constituency and another from Reading to raise this issue in the House. Apparently, there is a dearth of interest among coastal Members of Parliament from all parties, which needs to be addressed.

All recreational sea angling from the shore and a significant proportion from boats takes place in inshore waters within six miles of the shore. Those inshore waters are being denuded of breeding stock and immature fish, and natural habitats are being destroyed by indiscriminate netting and trawling. Commercial fishermen have to throw back undersized fish that are already dead or die shortly afterwards. I therefore hope that the Minister agrees that sea fisheries committees should better enforce existing rules, have substantial representation from sea anglers and be cognisant of the benefit that sea angling brings to jobs and tourism.

How do the Government propose to ensure that recreational sea angling is given equal consideration in Government decision making while responsibility for marine resources is split between DEFRA, which handles commercial sea fishing, and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which handles recreational sea fishing? There has been acrimonious inter-ministerial correspondence in recent years arguing about who does what and what representation there should be, but it is important that the Government either take urgent steps to ensure that DCMS plays a far greater role in determining policy for sea fish stocks or do something to bridge the gap between the two Departments.

That division of responsibility has already resulted in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport not being involved in consultation on the UK's priorities for the common fisheries policy review. That review is central to conserving stocks that are vital to both sea angling and commercial fishing. While DEFRA is the sponsoring Department for the commercial sector, the DCMS, through Sport England, partially funds the National Federation of Sea Anglers, which represents more than 1 million sea anglers. In DEFRA's discussions about fish stocks, the interests of the commercial sector take precedence over sea angling instead of receiving equal consideration.

Another clash occurred when the Government said in responding to the salmon and freshwater fisheries review that the Environment Agency had a duty to enhance the social value of fishing as a widely available and healthy form of recreation. The Government added that this duty should be put on a statutory basis as soon as practicable because of the contribution that fisheries make to economic development, particularly in rural areas and to recreation. That was the finding of the salmon and freshwater fisheries review.

We now hope that the sea fisheries committees will take the same line, which they are not doing at present.

The Environment Agency has been extremely helpful. I am grateful to its parliamentary team for briefing me in advance of this debate. There is one point worth making. In the Environment Agency response in August 2002 to the DEFRA consultation on the review of the common fisheries policy, it stated in paragraph 3.9:

> "Recreational sea fishing is a major and growing resource, particularly in the recovering urban estuaries. Good quality sport for a range of species is enjoyed by thousands of fishermen across England and Wales. To date, many of these anglers feel that they have little representation of their interests. The Agency would wish to include full recognition and representation of the recreational fishing resource within the revised Common Fisheries Policy."

We endorse that.

It has been a privilege to speak for hundreds of thousands of sea anglers around our coasts. Now I and they await the Minister's response.

10.55 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): I congratulate the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) on securing the Adjournment debate, and particularly on its subject, which is an important element of our fisheries whose voice, I accept, has not always been heard as it should have been.

Sea angling is a selective, environmentally friendly and low-impact fishing activity, and an estimated 1.2 million anglers engage in sea angling every year in the UK. As the hon. Gentleman rightly pointed out, as well as the substantial economic contribution that they make, they clearly have a role to play in the management of the marine environment, particularly in inshore and coastal waters.

The reformed common fisheries policy reflects the UK's goals for a policy based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. I shall deal a little later with the improvement that has taken place in our Department since we became DEFRA rather than the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and have taken more notice of environmental and sustainability factors. That is at the core of sea anglers' concerns.

I welcome the fact that the reformed CFP is more inclusive than before, as it will need to be to ensure sustainable fisheries management. Although much of the CFP is specifically directed at the commercial fishing sector, a number of useful gains to recreational sea angling came out of last December's review. Those are the retention of the UK's 12-mile limit; provision for member states to introduce conservation measures within their 12-mile limit, provided such measures are not discriminatory; provision for the establishment of regional advisory councils; and Community action to reduce discards.

I am aware of the figures cited by the hon. Gentleman about the considerable economic contribution that sea anglers make. They and the associated industry make an

[Mr. Ben Bradshaw]

important contribution to the coastal economy. DEFRA recently commissioned an economic evaluation of that contribution—a study welcomed by sea anglers—and we hope to receive its findings by the end of the year. The report will cover a range of issues, including identifying key areas of sea angling activity in England and Wales, assessing the economic contribution of sea angling, including the indirect benefit, and identifying key trends and future proposals for the sea angling sector.

The sensible conservation of marine resources is certainly in the interests of both anglers and commercial fishermen, although the latter sometimes take some convincing. We shall continue to aim for a balance in Community fisheries policy that will ensure recovery of threatened stocks and preserve a viable degree of activity for communities that rely on fishing. We shall continue to press for the increased application of an ecosystems-based approach, including multi-annual management plans and action to reduce discarding and to avoid the unnecessary by-catch of endangered species.

Anglers are now represented by ministerial appointees to most sea fisheries committees in England and Wales, and their local issues can be fully considered. My Department is considering the terms of reference for a study of fisheries enforcement issues. That could have a far-reaching impact on sea fisheries committees, and we shall ensure that the voice of recreational fishermen is heard. Sea anglers' interests will also be taken into account in the review of inshore fisheries management.

The No. 10 strategy unit has been tasked with developing a strategy for a sustainable fishing industry in the UK, of which I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware. Sea anglers' representatives have been closely and productively involved with that project, and the National Federation of Sea Anglers is a member of the strategy unit stakeholder advisory group.

The establishment of regional advisory councils under the reformed common fisheries policy was intended to increase the participation of those affected by the CFP to secure better and more regionally focused fisheries management. There will undoubtedly be areas of an RAC's work in which sea anglers can make a valuable contribution, and I would encourage them to become involved where they can.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of threats to certain stocks, and of some of the equipment and techniques used by commercial fishermen whom he believes to be in contact with those on whose behalf he has spoken tonight. The latest science is not quite as depressing as he seemed to suggest. Certainly, the measures that he recommended do not seem necessary at this stage. The Government do, however, take a precautionary approach to stock levels, and we shall continue to keep the situation under review.

We recognise that the continuing development of certain fishing gear and techniques such as gill netting and trawling can, like all forms of fishing, have damaging effects on stocks. That is why technical conservation measures such as mesh size restrictions to allow undersized fish to escape are integral to the common fisheries policy, and they continue to be evaluated and developed.

The hon. Gentleman described what he saw as a turf war or a conflict between the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, whose job was to represent the interests of recreational fishermen, and the Department for Environment, Food and Regional Affairs, which was primarily responsible for commercial fishing. That is a bit of a simplification—especially, as I said earlier, given that DEFRA was formed after the last general election. I have not been in my job for long, but I hope that one of the benefits has been its becoming a Department that is more open to environmental concerns and the importance of sustainable fisheries. Our Department works hard with scientists to ensure that our assessments of fish stocks are realistic, and that we do not allow any activity that would damage them. It is in everyone's interests—both commercial and recreational fishermen—that stocks are at healthy levels and that our policies ensure that they are.

We work closely with the DCMS, and we are committed to maintaining a constructive dialogue on the issues raised by the hon. Gentleman. As part of that process, the DCMS participates in annual meetings, chaired by DEFRA, with representatives of sea angling and vessel-chartering interests. My Department is always happy to liaise with the DCMS to ensure that full account is taken of the needs of sea angling in consideration of future policy on fisheries issues.

Both the hon. Gentleman and, in an intervention, my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) mentioned cormorants. I am well aware of the issue: licences have crossed my desk for the culling of cormorants where they seem to pose a threat to inland fisheries in particular. I am also aware of the large rise in the cormorant population. It is a complex matter. The arguments about why the cormorants are moving inland and why there are more of them need to be balanced. It may be because there are more fish farms now and fish farms are doing quite well in our rivers, which are much cleaner than they were a few years ago.

Members may be interested to learn that today my Department hosted a major conference on the impact of cormorants in Bristol. As soon as I have some useful feedback and conclusions from that conference, I shall ensure that Members have access to it as early as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 9 September 2003

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

MERSEY TUNNELS BILL (*By Order*)

Order for further consideration, as amended, read.

To be further considered on Tuesday 16 September.

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Small Business

2. **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): When he next expects to meet representatives of the small firms sector to discuss the application of the Industrial Development Acts to Scotland. [128444]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Alistair Darling): I will continue to engage with all those involved in the Scottish economy. I will be very happy to meet representatives of small businesses to discuss industrial development.

Mr. Bellingham: The Secretary of State will know that there has been a huge increase in the amount of funds that are available under the Act. Obviously small firms are vital for the Scottish economy. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House what percentage of his grants will go to the small firms sector? Will he also tell us what mechanisms for accountability will be put in place to oversee the expenditure of the money, both in this Parliament and in the Scottish Assembly?

Mr. Darling: First, I should perhaps point out that it is the Scottish Parliament. As the House will know, I am very aware of these things.

Secondly, as for legislation, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for welcoming the fact that the Government have increased the amount of money available for industrial assistance. He will be aware that under the Scotland Act 1998 responsibility for disbursing these funds is exercisable by the Scottish Executive, who have chosen to do so largely through Scottish Enterprise. It will be a matter for Scottish Enterprise as to how and what proportion goes to small businesses. I am pleased to note that in the first quarter of this year nearly 5,000 new firms were set up in Scotland, which I hope the whole House will welcome.

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): When the Secretary of State meets representatives of small firms, what will he say to them about the massive hikes that they have suffered in employers liability insurance? Is he aware of the recent Federation of Small Businesses survey, which reported that 20 per cent. of firms have had a doubling of their premium; 25 per cent. have difficulty in getting cover at all; and 60 per cent. report a drop in profitability? What can the Government do to assist this vital sector?

Mr. Darling: I am aware of the problem. I expect that most Members will have been approached by constituents in the small business sector, who have faced quite substantial increases in premiums. That is partly because for a long time the industry was quoting low premiums. It has now had to increase them because of claims. There is also concern about a contraction in the insurance market, especially in certain sectors. It is something that my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Treasury and in other Government Departments are considering. It is clearly for the market to provide solutions in relation to insurance, but it is something about which the Government are concerned. Public liability insurance is becoming an increasing burden on business, and is something on which we want to keep a very close eye.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): May I congratulate the Secretary of State on his recent visit to Dundee and on his visit to small businesses in my constituency? They welcomed his commitment that the Government will do all that they can on issues such as insurance liability indemnity. Will he therefore continue to ensure that there is a strong Scottish voice in the different Departments in the United Kingdom to ensure that Scottish small businesses get their fair share and that their voices are heard at all levels of government in the UK?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend knows that I spent an extremely interesting day in Dundee, where I saw some examples of extremely good innovation in the biotech sector in which companies have been set up as a result of research that has been carried out in Dundee as well as in other parts of Scotland, and in which new businesses are being set up that have been extremely successful. My hon. Friend is right that there are matters about which small businesses are concerned, particularly public liability insurance, which as I said a few moments ago is something on which we need to keep a close eye. It is encouraging that with the stable economic background that we have, with the lowest interest rates since 1955, we have the sort of environment that is likely to encourage business growth and in turn generate jobs. That is something that we should all support.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I am delighted that the Assembly has become a Parliament in the Secretary of State's second Question Time. *[Interruption.]* Well, it only took a while.

The Secretary of State will be aware that the Federation of Small Businesses listed access to broadband as its No. 1 priority in its recently published manifesto. Despite the fact that there are comprehensive targets in place for Northern Ireland and for Wales, there is no such comprehensive target for Scotland, which means that many areas of rural Scotland, including 25 of the 27 telephone exchanges in my constituency, do not have even a medium-term prospect of getting access to broadband. Will the Secretary of State tell us what the problem is with access to broadband in Scotland? Is it state aid rules or is it just lack of ambition on the part of the Government?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman is right that it is important that small business has access to broadband. Next week, Scottish Enterprise is running a programme to promote e-business to make people more aware of the opportunities available to them. Despite what the hon. Gentleman said, a recent report produced by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development shows that Scotland is in the upper quartile of businesses that have access to broadband and e-trading. However, the hon. Gentleman is quite right—broadband ought to be promoted, and he will know that that is one of the jobs of Scottish Enterprise which, of course, is the responsibility of the Scottish Executive. It is important that we develop that so that we can make sure that Scotland's small business sector thrives.

UK Supreme Court

3. **Annabelle Ewing** (Perth): What representations he has received concerning the proposals for a UK supreme court. [128445]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Anne McGuire): The proposals for a supreme court are currently the subject of consultation by my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs. The consultation includes a wide range of Scottish interests. Although no responses have yet been received, the consultation does not close until 7 November.

Annabelle Ewing: I thank the Minister for her answer, but is it not the case that the role of the Secretary of State for Scotland in protecting the integrity of Scots law must be viewed as compromised from the outset, as his boss at the Department for Constitutional Affairs will have the final say. Would today not be a good opportunity to support calls to end the anomaly whereby in post-devolution Scotland final appellate jurisdiction over Scots civil law lies south of the border?

Mrs. McGuire: I like to take the hon. Lady seriously, but sometimes it is very difficult, because every contribution she makes in the House is predicated on the fact that she wants to rip Scotland out of the partnership of the United Kingdom. I would advise her, if she wishes to make comments such as those she has made today about civil jurisdiction, that she has ample opportunity to do so during the consultation period. I would remind her that the consultation has been welcomed in Scotland by the Lord Advocate and senior members of the judiciary. I am sure that any contribution that they make to the consultation will be taken seriously by the UK Government before a decision is made.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): May I begin by welcoming today's statement on Scotland Office staffing, even though it is a shame that it will be six weeks before we can ask questions about it? On the subject of the supreme court, the hon. Lady will be aware that a number of Scottish cases go to the House of Lords each year. Can she tell us what thought has been given to arrangements for the handover of those cases to the supreme court when it comes into being? For instance, will they continue to their end in the Lords, will they be taken over by the supreme court while they are still in process, or will applicants have to return to "go"?

Mrs. McGuire: First, I would have been delighted to take questions on the staffing of the Scotland Office if the hon. Lady had managed to find a creative way of linking them into her question. I would like to put it on the record that this is a rational approach to the way in which the Scotland Office is now working. As for the transfer of cases, that will be managed properly—there are very few cases currently being considered by the House of Lords. Those cases that have to be dealt with by the House of Lords will, I understand, be concluded there. However, there will be transitional arrangements, and if I need to give the hon. Lady clarification of the detail of that major radical and important constitutional change in our judiciary, I shall certainly do so in writing.

Mrs. Lait: I am grateful for that offer and for the hon. Lady's putting on record the plan for handling the issue. On another angle of this matter, as the proposed creation of the supreme court shows that the devolution settlement is not settled, which parts of the House of Lords Committee, chaired by Lord Norton, is she considering for implementation?

Mrs. McGuire: The hon. Lady's question is so obtuse that even I do not understand it in this very robust debate. When we had an opportunity to discuss issues relating to the new Department for Constitutional Affairs and the Scotland Office, she did not raise the matter, but perhaps I could meet her after Scottish questions and we could discuss it in detail. Finally, we are dealing with a transitional arrangement for a radical approach to our judiciary in the United Kingdom. I should have thought that the hon. Lady would have welcomed that.

Parliamentary Boundaries

4. **Mr. Michael Connarty** (Falkirk, East): When he will approve the detailed timetable for legislation on new boundaries for UK parliamentary seats in Scotland. [128446]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Alistair Darling): The House will know that it is up to the boundary commission to decide when it reports to me on its current review of the parliamentary constituencies. However, as I have made clear in the

past, as soon as I receive the report I shall lay it before Parliament, together with an order to give effect to its recommendations.

Mr. Connarty: I am grateful for that reply. I just wonder whether there may be a problem in deciding whether to put Dungavel prison into an English constituency, or whether my right hon. Friend will intervene to solve by some other, more positive, method the problem at Dungavel of children being locked up in a former prison.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is out of order. The Minister will not reply.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Does the Secretary of State accept that, given the radical proposals on reducing the number of MPs in Scotland, which my party supports and recognises as a consequence of devolution, it is important to ensure that the matter is resolved clearly and not dragged out to add to the confusion? In the process, will he consider bringing together the review of Westminster and Scottish boundaries to avoid a long period of confusion about different boundaries in different Parliaments, and perhaps also take the opportunity to introduce the single transferable vote for the Scottish Parliament at the same time?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman's question had three parts. It was very clear that once the Scotland Act 1998 was passed, the number of Members of Parliament that Scotland sent to Westminster would be reduced. I have made that clear, as has the Prime Minister, and that is what is going to happen. Indeed, I say that with some feeling, as I am quite directly affected by some of the recommendations made by the boundary commission.

When the boundary commission reports is a matter for it, as it is independent of government, but it has said that it will probably have finished its review of the Westminster constituencies at the beginning of next year. The House will also be aware that, at the moment, its terms of reference mean that it will go on to look at the consequential effects for the Scottish Parliament. As we are going to legislate to maintain 129 Members of the Scottish Parliament, that work will not be necessary, but I hope that that will not hold up the reorganisation of Westminster parliamentary constituencies.

Voting systems will be a matter of discussion, especially among the parties in Scotland. I know that there are concerns not only about individual systems but about the fact that four different systems will be in operation in Scotland. I am sure that all of us, no matter what political party we belong to, will have thoughts about that, but it is something that needs to be discussed in Scotland. For the avoidance of doubt, I can tell the House that the only legislation that we are contemplating at the moment will maintain the 129 Members. We are not contemplating any other legislation at the moment, but that is not to say that debate about these matters will not take place over the next few months and years.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Following the implementation of the boundary review, which will reduce the number of Scottish MPs—it is currently a tad unfair to those of us south of the border—does the Secretary of State believe that there will be a parallel reduction for similar reasons in the over-generous Barnett formula?

Mr. Darling: Public spending and its distribution are, of course, something that the Chancellor keeps under review. If I were my hon. Friend, I would take satisfaction—if that is what it is from his point of view—from the fact that there will be something of a parity between English and Scottish constituencies, which I think most of us believe is absolutely necessary following the introduction of the Scotland Act 1998.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): Notwithstanding the answer that the Secretary of State gave to the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce), will he deny speculation that he plans to remove from the remit of the boundary commission the requirement to allocate Scottish constituencies to regions in Scotland? If he cannot do so, is it because he plans to gerrymander that process himself, or has he decided to move already to another form of proportional representation that is perhaps more suited to his party's interests?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary is not alone in feeling confused today, as I am feeling completely confused about what on earth the hon. Gentleman is saying. For the avoidance of doubt, I have said that we intend to introduce legislation only to maintain the 129 Members of the Scottish Parliament. I also said that the boundary commission's work in relation to the reduction of numbers in the Westminster Parliament will go ahead.

On what electoral systems might prevail in Scotland in future, I wish to make two observations. First, I think that the issue needs to be discussed by political parties in Scotland. Secondly, no one party has a monopoly of wisdom here and some thought must be given to what systems are appropriate. This is the sort of debate that will no doubt continue for months and years, and I am totally relaxed about that.

Overseas Ministerial Visits

5. **Sir Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): If he will list the overseas visits he has *(a)* undertaken since 12 June and *(b)* planned for the future. [128447]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Alistair Darling): I have made no overseas visits since 12 June in my capacity as Secretary of State for Scotland, and I have no plans to do so.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: The reason I ask the question is that Scotland faces severe problems of economic growth and huge job losses in manufacturing industry. Industry is plagued by a very high business rate, which, in my view, needs cutting. What is the right hon. Gentleman doing to encourage further inward investment in Scottish manufacturing, which is so important if we are to provide jobs for the Scottish

people? As an English MP, I am as concerned about manufacturing in Scotland as in England or in my own constituency.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should have put down a question on manufacturing in Scotland. He has been given an answer, and I do not intend to call a supplementary.

Angus Robertson (Moray): The Secretary of State says that he has not conducted a single trip to another country. May I strongly urge him to do so, for one reason? He might be able to broaden his experience and to learn how few countries lock up in prison the children of asylum seekers. Can he name one European country—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Once again, the hon. Gentleman is out of order. The supplementary should relate to the question that was tabled. *[Interruption.]* I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not challenging my ruling. He seems to be in an awful state. *[Interruption.]* Did he say that he is challenging my ruling?

Sir Nicholas Winterton: As a member of the Chairmen's Panel, I should not do so.

Mr. Speaker: That is fine, then.

UK Elections

6. **Mr. George Foulkes** (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): What plans he has to ensure that those eligible to vote in UK elections are registered on the voters' register. [128448]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Anne McGuire): It is the responsibility of local electoral registration officers to take reasonable steps to obtain the information required to prepare and publish registers of local government and parliamentary electors.

Mr. Foulkes: I have to say that I find the Under-Secretary's reply rather complacent. *[Interruption.]* Yes, I am off the Christmas card list. Has she seen the parliamentary answers indicating that more than 100,000 people in Scotland who ought to be on the register are not on it? As this is one area for which the Scotland Office does have ministerial responsibility, will she urge electoral registration officers to intensify their activities to ensure that people who are eligible are on the register? Will she also draw the matter to the attention of the boundaries commission? If 100,000 Scots voters are not on the register, that will have a significant impact on its work.

Mrs. McGuire: I share my right hon. Friend's concern that some people, for a variety of reasons, do not take up their opportunity to register. The Electoral Commission is considering ways in which we can encourage people to do so. As my right hon. Friend knows from his previous existence as a Minister in the Scotland Office, a great deal of work is done with electoral registration officers to ensure that their methods for getting people on to the register are robust and thorough. Changes have been made to the way in which we register. For example, rolling registration allows electors to provide updated details at any time. We need to consider how accurate registers were under the previous conditions and how accurately they reflect the current situation. I take my right hon. Friend's comments on board, and I am sure that they will have been heard by electoral registration officers, who no doubt listen to Scottish questions.

Sir Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Some of us deeply regret the passing of the personal canvass that used to be part of the operation, because it guaranteed that if people were at their addresses they would be found. I know that she is as jealous of civil liberties as I am, but would she consider giving electoral registration officers access to other publicly held information for matching purposes? They have access to council tax data, but those data only identify one householder. Household benefit lists give the names of everyone living at an address. Will the hon. Lady consider whether the regulations could give extra powers to EROs to check and match the gaps in the current postal arrangements?

Mrs. McGuire: The hon. Gentleman will know that in May 2000, the Electoral Commission published its report on electoral registration processes and concerns about under-registration. Insufficient data-sharing between the various authorities was identified as one of the issues that may need reconsideration. That is the subject of a further research project by the commission, which will examine the extent and nature of non-registration throughout the United Kingdom as well as in Scotland.

Many of us are in a position to emphasise to our local electors that people should register to ensure that they do not lose the right to vote.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND

The Advocate-General was asked—

Devolution

16. **Annabelle Ewing** (Perth): What devolution issues have been raised with her since 24 June. [128458]

The Advocate-General for Scotland (Dr. Lynda Clark): Since 24 June, 93 devolution issues have been intimated to me. All but three related to criminal matters involving human rights claims, and the majority concerned delay in bringing criminal proceedings to trial. Other issues included challenges to the fixing of punishment part sentences for life prisoners under the Convention Rights (Compliance) (Scotland) Act 2001, confiscation of assets, and a challenge to a prison governor's refusal to provide a word processor to an inmate for the preparation of an appeal.

Annabelle Ewing: I imagine that one of the devolution issues winging its way towards the hon. and learned Lady is the growing outcry in Scotland about the shameful Westminster practice of locking up the

children of asylum seekers in Dungavel. Has the Advocate-General had recent contact with the Scottish Executive about the extent of their devolution powers, on the basis that health, education and social welfare issues are devolved? What is the statutory authority in Scotland for the exclusion of those children from mainstream education?

The Advocate-General: First, the Government introduced the European convention on human rights into our law. That provides a basis for domestic challenge.

On things winging their way towards me, I shall wait with bated breath until they land on my desk. If and when that happens, I shall consider any devolution issue in detail, as I always do. The constitutional settlement is clear: asylum is a reserved matter and education is generally devolved.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Generally?

The Advocate-General: Generally. If I receive a relevant devolution matter of the sort that the hon. Lady suggested, I will scrutinise it carefully and bear her comments in mind.

Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000

18. **Mr. Michael Connarty** (Falkirk, East): What human rights assessment she has made of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000. [128460]

The Advocate-General: I assess the legislative competence of each Bill introduced in the Scottish Parliament as part of the process of considering whether to exercise my power under section 33 of the Scotland Act 1998 to refer a Bill to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. That assessment includes a consideration of compliance with convention rights. When a Bill becomes law, my role on devolution issues continues.

Mr. Connarty: I am informed that sections 1 and 14 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 state that any child with a need for special educational provision should be provided with it in mainstream schools. Gordon Jeyes, director of children's services and secretary of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, said that he believes that the UK Government are in breach of the Act because we do not implement it in relation to asylum seekers' children who are held in Dungavel.

The Advocate-General: Let me quote section 1 of the Act to my hon. Friend. It states:

> "It shall be the right of every child of school age to be provided with school education by, or by virtue of arrangements made, or entered into, by an education authority."

Anyone who believes that there is a difficulty in relation to a devolution issue is perfectly within their rights to raise that, as I have explained.

Devolution

19. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What devolution issues she has considered since June 2003. [128461]

The Advocate-General: Since the end of June 2003 there have been 88 devolution issues intimated to me. As to their subject matter, I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave a few moments ago to the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing).

Miss McIntosh: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Lady for that answer. Will she cast her mind back to the answer that she gave me before the summer recess on partnership law in relation to the reforms to Scottish land law being passed by the Scottish Parliament, and the devastating effect that they are having on Scottish landowners? What representations has she received from those landowners, and will she revise her advice in view of those representations?

The Advocate-General: I am casting my mind back drastically. I remember the hon. Lady's general question, but not the details. So far as I am aware, I have not received any representations since then, but I will certainly check with my office to see whether any have been made. If I think that I need to make changes to any of my views, I shall do so.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State was asked—

Judicial Appointments

21. **Mr. Paul Goodman** (Wycombe): What responses he has had to his consultation on the appointment of judges. [128464]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. Christopher Leslie): At this early stage of the consultation on the issue of creating a more independent judicial appointments process, a wide range of responses has already been received, including from members of the judiciary, magistrates, solicitors, barristers, academics and members of the public. Consultation closes on 7 November.

Mr. Goodman: Given that radical left-wing modernisation and the separation of powers are surely one and the same, will the Minister confirm that there will be no political veto over the appointment of judges—and if not, why not?

Mr. Leslie: The present arrangement has a Cabinet Minister intimately involved in the selection process of the judiciary. That system has produced a judiciary of very high standing and probity, but we feel that it is now an unsustainable anachronism and that we should have more open, transparently independent appointments processes. That is why we want an independent judicial

appointments commission, and a number of options have been posited in the consultation paper, which I commend to the hon. Gentleman.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): The Minister talks about a more open and transparent system. Is it not the case that, last year, although the Lord Chancellor's Department received 3,600 applications, carried out 1,800 interviews and made more than 750 appointments, a clear audit trail for that process is lacking? Would not such an audit trail help to produce a system that would lead to a more diverse and representative Bench in a rather shorter time than the 10 to 15 years that some commentators believe it will take at the moment?

Mr. Leslie: It is, of course, desirable to have a more diverse judiciary reflecting the broad nature of the population, but we have to have appointment on merit, and this is the best way to proceed. One of the proposals in the consultation document is for a judicial ombudsman to oversee the work of the independent judicial appointments commission, but we believe that the current Commissioner for Judicial Appointments already does a good job of auditing and ensuring that our appointments process is of a high standard.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The noble and learned Lord Woolf, the Lord Chief Justice, said recently:

"If the Executive can influence who is on the appointments commission and who the commission appoints that is interfering with the judiciary."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 8 September 2003; Vol. 652, c. 113.]

To ensure that that does not happen, will the Minister ensure that the committee that appoints the commission will not be chaired by the permanent secretary to his Department? If the Secretary of State is to have any role in judicial appointments, should it not be confined to accepting a single name proffered by the commission or, if rejecting it, giving reasons for so doing?

Mr. Leslie: There is an important issue involved in ensuring that advice on appointments from the Crown is given by Ministers, so that Ministers can be held accountable to Parliament. The hon. Gentleman asks an important question, however. The issue of who appoints the appointers is brought out in the consultation document. There is also a proposal in that document for an appointments panel chaired by the permanent secretary of the Department, with a senior judge and another senior non-political figure. We await the responses to see what the reaction to that proposal might be, but I hear what the hon. Gentleman has to say.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): The Minister will know that we affirm the absolute necessity of maintaining the independence of the judiciary as the safeguard of the freedom of the people, and of maintaining the freedom of the rule of law from political interference. How can the Government's proposed reforms achieve that? First, the ultimate appointment of judges will be made by the Secretary of State, who, on 14 July, said that he intended to act politically. Secondly, as has been said, the sifting committee will be chaired by his own permanent secretary. Thirdly, far from achieving a proper separation of powers, the proposals remove the constitutional authority of the Lord Chancellor in the Cabinet, thus enhancing the power of the Secretary of State and thereby that of the Prime Minister—as usual.

Mr. Leslie: The hon. Gentleman should pay a little more attention to the detail in the consultation document. He is wrong, for instance, in saying that we propose that the permanent secretary chair the sifting panel during the selection process. That is simply not correct. We want an independent judicial appointments commission that will undertake the day-to-day process of selection separately. Under the current arrangement, as with that operated by the last Administration, a political Lord Chancellor sitting in the Cabinet—a Minister—undertakes all aspects of the process. We believe that the time when that was justifiable is past, and we want a more independent system. I hope that the Conservative party will add its support for that.

Judicial Reform

22. **Mr. Graham Allen** (Nottingham, North): What consultation processes involving hon. Members he plans for his proposals for *(a)* a Supreme Court, *(b)* an independent judicial appointments commission and *(c)* the future of the rank of Queen's Counsel. [128465]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. Christopher Leslie): The three consultation papers are available to all Members in the Vote Office, and views are of course most welcome as part of the consultation process. We will also endeavour to work closely with the departmental Select Committee, and make all responses available to it at the end of the consultation.

Mr. Allen: I commend my hon. Friend for presenting three proposals that appeared in past Labour party manifestos. That is a high strike rate, which I hope my hon. Friend will continue.

What involvement will there be with Parliament itself during the consultation, and in particular with the new Constitutional Affairs Select Committee chaired by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith)? Would it not be a good idea to involve Members of Parliament, and also to involve members of the public by putting the process online so that everyone could discuss it rather than one or two insiders?

Mr. Leslie: The noises off from the shadow Leader of the House, revolting against the concept of online consultation, clearly reflect his enthusiasm for that particular element of modernisation.

I understand my hon. Friend's point. It is important for all sections of society to be involved as much as possible—not least hon. Members, who are never backward in coming forward with their views.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Should not one of the first ways of involving Members through the Select Committee be to take careful note of what the Committee said about the experience in Scotland of setting up a judicial appointments commission? Is it not clear that that body's manifest independence from both

the parent Department and the political process has been very important in ensuring its acceptance by the judiciary and others? Is it not also important to resolve the difficulty mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), which still exists in the Scottish system, of ensuring that the fact that ultimately appointments are made on the advice of Ministers does not enable Ministers to become involved in a process that is supposed to be independent?

Mr. Leslie: The right hon. Gentleman makes some interesting points. Like the Chairman of the departmental Select Committee, I think it vital that we have a dialogue with the Committee as the proposals evolve. I also agree that it is important to investigate the method of appointment in great detail. According to one model, appointments would go straight from the commission to the Crown; according to another, the single recommendation would go to Ministers and then, formally, to the Crown, which would preserve ministerial accountability to Parliament. That is another important issue with which I know the Committee will be concerned.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): Notwithstanding the virtues of the Scottish independent system for appointing judges, will my hon. Friend note that in many people's opinion the appointments made by the independent commission have resulted in the appointment of more or less the same type of people as before, although perhaps they are slightly more conservative with a small "c" than their predecessors. Will my hon. Friend draw lessons from that experience when considering the introduction of an appointment system for England and Wales—and, indeed, for the supreme court?

Mr. Leslie: My hon. Friend is right: a much more diverse judiciary is certainly desirable. We must preserve appointment on merit, but I do not believe that the two are incompatible. If we have a new judicial appointments commission drawn from a wider spectrum of society, it is more likely that candidates will be appointed from a larger pool, and I hope that that will happen.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): The point that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) was trying to make is that if we move to a commission-based system, we will be less likely to see some of the bold, good appointments that have been made in the past two or three decades. If the Minister is going to take the Select Committee system seriously, could he try to give the Committee a clear answer as to whether the Prime Minister consulted either the previous Lord Chancellor or the current one before announcing the proposed changes to the appointment of judges?

Mr. Leslie: There are of course always full consultations between all Cabinet members before policy announcements are made, and I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should think otherwise. I disagree with his view that a commission is somehow less likely to appoint bold, more interesting people to the judiciary. There is no evidence for that, and as we develop policy we want to ensure that we have the capability to introduce a diverse range of potential candidates, but also those of the highest possible calibre.

Judicial Appointments

23 **Keith Vaz** (Leicester, East): How many judicial appointments the Lord Chancellor has made since 15 June. [128467]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. Christopher Leslie): Since the Lord Chancellor was appointed on 12 June, he has made or recommended 435 appointments.

Keith Vaz: May I, through the Minister, congratulate the Lord Chancellor on his assiduousness in appointing so many people, under a system that the Minister has today accepted is flawed? Given the evidence that the Lord Chancellor gave to the Select Committee, in which he said that he wanted to see a new breed of person appointed to the Bench, could the Minister tell the House how many of those 400-odd appointments accurately reflect the Lord Chancellor's views?

Mr. Leslie: Each of the appointments made is of the highest calibre. I would say not that the current appointments system is flawed, but that there are anachronistic elements, in so far as the system manifestly involves politicians. I believe that we should move away from that state of affairs. There are a large number of appointments, but it is certainly true that different types of people have been appointed, most of whom are magistrates. When the annual report on judicial appointments is published, it will include more detail about the nature of the people appointed.

Court Closures (East Anglia)

24. **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): What recent representations he has received from magistrates courts in East Anglia about proposed court closures. [128468]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. David Lammy): There are currently no plans for any court closures in East Anglia, and we have received no representations on this issue.

Mr. Bellingham: Surely for justice to be seen to be done, it is highly desirable that most defendants be tried by magistrates as near as possible to the scene of the crime. Furthermore, the majority of members of the lay magistracy joined only because they wanted to sit in courts in their local towns. So why are the Government still giving the go-ahead to the closure of small magistrates courts in small towns—including some in Norfolk—that has taken place during the past six years? Do they not believe in the lay magistracy, and why are they undermining the morale of lay magistrates?

Mr. Lammy: The hon. Gentleman has asked this question on three occasions in the past year and he is about to get the same reply. It is right and proper that magistrates live locally, but it is clear that we cannot have courts in every town. This Government closed six courts this year and seven last year; in the last year of the their Administration, the Conservatives closed 21.

House of Lords Reform

26. **Mr. Clive Soley** (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): If he will make a further statement on reform of the House of Lords. [128471]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. Christopher Leslie): The Government published their response to the Joint Committee on House of Lords Reform on 16 July. We are considering a variety of the issues raised, and we intend to consult on the role of the appointments commission in the near future.

Mr. Soley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply. Will he do everything possible to ensure that the Joint Committee can continue its work? That is necessary in part because there are many, relatively straightforward reforms that we can carry out—not least of which is dealing with Members of the House of Lords who can still peg their seats and legislate, despite having criminal convictions. But more importantly in the long run, reform of the House of Lords has to be agreed between and within the two Houses, and the only way to deliver that is through the Joint Committee's continuing its work, and working by consent within that procedure.

Mr. Leslie: Of course my hon. Friend is right, and the Government are more than content to see the Joint Committee continue its work of examining the issues and recommendations. We are grateful for the work of drafting and producing the second report, to which the Government responded earlier in the year. It was a useful summary of the debate and, as I said in my earlier answer, we now want to consult on the role of the judicial appointments commission for those appointed to the House of Lords. We hope to make further announcements in the near future.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): My hon. Friend will know of rumours in the national newspapers suggesting that the Government are going to introduce a de minimis Bill, which would effectively bring about a wholly appointed second Chamber. The Government's response to the Joint Committee's paper seemed to be pushing in the same direction. I am sure that my hon. Friend is well aware that that option received the fewest votes in this Chamber, so will he ensure that it is not the option that the Government bring forward?

Mr. Leslie: My hon. Friend has far too great a stature to comment on rumours surfacing in national newspapers. I shall not do so, and my hon. Friend will have to wait to see what proposals we introduce. We have a new Department and a new ministerial team, and we are keen to move forward. We do not believe that the status quo is desirable, but I repeat that my hon. Friend will have to wait and see what proposals we introduce.

Judicial Reform

27. **Mr. David Ruffley** (Bury St. Edmunds): What the Lord Chancellor's plans are for reform of the English judiciary; and if he will make a statement. [128473]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. Christopher Leslie): The Government intend to establish an independent judicial appointments commission in order to create a more open and transparent method of appointing judges. We also intend to create a new supreme court for the United Kingdom to separate the highest appeal court from the legislature. Consultation on those proposals closes on 7 November.

Mr. Ruffley: Will the Minister confirm that in appointing judges the judicial appointments commission will not operate a quota system—either formally or informally—for certain groups?

Mr. Leslie: Yes, that is absolutely our intention. We want not quotas, but appointments on merit.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): On occasions, which are bound to arise, when it proves impossible for the future judicial appointments commission to reach consensus on proposed candidates for appointment, does the Minister envisage that there will be scope for votes?

Mr. Leslie: I presume that it will be for the new independent judicial appointments commission—we have tentatively suggested that it should comprise about 15 members: five from the judiciary, five from the legal profession and five from the non-legal sector—to undertake its own deliberations in the manner that it sees fit. We shall have to see whether that level of detail—providing for equal division—needs to be brought out in the response to the consultation. I am immensely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for focusing on that specific point.

Supreme Court

28. **Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): What the estimated cost is of establishing and maintaining a supreme court. [128474]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. Christopher Leslie): As the consultation document on the creation of a supreme court makes clear, we are currently considering options on the accommodation and infrastructure requirements for the new court. Whatever option is chosen, it will have to deliver value for money.

Mr. Osborne: I am disappointed that the Minister could not provide an answer. Surely he should have some idea of how much something will cost before proposing it to Parliament.

Mr. Leslie: First, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his elevation to the Opposition Whips Office—an immensely important post for him given his quick rise. The new supreme court will need to be housed outside the Palace of Westminster and we shall consult the present Law Lords, among others, on the requirements for accommodation. We do not want the supreme court to be an extravagant institution, but neither should it be done on the cheap. It should be fit for the purposes envisaged for the highest court in the land.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Will the new system be more expensive?

Mr. Leslie: The hon. Gentleman should have heard the answer that I gave. I do not believe that we should have an extravagant system for the supreme court, nor one put together on the cheap. We want to ensure that the supreme court will be fit for its purposes, so we shall consult those who will work in it and who understand how the highest court in the land will operate on the necessary costs of administration and infrastructure.

Judiciary (Political Independence)

29. **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): What recent representations he has received on the protection of the political independence of the judiciary. [128475]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. Christopher Leslie): We currently have judges of complete independence, probity and the very highest ability. The Government believe that they must continue to be independent, of both the Executive and the legislature. Proposals for an independent judicial appointments commission and a new supreme court have been published. Responses to the consultation documents that were published in July are still being received, as the consultation period finishes on 7 November.

Mr. Luff: Does the Minister understand that those of us with experience of other so-called independent appointments commissions, such as those in the NHS—

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Or the Whips Office.

Mr. Luff: Or the Whips Office, as my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) suggests. We have seen that the results have been completely distorted by the criteria laid down by Ministers. The commissions cannot be truly independent. I urge the Minister to reflect again on whether the proposals will genuinely enhance the independence of the judiciary.

Mr. Leslie: I understand the warnings from the hon. Gentleman, but surely the House will support moves towards a more independent, transparent, open and accessible appointments system for the judiciary. I believe that that is possible, and so far I have not heard anyone oppose it.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

The Leader of the House was asked—

Select Committee Chairmen (Pay Review)

32. **Sir Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): When he expects to respond to the Senior Salaries Pay Review Body's report on the remuneration of House of Commons Select Committee Chairmen. [128478]

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Peter Hain): When I laid the SSRB's report on pay for Select Committee Chairmen in the House of Commons before the House on 17 July, I stated that I intended to discuss the matter widely and to reflect on hon. Members' views before deciding on the terms of a motion to be put before the House in the autumn. Subject to the demands of parliamentary business, and to the completion of the examination by the Committee on Standards and Privileges of the issue of Chairmen's outside interests, I hope that we will find time for a debate as soon as possible after the conference recess, and certainly before the end of the Session. It will then be for the House to decide on its response to the SSRB's report.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I thank the Leader of the House for that response. Does he accept that the payment of Select Committee Chairmen must not be seen as an extension of patronage? With that in mind, will he consider looking again at how Select Committee Chairmen are appointed, and ensuring that such appointments are made by a committee divorced from the Executive and the Whips Offices? In that way, Back-Bench Members can take control of the process and the remuneration will offer a way to an alternative career structure for Members of this House.

Mr. Hain: I very much agree that there should be a properly remunerated parallel career structure. If I may quibble, however, I would not necessarily use the term "alternative". People can move between the two occupations, as we have seen recently. But proper remuneration is important, and that will be a matter for the House.

On the question of patronage, I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman, who was an excellent Chairman of the Health Committee in a previous Parliament. He gave a very good example of how to defy patronage. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members mention my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who is indeed an excellent Select Committee Chairman. In a sense, she has found her place by defying any laws of patronage. I do not think that patronage is the real issue. The issue considered by the SSRB was whether remuneration was proper, and in what form it should be implemented.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Does the Leader of the House recall that the Select Committee on Modernisation's recommendation incorporated direct reference to greater independence and effectiveness in Select Committees, so that Chairmen genuinely earned their salaries? In those circumstances, does he think it proper for a Secretary of State for Defence to lean on the

Chairman of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs to try and secure a particular type of questioning in the recent inquiry? Does that improve the Committee's independence? Does not the right hon. Gentleman consider it extraordinary that the evidence placed before that Committee was so lacking in comprehensive coverage of the issue, given what has been exposed by the Hutton inquiry?

Mr. Hain: Those matters are, of course, for the Hutton inquiry, but the hon. Gentleman should not demean the role of Select Committees, which play, in investigating and in holding the Executive to account, a vital part that the Government welcome and encourage.

Laptop Computers

34. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): What plans he has to make further recommendations to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons on the use of laptop computers in Standing Committees of the House. [128481]

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Phil Woolas): I pay tribute to the right hon. Gentleman on his appointment to the Select Committee on Information. He is also a member of the Speaker's advisory panel.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has made no recommendations to the Modernisation Committee on the use of laptop computers in Standing Committees. He is aware that some Members would like their use to be permitted, but the Chairmen's Panel has concerns about the matter.

Mr. Jack: While I thank the Minister for his kind words and his answer, does he not think that it would be timely for the Modernisation Committee to consider the situation now? Use of laptops is permitted in Select Committees, and a recent report has shown their advantages. However, that facility is not afforded to Members undertaking the detailed work of Standing Committees. Does the Minister not think that the time is right to consider that point, perhaps in concert with the Information Committee?

Mr. Woolas: At present, that is a matter for individual Select Committees, although I share the view that there may well be advantages to the use of laptops as new technologies develop. The House may be interested to know that there are proposals for Members to have access to PDAs, which I understand to be personal digital assistants. The mind boggles about what the sketch writers will make of that, but new technology has an element of inevitability about it.

Debates Procedure

35. **Julie Morgan** (Cardiff, North): If he will bring forward proposals to the Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons on procedure in debates on the Floor of the House. [128482]

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Peter Hain): Although I have no plans to do so, I am aware that the Procedure Committee is examining procedures for debates, and I await its findings with interest.

Julie Morgan: What plans has my right hon. Friend to discuss the introduction of a list of speakers to be published before debates in the Chamber? Does he agree that it would contribute to the enthusiasm of Members taking part in debate if they thought that they had some chance of being called?

Mr. Hain: I think, Mr. Speaker, that you may have views on this matter, and I therefore intend to tread warily. I understand my hon. Friend's concerns, and I know that the House of Lords, for example, has always had published lists. The Procedure Committee is considering the matter, and I am sure that you will make your views known in due course, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): One of the good things to come out of the Modernisation Committee when it was led by the Leader of the House's predecessor was the publication of a parliamentary calendar. Can the right hon. Gentleman say when he will be in a position to publish next year's calendar?

Mr. Hain: I certainly intend to publish the calendar as soon as possible, once it is clear when the Queen's Speech will be and how the next Session will unfold. We shall do that as soon as possible, because I know that the calendar is useful to Members and to servants of the House.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Might the Leader of the House combine several modernisation techniques so that those of us who have a nasty habit of turning up here to make speeches could in future just read them into the record from some remote spot, saving us from having to come here at all?

Mr. Hain: I would much rather hear my hon. Friend's speeches than read them in *Hansard*. I am sure that the whole House would agree with that.

Bills (Online Pre-legislative Scrutiny)

36. **Mr. Graham Allen** (Nottingham, North): How many Bills he expects will have been subject to online pre-legislative scrutiny by the end of the Session; and if he will make a statement. [128483]

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Phil Woolas): None of the Committees that conducted pre-legislative scrutiny of draft Bills in this Session has undertaken online consultation; nor am I aware of any plans to do so. However, the report of the Joint Committee on the draft Communications Bill in the previous Session demonstrated that online consultation on draft Bills could be useful. Whether it is undertaken remains a matter for decision by the Committee concerned.

Mr. Allen: I took the trouble to write to all Secretaries of State asking whether they would hold any pre-legislative consultation in the next Session, and I

received a standard reply from each saying that they do not pre-empt the Queen's Speech. However, as a long list of Bills is being circulated, would it not make sense for my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to use that list in talking to Select Committee Chairmen to try to build into their programmes of work serious pre-legislative scrutiny of all the Bills that the House will consider?

Mr. Woolas: That is a matter for the House, but the Government recognise the benefits of pre-legislative scrutiny. There have been nine such Bills in the current Session and there were seven in the last Session. It is the Government's desire to facilitate online consultation. As I said, the matter is for the Committees, but my hon. Friend's suggestion seems to have merit within that policy.

Bills (Programming)

37. **Mr. Andrew Mackay** (Bracknell): If he will propose to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons that it inquire into the arrangements for programming legislation. [128484]

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Peter Hain): The Modernisation Committee stated that it will keep the operation of programming under continuing consideration and make further recommendations as it thinks appropriate.

Mr. Mackay: Does the Leader of the House accept that the present programming is not working properly and that all too much legislation is not properly scrutinised, with large sections of Bills not even looked at by the House? That cannot be right, and there is urgent need for change by the time the next Session starts later this year.

Mr. Hain: I am aware of the right hon. Gentleman's concerns and those of many of his colleagues, but I want to put the matter into perspective. Under the previous procedure, prior to programming, large numbers of clauses were not debated or properly scrutinised, which was one of the reasons that we introduced the reform. Although I am always open to suggestions for change, and the Modernisation Committee is keeping the matter under review, we should compare realistically and accurately with what happened before, instead of trying to suggest that the whole situation is worse in respect of scrutiny. No Bill was fully scrutinised under the previous system—that is the issue.

Devolution

38. **Andrew Selous** (South-West Bedfordshire): If he will introduce legislation to prohibit Members for non-English seats in the House voting on matters pertaining only to England. [128485]

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Phil Woolas): To facilitate for the House, given the lack of time, I simply say no.

Andrew Selous: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that probably nothing is more inclined to bring disharmony between the constituent nations of this United Kingdom than the passing of controversial and unpopular measures, as far as England is concerned, with the support of hon. Members who are not from England? What is he going to do about that?

Mr. Woolas: There is a fundamental disagreement. This House is sovereign and each Member of the House is equal—*[Interruption.]* Well, some may, in their opinion, be more equal than others. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman would say to hon. Members representing Northern Ireland constituencies that they should not be entitled to take part in legislative decisions that affect the United Kingdom as a whole, or indeed England. There is a disagreement.

EU-IGC

12.32 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): With permission, Mr Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the European Union's intergovernmental conference, which will begin in Rome on 4 October. Alongside this statement, I have today published a White Paper, "A New Constitutional Treaty for the European Union," in which the Government set out in more detail their approach to the IGC. The White Paper was laid before Parliament at 9.30 this morning, and copies have been made available so that hon. Members could question me on its content. In August, I published a Command Paper, 5897, which gives the full text of the draft treaty.

The origins of the IGC lie in the unfinished business of the treaty of Nice. Nice settled the simple mechanics of enlargement, but did not focus on how a Union of 25 states could then function effectively. So at the Laeken summit two years ago, EU Heads of State and Government agreed to establish a Convention on the Future of Europe with a view to both improved institutions and a single constitutional treaty.

Indeed, ever since the 1957 treaty of Rome, Europe's decision-making processes and institutions have not kept pace with the expansion of the EU's borders: for Rome's framework was designed for the six founding countries and it has been struggling ever since to cope with the demands of nine, 12 and now 15 member states. Without reform, we would be likely to see bureaucratic gridlock at 25.

It is hard to overstate the significance of the enlargement of the EU that will come to fruition next year, which will be three times greater than any previous enlargement. EU membership will be a fitting reward for the courageous steps that eight former members of the eastern bloc have taken since the fall of the Berlin wall to embrace the values of liberal democracy. In addition, the EU will be joined by two nations—Cyprus and Malta—which have long, historical links to the UK and are members of the Commonwealth.

Enlargement has been supported by successive British Governments, partly out of a sense of obligation to help correct the injustices of the cold war, but also on a pragmatic assessment of our national interest. Eight years ago, one of my distinguished predecessors, Lord Hurd of Westwell, said:

"enlargement is not a luxury. It is a necessity if we are to build a safe and successful Europe for the 21st century."

It is also a necessity if we are to build a safe and successful Britain. With the necessary reforms of the European Union's institutions, enlargement will mean greater trade and investment opportunities for British companies and more jobs for British workers. It will give us more partners in the fight against the problems that cross borders, such as drug trafficking, environmental pollution, international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The EU's greatest achievement has been to help to secure an absence of war among its member states. Enlargement will extend that achievement and cement the values intrinsic to peace across the continent.

Our commitment to a successful enlargement lay behind the Government's positive approach to the Convention on the Future of Europe. From the outset of the Convention, we were clear about the purpose of the new constitutional treaty. We did not want to scrap the Union's existing constitutional foundation, but that is however contained in a plethora of documents, from the treaty of Rome to the treaty of Nice. What we wanted instead was a text that brought those treaties together in a single, more coherent whole. We also wanted a treaty that streamlined decision making to ensure that the Union was able to act effectively with 25 members, and we wanted reforms that would enable the Union to deal with the problems of today, rather than those of 50 years ago, and to ensure that the Union delivers for Europe's peoples.

The text that the Convention finally agreed in July largely meets those criteria and Britain's interests, as has been widely acknowledged elsewhere in Europe. The Convention, skilfully chaired by President Giscard d'Estaing, has produced a text that is clearer and more comprehensible, but does not alter the fundamental constitutional relationship between the member states and the Union. Let me express my gratitude to all Convention members, including our own governmental team, led by the Leader of the House, the parliamentary representatives from both Houses and staff of the House and the other place who did so much to support our parliamentary representatives.

What I have sought to do in the White Paper is to set enlargement and the new constitutional treaty in its proper context. So in section I of the White Paper, we set out the benefits of EU membership to Britain. Section II deals with changes that have taken place in Europe. Section III explains the process of both the Convention and the IGC, and section IV sets out the Government's assessment of the Convention's outcome.

Let me summarise our major conclusions. We welcome the fact that the draft brings a sense of order to the EU's hitherto byzantine constitutional structure. It consolidates the Union's existing treaties in a single, logically ordered text, which replaces the Maastricht treaty's elaborate three pillars with a single treaty structure. It streamlines the number of EU legal instruments. As someone who has studied the draft with care, I do not pretend that it is an easy read, but it is a lot better than the texts that have gone before.

The draft treaty provides for more accountable EU institutions, rooted in the legitimacy of its constituent parts—the nation states. For the first time, we have a clear definition of where the Union can and cannot act. The text makes it crystal clear in article IX, that the EU's powers derive from the member states and that any power not explicitly conferred on the Union by the member states remains with the national Governments. That article then goes on to establish new procedures for giving national Parliaments an effective role in policing the Commission's legislative proposals.

Under the draft, contained in article III-160 and a protocol, all such proposals from the Commission have to be scrutinised by national Parliaments for proportionality and subsidiarity, and where the national Parliament objects, the Commission has to take back the proposal for review. That significantly strengthens the powers of national Parliaments. The House will wish

to know that the House of Lords European Union Committee, having examined the proposals in draft, concluded that

"it is clear that the balance of power in the European Union is going to shift from the Commission in favour of the Member States if the"

Convention's

"proposals . . . are adopted".

We believe that in its present form the text will deliver a more efficient European Union, which is essential to the success of an enlarged Union. It includes a key British proposal: the creation of a full-time chair of the European Council. This will too, in practice, shift authority from the Commission to national Governments. The post would bring greater continuity to the Union's actions and ensure that the agenda decided upon by member states in the European Council was delivered.

The White Paper spells out our position on the charter of fundamental rights. The Convention text makes it clear in article II-51 that the charter

"does not extend the field of application of Union law beyond the powers of the Union or establish any new power or task for the Union, or modify powers and tasks defined in the other Parts of the Constitution."

It therefore does not give any new powers to the EU. Member states are affected only when implementing Union law. As for the future of the Convention, the Government will make a final decision on the incorporation of the charter into the draft constitutional treaty only in the light of the overall picture at the IGC.

Like most other member states, we have reservations about some aspects of the Convention's draft. There are elements in the text that the United Kingdom does not support. There are some areas where the Convention was unable to finalise its proposals, and others that require further technical and legal work.

In the IGC, we will not support proposals to extend the principle of qualified majority voting to certain key policy areas. We will insist that unanimity remains for treaty change and in other areas of vital national interest such as tax, social security, defence, key areas of criminal procedural law and the system of own resources. Unanimity must remain the general rule for common foreign and security policy, as proposed in the final Convention text. We will not sign up to any treaty that does not, in our view, advance Britain's national interest.

Other member states have their own concerns about the Convention's text. At the European summit in June, EU Heads of State and Governments said that the Convention's draft was a good basis for starting in the IGC, but that it would obviously be for the IGC to make the final decisions. At a meeting of EU Foreign Ministers last weekend, it was clear that many of my counterparts wanted to raise their reservations once the IGC negotiation was under way.

Let me deal with the question of a referendum. In practice, in the United Kingdom, we have held referendums when creating or joining a new institution, but not on reforming an existing institution of which we are already a member. So, it was right for there to be a referendum on whether to stay in or leave the EU, and that will be right on whether to replace the pound sterling with the euro. Equally, the previous Government were right to resist referendums on the major constitutional treaty changes in the Single European Act 1986 and the 1992 Maastricht treaty. Moreover, the proposals in the current draft treaty do not change the fundamental relationship between the EU and its member states, and on any analysis they involve less change than the Maastricht treaty and the Single European Act. The Government have therefore concluded that the right place to decide on any outcome of the IGC is here in this House and this Parliament.

It is for that reason that we have sought to involve Parliament in the drafting and scrutiny of the process from the outset. Our delegation to the Convention gave regular progress reports to the specially constituted Standing Committee on the Convention. These have been invaluable and it goes without saying that we would welcome further proposals from both Houses and their Committees on the draft text and our negotiating position. Ministers have been held to account by the European Scrutiny Committee here and the European Union Committee in the other place. The European Scrutiny Committee has already produced three reports, and the House of Lords Committee has produced 14.

As I have already mentioned, I published the draft treaty articles in a Command Paper. Following consultations with, and proposals from, the European Scrutiny Committee, the House will wish to know that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House tabled a Standing Order today, which appears on the Order Paper, to establish a Standing Committee of this House on the IGC. This will be closely modelled on the Standing Committee on the Convention, except that it will hear statements and take questions from Ministers rather than House parliamentary representatives, as the Standing Committee did when the Convention was operating.

Following a very helpful proposal from my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen), we are supplementing the parliamentary processes on the IGC with an online public debate. My Department has opened an internet discussion forum— *[Interruption.]* Well, at Question Time there was concern that we should make such issues more accessible and members of the public will be given an opportunity to express their views on the draft treaty.

It would be rash to predict the ultimate outcome of the IGC. There will inevitably be many twists and turns in a negotiation between 25 countries. Neither am I making any assumptions about the IGC's duration. What matters is that we secure the right text for the United Kingdom and for the EU as a whole. Securing that outcome flows not from seeking isolation within the European Union but from active and positive engagement. There is no need to approach this IGC with the defeatism of the kind that we sometimes hear. We approach it instead with a confident sense that Britain's rightful role is to play an active part in shaping the future of Europe in the interests of the British people. That has been the hallmark of the Government's policy on the European Union since 1997. By working with our European partners, we are ensuring that our vision of Europe—a vision of nation states, proud of their heritage and distinctiveness, working together for the greater peace and prosperity of the continent—guides Europe's future.

[Mr. Jack Straw]

Britain's membership of the European Union is vital for our continued prosperity. To turn our backs on the Union at this historic time of an enlarged Europe would not only betray our national interest but mark a profound lack of confidence in Britain and everything we stand for. I commend the White Paper to the House.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I thank the Foreign Secretary for his statement and start on a note of consensus by endorsing his welcome of enlargement. I have to say, however, that if this morning's process is part of his promised consultation, two hours to digest more than 50 pages of closely argued text is a travesty.

The White Paper is pretty typical of this Government: another dossier with another prime ministerial foreword containing inaccurate statements. In particular, the Prime Minister writes—it was echoed by the Foreign Secretary in his statement—that the proposed treaty reforms

"do not alter the fundamental constitutional relationship between the Member States and the Union".

Who do they think they are kidding? That phrase will return to haunt them. No one in Europe believes the tidying-up streamlining argument that we just heard. They see the treaty as a step change along the route to full political union. This dossier is another chapter in the Government's campaign to use smoke and mirrors to hide their true intentions towards Europe.

The White Paper was originally billed as the bold negotiating stance that the Government would adopt at the IGC. Instead we find that it is a timid attempt to soften us up for eventual acceptance of the draft text pretty well as it stands. That fits with the expectation of other European leaders that the text is unlikely to be changed. The right hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) used to tell us about red lines that would not be crossed, the implication being that the Government would veto the treaty if they were crossed. The words "red lines" are nowhere to be found in the dossier. Instead we learn that the Government will "insist" on certain areas that the Foreign Secretary set out in his statement.

What does that insistence mean? If the Government's insistence in all or part fails, will they veto the treaty? We have a right to understand what the change of language means. If they will not veto the treaty, their insistence will, as I suspect, prove pretty meaningless. Anyway, most of the areas of so-called insistence are on issues that are already pretty well conceded, although I am sure that in due course they will be publicly spun by the Government as significant victories.

The Foreign Secretary has previously talked about constructively improving the treaty, and he has also told us again today that he believes in a Europe of nation states. The current draft treaty proposes something very different, namely a distinct political entity with all the key elements of a state, and no amount of prime ministerial bluster can disguise that fact. If the Foreign Secretary means what he says, there should be many more areas of insistence to achieve that goal of a Europe of nation states.

The Foreign Secretary should insist on opposing the legally binding and enforceable charter of fundamental rights, as the Government promised to do last year, instead of suggesting, as the White Paper does, that it will be left until the end of the IGC to decide what the Government's position will be. We all know what that means. He should insist on removing the explicit primacy of EU law enshrined in a constitution that fundamentally overrides our sovereignty. He should insist on deleting the proposed five-year presidency, which strikes at the heart of the whole concept of intergovernmentalism and marginalises smaller countries.

The Foreign Secretary should insist on striking out the proposal for a European diplomatic service, which is by definition the tool of a state. He should insist on preventing creeping integration by way of the so-called escalator clauses. He should insist on the principle that subsidiarity and proportionality should be enforceable by national Parliaments. Above all, he should insist that a written constitution is not only, as the Prime Minister told us two years ago, unnecessary, but totally inimical to the interests of the United Kingdom and should be scrapped. Such insistences would be proof of the Government's sincerity when they claim to be against the establishment of a European state, but none of them has been made.

What has happened to those other changes demanded in former amendments tabled by the right hon. Member for Neath? What has happened to the amendment to article III-162 on asylum, which he described in the amendment as fundamentally important? What has happened to the description of the proposal to create a EU Foreign Minister as unacceptable? If the Government have already backed down on those, as I believe they have, it does not augur well for any of their other areas of insistence.

This IGC is an unparalleled chance for the Government to act genuinely on behalf of the British people by fighting integration and resisting the onset of a European state. It is a vital opportunity to put forward a positive alternative vision of a new Europe, a genuine partnership of sovereign nations, as Conservative Members have been doing in recent months. *[Interruption.]* The White Paper tragically fails to do that, and for all Labour Members' laughter, its clear intention is to soften up the British people for the adoption of the constitution and the treaty as they stand, in a cynical exercise that shows yet again why the Government can no longer be trusted.

This is not so much a White Paper as a white flag, and the Government's docile surrender to the concept of a politically united Europe is a betrayal of trust. They can respond to that charge by letting the people decide who is telling the truth and who is speaking for Britain. A significant number of other European countries will be honest enough to trust their people on this issue in referendums. Why are our Government so frightened of trusting the people?

Whatever the spin, the changes proposed in the draft treaty are fundamental and constitutional. No Government have the right to agree them without the consent of the people. If they want to regain some of the trust that they have recently lost, they should start by trusting the people in a referendum.

Mr. Straw: I was hoping that we might have some forensic comments from the right hon. Gentleman. He

complains that he has had two hours to read the document, but I have to say that that is far longer than I used to get when I was in opposition. He has also had two months to read the full Convention text, and it is evident that he has not done so. He sought to create a fantasy of a European superstate, a piece of confection, and then to knock it down.

The right hon. Gentleman ought to be reading the text in the Command Paper, which is very clear, and, as I said, I published that not two hours but two months ago. Article I-9 in that document is very clear, and in terms of defending the interests of nation states, it is a far better text than that which the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues secured in Maastricht. The article makes it clear that the member states confer competences on the Union, not the other way round. Any competences not conferred on the Union remain with the member states.

The right hon. Gentleman says that the process is creating a European Union. I have to point out to him that that was created by the Maastricht treaty. That was part of the argument. He says that, outrageously, this process proposes to make European law superior to the law of the United Kingdom Parliaments and those of the other 24 member states. He is right to say that, but he forgot to say that that has been the central part of our law relating to the EU for 31 years.

Mr. Ancram: You are missing the point.

Mr. Straw: I do not think that I have missed the point at all. Thirty years ago, the argument about whether we should join the European Union turned critically on whether the House and the country were willing to accept that where the EU agreed legal changes, they had primacy over the law of this Parliament. What the House decided then, and what the country decided by referendum in 1975, was that European law would indeed have primacy over UK law in order that we were able to share the benefits of EU membership. That was the bargain that was struck, and nothing in this treaty changes the nature of that bargain.

The right hon. Gentleman then went on about subsidiarity and enforceability. His colleagues in the House of Lords looked at the draft proposal on subsidiarity, and they, not me, complimented that proposal, which is now in the text of the Union, saying that it would shift the balance of power

"from the Commission in favour of the Member States if the proposals . . . are adopted".

Obviously the right hon. Gentleman has not read that report or looked at the names of the members of that Committee, but I can tell him that it has five Conservative members, including a distinguished former Chief Whip of this House, Michael Jopling, and someone who is not known for his fantastic enthusiasm for all aspects of the EU, Norman Lamont. At least he had the good grace to recognise that, as the Committee said, this does represent a shift in the balance of power from the Commission to nation states.

I appreciate the difficulties faced by the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram). Here is a man who, in developing his political career, was strongly in favour of the EU. Many of us in the House will remember the dark days of the Conservative party, when, in 1992 and 1993, it was writing an extremely long suicide note. The right hon. Gentleman, along with 12 other members of the current shadow Cabinet, argued passionately against a referendum on Maastricht. He also argued in favour of what was in the Maastricht treaty. In those days, he was even willing—as I am not, and nor are my Government or my party—to contemplate being a member of a European superstate.

I ask the House to listen carefully to the right hon. Gentleman's words because they are confusing at first blush. He said:

"I said at the beginning that I did not want to be part of a European superstate. Equally, I do not want to find myself in a country that is outside a European superstate". —[*Official Report*, 4 November 1992; Vol. 213, c. 343.]

That was perhaps a less eloquent part of his speech, but overall he was endorsing Maastricht.

In this White Paper we have set out in detail not only what is proposed in the Convention but what was decided at Maastricht, and I invite the right hon. Gentleman to refresh his memory of Maastricht. It changed the European Community to the European Union and extended the EU's competence to a number of new policy areas, including economic and monetary policy, social policy, education, vocational training and youth, culture, public health, consumer protection, trans-European networks, industry and development. It introduced the co-decision for the European Parliament, a fundamental change in the running of the EU, and extended or introduced qualified majority voting to 30 policy areas. I repeat that on any analysis the Maastricht treaty involved a greater and more significant change to the way in which the Union operates than does that which is before us.

Lastly, the right hon. Gentleman said that the set of proposals was inimical to the interests of the European Union and should be scrapped. I look forward to hearing from him what his position and that of his party is in respect of the EU. Are they manoeuvring themselves, as many members of the Opposition Front-Bench team are, including the Leader of the Opposition, to a position where they are proposing to leave the EU and to disengage altogether?

I do not pretend that the EU is perfect—far from it. However, after 37 years of experience, I believe that we are better in it than out of it. We are better making the best of it for Britain in it than out of it. I know that the body that is totally inimical to the interests of Britain is the Conservative party.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. I welcome also what I hope was an open-ended commitment by the Government to parliamentary scrutiny, be it in the Chamber, in Select Committees or in the Standing Committee on the Inter-Governmental Conference, which he reported to the House today. The European Scrutiny Committee is looking forward to my right hon. Friend giving evidence to us tomorrow on his White Paper, and I look forward to welcoming him.

I offer one word of caution, and it refers to the Standing Committee on the treaty. Will my right hon. Friend have a word with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House about consulting colleagues who

[Mr. Jimmy Hood]

were members of the Standing Committee to learn from the lessons that clearly helped to improve the scrutiny of the Convention? I am sure that those lessons will serve the House well if we consult before the Standing Committee is set up.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he said. I have always believed in open-ended scrutiny of Ministers. I look forward to submitting myself to that process, including before my hon. Friend's Committee tomorrow.

Scrutiny will need to take place at three sets of levels. One of those levels should be Select Committees, including the one that my hon. Friend chairs. In some specific areas, I do not doubt that subject departmental Select Committees will wish to be involved in examining carefully how various drafts of the text are likely to operate. I anticipate that that will be the case especially in relation to foreign policy and defence. Secondly, there should be scrutiny on the Floor of the House, and thirdly in Standing Committee. As I was not a parliamentary representative on the Convention, I obviously did not attend Standing Committee. However, I understand the point that my hon. Friend is making. I accept the need to consult him and his colleagues and, indeed, Mr. Speaker, the chairman of the Committee and yourself, to ensure that the process operates effectively.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): The Foreign Secretary was right to shake us out of our domestic introspection by reminding us of the significance of enlargement and the consequences for those countries that have thrown off the yoke of communism and embraced liberal democracy. It is right that we should remember that when we consider the detail as far as it affects ourselves.

I had no difficulty reading the 60 pages in the time allotted. If I have a criticism of the White Paper, it is that it does not contain much that I have not heard before. Of the 60 pages, only 12 were devoted to the Government's opinion of the Convention text. May we take it that elsewhere will we see a detailed critique by the Government of the terms of the text?

I agree about the areas that are sometimes described as red lines for example, tax, social security, defence and own resources. I agree that they should remain the exclusive responsibility of the House. They are a necessary part of the sovereignty of the Parliament to which we are elected.

As for the charter of fundamental rights, paragraph 103 reads:

"The Government will make a final decision on incorporation of the Charter into the draft Constitutional Treaty only in the light of the overall picture at the IGC."

That may not be byzantine, but it is certainly delphic. Do the Government have as a reserve position the vetoing of the whole process if they are not satisfied with the outcome of their negotiations in relation to the charter of fundamental rights?

Why is it that the Government set themselves so implacably against the idea of a referendum on a treaty that in my judgment raises constitutional implications, not least in relation to the charter of fundamental rights? Surely a Government confident of their own position would be comfortable in seeking the endorsement of the people of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Straw: On that last point, it is not a question of being comfortable. I am very comfortable with the position that I and the Government have adopted. It is about what is appropriate. I have already said that in this country we have had, and will have in future, referendums when we are joining or, in one case, voting to leave an institution. In a European Union context, it was right to have a referendum in 1975. We should have had one in 1972 or 1973 as we were joining but, as I said, we had one in 1975. It is obviously right that when faced with a new economic institutional proposal—that of whether to join the euro or not—there should be a referendum on the issue.

The House needs to have some confidence in its own judgments. We have dealt with European Union constitutional treaties—my party has taken a consistent view on them, and I think that even the right hon. and learned Gentleman's party has in the past—by the parliamentary process. I believe that that is the appropriate way forward.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman says that the White Paper does not contain much that we have not heard before. I take it as a compliment that we have at least been consistent in the negotiating approach that we have adopted.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Consistently wrong.

Mr. Straw: Consistently right. I have no doubt that the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) will catch your eye later, Mr. Speaker.

As the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) will recall, there were four occasions before the summer break when we discussed these matters in great detail. Further detail will be provided about our negotiating position, not least in cross-examination by various Select Committees. I am glad that he endorses our position on the red lines.

There is nothing particularly delphic about paragraph 103. Given the nature of the charter of fundamental rights, we must ensure that the text properly protects what we want it to protect. We will not be able to make the final judgment on that until we have seen the rest of the text. In other words—the right hon. and learned Gentleman asked me about the veto—nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): There is much in the Government's approach to the IGC and the Convention that I want to support. However, there is an equal number of issues that I have serious concerns about. The weakest arguments that I find in the Government's approach are those that are deployed against having a referendum. The White Paper is clear that the Convention and the IGC will affect the lives of every man, woman and child in this country and will impact on the way in which we govern ourselves. In these circumstances, and given the fact that many other member states have decided to hold referendums, why

are the Government so insistent that the people of this country should not be consulted on the way in which they are governed?

Mr. Straw: It is a question of judgment whether the changes in the draft, if they were agreed, would fundamentally change the nature of the relationship between this Parliament, this country and the European Union, and I do not believe that they would. In the White Paper, we have not used the language that he suggested about how the changes will fundamentally affect the lives of people in the United Kingdom.

It is certainly true that an enlarged Union will fundamentally affect people's lives here, and that is why all parties in the House have been committed to it. It needs to be understood that the argument for the changes is to make enlargement work. However, if it happened that the Convention process ran into the ground and one country or another did not ratify it, then, to put it bluntly, it would not be the end of the world. We would have to get by with Nice. My objection to Nice is that it is unsatisfactory and inefficient, but it is not that there is a different level in terms of the relationship between member states and the European Union and between Nice and what is now proposed, except that under these proposals the European Council Heads of Government will in practice gain more authority with a small "a" because they will have a full-time president who will be able better to match the European Commission. In addition, we have the important proposals in respect of subsidiarity.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): Does the Foreign Secretary recognise that, by holding a large number of referendums over the past six years, the Government have already changed the constitution of this country? Would not other countries have taken more seriously some of the positions that he has now had to abandon if the Government took more seriously the views of the people of this country and were prepared to hold a referendum? Given that the Prime Minister has instead called for parliamentary scrutiny of the treaty—a statement in itself sufficiently remarkable from the Prime Minister that it betrays the absence of other arguments—will the Foreign Secretary commit himself to that treaty being scrutinised clause by clause on the Floor of the House by all right hon. and hon. Members?

Mr. Straw: The question of the scrutiny of any treaty proposals will proceed in the normal way and, of course, constitutional matters will be considered in the way that applies to any European Union treaty. I am not going to anticipate the precise nature of the arrangements for that. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] The House knows that, but I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman is committed to proper and effective parliamentary scrutiny.

We put our approach to the intergovernmental conference to the British people at the last election. We said in our manifesto:

"Labour wants the next Inter-governmental Conference in 2004"

Mr. William Cash (Stone): The manifesto did not say what the constitution would contain.

Mr. Straw: I am sorry, but with great respect, the shadow Attorney-General, unusually for him, he gets things wrong, but he at least reads the text unlike his right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary—is saying that we never mentioned it. I am quoting directly from the Labour manifesto, a document branded on the hearts of all Conservatives because of the historic defeat that it produced. It said:

"Labour wants the next Inter-governmental Conference in 2004 to address public concerns about the way the EU works, spelling out in a clear statement of principles what should and should not be done at European level. Labour supports a stronger role for national parliaments in European affairs."

We have delivered that, and there was no suggestion—we knew that the IGC was coming—in our manifesto that we would go for a referendum, and we all know what the result was.

May I tell the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) that in other countries the view is that Britain did very well in respect of the negotiations? *Le Monde* said:

"The British government is pleased with the Convention and has every right to be so. The text meets virtually all its expectations and allays most of its fears".

Robert Badinter, one of the leading French constitutional experts said that, as a result of the way in which we operated, the constitution for the Europe of the 25 could now be dubbed "la britannique". It may also be helpful to know that when the text was becoming clear, one of the leading federalists, Giuliano Amato, was so sad that he said:

"I want to kill myself".

Mr. Bercow: Is that intellectually conclusive?

Mr. Straw: No, it is just suggestive of the fact that we did rather well in the Convention, and we hope to do even better in the IGC.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: May I appeal to the House for brief questions and, along with that, brief answers?

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): May I urge my right hon. Friend to look again at the question of a referendum? I cannot believe that, deep down, he believes that the changes that the new constitution will bring about are not worthy of a referendum. Like me, he supported a referendum on Maastricht. A referendum would give us a stronger negotiating position and would mean that, if the people of this country wanted to be committed to the European Union, they would feel that they had the right to support it.

Mr. Straw: On a point of fact, I did not support a referendum on Maastricht. The record shows that I was against it and voted against a referendum. On the wider issues raised by my hon. Friend, I have already explained the Government's position. I urge colleagues on both sides of the House to look carefully at the text and the White Paper so that they can say where in the text, taken as a whole, there is a fundamental change in the wrong way in the nature of the relationship between member states and the European Union. I frankly think that they will find that very difficult.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): Why are the Government spinning the fantastic distortion that they

[Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory]

have achieved most of their aims already except for a handful of issues that are still to be decided? Will the Foreign Secretary confirm to the House that, in the European Convention, the Government tabled over 200 amendments to the draft constitution? I have the list here. Only 11 were accepted, so what has happened the other 189 issues which the Government opposed? Why has the White Paper downgraded or, in most cases, dropped entirely any reference to all those other issues to which the Government objected? Will the Government drop this absurd strategy of fastening on a handful of red line issues on which they think that they can claim victory, ignoring all the other objections that they made in the Convention and which they are now carefully forgetting?

Mr. Straw: We are not forgetting other changes.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: They are not in the White Paper.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman is making an error in insinuating that the draft from the Convention is the final word—it is not.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The objections are not in the White Paper.

Mr. Straw: I am talking about the draft produced by the Convention. The Heads of Government at Thessaloniki said that it was a good basis for starting the negotiations. I am not going to anticipate what will happen at the IGC, but a great many amendments will be submitted by many member states. As for the right hon. Gentleman's arithmetic—I shall come back to him if am proved wrong—what often happens in negotiations is that one member state submits language and another member state submits similar language. He will remember improbably, he was Minister for Europe—that, in the end, as a result of negotiation, language is agreed that is not necessarily the same as that originally submitted, but which is acceptable. I said in my opening statement that there are other areas, which, I am sure, were covered by some of those 200 amendments, that require technical improvements. There are other issues, too, that we intend to raise in the negotiations.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): The Foreign Secretary helpfully said that one area on which the Government will insist on unanimity is future treaty changes. In that context, can he help me with what seems to be more than just a linguistic inconsistency? The Command Paper talks about the draft constitution treaty for the European Union and a clear treaty structure. The document that the Convention handed over to the Heads of Government at Thessaloniki referred to a

"draft treaty establishing a constitution for Europe"

Most of the people who wrote that—I am not one of them—were quite clear that they wished to move away from the treaty structure and establish an independent constitutional structure, which would mean that there would be no future treaty ratifications. If the Government are committed to treaties, what will they do to ensure that a treaty structure remains?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend makes an important point. This is, in our judgement, a draft constitutional treaty and I have just spotted the fact that that is included on the cover, as provided by the European Convention to which my hon. Friend referred. We are clear that the basis of the European Union must be a treaty basis, and that is why I have spelt out today the fact that we have to keep the veto and proper processes for any treaty changes.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): Just before he rose to speak, the Foreign Secretary heard the Deputy Leader of the House assert the sovereignty of the House. That is only meaningful in the democratic age, as Winston Churchill said, as a shorthand for the sovereignty of the people. The Foreign Secretary prayed in aid a referendum that took place over a quarter of a century ago on a very different proposition from that facing the British people and the House today. It is not good enough, and everyone knows that it is not. Maastricht purported to establish things that were irrevocable and irreversible, and they will be included in the constitution. It is therefore imperative that the sovereign people of this country should have the right to judge whether the measures that have been taken in their name in recent years are what they want.

Mr. Straw: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's point. I was praying in aid the distinction between a referendum on whether to join or leave the European Union and the proposition for a referendum on a constitutional treaty such as this, and saying what that distinction was. In arguing against a referendum, I was praying in aid the precedent of the previous Government—I know that he did not agree with it, but most members of the then shadow Cabinet did so—in deciding against holding a referendum either on the Single European Act 1986, which made profound changes and introduced qualified majority voting, or on Maastricht. I happen to think that that was the right approach and I am surprised that, without any good basis at all, some Opposition Front Benchers have now changed their minds.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the vision set out eloquently by the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) is shared by no other country, whether by an existing or accession member of the Union, and that the logic of his shopping list is therefore that of withdrawal?

In terms of parliamentary accountability, especially for common foreign and security policy and European security and defence policy, what mechanism would my right hon. Friend devise to ensure such accountability beyond Select Committees, the Floor of this House and the new Committee, at an all-European level, including both national Parliaments and the European Parliament? Finally, as the accession of 10 new countries is such a grand thing to celebrate, how does he propose that we in Britain celebrate enlargement next May?

Mr. Straw: My right hon. Friend referred to a vision, but I would say that the right hon. Member for Devizes

(Mr. Ancram) has a fantasy about Europe that is not shared by any other country. Indeed, were the Conservatives suddenly to find themselves in government, they would betray Britain's interest and undermine the basis of its prosperity with their current approach. The simple truth of the matter is that the strategy set out by the leader of the Conservative party is, step by step, to put the United Kingdom in a position in which it has to leave the European Union. Indeed, that is what he has often talked about.

My right hon. Friend made some points about common foreign and security policy—

Donald Anderson: At an all-Europe level.

Mr. Straw: That would be done in part by the European Parliament. However, let us be clear that we in the United Kingdom are against any Communitisation of the CFSP and therefore against the European Parliament, which represents voters around Europe but not nation states, having a formal role in the settling of common foreign and security policy.

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): In 1975, at the time of the last referendum, we had already been a member of the European Union for two and a half years. The question put to the British people was whether they approved of Harold Wilson's renegotiation. The consequences of their not approving would have been that we either left or sought some other arrangement. The consequences of a no vote in a referendum on this constitution would be very similar, so I do not believe that the constitutional position is any different. However, I do not want the Foreign Secretary to re-rehearse his arguments for or against a referendum. I want him to tell the House whether he believes that, if the Government are successful at the IGC, the British people will support continued membership under the new constitution. If he does, why does he not feel that that could be legitimised by the British people voting in a referendum?

Mr. Straw: I am quite clear that the British people support membership of the European Union. Of course, they also have criticisms of the way in which it operates, as do I, but what they want is a Government who stand up for Britain's interests and get the best deal for Britain in terms of prosperity, and also help to secure the peace across Europe.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): There are many on both sides of the House who oppose our involvement in Europe or have done so for many years, and their position has not changed. However, I welcome the White Paper, as I believe that it is an opportunity to discuss in detail the effects of what has emanated from the European Convention. In the light of the low turnout of 59 per cent. in the previous general election, what level of participation would my right hon. Friend expect in a referendum in this country on the Convention?

Mr. Straw: I am sorry to say to my hon. Friend that I have no idea about his last point, as it is a hypothesis on a hypothesis. I am grateful for his welcome of the White Paper as an opportunity for Parliament to do its proper job in scrutiny. I find it odd that Opposition Members seem to lack confidence in their ability effectively to scrutinise what the Government are doing.

Angus Robertson (Moray): The Foreign Secretary will be aware that there is consternation in fishing communities in Scotland about the treatment of fishing policy in the draft constitution. He will also be aware of the views of the European Scrutiny Committee, which is concerned about the prospect of exclusive EU competence in the conservation of marine biological resources under the common fisheries policy. Why then did he make no mention of fisheries policy in his statement or in the whole paper? Is it because like the Heath Government, he views fishing as expendable, or as the irrelevance that the current Government treat it as?

Mr. Straw: It is neither. We happen to think that fishing is extremely important, and I know of its importance, particularly to Scottish communities.

Angus Robertson: Why is it not included?

Mr. Straw: The reason why it is not included—this has been the subject of correspondence between his party and me—is that the key competencies from which restrictions on fishing arise are already exclusive.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that, since 1 January 1973, the Common Market and the European Union have not been one great big happy family, as has been evidenced by recent events over Iraq as well? Does he also agree that there has been a loss of manufacturing jobs since 1 January 1973, despite the fact that the great visionaries of the Common Market said that that would not happen? What guarantees can he give us that, in this wonderful new 25-member group, loss of manufacturing jobs will be stemmed? How much more will we be paying on the common agricultural policy as a result of the inclusion of a further 10 members?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is, as ever, correct in saying that the European Union has not been one great big happy family since 1973 or even since a more recent date. Whatever the arguments were—I remember them well—about whether we should join the European Union or stay in in 1975, the truth is that it would not be in Britain's economic interest for us to leave the European Union or damage our national interest in it. I am quite clear that unemployment would be higher. There is a separate issue about manufacturing that is not directly related to our membership of the European Union. Overall, we and British work people stand to benefit greatly by the enlargement of the European Union.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that, in many ways, the protection of British interests about which hon. Members are concerned is best guaranteed by enlargement itself? Will he accept from me that it is welcome that the 10 applicant members will be full participating members of the IGC, but ensure that, having not been part of the negotiations, they will have the right to have their

[Malcolm Bruce]

concerns considered? Many of them say that they did not escape from the Soviet Union and acquire their new independence merely to give it up. It is absurd to think that they are signing up in referendums to accession with such enthusiasm in anything other than the belief that their independence is being enhanced.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about the position of the accession states. They are proud of their sovereignty and are not going to give it up. That also applies to the other member states. Whatever the question of their involvement in the Convention, those 10 accession countries are now participating on equal terms with European Union Foreign Ministers and will participate on equal terms in the IGC. Under the decisions made at Thessaloniki and Copenhagen, they have the same rights of veto over the final text as any other member state.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I assume that Her Majesty's Government are not supporting a referendum because the history of referendums on Europe is that if Governments do not get the right answer they keep on having them until they do.

Since health is not one of the areas that is protected by a veto in the document, will the Foreign Secretary confirm in good faith that if the national health service is told that it must agree to a system of patient payment, Her Majesty's Government will not only oppose, but not accept, such instructions?

Mr. Straw: Yes.

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): Given that the Government are obviously going to be too cowardly to hold a referendum to consult the British people on this new constitution for Britain and Europe, will the Foreign Secretary at least undertake to abide by the result of an independent referendum, conducted with the co-operation of the Electoral Reform Society and with cross-party support, in which every elector is consulted? Would he accept that result?

Mr. Straw: No, especially if it is to be run by *The Spectator*.

Skin Piercing

1.31 pm

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for cosmetic body piercing and micropigmentation; and for connected purposes.

Local authorities currently have the power to regulate any place that performs ear-piercing, tattooing, acupuncture and electrolysis. In recent years, however, a growing number of young people—I confess that I am not one of them—have had various parts of their bodies pierced, and new forms of permanent and semi-permanent tattoos have become popular. I do not share their enthusiasm, but, as my constituency has large numbers of students, I know that such things can become incredibly popular. All such cosmetic procedures involve needles—which, however fine they may be, pierce the skin—and, in the case of semi-permanent tattoos, dyes. Piercing the skin leads to the risk of infections and their transmission. The potential health risks if equipment is not properly sterilised and hygiene is not respected range from the serious, such as the transmission of HIV, hepatitis B and blood poisoning, to the less serious, such as septic injuries and inflammations.

It is surprising that current legislation does not cover some of the more fashionable and recently introduced body piercing and cosmetic procedures. Ear-piercing is covered, but other parts of the body are not. Similarly, the traditional form of tattooing is covered, but the semi-permanent forms are not. London has had the power to regulate all such establishments since 1991. I wish that power to be extended to all local authorities in England and Wales. Ensuring that all establishments are registered and observe the byelaws and standards of cleanliness would contribute to public health, consumer protection and, in extreme cases, save lives.

In February, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn)—she is sorry that she cannot be in the Chamber today, as she is away on parliamentary business—secured an Adjournment debate in which she described the tragic case of one of her constituents, Daniel Hindle, a healthy, active teenager with a passion for music. Daniel and his girlfriend went to an establishment in Sheffield, doing what many teenagers do. His girlfriend had her eyebrows pierced and he had his lip pierced. Daniel had been born with a heart defect, but as he had had a healthy and active life he did not think that by having his lip pierced he would risk his health. No one drew attention to any risks, so he went ahead. A few days later, he became ill and was admitted to hospital. He was infected with septicaemia—blood poisoning—which attacked all his major organs and left him so weakened that he could not fight the infection. A few days later, he died.

There is no suggestion that the studio in Sheffield did anything wrong within the current law. It did not warn him because it had no duty to do so. There was a voluntary code, but there were no regulations. The Bill would change that. Voluntary codes of practice, which are used in some areas, are helpful, but they should be put on to a statutory footing. All local authorities need

to have the power of regulation that is available in London, so that establishments that perform all forms of body piercing will issue the appropriate warnings and provide the appropriate safe environment.

This is not a trivial matter. Fortunately, tragic cases like Daniel's are rare, but complications with less dramatic outcomes are numerous. In the past year, more than 95 per cent. of GPs in Greater Manchester treated complications caused by body piercing, and in 2001, incidences of damage to the ear in England and Wales increased by almost 2,000.

As I considered the matter more closely, another aspect came to my attention—henna tattoos. Fortunately, the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson), who has responsibility for public health, is sitting on the Front Bench, so I hope that she will take note of this. Many families who go on holiday to islands such as Tenerife and Cyprus find numerous stores that offer henna tattoos to children. Because there is no piercing of the skin and henna is a natural dye it is assumed that it carries no risk, but a black dye containing a chemical called paraphenylenediamine—PPD—has caused many cases of allergic reaction. For example, two brothers from Birmingham—one was eight, the other was 10—went at the same time to have a body tattoo in Tenerife. When young Kalum Beckford got home he had developed a tremendous infection as a result of his tattoo and is scarred for life—the Bart Simpson tattoo on his arm will never disappear. His brother, however, suffered no adverse effects. Jade Yates, a child from Staffordshire, will be scarred for life by a henna tattoo.

The Department of Health already issues guidance to those travelling abroad advising them to be careful about any procedures involving needles. It should also draw attention to the problem of henna tattoos for small children. All the cases that I have come across involve children under the age of 10. It is unclear what causes the allergic reaction; it may simply be their youth. I recognise that henna tattoos are strictly outside the scope of my Bill, but I wish to put the matter on record.

The gist and the essence of the Bill that I wish to introduce is that local authorities across England and Wales should be extended the powers that London already has to regulate all establishments that perform any kind of tattooing, whether permanent or semi-permanent, and any body piercing, whether to the ear or any other part. That would be a contribution to public safety and health. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Ms Gisela Stuart, Ms Meg Munn, Richard Burden, Mr. Philip Hammond, Dr. Evan Harris and Ms Ann Coffey.

SKIN PIERCING

Ms Gisela Stuart accordingly presented a Bill to make provision for cosmetic body piercing and micropigmentation; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 21 November, and to be printed [Bill 155].

Opposition Day

[15TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Military Situation in Iraq

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): We now come to the first debate on the Opposition motions. Mr. Speaker has not selected the amendment.

1.39 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of the military situation in Iraq.

The motion is not designed to divide the House. It is a sad fact that the debate has been made necessary by a combination of the reluctance of the Secretary of State for Defence to make a proper oral statement to the House yesterday about the military situation in Iraq—*[Interruption.]* We received a pretty strong impression that the Government would try to shelter the Secretary of State by whichever means they could. The debate is also rendered necessary by the fact that post-conflict occupation of Iraq is proving a very different experience from what was anticipated.

First, nothing should detract from the huge achievement of the British, American and other coalition forces earlier this year. American and British forces achieved their military objectives with extraordinarily few civilian casualties. In particular, the painstaking way in which 7th Armoured Brigade and 16th Air Assault Brigade took Basra and the surrounding towns will go down as a new textbook standard for how to fight a 21st-century war. We remain in no doubt about the prize that the military victory represents for freedom, regional and global security in the long term and, most immediately, the long-oppressed people of Iraq.

We do not resile from the achievements of our armed forces or our support for the decision to go to war. We should not dismiss what has been achieved since the end of the combat phase. The leader who possessed and used weapons of mass destruction, never abandoned the ambition to obtain chemical, biological and nuclear capabilities and defied the United Nations to the end in his attempt to achieve his objectives, is gone. With the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, Iraq is no longer a state sponsor of terror. Many key figures in his evil regime have been tracked down, killed or captured, including his two notorious sons.

We should welcome and acknowledge that, throughout Iraq, 37,000 Iraqi police have been trained or retrained and are now taking on their proper role. A new Iraqi army is being recruited, trained and equipped and will progressively take on at least a share of the security role. Thousands of tonnes of arms and ammunition have been seized throughout Iraq and destroyed.

Politically, a 25-member national governing council has been established and will create a preparatory commission to write a constitution. There are municipal councils in all major cities and 85 per cent. of towns, thus enabling Iraqis to take responsibility for managing local affairs.

[Mr. Bernard Jenkin]

That precious progress should confirm to anybody who cares about fundamental human rights that the terrible price of even the limited war was worth it. Moreover, there can be no going back.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): On the price of the war, how many Iraqi civilians were killed or injured as a result of it or its aftermath?

Mr. Jenkin: The number of Iraqi civilians who were killed during the conflict is a tiny proportion of Iraqis and other civilians who were killed by Saddam Hussein during his reign of terror. That should occupy the hon. Gentleman, who has a record of speaking up for human rights in the House.

There can be no going back.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): In answer to the question of the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith), I believe that the generally acknowledged figure is more than 6,000.

I do not want to interrupt the flow of the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), since he is trying to support and oppose the Government at the same time. However, he said that things had not turned out as expected—expected by whom?

Mr. Jenkin: I shall deal with that later. It should be possible to criticise some Government actions and support others. People would have more respect for politics in this country if it were more constructive than destructive.

As one of the occupying powers, the United Kingdom has a moral and legal obligation to see through the political, social and physical reconstruction of Iraq. In the British sector, progress is due almost entirely to the extraordinary dedication of our armed forces on the ground. When I visited 7th Brigade headquarters in May, soldiers were not simply providing security but restoring utilities and public services, providing medical assistance, restoring local health care facilities and helping local people to reopen schools, community centres and even local newspapers. They were rationing fuel, taking food and potable water to where it was needed, running the railway system from Basra to Umm Qasr and even the banking system. The latter involved a daily decision by the responsible officer about the way in which to control the quantity of money in circulation to prevent inflation.

However, there are clear limits to the amount that soldiers can be expected to achieve. In May, our officers on the ground were asking, "Where is the Department for International Development?" When my right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary visited at the end of July, they were asking the same question. Precious little genuine construction has been taking place.

My right hon. Friend has also tabled a written question asking how many contracts have been let and are in progress. If the Secretary of State for Defence can provide an answer today, I am sure that it will be illuminating. Lack of tangible improvements in living conditions in Iraq is increasing Iraqi frustration with and cynicism about the coalition, and creating ever more challenges for our armed forces.

British commanders warned in May and July that remnants of the ousted regime, backed by terrorists from outside Iraq, would become an increasing threat. According to some reports, hundreds if not thousands of insurgents from Saddam Hussein's former Government have organised into cells, especially in the Sunni-dominated areas in and around Baghdad. The nature of their resistance is clouded by the presence of hundreds of criminals freed from Iraqi jails just before the war and as many as 1,000 foreign fighters, mainly Islamic militants, who have filtered into Iraq from Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Jordan. Some are suspected of direct ties to al-Qaeda. They have been getting better organised and play on the widening disillusion among ordinary Iraqis.

Why did Ministers apparently ignore those warnings? What intelligence existed before the conflict to show that armed opposition would become a problem afterwards? We have had to accept the terrible news of further British casualties, and I am sure that all Members want to pay tribute to our servicemen who have been killed in the course of their duties and extend our deepest sympathy to their families and friends.

The Government are sending reinforcements when our armed forces are already overstretched and trying to recover their readiness for future military operations. Although increased military capability is clearly necessary to deal with the increased terrorist threat and the continuing burden of so many civilian tasks on our soldiers in Iraq, the reinforcement underlines the fact that the post-conflict plans, if they existed, have gone wrong.

Before the conflict—I quote my right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary—we made clear what had to happen before any military action:

"We need to hear from the Government that there is a blueprint—that there are plans and resources—so that a democratic, prosperous and renewed Iraq can quickly enter the family of nations and the global economy."—[*Official Report*, 24 September 2002; Vol. 390, c. 39.]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I did not catch whether the hon. Gentleman said that the Government were right or wrong to send extra forces to Iraq at this stage.

Mr. Jenkin: I have made that perfectly clear and I am surprised that the Secretary of State has not noticed. We support his decision but the reasons for its necessity are worth probing. If he is trying to reduce our military commitments and has withdrawn forces from Iraq only to have to start sending them back a few months later, I suggest that something has gone wrong. Does he deny that?

Mr. Hoon: If the hon. Gentleman agrees with the Government's decision to send extra forces, does he accept that it does not help the armed forces if he makes erroneous claims about their being overstretched?

Mr. Jenkin: I seem to recall the recently departed Chief of the Defence Staff pointing out that it would take some 18 months for the British armed forces fully to recover their readiness for future military operations of the kind that we saw earlier this year. Perhaps the Secretary of State has forgotten that discussion. Perhaps

he was not at that particular meeting, but it was certainly widely reported in the press. It is well understood that, with such a high proportion of the British Army committed to military operations, its training and readiness cycle is under significant strain. More particularly, on a personal level, many members of the armed forces have had their leave cancelled or their training delayed, which affects their personal morale and capability. If the Secretary of State is in denial about the problem of overstretch in the armed forces, I fear for their future.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): The shadow Secretary of State has detailed some of the visits that he made after the war and the discussions that he had with our military commanders about the prospect of civil disintegration in Iraq. Did he, however, raise his concerns about such a prospect when he visited our troops before the conflict, both in theatre and outside, and when he had discussions with the Secretary of State at that time?

Mr. Jenkin: I did not think that front-line commanders preparing for a conflict would have to worry about what the Department for International Development and the Government back home should have been worrying about. They were more concerned about whether there were going to be enough chemical suits or whether the food was going to be delivered on time to their soldiers, and about some of the other problems that our overstretched logistics were presenting to them.

Mr. Keetch: I would like to press the hon. Gentleman on this point, because I am aware that he visited the Gulf before the war and that he had discussions with the Secretary of State at that time. The commanders certainly expressed to me their concerns about what might happen after the war. We probed that matter and, indeed, went to the United States and spoke to representatives of US Central Command about it. Did the Conservative shadow Secretary of State carry out the same exercise?

Mr. Jenkin: We had a whole debate in the House—in January, I think—on post-conflict planning. It was then that the Government gave us assurances that planning would be in place, and it is for them to explain why those plans have turned out to be so different.

Increased military capability is clearly necessary to deal with the increased terrorist threat and the continuing burden that so many civilian tasks place on our soldiers in Iraq. But this reinforcement underlines how the post-conflict plans have gone wrong. The Prime Minister assured the House on 3 February that he had to have a plan

"every bit as viable and well worked out as a military plan."—[*Official Report*, 3 February 2003; Vol. 399, c. 36.]

I questioned the Secretary of State for Defence on 3 April, during the conflict, as we became more concerned about the lack of preparation, but the only assurance that he would give about his "ambition" for post-conflict Iraq to be run by the Iraqi people was that it was just that: an ambition. There was no sign of a plan.

We now know from the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Clare Short) that there was no plan. What does the Secretary of State have to say about that? Why on earth was the right hon. Lady allowed to stay in her post month after month, when she was so clearly seeking to obstruct the Government's policy? This underlines how weak the Prime Minister has become in his own party and his own Government. Presumably the Defence Secretary had discussions with the right hon. Lady, then his counterpart at the Department for International Development, about post-conflict reconstruction. What on earth did they discuss? Was he aware that there was no plan, when he committed British forces to this operation? More importantly, is there a plan now?

Yesterday's written statement says that

"the full scale of the requirement"—

for reinforcements—

"... has yet to be developed".

It goes on:

"The military capabilities needed will be identified as the detail of the plan's implementation takes shape."

Does this mean that there is still no fully formed plan? If we are committing further UK forces, what exactly are we committing them for? The Secretary of State's statement tells us that the requirement is

"driven by initiatives of the Coalition Provisional Authority and the Department for International Development (DFID) to accelerate reconstruction activities in Iraq".—[*Official Report*, 8 September 2003; Vol. 410, c. 2WS.]

That is a laudable aim. The Foreign Secretary told BBC Radio 4 this morning:

"The key task there is to make use of these troops to get the infrastructure back up and running."

Will the Secretary of State explain what is meant by that?

There is an urgent need for increased security, increased patrols, better protection of key points, convoys and installations, and better intelligence as well as a need to improve border security, disarm rebels, mediate between warring Iraqi factions and speed up the recruitment and training of the Iraqi military. Our soldiers are fighting a classic counter-insurgency war, for which their training and experience have well prepared them. Their priority must be to kill or capture the terrorists, but are we to believe the Government when they say that they are increasing the burden of essentially civilian tasks for our troops? The fact is that the reconstruction effort has been painfully slow, and rectifying that is a key priority in restoring Iraqi public confidence in the coalition provisional authority. Where are the civilian agencies and contractors that should be undertaking these tasks?

Will the Secretary of State tell us whether there is a clear plan? If there is, please will he publish a suitable summary of it for the House? Unless he can do so, in the light of the months that have already passed with so little reconstruction activity, why should we believe his assurances that any plan exists at all?

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Did not the shadow Secretary of State sit through the Foreign Secretary's statement yesterday, in which he went through plan after plan? *[Interruption.]* He did. He said, for example, that all 240 hospitals in Iraq are operating. That is probably better than France,

[Mr. George Foulkes]

considering the way things are at the moment. The Foreign Secretary outlined detailed plans yesterday. It is the shadow Secretary of State who seems to be in denial.

Mr. Jenkin: It might be the root of the problem that the Foreign Secretary's idea of detail is very different from ours. A few sketched aspirations do not constitute a strategic plan. There is a case for the Government publishing a proper document that includes details of how they plan to move forward and that sets out the military tasks rather than the civilian tasks that they expect our armed forces to undertake. I can tell the right hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) that there are people in the armed forces who are very worried about the lack of a strategic plan and about what the Government are taking on in Iraq without such a plan.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): Does the hon. Gentleman favour DFID employees and non-governmental organisations operating in Iraq when the security situation is not safe? If not, why is he criticising DFID?

Mr. Jenkin: I favour our military forces concentrating on the security tasks, so that those people can enter Iraq safely and carry out their tasks. That means that DFID will have to co-operate actively with the British armed forces and that the NGOs will have to work closely with our armed forces on the ground. That is the only way to improve the situation, rather than dumping on our soldiers all the jobs that they cannot do.

Mr. Salmond: We are witnessing the collapse of the pro-war coalition. Did it never occur to the hon. Gentleman, or to any Conservative Front Bencher, that given that the Government deceived the country over the reasons for going to war, they might well also have deceived us over the after-war preparations?

Mr. Jenkin: I am not here to play politics in this debate. I am here to hold the Government to account for their failure to plan properly for post-conflict Iraq. I am therefore asking the Secretary of State to publish a plan, perhaps in co-operation with his counterpart at DFID.

The Government have clearly been involved in promoting good will between the United States and our other allies in the United Nations. We certainly support a greater role for the United Nations if it will bring other nations in to support the coalition's effort to improve security, provided that there remains a coherent single military command, which, naturally, would be American. Will the Secretary of State spell out exactly what increased role for the UN he envisages, and how it will affect the conduct of military operations in Iraq?

The US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, has stated that the latest draft resolution contains

"invitations, direction, and other ways of inserting the UN in the development of a new Iraqi government".

If this is still not enough to appease French anti-US sentiment, what consideration has been given to a lead role for NATO? NATO is successfully leading the peacekeeping force in Kabul, and it has the experience and expertise to lead multi-national military operations in war-torn countries. There is great confidence and expectation at NATO headquarters that it should play a role. NATO has already been assisting the Polish armed forces in Iraq; moreover, it could decide to lead peacekeeping forces on the basis of a decision involving 18 rather than 19 in order to exclude any French obstructionism.

The prerequisite for avoiding what the Foreign Secretary's memorandum described as strategic failure in Iraq is the restoration of personal security, along with a tangible start on the rebuilding of Iraq. If we fail to achieve that soon, it will be difficult for genuine political reforms to take hold, and the political liberation from Saddam Hussein will be in danger of becoming the kind of foreign occupation that the Iraqi people resent and for which we have no ambition.

Iraq is already a magnet for terrorists who want to have a go at United States or United Kingdom soldiers. The horrific attack on the United Nations confirms that they want to destroy anything associated with the values of democracy and freedom. We cannot let them win.

There is every reason to be optimistic about the future of Iraq, provided that there is coherent planning and determined implementation. That holds out the prospect not just of democracy and prosperity for the Iraqi people for the first time, but, with all eyes in the middle east focused on Iraq, of a transformation of security throughout the region. The Government must convince the British people that those prizes are worth the money, the sweat and even the lives of the hard-pressed men and women of our armed forces. They have our admiration and good wishes as they face the challenges ahead.

2.2 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): Throughout the shadow Defence Secretary's speech, I hoped to hear one constructive suggestion of something that the official Opposition might do that would differ from the policy that the Government have pursued. Not once, in any part of his speech, was there the slightest indication that they would do other than pursue that policy.

Mr. Jenkin: I will tell the Secretary of State what we would have done differently. We would have had a plan at the outset for the post-conflict reconstruction of Iraq. The Government clearly have no such plan, as we have been told by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Clare Short).

Mr. Hoon: I will deal with that point in a second.

The House is all too aware of the tragic events in Iraq over the summer months. The bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August, in which the UN special representative Sergio de Mello, Fiona Watson and 19 others died, was a horrifying attack on an organisation dedicated to helping the Iraqi people. The bombing of the Imam Ali mosque in An Najaf, which killed more than 100 innocent people, demonstrated the contempt in which those responsible hold the future of Iraq and the lives of even their fellow citizens. No less tragic are the deaths of UK and other coalition troops, and the deaths of those—including

members of the new Iraqi police force—who have been targeted for working with the coalition. We are determined to find those responsible for the atrocities and bring them to justice, whether they are former regime loyalists or members of other extremist groups. We will not let them succeed in their efforts to destabilise Iraq.

The security situation in Iraq is undoubtedly difficult. We face challenges even in the south, where Shi'a hatred of Saddam and the Ba'ath party has generally made the population more welcoming of the coalition's presence. Organised crime has increased since the collapse of the old regime, partly because of the amnesty that Saddam granted to prisoners as coalition forces entered Iraq. Sabotage, copper theft and fuel smuggling are all damaging the local economy, and the consequent need to guard infrastructure until the Iraqis are fully able to do so for themselves diverts effort from the primary task of creating a generally more secure environment.

Yesterday I told the House of the outcome of the formal review of UK forces and resources in Iraq undertaken by the UK divisional commander in theatre. That review identified an immediate requirement for two additional battalions, 2nd Battalion The Light Infantry and 1st Battalion The Royal Green Jackets, together with some additional specialist personnel. Those additional forces, numbering some 1,200 people, are now being deployed to Iraq. Indeed, the 1st Light Infantry Company arrived in theatre over the weekend.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Can the Secretary of State give an indication of how many more troops he expects to send to Iraq in the next few months, under whose command and for how long British troops will be in Iraq, and when he expects all British and American forces to be withdrawn and to end the colonial occupation of the country?

Mr. Hoon: I do not accept my hon. Friend's conclusion, but I will certainly deal with his questions during my speech.

The extra forces will give commanders in theatre a range of additional capabilities to meet the growing number of military tasks that we face. Those tasks will include providing the coalition provisional authority with additional protection and improving our information-gathering capability in the divisional area of operations. Crucially, our extra personnel will also be involved in initiatives such as the training of additional indigenous Iraqi security organisations, in particular the Iraqi civil defence corps. Plans are being developed for a significant acceleration of the forming of 18 battalions of the ICDC, and we envisage their being able, over time, to take over many tasks from coalition forces.

It should be emphasised that we are deploying additional forces to Iraq to allow commanders to undertake more military tasks. The situation in Iraq is constantly evolving, as are the kinds of tasks being undertaken by UK forces.

Mr. Salmond: I thought that the reason for deploying extra forces to Iraq was to avoid strategic failure, to quote the Foreign Secretary. But given that it was the Government's bypassing of the processes of the United Nations that led us into this morass, might not ceding full authority to the UN now help us to get out of it? If the Government do not do that, we will face not strategic failure but the needless loss of many, many more lives.

Mr. Hoon: I do not accept that we bypassed the United Nations; and, as the hon. Gentleman well knows, discussions are taking place again in the UN about a further resolution to support the effort being made by the international community in Iraq.

At the end of July, General Lamb's review concluded that force levels were about right for the tasks at that time, although we rebalanced them slightly with the deployment of a small additional number of troops. That shows that we keep force levels under constant review to ensure that we can move the right capabilities into theatre at the right time to undertake tasks as they arise. Our flexible approach allows us to minimise the effect on our forces by ensuring that troops who do not need to be in Iraq can take some well-earned time off. I am sure the House agrees that it would be wrong to keep troops away from their families for any longer than necessary. We will continue to keep our force levels under review and to adjust our force numbers as necessary to meet United Kingdom and coalition military objectives.

We also intend to deploy a number of armoured patrol vehicles at the same time as the additional troops. That, too, is a requirement identified in GOC 3 division's review of the evolving situation in Iraq and the likely future capability requirements for UK forces. A full investigation of the incident that led to the tragic deaths of three members of the Royal Military Police on 23 August is continuing, but commanders constantly review the security situation, adapting protection measures to reflect different circumstances.

We have always said that local commanders are the people best placed to identify the capabilities that they require and how to use them. It is obviously crucial for service personnel to be issued with the right equipment, but force protection is as much about tactics, techniques and procedures as it is about specific items of protective equipment. While inevitably carrying an inherent risk, those tactics—described by some as a softly, softly approach—have been tried and tested in operations around the world and are crucial to achieving our objectives in Iraq.

No one ever suggested that it would be easy to restore stability in Iraq, certainly given the time frame that we have had since the end of hostilities. In the south particularly, the basic utilities—power and water supplies—were in a dreadful state as a result of the former regime's policy of deliberate neglect. The situation is now further complicated by looting and sabotage. I should emphasise, however, that that is the activity of a small criminal minority, not the population of the south as a whole.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I have been talking to some young people who have just returned from serving in Basra. What those soldiers have told me in my surgery certainly does not reflect the rosy picture that the Secretary of State paints of the south. Three soldiers

[Mrs. Alice Mahon]

who had done a six-month stint out there said that pressure is being brought to bear for them to go back. They said:

"The situation is getting much worse. They tolerated us at first; now they deeply resent us."

Mr. Hoon: I was not painting a rosy picture; indeed, I went to some lengths to point out the difficulties faced by our forces in the south. Equally, I do not accept my hon. Friend's assertion that the situation is getting significantly worse. The great majority of the population in the south are very supportive of the coalition's presence and understandably simply want basic infrastructure—fuel, power, water—of a standard that we would expect, compared with the standard that they suffered under Saddam Hussein's regime. I shall return to that issue in a moment.

Mr. Jenkin: I do not necessarily disagree with a great deal of what the right hon. Gentleman is saying, but will he clarify what the Foreign Secretary meant when he said on the radio this morning that the key task is to make use of these troops to get the infrastructure back up and running? Can he confirm that, as he seems to be saying, British armed forces will be concerned with security tasks and military training to enable the civilian agencies and contractors to come in, rather than with providing soldiers to do civilian jobs?

Mr. Hoon: Essentially, there is a need to ensure adequate power, for example. That can be achieved by moving in mobile generators, but there is not a lot of point in moving such generators in to the south of Iraq if they are then stolen and the metal sold in the scrap metal markets of Kuwait. The forces will be working with those providing the generation capability to ensure that such capability is providing electricity, not simply disappearing from the south.

Llew Smith: Can the Secretary of State explain why the Government can provide precise information about the number of our armed forces who were killed or injured as a result of the war and its aftermath, but cannot provide similar information about the number of Iraqi civilians killed or injured as a result of that conflict?

Mr. Hoon: I am sorry that my hon. Friend finds that question so difficult—I would have thought it self-evident that we keep a very close track of those whom we ask to perform tasks on behalf of the United Kingdom Government. It is obviously more difficult to identify with precision those who are killed in the course of a conflict, especially civilians. I would have thought that the answer is self-evident.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Although, as I said yesterday, I would wish to see many more countries involved in addition to those that already have troops in Iraq, is there not one fact that every single critic on both sides of the House must answer? How could such a murderous dictatorship, responsible for the murder and often brutal torture of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, be destroyed other than through what has happened in the past few months?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend has been a consistent supporter of the Government's position and I am grateful for his observations. Above all else, whatever the difficulties and problems with security and the basic infrastructure, those who visit southern Iraq all say the same thing: Iraq is an enormously better place now than it was under Saddam Hussein. Those people know that, and they are enormously grateful to the coalition and for the efforts that have been made.

Harry Cohen: Will the Secretary of State explain to the House why any other country—France, for example—should send troops to Iraq, given that President Bush made it clear that control of the occupation will be fully under the United States, and that he is not prepared to cede an inch of that?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend seizes on one particular example—France—overlooking the fact that the great majority of European nations are supportive of the coalition's position, and that up to 30 countries have sent forces. In a sense, it is for him to ask why all those countries are willing to help. Indeed, more countries have indicated their willingness to help, subject to a further United Nations resolution. There is a strong international coalition that wants the problems of Iraq to be resolved. I repeat to my hon. Friend the point that I made yesterday: whatever his doubts about the situation leading up to the conflict, and about the conflict itself—I recognise that he had them—surely he and all of those who oppose the conflict must recognise that the situation now requires that we make a determined effort to restore Iraq to the international community, and to provide precisely the structures that we are putting in place to allow Iraq's people not only to take responsibility for their own affairs, but to rebuild their country.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Does the Secretary of State think that the United States' position might change if countries such as France and Germany decided to deploy the quantity of troops that the Americans have stationed in Iraq?

Mr. Hoon: It is a fact that about 140,000 US troops are currently in Iraq, which says a considerable amount about the United States' determination to rebuild that country.

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): Will my right hon. Friend accept the words of Major Ivor Morgan, a constituent of mine who is serving in one of our field hospitals in Iraq? In writing from that field hospital, he makes it clear that the armed forces and Great Britain have a role—to give back to the people of Iraq what we all enjoy in England, namely, a life in which all people are free from tyranny, live equally and have choice, and live without fear where democracy exists. He wants to make sure that we all accept that this is an appropriate role for the armed forces, and that we support it.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I cannot improve on the comments that she has passed on to the House.

A few moments ago, I pointed out to the House the importance of working with an international coalition. As I said, it involves some 30 countries. Seven countries have already deployed forces under the United Kingdom's Divisional Command, making a valuable contribution to the provision of security. To accuse the coalition of losing the peace, as some have done, is to ignore the real progress that we and the Iraqi people have made, in spite of the difficulties. It risks the assumption that the terrorists who blow up the United Nations building or the Baghdad police headquarters somehow speak for the Iraqi people. They do not: on the contrary, the majority of Iraqis support the coalition and are delighted, as I have said, that Saddam has gone.

Most of Iraq is calm. Newspapers, shops, markets and many other aspects of normal daily life are flourishing. Children will soon be returning to school after their summer break. The coalition has recruited and trained 37,000 police; a facilities protection service that is some 14,000-strong is designed to guard Iraq's economic infrastructure from looting and sabotage; and there are also 2,500 border guards. A further increase in the number of these Iraqi security forces is a key priority for the coalition in the coming months. In addition, coalition forces are working with and supporting Iraqi leaders at both local and national level.

The Iraqi governing council, the establishment of which was welcomed in United Nations Security Council resolution 1500 as an important step towards the formation by the Iraqi people of an internationally recognised Government, has established a preparatory constitutional commission. This commission will put forward recommendations on the democratic drafting of a new constitution for Iraq—one that will enshrine human rights, transparency and justice for all of Iraq's ethnic and religious groups. The council has also sworn in a Cabinet of Ministers that is representative of Iraq's differing ethnic and religious groups. This is a major step forward in the process of transferring political control back to the Iraqi people. Our aim—the aim of all of those working together for Iraq's future—is to maintain this momentum, while building the secure environment within which progress in other areas can be made.

Ultimately, the key to Iraq's success will be political and economic development. While UK forces have so far done all that they can to repair waterworks and power lines, we need to make more rapid progress on rebuilding Iraq's basic infrastructure. We must also ensure that the Iraqi people feel involved in this reconstruction process. The riots in Basra a month ago required careful handling.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): In encouraging the Iraqi people to participate in reconstruction, it must be appreciated and recognised that they suffered for more than 20 years—a period in which nobody was brave enough to do anything unless it came as a Ba'ath party order. That factor has to be built in in asking the Iraqis to take the initiative. It will take time.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He provides the answer to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn), who spoke about an occupation. Surely even he would recognise—he argues consistently in the House in favour of democracy, respect for human rights and so forth—that the position in Iraq has improved enormously. Surely he would not prefer the people of Iraq to go back to the sort of society in which they lived under Saddam Hussein. We can all unite on that argument. I would not suggest that we can all agree on why military action was taken in the first place, but even from the perspective of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North, what we are now doing is the right thing, given the need to improve the lives of the Iraqi people.

I was dealing with the position in Basra a month ago. There were riots, which required careful handling. I pay tribute to the sterling effort of the coalition forces to engage with local political parties and the protesters themselves, and to distribute emergency fuel supplies, which prevented further unrest. The incidents demonstrated the impact that infrastructure issues can have on security. Progress on those questions will be only short lived without accompanying progress on improvement in those basic facilities.

Consequently, in southern Iraq, we will make a major effort to repair the damaged infrastructure, combining the expertise of the military, the Department for International Development and CPA South. The sum of £20 million has been allocated to fund the initial stages of that work, which will deliver a more stable power supply, improved fuel availability and lead to a significant improvement in the delivery of water services to all sections of the population. Critical to the project's success will be the enabling military support that we provide. The required military capabilities will be identified as the detail of the plan's implementation takes shape.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): It is noteworthy for the whole House that when the Ministry of Defence needed to send more troops—another 2,000 or so—at short notice, it was often the military battalions that were despatched. We are all aware of the overstretch implications for the Army in general, and the infantry in particular, as a result of the present difficult position. In order to avoid any sapping of morale, will the Secretary of State take the opportunity this afternoon to scotch the rumours circulating within the Ministry of Defence that there are plans afoot to reduce the number of regular infantry battalions? Our recent experience shows that we desperately need those troops, so I hope that the rumours will be laid to rest now.

Mr. Hoon: Recent times have seen a significant increase in the infantry forces available to the Army—progress that I greatly welcome. Many young people seeing the success of our armed forces in a series of different operations want to be involved. As I told the House yesterday in Defence questions, we need constantly to review our position. There are no plans along the lines that the hon. Gentleman suggested, but as I promised the House, a White Paper will be published in due course, in which we shall set out our short-term future direction for equipment and other aspects of the organisation of our armed forces.

I announced yesterday that we are taking steps to identify and reduce notice to move for some additional headquarters personnel in certain units. That will allow further deployments as rapidly as possible in response to the accelerating programme of work.

[Mr. Hoon]

The Government have set out their vision for Iraq and the Iraqi people. In the document published on 16 March, we looked to a future in which Iraq would become a stable, united and law-abiding state, welcomed back into the international community and providing effective and representative government for its own people. Our commitment to that goal remains constant and we will maintain the necessary military forces in Iraq for so long as is required to achieve it.

2.23 pm

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): May I begin by paying tribute to the brave men and women who are risking their lives to bring peace and stability to the Iraqi people, and pass on the condolences of all on the Liberal Democrat Benches to the families of those who have died recently in the conflict? The current military situation in Iraq should come as a surprise to no one. No one expected the war to be easy, but the warnings about the potential difficulties of the post-conflict phase, and the tremendous difficulty of winning the peace were sounded loud and clear before the fighting began—even from within the US and British Governments. UK forces are performing their work in Iraq with tremendous skill, but they face a difficult and complex campaign. Parliament and this country were split over the decision to go to war when we did, but now that British forces are in the country, we support them and hope that they will succeed in their mission to bring peace and stability to Iraq. No reasonable person would oppose the plans for improving security in that country.

Jeremy Corbyn: Will the hon. Gentleman do us the favour of explaining exactly the Liberal Democrat position on the war in Iraq? I recall standing alongside his leader on 15 February in Hyde Park to oppose the bombing and invasion of Iraq. Is the hon. Gentleman now saying that British troops should stay for ever more in Iraq and that he supports the Iraq war, or is the Liberal Democrat position to bring the troops home? I think that we deserve to know.

Mr. Keetch: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we, like most reasonable people, support the Geneva convention. Britain and America are occupying forces. We invaded Iraq and have the responsibility to stay there to resolve the situation. If the hon. Gentleman will give me the time, I shall move on to explain the Liberal Democrat position—it is different from the Government's—on how that should be achieved.

No reasonable person should now be calling for the troops to be withdrawn. Our reservations at the time about the difficulties of winning the peace and the lack of international consensus about the terrible costs of war led us, along with brave people from both sides, to vote against the Government. However, those decisions were taken, and now that the main conflict is over, securing stability and democracy in Iraq is in the interests of the whole international community. There are difficult and dangerous problems in Iraq and we should be trying to make the best of resolving them. An unstable Iraq is a danger to the region and a danger to the world. Iraq may not have been a hotbed of terrorist activity before, but it is in serious danger of becoming one now and that must be dealt with.

I welcome the review of troop movements conducted by the Ministry of Defence, but lament the lack of planning, or hopelessly over-optimistic planning, for the post-conflict phase. The UK has maintained approximately the same number of troops in Iraq since the end of major combat operations. We were told then that commanders on the ground believed that the situation did not merit more troops. Now, despite the arrival of Italian, Polish and Spanish troops, it is clear that it must have changed. Can the Secretary of State explain what is different now from the end of July? Is Iraq substantially more dangerous now, or has there been a change in the political imperative?

Current UN figures place the number of attacks on coalition forces at an average of more than 10 a day. Will the Secretary of State comment on the rate of attacks on our forces? Is it an increase on previous months? Are British forces in greater danger now than they were a few weeks ago? The Secretary of State's written statement yesterday made it clear that the new deployment represents an interim reinforcement, so what are his estimates of the total number of troops in fact required? Will existing offers of troops from other countries meet that requirement; and will the Secretary of State confirm that if more troops arrive from other places, we may expect Britain and America to reduce their contribution?

At the same time we await the Government's defence White Paper. We believe that the Government must think hard about the long-term requirements for infantry numbers in the light of recent events.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): Will the hon. Gentleman once again clarify Liberal Democrat policy? Did the Liberal Democrats oppose the war, but now believe that we did not send enough troops in at the beginning?

Mr. Keetch: I do not even understand the question. Clearly, we opposed the war. There is no doubt about that; we voted against it. However, the House voted for the war and we accept that. We supported the troops in what they were doing; we wished for a swift and successful outcome; and we still wish for that. The number of troops on the ground should be determined by the force commanders. As the Secretary of State said earlier, at the end of July the force commander on the ground accepted that the number of troops was then correct. Clearly, more troops are now required and I am trying to ascertain whether the situation has become worse or whether the political imperative has changed. That is what the debate is about.

In that regard, does the Secretary of State agree that if more troops were sent under a UN mandate, backed by a new resolution, they would stand a better chance of producing real stability in Iraq? That would be better than simply sending more coalition forces. Advocates of UN control make the case that a UN force would be better at restoring security than an American-led one. Surely that is the case. A framework for political transition under the UN authority is the key to providing hope for the Iraqis and stemming the support of terrorist groups. Ultimate security in Iraq depends on the emergence of a legitimate Iraqi Government with

their own security forces, supported if necessary by international military and police. We believe that the UN can best create such legitimacy.

Mr. Jenkin: Does not the hon. Gentleman understand that the UN is not a military organisation, and that it is not good at commanding multinational military operations? That is what we found in the Balkans. It was not until the Americans took a lead, with NATO, that we were able to get a grip on the situation there. Is not that the model that we should be pursuing, and not an ephemeral and idealised UN solution that is really only a vehicle for French resistance to American policy?

Mr. Keetch: If one is looking for a model, the first Gulf war is a very adequate one. The UN authorised the Americans to control that force. Clearly, a force of the size involved now needs America to remain in the lead, but that must happen with UN authority, and other UN nations must also be prepared to take part. We believe that such a force—helping to keep the peace, develop the new political leadership of Iraq and bring about the reconciliation of the country—would best be led by the UN.

Before his tragic death in Baghdad, the late and respected Sergio de Mello said that total security could never be provided by outsiders. The coalition could never provide enough guns to coerce all the people of Iraq all the time. So the sooner that there are Iraqi forces answerable to an Iraqi Government, the better. We believe that that can be brought about most quickly by a multinational UN-led operation in Iraq.

I hope that the Government will impress on the US that it would be an error to disband the Iraqi army. If it is domestic security that is required, no one would be better placed to provide it than some of those former soldiers. It is difficult to see what obstacles lay in the face of reconstructing and retraining that army. If there are any, will the Secretary of State say what they are?

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): Is my hon. Friend aware that a precedent exists for using Iraqi forces? Personnel from the Basra naval academy have been retrained as guards for the world food store outside the city.

Mr. Keetch: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who I know has seen the situation in Basra at first hand. If it is possible to use the Iraqi navy for such purposes, it should also be possible to use the Iraqi army.

In that connection, will the Secretary of State say what plans exist to involve the governing council in security matters, policing and so on? Is there a coherent timetable for handing back power to the Iraqi people?

The UK Government should be using whatever special influence they have with the US to put the UN in the driving seat in Iraq. That may mean sharing reconstruction contracts among other countries, but if that is the price to be paid for international help, it should be paid.

That may be an extreme view, but a French politician told me only a few weeks ago that he would not ask French troops to put their lives on the line to protect American business men securing American contracts from an American-controlled Iraqi Government. Only the UN can provide the Iraq council with legitimacy, get the constitutional conference moving, and make Iraqis feel that they have a say in their future. US and British forces will have an obligation to remain in Iraq until that time comes, but ultimately the UN should take over.

We are debating the military situation today, but we should not forget the humanitarian situation the supply of power and water, and the provision of food. It is clear that aid agencies cannot operate without security, and the reports that NGOs are leaving the country on account of the worsening security situation are deeply worrying. What impact is the current instability having on the welfare of the Iraqi people and the supply of assistance? Will the Secretary of State confirm what discussions he or his colleagues at the Department for International Development have had with the NGOs? Are the Government working towards achieving the security that the NGOs require to carry out their work?

I turn now to the issue of weapons of mass destruction. What is the current assessment? Are British troops—or indeed Iraqis—considered to be at any risk from the yet undiscovered weapons of mass destruction? Has any more evidence been found?

I conclude with some thoughts about today's Conservative-inspired debate. I find it rather surprising that members of the Conservative party—who supported the decision to go to war and, indeed, were the only people who were more vociferous in their support for the US than the Government—should now complain so bitterly about its aftermath. When the Leader of the Opposition led his party through the Lobbies with the Government on 18 March, he did so with full knowledge of the difficulties that might arise afterwards.

People on all sides of the argument understood that going to war without the full support of the international community could cause difficulties when the war was over. I assume that members of the Tory party did not support the war on conditional terms—that they did not back the Government only on the understanding that everything went well. They supported the decision to attack Iraq at the time, and they have to live with the consequences.

The House should imagine for a moment what would have happened if the US had attacked Iraq but the British Government had decided not to contribute. The Tory party would have attacked the Government for failing in their duty. Indeed, the Tory leadership fully supported a pre-emptive strike a long way in advance of the votes in this House on 18 March 2003.

When did the Tory party start supporting the attack? On 2 September 2002, the Leader of the Opposition said that the party supported a pre-emptive attack on Iraq. He stressed that military action was about standing up for British interests and he criticised the Prime Minister for allowing the case for military intervention. He backed the prospect of a pre-emptive US and allied attack on Iraq. That was weeks before the publication of the so-called dodgy dossier, and more than six months before the votes in Parliament on 18 March. It was two months before the weapons inspectors returned, and before most of our forces were in the Gulf.

[Mr. Keetch]

The Conservatives backed pre-emptive action to the hilt, and they did so in spite of the warnings from so many people – including members of the Conservative party – that such action might cause problems.

In connection with today's debate, we should remember that, before the debate in March, the dossier and the deployment of troops, the Tories backed George Bush's war. This House, and this country, should never forget that.

2.36 pm

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): When I listened to the start of the debate, I thought that there must have been some confusion behind the Speaker's Chair. I thought that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had bumped into the shadow Secretary of State, that they had dropped their notes, and then picked up each other's by accident. I was convinced that the speech by the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) was being made by my right hon. Friend. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has made many fine speeches, but it was not his finest hour today. The House has been deprived of a proper opportunity to discuss the Iraq issue, and the Opposition motion is very disappointing. If all my right hon. Friend has to worry about is what is coming at him from across the Dispatch Box, he does not have much to fear.

I last spoke in a debate on Iraq last November. I opened my speech with a question: would the world be a safer place if we went to war in Iraq? If not, I believed that we should not go to war. I supported the Government and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on that occasion, and continued to do so until March.

I did not vote in favour of the war, however. That was not because I supported Saddam Hussein, or because I was against military action—had we succeeded in getting a second resolution through the UN Security Council, I would have been quite comfortable about continuing my support. I made my decision because I was worried about the consequences of intervention, and history shows that those concerns were justified.

I do not speak from retrospective spite. I am certainly not one of the "I-told-you-so" brigade, although there may be a few of those. I am expressing my deeply felt conviction. It was not comfortable for me to vote against a three-line Whip for the first time in 16 years, but to this day I am convinced that my decision was correct.

If Mr. Speaker were in his place, he, as a Glaswegian, would understand my next point. Anyone who goes to the wonderful city of Glasgow and who has lost his way will always find a friendly face prepared to give him directions. If you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, said to someone in Glasgow, "I'm lost and I want to be there", he would give you a warm reception and say something like, "I'll tell you where to go, but if I was going there, I wouldn't start from here." There is no good our looking retrospectively and criticising what has happened. It is our duty and responsibility to concentrate on how we get from where we are to where we want to be.

I speak from a position of supporting the Government. I am certainly not one of those who criticises the Prime Minister—quite the opposite. I am a firm supporter of the Prime Minister, and history will prove that his influence on the American Administration from 9/11 onwards was vital. I hate to imagine how the world would be if he had not exerted his influence to restrain the hawks in the American Administration. People criticise the Prime Minister for blindly following George Bush, but that is not my reading of what he has done. The Prime Minister has not done that at all. He supported more the position of the US State Department and Colin Powell than he did the position of the Defence Department's Rumsfeld and others around the President of the United States.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): My hon. Friend makes an interesting point about how our Prime Minister may have restrained the actions of the United States. Would he care to think whether the new behaviour of the United States, more friendly towards the United Nations, owes more to the influence of our Government or to the practical experience of the Americans in Iraq?

Mr. Hood: Let me give a politician's answer: it is very much a bit of both. However, I am sure that the Prime Minister would much have preferred to have a second resolution. So much was invested in getting that resolution that we were put in the position of not being able to back away and hold back some of the American hawks, and that may have added to the pressure placed on the Government to commit themselves to going in with the Americans rather than letting them go in on their own. I am sure that our Prime Minister has had influence in arguing the case for looking more supportively at the United Nations. I am confident, too, that what has happened in the European Union and in NATO must bring about a revision of how we work together.

It is tragic for the rest of the world that the hawks were given so much power in America, but they are finding out now that they cannot go it alone. The only answer is to go through the EU and NATO, and certainly through the UN. To return to my Glaswegian story, the point is that in order to get to where we need to be, there is only one road to take—the road through the United Nations. I see no other solution. I heard the Secretary of State say that 30 countries will join the coalition in sending troops, and that is always welcome. But the question is how many troops those 30 countries will send.

Mr. Keetch: From memory, and the Minister can correct me if I am wrong, I think that it is 140,000 American troops, 10,500 British and a total contribution of 9,000 Poles and others.

Mr. Hood: There we are. Waiting for someone else to join the coalition and bring a solution is not the answer. The only answer is to go through the United Nations. The sooner we accept that, the better. We must not defend entrenched positions—all that happens when we get entrenched is that we stay in the trench.

Mr. Keetch: The hon. Gentleman will agree that this is not just a question of numbers. The quality and experience of troops is also important. The benefit of having Indian, Pakistani and even French troops is that they have experience of peacekeeping operations and

know how to do the work. It is great to have 100 Lithuanian troops in Iraq, but they may not have been involved before in peacekeeping operations, while other troops from other UN forces will have had previous experience.

Mr. Hood: I do not know whether that was an intervention or an amendment to the hon. Gentleman's speech.

Let me conclude by turning to a real problem that has been made much worse by the events of the past six months. We can see what is happening in the middle east, in Palestine and on the west bank. There are people on both sides of that argument—indeed, we have people on both sides in the House. In my 16 years here, I have been fortunate enough never to find myself on either side of that argument; instead, I have seen the injustices on both sides and the need for the two sides to live side by side in peace. There is no rocket science involved in accepting the logic of finding a political solution, but politicians are all too often not part of the solution, but part of the problem. I despair when I see what is happening in Palestine and Israel, but once again the only solution must be a multinational solution though the United Nations. We must unite within the UN to bring solutions to such dark problems. If we do not, we will be here in six months holding another debate on Iraq and the middle east as we discuss more misery, more killings and a continued lack of commonsense political solutions. I hope that we can go forward through the UN and that the American Administration can bite their lip, swallow their pride and seek a UN mandate through the Security Council to solve the problems in Iraq and the rest of the middle east.

2.48 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): My hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) often tells me how he finds himself in full agreement with the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) in the Select Committee on European Scrutiny, which the hon. Gentleman chairs. I, too, find myself in virtually total agreement with every word he has just said.

Similar to the hon. Gentleman's Glasgow example, it would be possible for those of us who unambiguously opposed the conflict to say that it has nothing to do with us and is all the fault of the Government and the Conservative Opposition who led us into the morass in which we find ourselves. It would be possible to say that we should therefore offer no solutions or suggestions for how to get out of the mess. However, as the hon. Gentleman said, it is incumbent on us to put forward our proposals and solutions. It is a matter of great regret that the amendment that my hon. Friends and I tabled was not selected so that we could divide on it this evening. It would have found a lot of support across the House from people who genuinely seek a way to improve the situation. Indeed, I see the Liberal Democrat spokesperson, the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch), nodding in support of that.

What is the Government's objection to unambiguous UN authority for the stabilisation force in Iraq and to its being under UN control and within the ambit of the UN? I listened closely to President Bush's statement the other evening. Although I would not say that he is running back to the UN cap in hand, a significant level of concern has forced him into that position.

The House should reflect that, while we mourn the British armed forces' casualties in Iraq, the casualties of the American forces are much, much greater. They have lost more people in Iraq since 1 May, when the President of the United States officially declared that hostilities were over, than they lost during the period of actual conflict. The latest figures that I have show total UK casualties of 50, of which 17 occurred after 1 May, but 123 casualties among US service personnel since that date. Furthermore, on figures from websites offering counts and estimates from reputable academics, the Government do not seem to have grasped that more than 6,000 civilians have died in the course of the conflict. Whatever was achieved in Iraq, it was certainly not at a bargain; there has been a substantial cost in human life.

I agree with the hon. Member for Clydesdale: pressure of events rather than the eloquence of the Prime Minister persuaded America to put Colin Powell—the Secretary of State—back in charge of some aspects of American foreign policy. What has been proposed to date will not be satisfactory, understandably, for many of the countries that resolutely opposed conflict on US and UK terms.

Although I realise that for the Government the BBC website is not the most reputable source, for a large majority of people it is, none the less, a much more reputable source than the Government themselves. Today, in analysing the moves of the UN, the website states:

> "Several Security Council members—including France, Russia and Germany—are reluctant to approve any resolution that appears to give retroactive blessing to the Iraq war, which they opposed."

That is entirely understandable. I would not approve that. I am sure that the hon. Member for Clydesdale, although he is looking for a solution, would not approve of anything that gave a blessing to something that we thought fundamentally wrong. The website continued:

> "They have also insisted that any UN mandate give genuine power to the international organisation, rather than merely being a fig leaf for a US-run operation."

That, too, is entirely understandable.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin) *rose—*

Mr. Salmond: As the Minister wants to intervene, I hope that he will tell us what are the obstacles to giving a genuine UN mandate, rather than a US fig leaf. What are the blockages?

Mr. Caplin: I intervene to tell the hon. Gentleman that if he had been in the House yesterday, he would have heard my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary explain some of those details; in particular, the work that the United Kingdom, the US Government, the European Union and others are doing in the UN to try to strengthen the UN mandate in Iraq. That is why there is a draft resolution; it is being discussed at the Security Council and proposes

> "a United Nations-mandated multinational force under existing unified command".—[*Official Report*, 8 September 2003; Vol. 410, c. 39.]

because that is the best way for the UN to operate.

Mr. Salmond: Under the command of US armed forces. The concern of many of the countries that opposed the war, and many of those that did not, is, as the BBC website pointed out, that there will not be genuine power for a genuine UN mandate. The Minister knows all too well that there is a substantial difference between an invitation with a supportive UN resolution under the US command structure and a genuine authority under the UN for a multinational force. Even if he does not realise that, the countries that are, as yet, reluctant to take part certainly do realise it. What exactly are the obstacles to moving to that genuine UN position?

Mr. Keetch: Until that point, I was enjoying the hon. Gentleman's view. The point that we made is that the UN could authorise the United States to command a force. Can he give us an example where a UN force of the size that would be required in Iraq has ever had a multilateral system? Surely, all UN forces have a command structure. We suggest that it should be a US command structure. No other nation and no other body could actually command a force of that size.

Mr. Salmond: As the hon. Gentleman knows, there are other examples of UN administrations, most recently in East Timor, where such a command structure was established. It was not the size of Iraq, but we have not had to try to establish a command structure in a country of that size.

Throughout the debate, the Liberal Democrats have tried to have things both ways. My interpretation of the hon. Gentleman's speech was that he was calling for a genuine UN force in Iraq. If he is saying that what President Bush is proposing at the UN is exactly that, his reading of the President's remarks a few nights ago is significantly different from mine. I thought that they were carefully phrased to say that the command structure would remain under US control.

The Liberal Democrat spokesperson engaged us with a quote from a French source, which tried to suggest that there were a variety of other reasons for not conceding that command structure. I am calling for a genuine UN authority and command structure.

Mr. Foulkes *rose*—

Mr. Salmond: I give way to the former Minister in the Scotland Office.

Mr. Foulkes: And in the Department for International Development.

This is a strange debate. The Minister has just said that what my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood), the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National party are calling for is what the Government are arguing for at the United Nations. The Liberal Democrat spokesman is right: if the UN force that we want is not commanded by the US, can the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) tell us which country will do it? I have great respect for Lithuania—apart from its football—but which country does the hon. Gentleman suggest? Lithuania, Poland?

Mr. Salmond: I am interested in the fact that the right hon. Gentleman suggests Lithuania and Poland rather than France, Germany or one of the other major powers, or indeed the many other countries that have committed substantial numbers of troops. I have no doubt that it will be extremely difficult to summon the number of troops that will be required unless from a variety of countries. Equally, I have no doubt that unless the operation is genuinely UN authorised and led, it will be impossible to bring into that force the very countries that would participate, but will not do so, to cite the BBC website, as a "fig leaf" for a continuing US-run operation. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can explain why those countries are reluctant to embrace the UK Government's offer. Perhaps the Minister can tell me why the Government have yet to persuade those countries, and the many others that see the current moves of President Bush as those of a country under pressure through overstretch rather than one that is willing to embrace a UN operation.

Nor do I have great confidence in the Government's claims of UN authority for their actions. If I interpret the Secretary of State's comments correctly, he still maintains that the conflict took place under proper UN processes. Few other people in the international community would maintain that position, but the Government maintain their fig leaf of proper authorisation because it is necessary to spin that yarn to try to justify the unjustifiable.

Ms Dari Taylor: I object to the statement about spinning a line. With great courtesy, I remind the hon. Gentleman that in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Serbia we could not achieve a force and command structure that was effective until the Americans and the British decided to take it over. Only at that point, when the structure of command was straight and easy, did we have sufficient troops. I remind the hon. Gentleman, with great passion, that we were told by the whole world that we were 10 years too late and thousands of Muslims died as a consequence, so I hope that he will withdraw that statement—it is silly and offensive.

Mr. Salmond: I have no doubt that the hon. Lady objects to being spun a line. The majority of people in this country object to being spun into a war under false pretences.

Ms Taylor *rose*—

Mr. Salmond: I have heard the hon. Lady now she will get her answer. I am certain that it would be a good thing if Muslim troops from Muslim countries were in Iraq at present, but we cannot get those troops because of the US Administration's anxiety to maintain absolute control over the command structure of the stabilisation force in Iraq. Incidentally, why was the US so anxious not to be in a dual role in Afghanistan, as a combatant country and in the stabilisation force, yet that is apparently all right in Iraq? What are the obstacles that prevent the United States from fully ceding authority to the UN? Is it a question of the contracts that the Liberal

Democrat spokesman mentioned a few minutes ago? Would it be too much of a climbdown to have to return to the UN and say that the French are not really "surrender-monkeys", that the Germans are not really ungrateful and that the UN is no longer the talking shop that the US Administration described it as only a few months ago?

The hon. Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor) shakes her head. Has she really forgotten the disparaging tones with which members of the US Administration described the UN? Can she really have forgotten the activities of those in the cabal in the US Administration who took us into this war? Is she really saying that she would trust their opinion more than she would trust the UN, as the international authority, which is supported by most people in this country?

Ms Dari Taylor: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Salmond: With great respect, I have given way seven or eight times, and I want to make progress.

Mr. Foulkes: The hon. Gentleman is in difficulty.

Mr. Salmond: I give way a lot more to the right hon. Gentleman—a former Scottish Office Minister—than he ever does to me in debates; he has never been anxious to give way.

I would simply like to know from the Government what is it about the doubts of France, Russia, Germany and many other countries in the UN that they are not willing to satisfy. The Government should establish that they are not trying to find a fig leaf for continuing US control, but that they want a genuine UN-authorised force. There is no doubt in my mind that such a force would stand a better chance of stabilising the position in Iraq in a way that is most certainly not happening at the moment.

Finally, I want to continue the analogy used by the hon. Member for Clydesdale. He said that, in Glasgow, people say that they would not necessarily start from here. I also recall that English comedians regarded the Glasgow concert halls as the toughest venues anywhere, anytime. I have never heard the Braemar gathering described as a particularly tough venue, except that the Prime Minister managed to get booed while in the royal enclosure of the Braemar gathering this weekend. The police interviewed one of the people who booed him and decided that it was not a breach of the peace; it was a legitimate expression of opinion. *[Interruption.]* The booing was widespread.

Mr. Foulkes: Has the hon. Gentleman seen the polls?

Mr. Salmond: The polls are not good reading for the right hon. Gentleman either. I suspect that he should worry about a Prime Minister who cannot even venture safely into the royal enclosure of the Braemar gathering. I suspect that the reason for that is the deep-seated resentment of people of all classes and types. They deeply resent being gathered into a conflict on a trail of deception. If the Government want to recover any sense of regard among the population, instead of trying to smooth lines and pretend that things are not as they are, they should genuinely eat their pride, go back to the UN and start to make this process legal under international law, as it always should have been. I hope that we will hear, in the summing up of the debate, that the Government will now embark on that course, which many of us would have advised many months ago.

3.3 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I welcome the debate because it is an opportunity to discuss the situation in Iraq, and I suspect that we will have to discuss that for many months, if not years, to come. I cannot see the British and American Administrations easily withdrawing from that situation or being prepared to agree to a UN operation, as the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) has outlined, because that goes to the heart of the problem: the politics of the US Administration, led by George Bush, who are deeply antagonistic to any kind of internationalism or multilateralism. Indeed, since US companies have already signed up a large number of contracts of behalf of the temporary administration in Iraq, I suspect that things will carry on like that.

Mr. Foulkes: Does my hon. Friend know which Administration brought the US back into UNESCO and paid the back fees to the UN that President Clinton unfortunately had refused to pay?

Jeremy Corbyn: It was indeed the Administration led by George Bush, who were then vainly trying to get UN support, but I am rather surprised that my right hon. Friend, with such a long and distinguished record in international affairs, should seek to defend the most right-wing US Administration we have ever seen.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Has my hon. Friend considered the fact that, with the forthcoming elections in America, the Government might find themselves in the very peculiar position of supporting the viewpoint of the Republicans in the US, while the Democrats are attacking the cause for war?

Jeremy Corbyn: It is extremely perceptive of my hon. Friend to raise that issue. Watching the debate in the Democratic party in the US, it seems that the stronger the anti-war position adopted by the candidates, the more support they get and the more likely they are to gain the nomination. Come the primary elections next year, the British Government will be in the strange situation of being lined up with George Bush against a Democratic party that will, I hope, adopt some kind of anti-war position, and it may do so because a large number of ordinary people in the US are also deeply upset about the policy in Iraq and also deeply opposed to the military intervention there.

I twice went to the US earlier this year to take part in anti-war activities, and I was very interested in the large number of ordinary people who journeyed through appalling weather to Washington to demonstrate in January. Some of them held placards saying, "40 million Americans go without any health care, yet our Administration can afford to go to war in Iraq." The same things were said in San Francisco and other parts of the country. There is a massive anti-war movement in the US, as indeed there is in this country.

I intervened on the Liberal Democrat defence spokesperson, who kindly gave way while on that subject, but I have watched the Liberal Democrats in

[Jeremy Corbyn]

operation, as we all have for many years, and they seem to have developed a fine art of making statements in the House and opposite statements on the streets of this country—something called Liberal *Focus* teams in operation on the ground. The hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) himself said that the Liberal Democrats now support the position of British troops in Iraq and that they support the increase in British troops in Iraq as well as other things surrounding the war. Yet, on the ground, Liberal Democrats go around claiming, where it suits them, that they are the anti-war party in this country. I am not proud of the position that the British Government have adopted because I deeply disagree with it, as I have made clear on many occasions, but I wish that the Liberals would just be clear about what their position actually is.

Mr. Keetch *rose*—

Jeremy Corbyn: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's intervention.

Mr. Keetch: I want to ask the hon. Gentleman a simple question: does he favour today the withdrawal of British troops from Iraq?

Jeremy Corbyn: Yes, I do favour the withdrawal of British troops from Iraq, and I favour supporting the development of a civilian Government in Iraq, if necessary, with UN support. What I see in Iraq at present is a British and American occupying force—that is what it is in legal terms—and I see the Americans gaining contracts from that for Halliburton, Bechtel and many others, all of which happen to have funded George Bush's election campaign in the first place. The British Government are totally complicit in that whole operation. When George Bush says that he is not prepared to agree to UN control of forces in Iraq, what is the position of the British Administration? They say that they are in favour of the US and UN, but they are incapable of influencing that policy.

I want to raise one or two other issues briefly, because this is a short debate. We have to ask ourselves some questions about how we got into this position. Was Iraq the real, credible and present threat that was claimed in the early part of this year? We were told, in terms, that there were weapons of mass destruction. We were told that there was a real, credible and present threat from Iraq. When will the Iraqi survey group report? When will we know definitely whether there are weapons of mass destruction in Iraq? When will we know about all the weapons that Britain sold to Iraq in the first place some years ago?

If it is right and proper, as it is, for Lord Hutton to conduct an inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the death of Dr. David Kelly, why is it not appropriate to hold an independent judicial inquiry into all the circumstances leading to the war in the first place, the pressures that were put on and the political decisions that were made to take us into that conflict? It is only right and proper that the British public should know in whose name the war is being fought and who is benefiting from it.

I have observed from reading websites and information and from talking to people who have come back from Iraq that it is a country with varying degrees of insecurity. Some areas are considerably worse than others. Many poverty stricken and unemployed former Iraqi army soldiers, who were given their weapons but no money and told to go away from their barracks, are running amok throughout the country. I also observe increasing opposition to the British and American presence in the country, but the insecurity does not extend to the oil wells and oil refineries. Huge efforts are put into protecting the oil pipelines. The argument that the war was for oil is only part of the truth—it was not the only reason, but it was a major factor. I suspect that in the long run we will get a large north American base in Iraq and a long period of instability in the region, because if one reads the musings of Rumsfeld, Bush, Cheney and all the others, the project for the new American century is all about such wars and the imposition of American bases in different places throughout the world. Is that really the kind of world in which we want to live in the long run? Is that really a sane, safe and secure way to look at the problems that are facing the whole globe?

Richard Younger-Ross: The hon. Gentleman referred to insecurity in Iraq. Can he say whether that insecurity would increase or decrease if British troops were withdrawn tomorrow?

Jeremy Corbyn: I suspect that the insecurity is serious or very serious in some parts and less serious in others. If British troops withdrew, I suspect that there would be a change to the atmosphere because the Iraqis would have an opportunity to develop their society themselves.

Is there to be a situation in which we put in more and more troops to protect their security? I heard the Defence Secretary yesterday defending the increase of 1,400 troops in Iraq—a few more are going. Successive generals used exactly the same arguments during the imposition of more American forces on Vietnam throughout the 1960s and 1970s. They said that the troops needed to be there for their own protection. Several hundred thousand troops ended up there, and there was ignominious defeat and failure as well as a huge loss of life among Vietnamese and American people. I am frightened that the same situation is developing in Iraq.

Mrs. Mahon: Does my hon. Friend agree that when the Soviet Union went into Afghanistan, it did so quickly and had a fairly successful entry to the country? Ten years later, when it came out, the red army was defeated and Afghanistan in such a state that the Taliban were able to take it over. It is easy to conquer a country, but what happens afterwards must be considered.

Jeremy Corbyn: The Soviet Union found to its cost that invasion is quick and simple with an efficient and well-equipped army, as my hon. Friend says. The problem arises in the longer term, and no doubt the situation was a major factor in bringing about the fall and demise of the Soviet Union.

The war has tragically cost the lives of servicemen from Britain, the United States and Iraq as well as the lives of many Iraqi civilians—the hon. Member for

Banff and Buchan cited a figure of 6,000. Iraq Body Count, which is a reputable academic organisation, puts the figure between 6,000 and 10,000. I do not know the figure, so I look forward to the Secretary of State's answer. Many people are dying due to unexploded cluster bombs, which were sold by this country and are on sale at the defence equipment exhibition that is being held in the east end of London. I suspect that large numbers of people will die of cancer because of the use of depleted uranium weapons and the poison that comes from them. A price will be paid for the war by children who are yet to be born in Iraq and poor civilians who do not have access to medical equipment.

Surely we need to look at the world in a rather different way from one involving a series of wars and conflicts during which we align ourselves politically with the United States Administration. We should instead examine the causes of war: injustice, poverty and the grasping of natural resources. When I hear the speeches of Bush and Cheney in which they talk about North Korea and other such places, I am horrified that what has happened in Iraq could well be repeated in other places. I ask the Government to think seriously about the need for a real break with the American strategy and about some intelligent approach to achieve peace and justice in the world, which would save us from wars in the future.

3.14 pm

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): The debate is important and it is appropriate that we should have it after our two-month recess during which the situation in Iraq has deteriorated and we have seen the circumstances surrounding the outbreak of the conflict exposed in the Hutton inquiry. I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) and for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) on not exposing, or gloating about, what has happened during the inquiry but concentrating on what has happened on the ground in Iraq. The situation has deteriorated and they have especially examined the role played by the Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Development. It is important to preface my remarks with congratulations to our troops on their efforts.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman comment on how it is consistent and reasonable to criticise the British Government's lack of planning in Iraq as the situation deteriorates, with which I have a fair degree of agreement, yet to make no criticism whatsoever of the American role, which is far more important?

Mr. Walter: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his early intervention. Perhaps he would care to listen to the rest of my speech and make a judgment on that.

I want to say a few words about the role that our troops have played in the conflict. I congratulate them on their efforts, skill and courage. I have spoken to many of my constituents who have come back from Iraq. I have a substantial Ministry of Defence establishment in my constituency and I am proud to be associated with the attitude that the troops have taken on the ground. If I may say something to satisfy the comments of the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), I am impressed by the attitude of the British troops compared with that of some of the American troops. The way in which the American troops have approached the Iraqi people might be described, at best, as arrogant. The situation has been deteriorating every day.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Surely my hon. Friend accepts that the Americans are policing a much more difficult part of the country and that they must necessarily adopt different tactics.

Mr. Walter: Whatever the tactics adopted by various troops, every occupying power has a duty to respect the human rights of those whom they are present to protect. There have been instances when United States troops have done things that I would frankly not wish to defend, but that is beyond the scope of the debate, which is about the military situation in Iraq as it affects this Government and our troops.

I have taken a close interest in the situation in Iraq both in the run-up to the conflict and during it. I am a member of the Select Committee on International Development, which has published several reports about the preparations for the conflict. The Committee has taken evidence from two Secretaries of State and other Ministers and officials. It has taken an interest that sometimes has gone beyond the role of the Department for International Development by examining other agencies, including those that act for the Ministry of Defence.

It is no secret that I spoke during the debate in the Chamber on Iraq and weapons of mass destruction on 26 February and that I voted for the amendment and against military action. What I said has been vindicated by the events that have taken place and the evidence presented to the Hutton inquiry. I said:

"There is no doubt that Saddam Hussein is an evil dictator with scant regard for human rights. There is no doubt that in the past he has used chemical weapons against his own people. We know from the run-up to the last Gulf war that he sought an albeit crude delivery mechanism for his weapons. It is clear that, along with at least 10 other dubious regimes in the world, he would like to possess nuclear weapons."

However, I went on to say:

"Despite the Prime Minister's claims of 'linkage', there is no evidence that Saddam has assisted al-Qaeda. There are Governments with whom we have good relations who have given much greater comfort to those evil terrorists. We await"—

we still await—

"the evidence of the weapons inspectors that Saddam has weapons of mass destruction. If he possesses them, the evidence is clear that the range of any of his delivery mechanisms would be a threat to his near neighbours, most of whom seem"—

and remain

"totally unconvinced of the need for war at the present time."—[*Official Report*, 26 February 2003, Vol. 400, c. 347.]

Mrs. Mahon: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that although al-Qaeda was not conspiring with Saddam before the war, it is more than likely that it is in Iraq now, conspiring with any unscrupulous element to disrupt a settlement?

Mr. Walter: I would not wish to speculate too much on that, but the conflict has not improved the terrorist situation. As we have seen on the ground in Iraq and in other parts of the world, the situation has deteriorated.

[Mr. Walter]

The Hutton inquiry has shown that the Government massaged some of the flimsy evidence on Saddam's capabilities. The evidence of the UN weapons inspectors was that they could find no weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): As the hon. Gentleman said, he was not taken in by the document and voted against it, as I did. The truth is that we are in the position that we are in today because we lost that vote on the war, not because of what the Government said at the time.

Mr. Walter: The hon. Gentleman is right, but the background to the current military situation is that the UN weapons inspectors could find no weapons of mass destruction. There were no chemical, biological or nuclear weapons, yet the Prime Minister told the House that Saddam Hussein had them and they could be deployed in 45 minutes. That is the longest 45 minutes in history.

Mr. Salmond: The Prime Minister may not have managed to persuade the hon. Gentleman, the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) or me, but the point is that some of the Prime Minister's more gullible colleagues were persuaded by the variety of dodgy dossiers with which we were presented.

Mr. Walter: The British people were taken in by dodgy dossiers and other things. I think that Hans Blix was too convincing in the view that he presented to the UN and that the military situation was precipitated by the possible disappearance of a window of opportunity, but that is all history, as hon. Members have said. We need to consider how we deal with the awful situation in Iraq now.

From those whom I have spoken to who have been on the ground in Iraq, it is clear that the life of ordinary Iraqis in many parts of that country is not, as the Secretary of State said, better than it was. There are severe problems with electricity and water supplies and other basic essentials of normal life. Crime and killings are commonplace. Any occupying power should be truly ashamed of the breakdown of law and order in that country.

In my constituency last week, I attended a meeting at which a number of people who had recently been in Baghdad and Basra told stories that are a fair reflection of what is going on, although I cannot corroborate them. We were told that a son was kidnapped in Basra. The family knew where to go to deal with the problem because the gang that had kidnapped him had set up a shop in the centre of town. It was clearly marked and everyone knew it was there. All one had to do was go to the shop with the name of the person who was sought and, after ferreting through files and so on, someone would come up with a piece of paper stating the ransom to be paid for the person to be returned. That is appalling and it is just one example of what is going on.

There are many such stories: electricity transmission lines have been pulled down in broad daylight under the gaze of coalition forces who appear to the local population to be either unwilling or powerless to do anything. I am talking not about sabotage but about a criminal business activity done for money. The scrap metal produced from such activities is freely available on markets around the world. The question is whether coalition forces were prepared for the aftermath of the war. Was the situation that we face today predictable? If so, what has gone wrong?

The International Development Committee spent a long time considering the humanitarian consequences before, during and after the conflict. As I said, we published several reports on that. We took evidence from the United States Administration in Washington, the UN in New York, numerous other international organisations and non-governmental organisations. We took evidence a number of times from both Secretaries of State for International Development. When asked the general question of what planning had taken place or whether there had been any, Baroness Amos said on 30 June that plans had been made but that they were for a different outcome. That sums up some of the lack of preparedness of our Government.

Baroness Amos said:

"there was planning which DFID was involved in with respect to what would happen post the conflict, and much of that planning went into thinking about the scale of the humanitarian crisis. At that time it was feared that there would be huge numbers of internally displaced people, refugees and so on, and much of the planning went into that. What was not anticipated was the scale of looting which happened post the conflict and which has hampered the effort to a certain extent."

She went on to say:

"there was preparation, there was preparation for a range of possible crises, ranging from prolonged urban warfare through large population movements and widespread disruption of essential infrastructure. As it happened what we did see was widespread looting and a breakdown in law and order, which had not been anticipated and which led to serious problems."

The disruption of essential infrastructure has happened, so what was the planning for?

Baroness Amos said:

"As I said, there is no doubt there were real initial difficulties, and that is because the planning was for different things."

She went on to say:

"I think that we planned for very specific scenarios which did not occur, and on top of that you had the looting which did occur . . . In addition to that there was confusion at the beginning, and part of that confusion was to do with the fact that the planning had been for these particular humanitarian scenarios."

So they got it wrong, at least in the Secretary of State's post-conflict view.

I take the House back to the evidence given by the previous Secretary of State, who on 21 March, in response to our first report, said in answer to our question about planning:

"The importance of infrastructure – especially for water and sanitation – has been fully recognised by the military and plans have been developed to provide, where necessary, emergency water and electricity supply."

In answer to a question about the possible security situation, she said:

"The risk of ethnic violence following conflict is a serious concern. Military and humanitarian planning is informed by this risk . . . The objective will be to create a secure and safe environment for all Iraqis, so that people do not want to move. This will require a focus on quick stabilisation of areas coming under coalition military control."

I shall now cite one of the Committee's recommendations to which the then Secretary of State replied. We said:

"It is important that the UN should have the lead role in a post-conflict Iraq as soon as possible. There is a real danger that donors and NGOs would not play a full part in the post-conflict reconstruction of Iraq if the country were administered by a military governor".

I think that that has come to pass. The right hon. Lady's response of 21 March was:

"The Government agrees. A UN mandate will be required to provide legal authority for the reconstruction effort, and to make possible the engagement of the International Financial Institutions and the wider international community. The Government is at the forefront of efforts to ensure that a suitable UN mandate is put in place and is holding regular discussions with key partners to achieve this."

Another of our recommendations said:

"We believe that one area in which the military could play an important role is policing and protection. We urge the military to develop plans to provide such protection, where requested, for humanitarian work if they have not already do so."

The then Secretary of State replied:

"The need for the maintenance of law and order has been fully appreciated and incorporated into campaign planning."

The Secretary of State ended her response to the Committee's report by saying:

"The Government is strongly committed to ensuring that we urgently relieve the suffering of the Iraqi people. In our view, the overall level of preparedness of the international community to cope with the humanitarian challenges which may lie ahead in Iraq is not as great as it could be . . . We will focus, in particular, on efforts to ensure that the UN is both funded and enabled, through Security Council resolutions, to play a leading role."

The Government acknowledged that there was a need for post-conflict planning, but as the current Secretary of State for International Development said, they planned for the wrong scenario. It was clear from the evidence that we took from the United Nations, both here and in New York, and from senior officials such as the director of USAID, Andrew Natsios, in Washington, that the post-conflict planning was both far too limited and unco-ordinated. That reinforces the need for the UN to have a key position. If the new Iraq is to fulfil the vision of the beacon of democracy, prosperity and freedom that President Bush has talked about, the Iraqi people must feel that they have ownership of this process. They must feel that they have confidence in this process, which means that it must be a UN process. That security force must be a blue beret security force, and if we are to have an economic effort to rebuild Iraq, it must be an international effort, not just a United States effort.

There is no doubt that we have removed an evil dictator who was oppressing the people of Iraq. I have every sympathy with those inside and outside Iraq who sought his removal. However, the case should have been made to the international community and executed under the auspices of the international institutions that we have spent half a century building up. Let us now restore the confidence and legitimacy of the United Nations. Let the United Kingdom and the United States put their strength and resources at the disposal of the UN for the benefit of the Iraqi people and for peace in the middle east.

3.35 pm

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West): I hope that the hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) will forgive me if I do not follow his general doom-mongering comments. We are fairly tight for time. I shall concentrate on what the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) said in his opening remarks. I listened with great interest to my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood), who is no longer in the Chamber. He made a series of pertinent observations at the beginning of his speech. He said that the hon. Member for North Essex can usually be relied on to make a pretty good speech in debates such as this. I would not necessarily agree with everything that the hon. Gentleman says, but he can be relied upon usually to make a pretty good quality contribution. Yet today—many hon. Members in the Chamber, and perhaps some of my hon. Friends, might agree—the hon. Gentleman's speech seemed pretty thin. As the debate progressed I could not help noticing that the Opposition Benches emptied. That was followed by frenetic activity, with the Opposition Whip leaving the Chamber and getting a few Conservative Members to return to their places.

I could not help noticing also that the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman), who I understand is the Opposition's spokesperson on international development, was looking rather concerned. Perhaps she was wondering whether she could make any meaningful interventions in a debate on the military situation in Iraq.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): I do not think that the hon. Gentleman's remarks are in the spirit in which the debate has been conducted. Before he passes comment about the presence of international development spokesmen, he might like to look at the Government Benches. He will find that there are no representatives from the Department for International Development in the Chamber.

Mr. Joyce: This is a debate on the military situation in Iraq, and I thought that the hon. Lady was looking rather concerned that she would be unable to participate. Fair comment has been made, so let us move on.

The Opposition's problem is that basically they do not have a meaningful critique of Government policy. They broadly agree with the Government's position and their actions. They think that there is not a bad general prognosis for the longer term. However, they have to find some thin gruel with which to attack the Government. I suspect that that is why the introductory remarks of the hon. Member for North Essex were a bit weaker than they might otherwise have been in normal circumstances.

I shall reflect on a couple of paradoxes that ran through the hon. Gentleman's comments. The Opposition want to agree broadly with the action taken on Iraq. The hon. Gentleman is reluctant to say negative things about the longer term, but everything that the Opposition say about the situation in Iraq conveys the impression that everything is falling apart. They do not really believe that, and when I hear Opposition Members make such comments on television they are clearly made without any spirit. We can see that in their eyes and hear it in their voices.

[Mr. Joyce]

Earlier on, the hon. Gentleman raised the issue of overstretch. The Government made an announcement this week on the deployment of troops to Iraq. The hon. Gentleman talked about the deployment as a problem of overstretch. When he was asked by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State whether he agreed with the deployment, he said that he did. In government, decisions have to be made that may have some minor negative consequence. It is certainly the case that we had 45,000 troops in Iraq and now we have 12,000. My arithmetic tells me that that is not a recipe for overstretch. That is one of the paradoxes that run through the comments of Opposition Members.

By and large, the Opposition, including the hon. Gentleman, understand the need for patience. In due course, small advances will be made here and there. We shall see a gradual reconnection of power, a gradual increase in lawfulness, and a gradual reconstruction of the infrastructure. There will be good reasons for some celebration. No doubt Opposition Members will want to take part in that celebration. However, the nature of their line at present is effectively to deny that any improvement will ever take place. That is not credible and it does not achieve a balance.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): The hon. Gentleman has considerable personal experience as he has served in the Army, and I should be grateful if he would comment on two points. First, my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), talked about the positive things at the beginning of his speech and tried to give a balanced view. Secondly, what is the hon. Gentleman's response to the Foreign Secretary's memorandum that was leaked last week and spelt out in dramatic terms the way in which the situation in Iraq was deteriorating, saying that 5,000 UK troops needed to be sent there? That is not something made up by the Opposition—that is the hon. Gentleman's own Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Joyce: I wholeheartedly agree with the general assessment that more troops needed to be deployed in Iraq in current circumstances. The commander on the ground asked for extra troops, and that is exactly what he got. The previous troop level satisfied his earlier assessment. It is terribly important, as the hon. Gentleman will know, that the commanders on the ground state the troop requirement—essentially that is what the MOD has provided. I therefore agree with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Francois: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, as the House has been in recess for two months, the Opposition have done the House a service by using their time to provide the debate today, thus allowing the House to discuss the latest situation in Iraq? Members on both sides of the House have welcomed that opportunity. On the point about overstretch, the hon. Gentleman is right that the Opposition have supported the deployment of troops, but we have pointed out that that has resulted in overstretch for our armed forces. That is not hypocritical—we have supported the action, but we have to accept that there are knock-on consequences. Surely, it is perfectly appropriate for the Opposition to point that out in the House of Commons?

Mr. Joyce: They can point out what they want, but the fact is that one cannot make an assumption of overstretch simply because troop deployment is to be increased. The overall deployment level is substantially lower, but the Opposition are using the term "overstretch" as if it were a given—an increase in troop deployment must mean overstretch. That is not the case either now or more generally.

When the hon. Member for North Essex made his introductory remarks, he rightly praised the troops for their contribution to our successes to date, winning the conflict in the first place and their excellent work at the moment. Then we heard that everything is falling apart. I do not know how the Opposition or other Members would feel if they were on the ground, constantly hearing how wonderfully they were doing, but learning that the effect of their efforts was negative or had been neutralised. That is simply not the case, and it does not help the debate.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I do not have a clear idea of whether things are getting better in Iraq or worse, but many of my constituents are asylum seekers from Iraq whom I have helped in the past. In the past few weeks, I have seen a number of them. Many of them are from Baghdad, not Basra, and are desperate to get their families out because of the security situation. Last week, I had a call from someone whose wife was in Baghdad—the day before, one of her neighbours had been raped and strangled. The caller said that the security situation in Baghdad is far worse than it was before the war.

Mr. Joyce: I accept what my hon. Friend is saying, and have listened to his comments before with interest—I know that he feels very deeply about this. However, I simply cannot accept that the situation now is worse than it was before when, if someone disagreed with the sons of the regime, they could be dragged off to a zoo, thrown into a tiger's cage to be ripped apart and eaten. Things cannot get much worse than that, and we know that that was a fact of life.

Mr. Jones: I am not saying that the situation under Saddam Hussein was anything but deplorable, but things can be worse than they are for someone who says something against the Government leadership, only to be taken away and thrown to the lions. Someone could be in a position where it does not matter what they say—an intruder might come in, burgle their house, murder them or kill their children. That is a worse position.

Mr. Joyce: I suspect that my hon. Friend and I will never agree on this issue. I simply do not agree that the situation is worse than previously. There is all sorts of evidence to show that that is not the case. For the moment, I guess that that will be the end of my comments on the issue, as we could debate it endlessly. I disagree that the situation is worse, as such a view does not stand up in the light of the evidence.

Ms Dari Taylor: The newspapers have been full of reports—I have no doubts about them, as they have

been supported by military documents—that Sunni extremists, Ba'ath die-hards and Muslim mujaheddin are all fighting in their different ways to unsettle the situation and put anything they can in the way of reconstruction. Surely to goodness we all understand that the situation is going to be very difficult, and nobody assumes otherwise. Did we not assume that that was going to be the case? Are we not asking the impossible in suggesting that the armed forces should understand everything that is going on and be present in every place where such people can manoeuvre in the community?

Mr. Joyce: I thank my hon. Friend for those wise remarks. It behoves us to remember that these are difficult times. I am sure that there will be a positive outcome in due course, but it will take time. This is not the time for political opportunism, but I sometimes detect a bit too much of it from the Opposition Benches.

It is not difficult to see that the Opposition tend to criticise what is happening on the ground in Iraq while desperately avoiding being critical of a Republican Administration. They want to criticise the situation in Iraq, but not a Republican Administration for whose policies they no doubt have a great regard. Frankly, that approach does not stack up. The situation in the British sector is considerably better than elsewhere. That is not to say that the US is not doing a very good job in the light of the different difficulties that it faces. However, the fact of the matter is that it does not stack up constantly to gainsay the effect that this country is having in Iraq without being critical of the Republican Administration. As it happens, in large terms, I would not be critical of America's efforts, as I think that it is making a pretty good effort. It takes a bit more than a generally negative tone in the short term with a hint at a positive tone in the longer term, along with the idea that the Opposition would have had some sort of cunning plan that they will not tell us anything about, to add up to a useful and coherent debate.

3.47 pm

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): I should like to pull up the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn), who made some very interesting comments, but suggested that there was a vast anti-war movement in America. I have just returned from a holiday in America and I can tell him that, although there is an anti-war movement, it is not large and certainly not vast. I was in America at the time of the UN bombing, and the concern there is that it is not getting the job done quickly enough. That is exactly what we are saying in this House. As the Americans see it, their role is to try to turn the country back into a democratic state as quickly as possible. Their concern is the time for which their troops will have to be committed in the country. They are already talking about overstretch, and they have 140,000 troops there.

On arriving in America, it was interesting to hear what people were saying on the streets. Obviously, when a bomb goes off and 100 people are killed, there will be much comment. It was extremely difficult to understand the Americans' long-term game plan. The local people saw a country called "Ayraq" that was somewhere the other side of Britain. They do not understand exactly what they are going to do with the long-term commitment that they are going to put in. We in this country would not understand the control and information coming down from President Bush. It is not getting home to the American people this message: "We have to go through with this now, no matter what, because we have to finish off what we have started."

The role of the United Nations, whether in Korea, Bosnia, Beirut or anywhere else, has always been to go into a country to stand between two sides to try to sort out a situation. However, that can be done only when there is some form of military stability in that nation. On 19 August, when a bomb was driven up to the UN building and an enormous number of people were killed, it was shown that that was not the case. Unfortunately, I do not think that it will happen in the foreseeable future. The longer that we are in Iraq, the more time there will be for opposing forces to build up.

There are great open borders in Iraq with Iran, Jordan, Syria and the Palestinians. In a way, it is a new Cuba. People go there because they can be seen to make a difference. The UN has a vital role to play, but it has to be under the auspices of some form of military force. It is not possible to train a nation's policemen and soldiers without the help of the policemen and soldiers of other nations. We learned that in Rhodesia—Zimbabwe—and in Kenya and Malaya. We, as a nation, are not doing enough, quickly enough, to help those forces to build up. We learned a lesson in Zimbabwe in 1980 when we quickly got British policemen and soldiers out there to train the forces. It may not be a pretty sight 20 years later, but at the time the operation worked well, and it was the speed that counted.

An increasingly prominent question—I certainly see it in my postbag—is: "Why haven't we found the weapons of mass destruction?" I supported the Government. Perhaps I am gullible and I was led astray by the Prime Minister, but—partly because I was in the services—I believe that one should support the troops when they are going in. We need to resolve the problem. It is all right for the Liberals to go on about it: they can change sides as many times as they want, but in the end nobody will believe them. At least we have the morals to stand by what we believe, unlike—I shall not say it.

Mr. Keetch: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: Oh, go on then.

Mr. Keetch: If the hon. Gentleman will not believe the Liberal Democrats, does he believe his own leader, who said that he believed that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, and could build up an arsenal that he could use against Britain? He said:

"The only question is will he choose to strike against Britain? I believe so."

Does the hon. Gentleman believe his leader?

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: I really must learn not to grant interventions to Liberal Democrats. I am not going to answer that. The Liberals need to learn when to be quiet.

[Mr. Liddell-Grainger]

I want to move on to reserve forces and overstretch. The hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce) made some interesting comments, although I do not agree with him. If we are to continue to have a long-term commitment to Iraq, we must not allow our forces to become overstretched. The British military work on a three-year training cycle. The first year is operational, the second is for training, and the third is for recuperating and resting. We are unable to recruit enough people to join our volunteer forces, so there is bound to be overstretch. The situation will continue for a long time to come. Our experience in Northern Ireland shows that it takes much longer to help people than is anticipated when one first goes in.

If we are to use our forces wisely, that must include our reserve forces, some of whom are hon. Members who are in Iraq or who may yet go there. We need a much better way of mobilising those forces. The cold war is long gone. A situation such as this never arose in the 1990s, at the time of the strategic defence review. We did not anticipate a long-term commitment to a country such as Iraq. If the situation is allowed to continue, we will find that troops are away so much that people will not join the military because their families will not see them or get the back-up that they need at home. The Royal Marines are based just outside my constituency in Taunton. Having just returned, they are about to be redeployed in another situation. That is fine—it is what they signed up for—but they find it very tough never to be off-duty. My hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) asked the Secretary of State about the possible loss of battalions, or even regiments. I hope that that is not to be the case, because we can ill afford it.

About 1.5 million refugees were chased out of Iraq over a long period. Those people should be brought back. Many of them—professional people who were chased out by the Saddam Hussein regime—are the kind of people who are needed back in Iraq to help to rebuild it. Many are in Jordan, Syria and Iran. We need to bring them back before they get the idea of coming back as armed insurgents. They must be brought back and assimilated into society but we must also do much more.

Congress has been asked for another $87 billion. That is an enormous amount of money to have to put up to lead such a programme, but it will be needed. It is all very well claiming that things will get better; the time that they take to do so means that more goes wrong. One cannot expect 47 per cent. of the rural population to do without water for a long period. We must ensure that 100 per cent. of people have clean water.

Why should anyone have faith in the supposedly developed world if we do not give a lead to people who need to be returned to the country and assimilated? Iraqis will continue to disbelieve what we are about. Why should they believe us? Actions speak louder than words. We must make progress; if we do not, we let those people down. The House should therefore completely support our role.

3.55 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Today's debate is timely, but I am sorry that the Government did not provide a full debate on the subject. I support the amendment that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) tabled. If it had been selected, I would have voted for it because

"stabilisation in Iraq can only be effective if implemented by forces under the control of the United Nations."

I would add that political power must be handed over to the Iraqi people as soon as possible. Some dreadful mistakes have been made, not least the total disbanding of the Iraqi army. That has made the situation far worse.

We are right to focus on the misleading devices that were employed to get the country to go to war. Like everybody else, I await with bated breath the outcome of the Iraq survey group's report on weapons of mass destruction and the Hutton report. However, now is not the time for that.

It is timely to remind hon. Members of the genuine consequences of the illegal and immoral war for the people of Iraq. It is proper to examine the way in which millions of ordinary Iraqi people are suffering now. We should also consider the destabilisation of the middle east. There is no comparison between that and the impact on a few political careers and no question about what should receive priority.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Mahon: No, I want to continue for a while and my hon. Friend has not been present for the whole debate.

As many hon. Members said, the war has not been cost free. More than 6,000 Iraqi civilians are dead, hundreds of thousands have been injured and the security and livelihoods of many more have been destroyed. For what—a better life? We were told that when the occupying troops went in, flowers would be strewn in their path and they would be welcome. However, the reality is a massive increase in rape—women are not safe to go out—abductions, in the south as well as the north, murders, lootings and all other violent crimes. Power supplies have still not been restored and the water remains contaminated. Diseases such as cholera and dysentery are rife.

Contrary to the claims of the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence yesterday that all 240 hospitals are operating, NGO reports present a different picture. I recommend that my right hon. Friends read those reports on how the hospitals are operating. A mass of evidence exists, if they look for it, that paints a grim picture. There is a huge increase in patients admitted with gunshot wounds; many hospitals are without the medicines that they require; much equipment is useless or not operable during power cuts. Much has also been stolen and wrecked by looters. It is therefore not true that 240 hospitals are operating as we would recognise a fully operating hospital.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Mahon: I shall do so shortly.

In a sense, Iraqis are worse off than they were under that hateful man. Before anybody asks "Do you support Saddam Hussein?", I emphasise that my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) and I

went to 10 Downing street and signed early-day motions in 1987 and 1988, when Saddam Hussein was considered to be someone with whom we could do business. I opposed him then; I do not have any truck with that man.

The view is being put forward that we got rid of a dictator, that it was worth it, and that we are going to bring freedom and democracy back to the Iraqis. I believe that the contrary is happening at the moment, and will do so for the foreseeable future. I cannot see that changing. Iraq has descended into a lawless state—civil unrest is growing and about a dozen attacks on our troops take place daily. The jihadists are entering the country at an alarming rate. This was always predictable; indeed, it was predicted.

What is happening in Iraq is seen by millions of Muslims throughout the world as a western crusade to grab the oil and to grab another part of the world for western society's needs. Iraq is surrounded by 10 or 12 Muslim countries, representing about 240 million Muslims. That is a fertile breeding ground for extremists. Al-Qaeda might not have been in Iraq before, but it, or similar groups, are almost certainly there now. I have never equated Iraq with Vietnam, although I know that some people think that it is going to end up like Vietnam did. My real fear is that Iraq could end up like Afghanistan.

We should give Iraqis the vote, but I am not convinced that the Shi'a majority want anything like what we would view as a western democracy. Iraq will almost certainly become an Islamic state. I do not think that this process will lead to a secular society; the country will probably split into various pieces. Everything that has been said about keeping it as a sovereign state and introducing democracy will simply not come about.

Yesterday, without making a statement to the House, the Secretary of State committed two more battalions and more specialist personnel to join the armed forces already in Iraq. This is a grave mistake. As I said earlier, I have recently spoken to troops who have just returned from a six-month tour of duty in Basra. They did not recognise the rosy picture that has been painted of southern Iraq. I sat and listened to them for more than an hour, and I suspect that two of them will be leaving our armed forces. There is no way that those two young men will go back to Iraq. They said that they were tolerated, at best, when they first went in, but that now there is deep resentment. If people want to look, they can see the demonstrations and the attacks that are happening on a daily basis, not only in the American-held areas but where we are, too.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): I am interested to hear what my hon. Friend has to say about the troops returning from Iraq. Other members of the Defence Committee and I visited Basra in late July, and I accept that the situation there is no bed of roses, mainly as a result of a lack of investment by the previous regime over many years. However, schools, for example, are being opened by dedicated troops who are working very hard there. Will my hon. Friend give credit for the fact that things are being done to improve the situation, certainly in parts of southern Iraq? The picture is not entirely the bad one that she and, unfortunately, the press are trying to paint.

Mrs. Mahon: I point out to my hon. Friend that all the schools were working before we carried out this illegal invasion. *[Interruption.]* Most of them were. I have had meetings with Iraqi women who were involved in higher education but who are now unable to pursue their studies because they dare not go out alone, either during the day or at night, because of the abductions, rapes and murders. Many Iraqi women in the south are also being subjected to the hard-line mullahs who now insist that they should be veiled. Many freedoms have therefore been taken away by this untimely and unnecessary war.

Mr. Kevan Jones: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Mahon: I must make some progress; we do not have too much time.

The Iraqis feel humiliated and deeply resent their country being occupied. It is much worse where the United States troops are in control. We are possibly doing a better job than they are, but the resentment is still there.

Yesterday, my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Chris McCafferty) asked how many ordinary Iraqis—men, women and children—had died since the peace had begun. I think it shameful that the Foreign Secretary admitted that he did not know; but we can obtain the information from the websites, and we read daily of the tragedies caused by the disastrous methods of control used by some of our US allies.

On Sunday Peter Beaumont, a distinguished journalist on *The Observer* who is very knowledgeable about this part of the world, reported on the victims of methods used by the coalition. Such things happen daily in Iraq. He said:

"Farah Fadhil was only 18 when she was killed. An American soldier threw a grenade through the window of her apartment. Her death, early last Monday, was slow and agonising. Her legs had been shredded, her hands burnt and punctured by splinters of metal, suggesting that the bright high-school student had covered her face to shield it from the explosion.

She had been walking to the window to try to calm an escalating situation; to use her smattering of English to plead with the soldiers who were spraying her apartment building with bullets.

But then a grenade was thrown and Farah died. So did Marwan Hassan who, according to neighbours, was caught in the crossfire as he went looking for his brother when the shooting began.

What is perhaps most shocking about their deaths is that the coalition troops who killed them did not even bother to record the details of the raid with the coalition military press office. The killings were that unremarkable. What happened in Mahmudiya last week should not be forgotten, for the story of this raid is also the story of the dark side of the US-led occupation of Iraq, of the violent and sometimes lethal raids carried out apparently beyond any accountability."

That is part of the daily life that people think is making things better for those in Iraq.

It is almost impossible to imagine the level of bitterness and hatred that such actions breed among the Iraqi population. I believe that our service men and women have been placed in grave danger. I believe that the United Nations and the non-governmental

[Mrs. Mahon]

organisations are exposed to an Afghan-type situation. When the International Red Cross is pulling out, we have some very serious problems.

Suicide bombers are now operating in Iraq. These are certainly not just Saddam Hussein's disgruntled fedayeen. I think that we have opened Pandora's box. The resolution currently before the UN will not be acceptable. What country, what sane Government, would send their service men and women under that resolution? It keeps the United States totally in control and gives little military, economic or political power to anyone else.

It is clear to everyone who has been involved in the debate that there was definitely no post-war plan. I still believe that the war was intended to allow the US Government to get their hands on Iraq's oil—and, shamefully, my Government were prepared to help them to do so. It has created division between Europe and America, and it has had profound consequences for the United Nations, which I think it has damaged. It was a dreadful and costly mistake. Questions will be asked for years to come about why we went to war. What we certainly do not have at present is an exit strategy, and as a Member of Parliament whose constituents contain young men and women in the services, I think that that is an absolute scandal. I want to know when they are coming home. I want the UN to be brought in—I think that essential—but it will not be brought in under the latest resolution.

This has been a dangerous, reckless adventure, which has made the world a much more dangerous place for all of us. Those who misled and deceived us, and conspired to bring about this disastrous invasion, will carry the guilt. The rest of us should keep reminding the world that such recklessness should never happen again. We should use the United Nations and stick by international law.

4.9 pm

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): I welcome this debate and it is opportune that we are able to discuss this subject today. However, given the seriousness of the situation in Iraq, I find the motion's wording rather wishy-washy. Considering everything that is taking place, much more could have been included in the motion and we could have had a more pointed debate.

Many very wise things have been said in the Chamber today. For example, the hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) made some particularly pertinent points about the lack of preparation. Preparation was an issue that we raised with various Ministers, including the Secretary of State for Defence, in the run-up to the war. We were always assured that everything was going to be all right, everything was planned and all eventualities had been catered for. Those assurances have proved about as worth while as the dodgy dossier, in that the reality has proved rather different from the case that was made.

Some predicted that there would be problems afterwards. I shall quote not from Liberal Democrat Members or Labour Members, but from John Major. The current leader of the Tory party may have some difficulties with that former leader, but I wish that he had listened to him a little more in the run-up to this debate; that way we might not have reached this current position. On 23 February, John Major was interviewed on BBC television. According to the BBC website, he said that there would be Armageddon in the middle east if the UK and the US attacked Iraq unilaterally. More pertinently, he went on to say:

"The problems of winning the war are clear. The problems of winning the peace are going to be much more complex."

Winning the peace is certainly far more complex.

I contend that our troops are overstretched, both in and out of theatre. I am a member of the British armed forces parliamentary scheme, which is attached to the Army for the year. We were privileged to go to Basra in early June and to visit the training facility at the British Army training unit Suffield, in Canada, last week. While we were there, the forces on the ground were asked to do many essential tasks, which they did gladly. However, they involved supervising construction work, helping to purchase fridges for health centres, training policemen and many other tasks that could easily have been done by other agencies, had they been there.

It was pointed out earlier in the debate—perhaps during the opening remarks—that the commanders kept asking, "Where is the Department for International Development? Where is the help that we expect from our Government with what we are doing? It is not there." It is no surprise that commanders are saying that they have adequate forces, but at the same time asking where DFID is. It was only a matter of time before the lack of assistance from DFID created stresses within the armed forces. The sending of extra forces is a response to that consequence.

I point out to the Minister that extra armed forces alone will not resolve the situation. We have to get the restructuring in hand to make the country more prosperous. We must get the basic services working and back under Iraqi control if we are to resolve the situation. In many ways, the longer that takes the more difficult it will be.

I referred to the overstretching of our forces in Iraq because of the tasks that they are being asked to undertake, and to the forces training at BATUS, whose training programme is called Operation Medicine Hat. Because of a lack of pre-training—as a result of Operation Telic, for example—Operation Medicine Hat has had to be cancelled. The troops are now training to a lower standard because the commanders do not feel that they will be able to reach the higher standard. For the Government Front Benchers to say that our forces are not being overstretched is palpable nonsense. Our forces are being reduced in capacity because they are not trained to the high standards that they were before.

Mr. Salmond: If I understood him correctly earlier, the Defence Secretary said that no one should say that the troops are overstretched because it would demoralise them. In fact, every constituent in the armed forces that I have met has asked me to articulate the view that they are dramatically overstretched, which poses severe dangers for morale. Who does the hon. Gentleman believe—the Secretary of State for Defence or his own and my constituents in the armed forces?

Richard Younger-Ross: I take the point, which the hon. Gentleman makes exceedingly well. I take the view

of my constituents and the forces that I have met in both Iraq and Canada, which is that our forces are overstretched. Saying otherwise is to look blindly and fail to see the reality. It is a problem that we need to face up to.

I can provide an example of how the overstretching works on the ground. I referred in an earlier intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) to the World Food Programme warehouses just outside Basra. The British Army trained some guards from the naval academy and they had a base within the compound to keep an eye on things. They were able to prevent looting. With the changeover of regiments, the new battle group went in, the commander examined what he had to do and reordered his forces. He took the decision—it was rightly his to take—to remove that force, which had been permanently stationed within the warehouse, and allocate it to other tasks elsewhere.

The World Food Programme was concerned and made representations to the Army and us that, if those forces were removed, the local guards would not be strong or disciplined enough, so looting would soon take place. The Ministry confirmed in a letter last week that that was indeed the case. Shortly after our forces were withdrawn, the walls were breached, looting took place and the British commander subsequently had to reverse the decision and put troops back within the compound to prohibit the looting. The problem facing the commander was that forces were limited and could be allocated only so far. Forces could have been allocated more readily if they were not doing the tasks that the Department for International Development and others should have been doing while they were there.

There are major problems—for example, with the electricity, water and oil supplies and with clearing up munitions. The Foreign Secretary told us yesterday that Russian companies were asking to be part of the contracts for rebuilding the power stations. I would like to know why I was told in a parliamentary answer earlier this year that there had been no approaches from Russia regarding the power stations. If Russian companies are interested, why is the process taking so long?

The power stations are not working to full—indeed, only 25 per cent.—capacity. Why cannot we get the components, probably stockpiled somewhere in Russia, into the power stations so that they can run at greater capacity? If they did so, there would be fewer electricity supply cuts, and without so many supply cuts, we would not have so many Iraqi children going to the munitions dumps, taking out boxes of mortars and emptying them on to the desert so that they can take the wood back to burn to boil the water in order to drink safely. How many Iraqi children have died as a consequence of the lack of power? Quite a lot. There is a poster campaign telling Iraqi children not to touch munitions, but the choice between clean water and opening a box of mortars to have the wood is a very hard one.

Jeremy Corbyn: I am very interested in what the hon. Gentleman is saying, and he makes his case well in respect of unexploded munitions. Has he any information about the effects of weapons that used depleted uranium, in both the first Gulf war and the more recent conflict? What is the incidence of cancers, especially in southern Iraq, as a result of the use of those weapons?

Richard Younger-Ross: I have no evidence on that. My information, as far as it goes, is that no link has yet been proven between depleted uranium and cancer.

Other hon. Members wish to speak, so I shall conclude my speech. Yesterday, I asked the Foreign Secretary about the resources that are being made available. He said that

"the Department for International Development has committed £198 million altogether this financial year. Within that overall figure, an allocation of £20 million was recently made for short-term infrastructure projects in the south of Iraq."—[*Official Report*, 8 September 2003; Vol. 410, c. 49.]

That is fine, but it did not answer the question that I asked. I wanted to know what resources, including people, were being made available. When he responds to the debate, I hope that the Minister will say why only two police offices have been allocated to Iraq—one to Basra and the other to Baghdad. More officers are needed to train the local police.

It is said that our forces are overstretched. I hope that the Minister will say how the Government will make available the resources to deal with the problems. Without those resources the prognosis is not bright or good. It is actually very gloomy.

4.21 pm

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker, for not being here for the start of the debate. I had the responsibility of being in the Chair for a private Bill Committee upstairs. I have yet to perfect the technique of being in two places at once.

I begin by congratulating my hon. Friends on the Front Bench on choosing this subject for debate. It is amazing that the Government did not take the opportunity provided by a September return to hold a full debate on this very serious issue. They will stand condemned in the eyes of the public for that omission. I can understand why they should be embarrassed about the matter, but their duty was to hold such a debate.

The House has speculated about the reasons for the war. The Prime Minister may love foreign excursions, or he may want to show what a good buddy he is to George W. Bush. As the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) said, it may be that there is a strong oil connection behind the war.

Regime change is illegal, as Canning made clear a couple of hundred years ago. However, he said that a pre-emptive strike was permissible under certain circumstances, if it meant that the safety of the realm would be secured. He did not quite use those words, but the sentiment is clear, and it is a short step from there to the Government's argument about weapons of mass destruction, to which the Prime Minister clings like a drowning man clutching at a straw. I suppose that there is a parallel there somewhere.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), the shadow Secretary of State, was the first to refer to the dodgy dossier, and events have proved him absolutely right. I voted against the war. I did so with sadness, but I did not believe the dossier. I remember the

[Mr. Richard Page]

Prime Minister's performances at the Dispatch Box: on more than one occasion, his face was contorted with conviction and honesty as he tried to convince the House, "I am Tony, trust me."

Hon. Members of all parties told me that they did not believe that there were weapons of mass destruction, but that they could not believe that the Prime Minister could come to the House and say what he said unless he knew something that they did not. They said that that was why they supported the Government. What is the situation now, given that some 10,000 people are dead or wounded, and that billions of pounds worth of damage has been done? In the absence of a miraculous discovery, it is fairly obvious that there are no weapons of mass destruction. Also, it is clear that the plans to rebuild Iraq have been woefully inadequate, even though we were assured time and time again that the proper plans were in place.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): Like my hon. Friend, I voted against the war, but like him, I wavered when I heard the Prime Minister, thinking that I might be in the wrong. Does my hon. Friend agree that the best thing for the good of the country would be a full inquiry? If we knew that the Prime Minister took his decisions on the best possible intelligence, I would always be prepared to say I was wrong.

Mr. Page: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; indeed, that is how I meant to end my few immortal words to the House. Since he has said that for me, I shall just give the House the few bits remaining.

I am amazed by the Government's surprise at terrorist and criminal activity in Iraq. It seems as if the Prime Minister writes a script then becomes aghast when the rest of the world does not follow it. There are no weapons of mass destruction—oh dear, there is a mistake. There was inadequate policy to rebuild Iraq after the war. And now they are surprised that terrorist activity is ruining all the reconstruction that should be taking place and they are asking more troops to risk their skins to save the Government's skin.

We had better start looking through the right end of the telescope. I do not think that the west understands the strength of Islamic feeling, faith and fervour throughout the world. We try to impose our values and disciplines on the rest of the world, and we act surprised when that does not work as we want it to. The hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) just asked whether we are right to impose western democracy on Iraq, and she was absolutely right. On how many places in Africa have we have tried to impose our democratic processes? Has it worked? Has it stuck? Has it continued? Of course not.

Nor do we understand the strength of Islam. If someone invaded this country, would we expect our patriots to undertake guerrilla activity against the invader? I think we would. We would be surprised if this great British island did not contain people who would say, "No. We want them out. We want to be back in charge of our own affairs." We call people terrorists, but to the Islamic movement and faith, they are holy warriors and martyrs, protecting their own and protecting their faith.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) said we need quick training and a quick way out. I say amen to that.

4.27 pm

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) has just said that the witching hour approaches. That is an interesting description of the time for winding-up speeches in the House of Commons, but I have no fears about exorcising ghosts and dispatching myths. If he cares to follow my speech, I hope that I shall not disappoint him after his catchy description.

I thank the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) for pointing out how important it is to have the opportunity to hold this debate following the summer recess. It was nice of him to do so. We all feel the need to discuss this important issue, and the Opposition have been willing to donate our time for it. It is in everyone's interest.

I rather liked some of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood). I cannot say that I greatly enjoyed the anti-American aspect of his speech, but he made one very telling point. One rarely hears from those of us in this profession that, as he said, politicians are usually part of the problem, not the solution. There was remarkable profundity in that, and we should all show his touch of humility on that point.

I had rather less time for the many interventions made by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). He fails to understand that support for the war was not a blank cheque in support of the failures that came out of the war. Grown-up politics means constructive criticism, even from one's supporters, and that is very much what we are engaged in.

Mr. Salmond *rose—*

Mrs. Spelman: I am not giving way on that point. The hon. Gentleman has burned up too much capital with his previous interventions.

I especially want to single out the contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter), who is a member of the Select Committee on International Development. He explained clearly the inconsistencies at the heart of DFID's policy, which led to the military situation in Iraq. I am glad that a DFID Minister is on the Treasury Bench now, although none was present for the whole of the rest of the debate. The Government chose to open and wind up the debate with Defence spokesmen, yet DFID and the Ministry of Defence are in this together, which is why the Opposition have speakers from both briefs. One Department cannot operate without the other.

There were a number of interesting contributions from the Government Benches. However, I disagree with the comments of the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce), who disputes the claim that there is overstretch. With his military background, I am sure that he will listen to a former Chief of the Defence Staff talking about overstretch in the Army. Soldiers take us—their political representatives at Westminster—on one side, as they did when I was in Afghanistan and the Gulf, and explain what overstretch feels like, what it means and the consequences for them and their families. To dispute that it exists is not a wise course.

The deep concern of the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) for the people of Iraq is respected on both sides of the House. She brought us the important and troubling information that the ICRC is withdrawing from its work in Iraq. That the military situation has become so bad that the ICRC has felt the need to do that is extremely significant. In my experience, it is the one organisation that works in the direst military situations and has been willing to go through the lines to help people, so for it to withdraw from Iraq is very serious indeed.

I hope that other hon. Members who contributed to the debate will forgive me if I turn to some of the main points. The debate has been interesting and it is important that we have had the opportunity to hold it after our break. Incredibly, in the last statement that we heard before our summer recess, the Government seemed to believe their spin about the military situation in Iraq: even then, they had persuaded themselves that it was better than the grim reality. The Minister of State, Department for International Development, actually said:

"Life has regained an air of normality."—[*Official Report*, 3 July 2003; Vol. 408, c. 552.]

That is extraordinary. How hollow that assessment rings today. Events over the summer have shown what a shambles the Government's policy for post-conflict Iraq has become.

Yesterday, the Foreign Secretary admitted that the situation on the ground is more serious than it was at the end of July. That is important. A senior member of the Government formally admitted in the House that things were deteriorating. That means that, as a coalition partner, we have presided over a deteriorating security situation. The closest we got to an admission of the seriousness of the situation from DFID was in its most recent update on Iraq on 5 September, which stated that security "remains tense". Given that many NGOs are withdrawing their staff from Iraq, that the UN is still operating from a different country and that we are sending more of our troops, that was, to say the least, an understatement.

It is difficult for the Opposition to resist saying, "We told you so", but almost exactly a year ago, on 24 September, the shadow Foreign Secretary gave the Government four key points that would have to be taken into consideration before a decision to go to war. First, we must act with the international community. Secondly, the basis for any war must be legal. Thirdly, if war took place, it should be prosecuted effectively. Fourthly, there should be no war without a clear vision for the new Iraq.

Just in case the Government were not listening back in September last year, we reminded them of the same four points before the conflict started in a debate in the House on 21 January. The Government chose to ignore our advice, with some of the most churlish and complacent answers to parliamentary questions that I have ever seen. For example, in October last year, I asked what discussions had taken place between the Department for International Development and its equivalents in the US, UN and EU about a possible conflict in Iraq, and I received the answer that they were not actively discussing those issues. That is very hard to believe if, as the former Secretary of State for International Development claimed on 17 June in her evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Prime Minister and President Bush had set a date for the war last September. What does that tell us about the Prime Minister's priorities for post-conflict Iraq if DFID was being sidelined from his discussions?

In November, we held a contingency planning forum for the non-governmental organisations, the suggestions from which received barely an acknowledgement. In December and again in January, I asked what discussions had been held with Iraq's neighbours about refugees, and I got the same answer on both occasions—one word: none.

On 30 January, the former Secretary of State for International Development stood right here in the House and said:

"the preparations are as good as they can be."—[*Official Report*, 30 January 2003; Vol. 398, c. 1054.]

How does that square with her telling "The Politics Show" on 1 June that

"preparations for post-conflict were poor"?

So, poor means good for the Government, does it? That failure has contributed to the present military situation in Iraq.

Who is to blame? On 3 February, the Prime Minister told the House:

"We are well aware that we must have a humanitarian plan that is every bit as viable and as well worked out as a military plan."—[*Official Report*, 3 February 2003; Vol. 399, c. 36.]

However, being aware is not the same as doing something about it. Now, in an article in *The Independent on Sunday* this week, the former Secretary of State for International Development lays the blame firmly on the Prime Minister, by claiming that the threat from Iraq was exaggerated. She said:

"On top of this, there is the total negligence of failing to prepare for the inevitability of a speedy military victory. Many, many lives have been lost and are being lost in Iraq because of this incompetence."

In her resignation letter, the former Secretary of State for International Development said that

"she agreed to stay in the Government to help support the reconstruction".

However, it appears that that reconstruction did not happen. The Prime Minister's added mistake was to ask her to stay on.

Mr. Caplin: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Spelman: I am reaching the end of my speech. The hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity in his winding-up speech, and we both have limited time.

Not only have the people of Iraq been let down by Government negligence, but our own people feel let down by the Government exaggerating important information on which the decision to go to war was based. A good outcome can be wrestled from the situation in Iraq. Above all, we have a responsibility to work towards that, but we need answers to questions about why the military situation got worse instead of better.

We welcomed the judicial inquiry into the death of Dr. Kelly, for which we are all sorry, but out of respect for all who have died in Iraq, in part through the lack of

[Mrs. Spelman]

contingency planning, we still need a full, independent inquiry into the Government's mishandling of the war. The inquiry should investigate not only the handling of intelligence material and the basis of the decision to go to war, but what happened in the Government to result in such a poor planning process. The Government can best address the military situation in Iraq by publishing a clear plan for the reconstruction of Iraq. Failure to do that will fuel the fears that they do not have a plan, and that does not bode well for the situation in Iraq.

4.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): Today's debate has provided an important opportunity for the House to consider developments in Iraq during the parliamentary recess. I certainly welcome the nine Back-Bench contributions to the debate, which has been taken seriously by hon. Members of all parties.

I must briefly tell the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) that we had Defence questions yesterday when my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Minister of State and I were in the Chamber to answer questions on all defence issues, including those that arose during the parliamentary recess. Parliament did not recommence today; it started yesterday.

I want to reflect on the efforts of those from the United Kingdom—military and civilian—who are trying to restore to Iraq the political security and economic stability that it needs and deserves. Many non-governmental organisations and charitable organisations from throughout the world, together with our armed services and staff from the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development, are working throughout Iraq. The House can be justifiably proud of the work that is taking place and all those who are prepared to work in sometimes trying or even dangerous conditions for the benefit of another nation. I am sure that the House will join me in paying tribute to their courage and compassion and the important role that they are playing in the reconstruction.

I want to go through some of the issues relating to the ongoing humanitarian and reconstruction work in Iraq. The Department for International Development has contributed £218 million for the reconstruction of Iraq, which is, of course, money from Her Majesty's Government. The United Kingdom is also providing €19 million—I know that Conservative Members will enjoy that—toward European Community funding in Iraq that is contributing to programmes relating to the humanitarian situation. The United Nations World Food Programme distribution system has been up and running since June. Small-scale voluntary returns of refugees from neighbouring countries are being facilitated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. As the hon. Member for Meriden knows, plans have been announced for the construction of emergency housing in southern Iraq for returning refugees and internally displaced people. The aim is to create 4,000 homes within six months at a cost of $27.5 million using local contractors and creating 20,000 jobs.

Despite what has been said this afternoon, almost all hospitals in Iraq are now in operation, although several still face some water, sanitation, power and security difficulties—no Government Member denies that. However, coalition forces are providing security for several such hospitals and Iraqi security guards and the police force are being trained for that purpose. When necessary, Her Majesty's Government are supplying generators.

US aid contractors are working to restore schools throughout Iraq. I am delighted that most schools were open by June this year and that about 5.5 million children were able to take end-of-year exams in June and July. The World Health Organisation reports that there is no overall shortage of medical supplies in Iraq, although there might be a shortage to treat several specific conditions. Some problems remain with the distribution of supplies to hospitals and clinics, which is largely a result of security problems. Routine vaccination for children has been restarted and a catch-up campaign run to vaccinate children who missed out during the conflict.

Water supplies have been disrupted by sabotage, terrorism and looting, and the House should condemn such action, but the International Committee of the Red Cross and others, including British armed forces, have worked well to repair facilities and to provide water by tanker where supplies have been disrupted.

I shall list some of the agencies that Her Majesty's Government are supporting through the Department for International Development. The World Food Programme receives £33 million; UNICEF £9 million; and UN Mine Action Service £4 million. The ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies together get £32 million.

Mr. Jenkin: We are impressed by those figures and do not dispute them. We acknowledge the money that is being spent. What the Government have failed to do, however, is to say why the infrastructure problems in Iraq, which are contributing to the unhappiness of the population, are only now being addressed. Why does that problem suddenly require reinforcements to overcome it? Why was it not in the original plan? Why did the Government not act earlier?

Mr. Caplin: That is all part of what was originally planned. The hon. Gentleman's intervention is timely and perhaps he will reconsider it in a moment. Unlike the Liberal Democrats, who quoted the Leader of the Opposition from last year, I shall quote what the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) said on the BBC 6 o'clock news last night:

"There is no reconstruction taking place."

I am putting on the record the reconstruction that is taking place time and time again on behalf of Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Jenkin *rose—*

Mr. Caplin: Want to try again?

Mr. Jenkin: The delivery of emergency water supplies or food parcels does not constitute reconstruction. How many contractors are working in Iraq, or has the security situation deteriorated to such an extent that they dare not go in?

Mr. Caplin: I reject the hon. Gentleman's comments. *[Interruption.]* Yes, I do. I want to carry on with the list.

It is extremely long and the House is going to hear it because of the serious allegation by the Leader of the Opposition that no reconstruction is taking place. I note that the hon. Member for Meriden did not repeat that accusation because she knows that it is not true.

Save the Children UK is receiving £500,000; the Mines Advisory Group nearly £900,000; the BBC World Service £400,000; the World Health Organisation £6 million; and the UN Development Programme £7 million. The BBC World Service is an important facility for the production of radio programmes on humanitarian issues for the BBC Arabic Service that the people of Iraq can hear.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): If the Government and the Minister contend that the reconstruction in Iraq is going according to plan, when will the standard of living for the majority of Iraqis be the same as it was before the war?

Mr. Caplin: Two things. First, I am not pretending that everything is okay. There is much more work to do. Secondly, I note that the hon. Gentleman does not agree with the leader of his party who said that no reconstruction is taking place. *[Interruption.]* Let me repeat it for Conservative Members: the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green claimed on the BBC 6 o'clock news last night:

"There is no reconstruction taking place."

I look forward to seeing the right hon. Gentleman at the Dispatch Box tomorrow opposite my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Mr. Salmond: Let us accept that the Leader of the Opposition is an easy target, but if everything is going to plan, what is the Foreign Secretary going on about in his leaked memo by saying that 5,000 extra troops are required to stop strategic failure? Does that mean that we can expect either another 3,000 troops deployed or strategic failure, or is the Foreign Secretary wrong?

Mr. Caplin: Later in my comments I shall turn to the hon. Gentleman's earlier contribution. *[Interruption.]* I shall answer him when I am ready. I want first to turn to the Liberal Democrats.

The hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) referred to the security situation and asked whether we need to send more troops, so his question was not dissimilar to that just asked by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). The Secretary of State talked about that in his opening remarks. I sometimes wonder whether hon. Members have been listening because my right hon. Friend made the point that we must not forget that much of Iraq is peaceable and the majority of the country continues to support the coalition. However, we must send troops where they are necessary.

Mr. Keetch: I heard exactly what the Secretary of State said today and yesterday—there are to be 1,200 additional troops and 1,000 will be on standby. The question that I and a number of others have asked is whether the Government can give an assessment as to whether that will be the final tranche of British troops deployed in Iraq. I understand that it is difficult to predict the future, but surely the armed forces need to know whether thousands more are to be sent to Iraq.

Mr. Caplin: Thankfully, Government policy is more flexible than that, and I cannot possibly answer that question because, as the hon. Gentleman will accept, we do not know what circumstances may arise. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. Perhaps the House could come to order.

Mr. Caplin: In the short time that remains—

Mr. Richard Younger-Ross: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Caplin: Later, if I have time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) referred to unexploded ordnance. Coalition forces have already cleared 350,000 unexploded munitions, and that was done primarily by UK and Danish teams.

I turn now to the speech of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan. I feel that his horse-racing tips would have been better than his speech. He clearly did not understand my intervention about the UN Security Council. He kept going on about a UN force, but he will be aware that Kofi Annan has ruled out any suggestion of a blue helmet force. To clarify matters for the hon. Gentleman, I point out that the important donors conference in Madrid next month, to which I am sure he would like to give his support, is referred to in the draft text of the Security Council resolution that is currently on the table.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Caplin: Go on then.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister be kind enough to reflect on the fact that the majority of the speeches made by Back Benchers in this debate supported my point about the UN force and, indeed, our amendment, which unfortunately was not selected? Since the Minister chose to mention me, will he return to the question of what the Foreign Secretary was going on about in the leaked memo about 5,000 troops? Will he answer the question—can we expect more troop deployments or not? If it is all going according to plan, why cannot he answer that question?

Mr. Caplin: Well, I believe that the story to which the hon. Gentleman refers was in *The Daily Telegraph*, which I do not read.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Caplin: I am afraid that I cannot. There is no time.

Mr. Garnier *rose—*

Mr. Caplin: With respect to the hon. and learned Gentleman, he has not been here all afternoon, but those

[Mr. Caplin]

who have, including the hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) and some of my colleagues, asked about the Iraq survey group. As hon. Members will know, the US is leading efforts to uncover the full extent of the misdeeds perpetrated by Saddam's regime. As well as unearthing efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction, that will include investigations into possible war crimes and support by the regime for terrorism. The group will have all the expertise that it needs for each particular task, and some members will be former UN weapons inspectors. The UK contribution to the group will be between 60 and 100 personnel, both military and civilian.

Questions were asked about troop deployment. My hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) asked about non-UK and non-US troops in Iraq. There are 14,700 such troops, of whom the majority, 9,200, are Polish, and we very much welcome the support of our soon-to-be EU colleagues in Poland. About 5,500 of the troops are from other nations, including good friends of the UK such as Denmark, Norway, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands.

Other questions have been asked about troop deployments by the hon. Member for Meriden and others. There was a review of troop numbers in July, which was accepted by the hon. Member for North Essex as being right and proper. At that time the review in theatre decided not to contribute any more troops. I emphasise the comments made earlier by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Local commanders in Iraq have requested the additional troop deployments that he announced in the written ministerial statement, and we shall continue to keep the matter under review with our commanders in the field in Iraq.

Richard Younger-Ross: Does the Minister accept that commanders on the ground said earlier this year that they were happy with the number of troops deployed because they were told that the Department for International Development would provide more resources? The Department has not done that, which is why we have the problem.

Mr. Caplin: I do not accept that. The clear emphasis of the earlier part of my speech was on the work of Her Majesty's Government through the Department for International Development and other agencies. It seems clear to me and to the whole House that the Department is working alongside our armed forces, and with the agencies that I listed earlier.

I shall conclude by taking up three or four points that were made in the debate. The hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) talked about overstretch in the reserves. Reservists exist to be used—I think that the hon. Gentleman will know that. That is in line with the strategic defence review. Indeed, it is what reservists are paid for, and that is why they are reservists. Currently, 2,200 reservists are in theatre, and no extra reservists were called out as part of yesterday's statement and deployment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith)—I do not know whether he is in his place—is the chair of the parliamentary Labour party defence committee and he knows a good deal about some of these matters. He spoke about the plan to establish democracy in Iraq. The House must understand that two months after the formation of the Iraqi governing council, that council is now heavily involved in the key economic and political decisions. On 3 September, only about a week ago, the council appointed 25 interim Iraqi Ministers. From now on, Iraq's Government Ministers will be led by Iraqi politicians responsible for implementing policy and managing their budgets. That was worth welcoming by the hon. Members for Meriden and for North Essex, but they never referred to it.

Even for those of my hon. Friends who may have opposed the military intervention, I think that it is now time to support those who are working so hard in Iraq to complete the task of its reconstruction. Our thoughts should remain with the families and friends of those who have lost their lives in Iraq. Fifty members of the United Kingdom armed forces as well as some civilians have died since 20 March. More have sustained injuries, some of them particularly serious. The whole House will wish them a speedy recovery.

What those people, both military and civilian, have in common is that they were trying to improve the lives of their fellow human beings in Iraq and the security of the middle east and the wider world. We are determined that their sacrifice will not be in vain. We shall continue what we have begun in Iraq, and we shall see it through to the end.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of the military situation in Iraq.

Teacher Shortages

4.59 pm

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I beg to move,

That this House notes that thousands of teaching posts have been lost in schools as a result of this year's funding crisis; condemns the Government for failing to respond early enough to reports of these redundancies, instead seeking to lay the blame on local authorities; further condemns the Government for not using any of the Department for Education and Skills' underspent money to alleviate this crisis; further notes that schools are having to ask parents for regular contributions to alleviate cash shortages; is concerned about the effect of these redundancies among teachers and support staff on the implementation of the Workload Agreement; and urges the Government to simplify the funding system for schools so that there will be no repeat of this year's problems in the recruitment and retention of teachers.

I am sure that the House will understand, as I do, that the Secretary of State has a prior commitment at the TUC, which is why he is not with us today. I hope that he takes the opportunity to talk to some of the teachers' representatives who will no doubt be there. One reason for our calling this debate is to show that the Government are letting down not just those who rely on our public services but those who work in them. It is not only parents and children who have been hit by the Government's school funding crisis but teachers, who are being made redundant in schools up and down the country. I am not surprised that teachers are angry—they have been betrayed by the Government's false promises, and they will never trust them again.

Ministers sometimes affect surprise that trust in the Government and especially the Prime Minister has disappeared. They seem puzzled that people no longer think that they are competent to run the public services. For an explanation they need look no further than the mess that they have created in our schools and their own performance in responding to this crisis since it became apparent earlier this year. This year, Ministers have provided the general public with a master-class in blunder and confusion. One moment we have protestations of innocence, while in the next breath the Government concoct a short-term and inadequate solution to the very problem that they just told the public did not exist at all.

The history of the crisis is instructive. When questioned by the Select Committee on Education and Skills in July this year, David Normington, the permanent secretary at the Department for Education and Skills, told us when he began to feel that there were going to be problems with school funding in the year ahead. His answer to the Select Committee was that it was after the Secretary of State's arrival

"at the end of October and before Christmas, some time around then."

We now know that the Department knew before Christmas that the crisis was going to hit our schools. After Christmas, at the Secondary Heads Association conference, the Secretary of State said that there was no problem. Indeed, he had previously told the Association of Chief Education Officers that simply throwing more money at them would not solve their problems. Such a request, he said, showing less than his usual charm,

"just floods straight over my head. I don't listen to what you say quite frankly".

I am sure that the association responded in kind.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Is my hon. Friend not being characteristically over-generous to the Secretary of State and, indeed, the Department? In fact, it would have been clear to anyone that a major upset in funding to local authorities would result in a major upset in schools' funding. That should have been clear well before the Secretary of State assumed his present post.

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend makes a distinguished contribution to the Education and Skills Committee, and he is exactly right. Indeed, it ought to have been apparent to the Secretary of State and other Ministers that not only was the local government settlement likely to cause difficulties but many other matters under the direct control of the Government were going to cause problems, not least the Chancellor's insistence on increasing employers' national insurance contributions, which hit schools particularly hard—characteristically, 80 per cent. of a school's budget is taken up with staff costs—and the decision to increase employers' pension contributions, which came straight off the bottom line of school budgets. The bulk of the crisis has therefore been caused by decisions made inside government.

I therefore agree with my hon. Friend that the Secretary of State's apparent ignorance of the fact that the crisis was going to happen, let alone the reason why it was happening, is quite extraordinary. I can only assume that he was convinced by the announcement by the Minister for School Standards that every local education authority

"will be getting at least 3.2 per cent. per pupil increase for next year, with further increases in the following two years. No LEA will lose out in real terms as this new system is introduced".

That was the Government's formal position in the early months of this year.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): The logic of my hon. Friend's argument and the comments given in the Select Committee evidence to which he referred suggest that when Ministers sought to blame hard-working LEAs for the problem, claiming that they had held back money from schools and that that is where the root of the difficulty lay, they were presenting a disgraceful travesty of the reality and that their statements were, frankly, untrue.

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend is correct. I am afraid that it is sadly characteristic of the Government that, when they are faced with a problem, their first instinct is to look not for a solution, but a scapegoat. In this case, the scapegoat was to be local education authorities. I suspect that the reason why the Government gave up on their fruitless quest for a scapegoat had nothing to do with the merits of the case, but related to the fact that many Labour-controlled authorities throughout the country were pointing out that their schools were suffering in the same way as those of Conservative-controlled authorities, which became politically unhelpful to them.

In May, in response to many LEAs of all political colours, protests from schools and the rising number of complaints about the crisis, the Department finally announced that it would allow schools to set deficit budgets and that they would be allowed to use their capital budgets for paying teachers' salaries. That was

[Mr. Green]

the first signal that the Department was beginning to accept the scale of the problem. However, I remind Ministers of what we said at the time: allowing schools to dip into money intended for capital projects as well as their reserves risks storing up even greater problems for the future. The scale of the problems that the Government have stored up with that approach to the problem is now beginning to become clear.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Does my hon. Friend agree that any school that was planning major works, which would almost certainly occur during the summer holidays, would already have committed itself to the contractors by the time that the Secretary of State panicked and made this apparent concession?

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend is right. Many head teachers have said that when a school is engaged in a major capital project, it is extremely likely that it will be carried out during the summer holidays. Given the need to book builders, it is likely that arrangements will have been made for this year long before the Government gave permission for the money to be spent elsewhere. Their gesture was therefore moderately futile as well as ill timed.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Is it not a fact that we are now spending more on our school buildings and putting an end to the decaying, crumbling schools that existed under 18 years of Tory rule? The Tories never for one moment accepted that the standard of school premises had any effect on the education of our children.

Mr. Green: If that is the best that Labour Members can come up with, they will have a lot of explaining to do to head teachers who have been told to use their capital budgets for revenue spending. Let me quote Nick Christou at East Barnet school, just one of the many affected head teachers, who has had to divert £90,000 from capital projects. He said:

"The money that I had was for repairing the roofs because they are leaking all over the place—in the maths office and textile technology room for a start. But we have to use it and run with our leaky roofs for one more year. We will just have to put buckets underneath them."

In Labour-controlled Ealing, schools are using between 70 and 100 per cent. of their reserves just to avoid another crisis this year. The Government's first response merely stored up a worse crisis for years to come.

Even once the Department and its Ministers had accepted that there was a problem, there was still an enormous gulf between the reality of life in our schools and the purported facts coming from the Government. Even in June, some in the Government were unwilling to accept the scale of the problems. On 11 June, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition asked the Prime Minister

"how many teachers are facing redundancy right now?"

The Prime Minister replied:

"According to the Department for Education and Skills, there are about 500 net redundancies."

We now know that that answer grossly underestimated the problems that schools have been facing. As my right hon. Friend said at the time:

"The reality is that the figures for redundancies are that, this year, three times as many will face the sack as last year."—[*Official Report*, 11 June 2003; Vol. 406, c. 673–74.]

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): Does my hon. Friend agree that the number of potential redundancies is being masked? What would he say to those at my local school, Chalfonts community college, which has been forced to send out a letter to parents and guardians asking for £20 per family per term to enable it to maintain a full teaching staff and equipment to further the children's education? Is it not true that all those teachers are facing redundancy unless they get those parental contributions because the Government have kept money back from our schools?

Mr. Green: Absolutely. All that I can say to my hon. Friend is that I hope that Ministers will apologise to the head, teachers, parents and governors at her school and at many others that face similar problems.

By midsummer, even Ministers had stopped trying to bluster their way out of the crisis. Extraordinarily, one of their partial solutions was to scrap one of their own flagship policies—the school achievement award. That was truly bizarre. Only in May, the Minister for School Standards had said:

"It is right to reward the staff whose work helps pupils to learn and today's awards celebrate their achievements".

Two months later, the Secretary of State announced that too many teachers had been allowed to go to the top pay levels too quickly. In the next month, he announced that the Government would be scrapping the policy that was, according to them, intended to

"celebrate the work of the entire school community".

Clearly, 2003 is not the year to be a teacher under this Labour Government. Last week, the Secretary of State finally came close to apologising to the thousands of children facing the new school year with fewer teachers. In a webcast to welcome the new academic year, he said:

"The government make mistakes, certainly I do, my colleagues do, and the handling of the schools' funding last year was a good example of that which I am determined to put right this year."

In these circumstances, with so many teachers experiencing redundancy or facing the threat of redundancy, I am amazed that the Government have the nerve to run expensive TV advertising campaigns for teacher recruitment. There is something surreal about watching a news programme that contains an item about teachers losing their jobs just before an advert urging people to become teachers. I congratulate Ministers on their latest advert, which features large numbers of headless people. As a piece of post-modern irony commenting on the Department's performance this year, it cannot be beaten.

If the Secretary of State had admitted culpability when these problems first arose, and had created a real solution instead of merely putting off the inevitable, perhaps we would not be in a situation in which one school in five are asking parents to make contributions to keep the school system going—my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) gave an example—and in which a survey by the

Secondary Heads Association and *The Times Educational Supplement* found that 2,700 teaching posts had not been filled and that 700 teachers have been made redundant. Only months ago, the Prime Minister was talking of losses in the order of 500 teachers.

Mr. Alan Campbell (Tynemouth): To clarify that survey for the information of the House, did it say that more jobs were created last year than were lost?

Mr. Green: I would be pleased to read out a lot more from *The Times Educational Supplement* if the hon. Gentleman likes. Its headline is: "Staff cuts running into thousands", and it gives what it calls the "critical numbers", stating that 2,729 teachers and 1,152 support staff have not been replaced because of lack of funding. *[Interruption.]* The Minister for School Standards urges me to carry on. I need no urging. The *TES* goes on to say that there have been 730 teacher and 301 support staff redundancies; that there are 1,881 unfilled teacher posts; and that, of teachers appointed, 4,246—16.6 per cent.—were judged unsatisfactory by heads.

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): I am pleased that I, too, brought that copy of *The Times Educational Supplement* with me. Is it not the case that it reports that 3,548 additional new teachers are being hired, which is a net increase of 89 on the numbers that the hon. Gentleman quoted?

Mr. Green: The Minister also knows that the increase in the school population means that approximately 1,000 teachers are needed to keep pupil-teacher ratios steady and that the Government have failed to do that. Perhaps he will turn to the inside pages of *The Times Educational Supplement*, which paint an even bleaker picture. *[Interruption.]* The job adverts appear in a separate supplement because teacher retention is so difficult under the Government.

The head of the Royal Grammar school in High Wycombe has pledged £15,000 of his salary to ease his school's budget problems. The school caretaker is offering £5 a month. In East Anglia, one comprehensive school is considering charging for textbooks. One school in London—the London Oratory, which, I dare say, is familiar to senior members of the Government—is asking parents for an increase of £5 in the monthly £30 contribution that they already make. The school made it clear that the call for extra money is a direct result of the funding cuts for many schools in southern England that the Government announced early this year. The Oratory started term last week with fewer teachers.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Green: Of course I shall give way to my right hon. Friend, who is a distinguished former Secretary of State.

Mrs. Shephard: Labour Members, notably Ministers, display some reluctance to accept the facts that my hon. Friend is presenting to the House. Here is a fact: at the Old Buckenham high school in my constituency, more children are on the roll this term than last term and there are two fewer teachers. Is that factual enough for Ministers? It is an example of what is happening throughout my constituency: more children and fewer teachers. Moreover, any sicknesses in the school mean that classes will have to double to 60 pupils. Is not that a marvellous achievement by the Government?

Mr. Green: My right hon. Friend is right that Ministers appear peculiarly reluctant to accept the facts that everyone else acknowledges to constitute an accurate description of life in our schools today. Their immediate reaction to the Secondary Heads Association survey was simply to rubbish it. It was followed by a survey of local education authorities in *The Guardian* that showed similar results. Ministers must stop pretending that the rest of the world is out of step.

In 55 local authorities, more than 1,000 full-time teaching posts have been lost through redundancies and schools opting not to replace teachers who leave for other reasons. If that pattern were repeated in all local education authorities, approximately 2,500 teaching posts would be lost. We have a consistent set of numbers, which everyone, except the Government, recognises.

In the Minister's authority, 17 teaching posts have been lost. The LEA told *The Guardian*:

"Schools have set budgets by using their high levels of carry-forward balances."

In the Secretary of State's authority, 11 teaching posts have been lost and French and German classes are being cut in schools, which can simply no longer afford them. The Government tell us that they want to revive language teaching in schools, yet schools are having to cut such classes because of the Government's funding policies.

Not only teachers but support staff are suffering. According to *The Times Educational Supplement*, on top of the 301 support staff who have been made redundant, 1,152 support staff have not been replaced because of lack of funding. There are also problems with cuts in the capital budget that the Government have forced on schools. One can only spend one's capital once.

What do Ministers say to Roland Waller, the head of Morley High in Leeds, who said:

"We have protected staffing by cutting repairs and maintenance to the bone this year. Upgrades to classroom furniture will be virtually zero and our rolling programme of redecoration and refurnishing has been curtailed."

Only yesterday, Anne Welsh, the new president of the Secondary Heads Association, said that this year's cash crisis would have repercussions for many years. She said that problems were exacerbated because

"It is increasingly difficult to persuade young teachers to take on the responsibility of middle management roles, which is very worrying given that most in leadership positions are within 10 years of retiring."

We are not therefore considering a one-year crisis; it will linger in schools for years.

The crisis throws into severe doubt the success of the Government's workload agreement with teachers, which is supposed to be their big reforming idea of this Parliament. It will work only if there are enough teachers and teaching assistants to make it work. I was therefore fascinated by the Government's amendment, which mentions 25,000 extra teachers. Ministers like to talk about such figures. We have heard some of that from those on the Government Benches already this afternoon.

[Mr. Green]

Let us look at the facts as they have been revealed today by the Department itself. The number of full-time, regular, qualified teachers has fallen by 1,400 over the past 12 months. These are not my figures: they are the Department's figures, published today. The number of overseas and unqualified teachers has quadrupled since this Government came to power. Without raiding countries that need their own teachers and using unqualified teachers, the Government would not be able to staff our schools, even before the work load agreement comes into effect.

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): The hon. Gentleman referred to robbing other countries that need their teachers. Which countries is he referring to?

Mr. Green: Jamaica, in particular. The Jamaican Government have protested to our Government that our country is enticing away too many of Jamaica's teachers to work in our country. The hon. Gentleman is a decent man: I am sure that he worries about relatively poor countries, and that he does not want this country to be scouring the world for teachers from poorer countries that need their own teachers in their own country.

Of course, school funding will be affected. West Berkshire council has calculated that the agreement will cost it an extra £2 million this year, with another £1.7 million in September 2005. I believe that it is a Liberal Democrat council, and it states that the cost of the work load agreement reform will be £78.20 per pupil in primary schools, and £100.93 in secondary schools.

The evidence of the Department's permanent secretary has made it clear that one of the main reasons behind this problem is that the funding system is far too complicated. In his exchange with the Education and Skills Committee, he was asked for his definition of the formula spending share and, with commendable honesty, he answered:

"I am not sure I know".

If the permanent secretary does not know how the system works, it is hard to imagine how heads and governors—let alone parents—are supposed to know how it works.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Does my hon. Friend agree that that is one of the reasons why the Government find it so difficult to understand exactly how serious the problem is: for the first time in my 39 years in this House, the Secretary of State was unwilling to meet Members of Parliament and representatives of local schools to explain the seriousness of the situation? The junior Minister was going to meet me and my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) today but that meeting was put off because of the debate. We are now told that it will be yet another two months before we even meet him. Would it not be infinitely better if the Secretary of State would meet Members of Parliament—as all Secretaries of State have always done in my experience?

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. It is a shame if the Secretary of State will not meet him. I am sure that when he does reorganise his meeting—with whichever Minister—it will be extremely fruitful.

Before the recent crisis, I do not think that anyone inside or outside this House thought that the current system was simple enough to understand or, more to the point, fair enough to deal justly with the different needs of different areas of the country.

What is needed to remove this unnecessary confusion is a far simpler method of funding our schools in a manner that will give each school greater autonomy and remove many of the complications that exist in the current system. The Government have not yet made it clear whether they intend to cut out local education authorities altogether from their new system—which I assume they will announce in the next few weeks.

Whatever the Government do needs greater predictability and simplicity to remove the need for central Government to set minimum levels of delegation and to ring-fence budgets. That would mean that many of the problems that we have seen this year would have less chance of recurring in the future. Crucially, it would also mean that heads and governors could choose their own priorities, and not simply reflect what Ministers want. It would also allow parents to compare funding levels in different areas, force Governments to defend the weighting applied to different factors, and allow good local authorities to use savings from administration for improved services by spending the money where it matters—in our schools.

Just 15 months on from the announcement of the comprehensive spending review, which was supposed to solve the financial problems in our schools, Ministers are presiding over cuts, redundancies, deficits, short-term sticking-plaster solutions and rising anger from teachers and parents alike. It is a terrible indictment of ministerial incompetence that they did not see this crisis coming, spent months trying to find a scapegoat instead of a solution and are still floundering around hoping that they have not stored up further problems for years to come. They stand condemned in schools up and down this country. I commend our motion to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

5.25 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"applauds the significant increase in funding made available by the Government to schools since 1997 and the increase in standards schools have achieved; recognises that schools have had extra costs as well as extra investment this year; welcomes the statement to the House on 17th July by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills announcing measures to bring stability to school funding in 2004–05 and 2005–06, including a guarantee of a minimum per pupil increase in funding for schools, and maintaining and inflation-proofing the income that schools will receive from the Standards Fund; supports the consultation his Department is undertaking with representatives of head teachers and local education authorities; welcomes the fact that there are around 25,000 more teachers in schools and over 80,000 more support staff than there were in 1997 and more teachers with Qualified Teacher Status in schools than at any time since 1984;

acknowledges three years of rising recruitment to teacher training and the 3,000 more graduates who have accepted training places than this time last year; and welcomes a 25 per cent. fall in the number of unfilled teacher vacancies between 2002 and 2003."

I am delighted to have an opportunity, at the beginning of the school term, to put on parliamentary record the Government's congratulations to students on their exam and test results this summer, and also our thanks to teachers up and down the country whose hard work has contributed to those results. We in the Labour party say without reservation that when teaching improves and students work hard, we should welcome rising standards and not denounce them. This year we have seen world-class standards in primary schools maintained, good improvement at key stage 3, steady progress by those aged 16, and excellent results at A-level and in vocational studies. Those qualifications are well worth the paper on which they are written, and the country should applaud such results. The reactionary curse that somehow more will mean worse has no place in the 21st century.

I also welcome the opportunity to repeat what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said here on 17 July. Some schools face significant funding problems this year; we are determined to work with them, and with their local education authorities, to overcome those difficulties. I will address the problems directly, because in some schools they are serious, but it is wrong to pretend that every school and every LEA in the country faces them.

Labour is proud that the last teacher census featured 25,000 more teachers than six years ago, and 13,000 more than two years ago. We applaud the growth in support staff numbers: there are over 80,000 more than six years ago. We are encouraged by the fact that the teacher vacancy rate fell to 0.9 per cent. in 2002–03, with 1,130 fewer vacancies than the year before. We also welcome the fact that the latest teacher training numbers, for 2003–04, are up by nearly 3,000 on last year.

We note that, even according to the partial *Times Educational Supplement* survey on which the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) hung so much of his case, more teachers were hired than were laid off, with four times as many support staff hired as were leaving their posts. The annual survey of teacher numbers is conducted in January, and the results are published in spring. It will give definitive figures for this academic year. It is interesting that both the Local Government Association and the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers have said that it does no one any good to exaggerate the problems, and both report an aggregate position similar to that of previous years. We recognise that there have been serious problems, however, which is why we want to overcome those problems. We share responsibility with LEAs for raising funds and for distributing them.

Mr. Andrew Turner: The Minister quoted the view that there was no point in exaggerating the problems. Will he tell us whether the 25,000 figure refers to full-time equivalent qualified teachers, and, if it does not, will he tell us what is the figure relating to such teachers?

Mr. Miliband: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the 25,000 figure refers to full-time equivalent teachers with qualified teacher status or qualifications from other countries equivalent to such status, or to teachers on employment-based routes into training. We discussed this at Question Time in June, and the figures are absolutely clear: qualified teacher status numbers are higher than they have been at any time since 1984. There is also a significant number of teachers with equivalent qualifications from other countries, as well as teachers on employment-based routes.

There have been problems this year. Let me summarise the reasons for them. Total education funding for 2003–04 has risen by £2.7 billion. I shall return later to the irony of the fact that a Conservative party that refuses to support the increased spending now says that it is not enough. While investment has risen, however, so have costs, by some £2.45 billion. A teacher who joined the profession in 1997 is now 60 per cent. better off in real terms. There has been a one-off increase in pension contributions this year, as well as the national insurance changes mentioned by the hon. Member for Ashford.

Increased costs mean that however great the increase in investment, overall headroom this year is limited. At local level—the hon. Gentleman did not mention this—pupil numbers are falling significantly in the primary sector for the first time since the introduction of the local management of schools. There are 55,000 fewer pupils this year than last in the primary sector; next year, there will be 60,000 fewer. That means funding reductions for some schools. Meanwhile, the decentralisation of the ring-fenced standards fund that was long urged by teachers and local government proves—how can I put it?—to be extremely popular in theory, but in practice, because it means the re-direction of direct grants, some schools are hit hard. Furthermore, in a significant number of local education authorities schools did not receive the full amount indicated under education formula spend, and spending on centrally retained pupil services rose faster than budgets devolved to schools. Also, the lateness of information for schools, for which this Department and local authorities bear responsibility, has made budgetary planning difficult.

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): A promise has been made—certainly to London MPs—that information will be brought forward and decisions taken earlier in the round. When will that be?

Mr. Miliband: The hon. Gentleman anticipates a matter that I shall come to in a moment. Essentially, indications of local authorities' passporting intentions have been brought forward by at least a month, and the School Teachers Review Body will report in early November, rather than in early February.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Will the Minister confirm that the two figures for the reduction in primary school numbers that he has just announced—55,000 this year and 60,000 next—represent about 1 per cent. of enrolled primary school numbers, but that the total reduction in costs for the relevant schools will be

[David Taylor]

significantly less than the 1 per cent. that they will encounter when the grant formula allocates the amounts to them?

Mr. Miliband: The answer is that that depends on the formulae that the various local authorities have for reflecting pupil numbers in the distribution of funds to schools.

Let me turn to how we will work with heads and local government to fulfil our commitment to ensuring that, in 2004–05 and 2005–06, stability and growth are delivered on the ground. The number one demand from head teachers is confidence for future years to help them manage their way through this difficult but unique year. On 17 July, the Secretary of State announced the initial steps, the first of which is a commitment to augmenting the floor increases paid to LEAs with a minimum per pupil guarantee for every school in the country—the first time that this has ever been attempted. The second step is the continuation of the standards fund and other grants for 2004–05 and 2005–06, giving extra direct help of about £400 million a year for school budgets. The third step is earlier notification of funding decisions and better support for the management of funding, on the way to delivering the three-year budgets for schools which many heads believe will be an enormous step forward in the management of their funds.

There is also a commitment to full passporting of money into education and a two-and-a-half year pay deal, with rigorous management of the upper pay spine. I can report to the House that there is close and ongoing co-operation with local government and representatives of teachers and head teachers on these issues, and I pay tribute to the constructive and serious way in which this work is being done.

Mr. Waterson: Will the Minister now apologise to all those hard-working and committed LEAs, such as mine in East Sussex, which gave a robust rebuttal to his and the Secretary of State's allegation that they were hanging on to money bound for schools? Will he accept that those allegations turned out to be totally without foundation?

Mr. Miliband: I can only say that, in the round and partly because of the difficulties of notification to which I referred, significant funds certainly were still being held at local authority level in April or May. I do not know about the individual circumstances to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but I am very happy to write to him about whatever difference of opinion exists.

I want to explain the fruits of the efforts being made by the Department, head teachers and local government. In the next month, we will be able to announce the level of the per pupil guarantee and the decisions on the standards fund. In November, the Government will announce the local government settlement, and the School Teachers Review Body will report its pay recommendations significantly earlier than usual. We intend that, by the end of December, every school will know of its LEA's passporting intentions. This is a considered and effective process to deliver continued growth and progress in the education system. As the Secretary of State made clear in July, at each stage we will sustain the national agreement on work force reform. That agreement is phased over three years, matching the profile of spending increases. I am pleased to report that unions representing teachers, all head teachers and all support staff remain resolutely committed to that work force agreement. That is an example, if I may say so, of the social partnership that is talked about on both sides of the House, and which is certainly being talked about in Brighton at the moment.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Will the Minister further clarify the minimum per pupil upgrading? Will it be based on the amount paid per pupil this year after cuts—or after increases paid for out of capital budgets—or will it be based on the amount paid in the previous year before the result of the turmoil?

Mr. Miliband: That is precisely what we are discussing with head teachers. We obviously want to reflect as closely as we can the actual position in schools throughout the country. The per pupil increase that will be announced at the end of September or early October is designed to provide a fair reflection of the position on the ground.

I was talking about the work force agreement. We are agreed with our partners that the costs of the agreement rise over three years, but it is also important not to accept that every change in the way teachers work requires additional resources. That is why the national remodelling team is working with heads and, critically, with governors to share good practice in the management of teacher work load. The Conservative motion suggests, I think for the first time, support for the principles of the work load agreement. If the Conservatives are committed to its principles, I welcome their conversion, albeit a late one, to changes that will benefit teachers and pupils alike.

The motion refers tentatively to underspends in the Department, but the theme was not developed. However, anticipating that it might be a strong point, I asked the Department to dig further into the issue and it would benefit the House if I set out the position clearly. The motion refers to the public expenditure White Paper published by the Treasury, in which a figure of £1.8 billion is mentioned. I do not want the House to be under any misapprehension that somehow that amount is waiting to be spent. That money is not underspent, but being spent. The sum of £900 million was allocated to departmental programmes, including schools, for 2003–04 and beyond. That was made clear in May. The sum of £350 million was spent in 2002–03, but billed by outside contractors in 2003–04. More than £300 million is being spent on projects such as sure start, but only after rigorous quality criteria are met; and £200 million is being committed to school budgets for future years. The Department is committed to spend what it is given for the three years of the spending review period—and we are committed to spending it well, to secure quality as well as quantity.

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): These are very impressive and helpful figures to learn about—*[Interruption.]* They are very convincing, but has the Minister made any assessment of the surplus funds held by a considerable number of schools on account of the fact that local authorities no longer

financially manage the funds that go to schools generally? Does he have any idea of how that money could be released for this particular year?

Mr. Miliband: It is always encouraging to receive my hon. Friend's praise, however gently it is disguised—faint praise. He makes a serious point, however. From memory, the figure quoted for school balances was about £1.2 billion, but those balances will have been reduced substantially over the past six months. I believe that local education authorities collect the figures about once a year. The annual survey will provide a clearer sense of the position and we can judge the circumstances on that basis.

Mr. Purchase: Can the figures be released?

Mr. Miliband: I can reassure my hon. Friend that the figures are released, not kept a secret.

The Department and Ministers are, as I hope I have been able to demonstrate, in close touch with schools and local education authorities that face problems this year. We take their concerns seriously and will work to sort them out. However, I suggest that one group from whom lessons are unlikely to be learned is the Conservative party. In a debate in Westminster Hall, the Conservative spokesman, the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady), freely admitted that Conservative Governments did not do enough for education in the past. He can say that again. Over 18 years of Conservative Government—between 1979 and 1997—47,000 teaching posts were lost. That is what the hon. Gentleman euphemistically referred to as "not doing enough".

David Taylor: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Conservative spokesman was a little unfair to his party's track record? The support—moral, financial and legislative—that his Government gave to the private sector in education accounts for its steady growth in the Conservative years.

Mr. Miliband: My hon. Friend tempts me into very productive terrain. In a debate in a Committee considering a statutory instrument in July—I cannot remember whether my hon. Friend was in the Chair at that point—the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West made it clear that he was proud of what Conservative Governments had done in the 1980s to support the private sector, and that he was committed to returning to some of those policies. I am sure that we will return to that matter in the future.

Mr. Pike: Is not it a fact that the decline in school teacher numbers happened at the same time as there was a massive decline in the standard of school premises? Schools really did decay and crumble during 18 years of Tory rule.

Mr. Miliband: I think that the figure on the tip of my hon. Friend's tongue is that, by 1997, £700 million a year—or £30,000 per school—was being spent on schools in capital terms. The figure is now £3.8 billion a year, so my hon. Friend is absolutely right.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Miliband: I will let the hon. Gentleman intervene, but I hope to edify the House with some more information about Opposition policies.

Andrew Selous: If the Minister believes that a growing independent sector is a sign of failing Government supervision in schools, will he explain why independent numbers are growing at present, under his Government?

Mr. Miliband: First, I did not say that. Clearly, the Government are committed to making the state sector as good as possible. That is the point that my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) was making.

However, I want to develop the point. Although the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West said that Conservative Governments had not done enough for education in the past, the hon. Member for Ashford said in July 2002 that the Opposition were not "in principle opposed" to spending more on education. His deputy, the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, went further. In a debate on school funding on 29 April, he made the extraordinary claim that the Opposition had "no quibbles" with the extra spending on schools inaugurated by the Government.

I looked up the word "quibble" in the dictionary. It means to make trivial objections. The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale was right about one thing: the Opposition's objections to the increased spending have been far from trivial: they have been fundamental, ongoing, dogmatic and ideological at every stage. While the hon. Member for Ashford said that the Opposition did not oppose spending on education, his party's official position was quite the opposite.

The Conservative policy guide was published last October. I commend it to the House. It had the ironic title "Leadership with a Purpose". Need I say more than that it was written by the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), before he stormed out of the shadow Cabinet in protest at the leadership that he was promoting? Even so, let us listen to what the guide says. In contrast to the hon. Member for Ashford, it states:

"Conservatives do not support the tax and spending the Government has announced."

Mr. Green: That is absolutely consistent.

Mr. Miliband: The hon. Gentleman says that that is absolutely consistent, but how can it be consistent for him to say that the Conservatives do not oppose the spending increases, but for his party's policy guide to say that they do? That seems quite a contradiction.

The Leader of the Opposition then went further. In an interview with *The Daily Telegraph*, the quiet man said:

"I explicitly on three separate occasions when asked said we will not match Government spending plans."

[Mr. Miliband]

The hon. Member for Ashford says one thing, yet his party policy is the absolute opposite.

Mr. Green: Let me resolve the confusion in the Minister's mind. What we oppose is the way that his Government waste huge amounts of taxpayers' money. We think that money spent in the education budget should go to schools and be spent on decisions taken by heads and governors and teachers. It should not be wasted on bureaucracy, in a way that causes teaching redundancies all over the country even when the Government are taxing people more than ever before. It is the way that the Government tax and spend that lets them down. That is why the British people do not trust the Minister or the Prime Minister any more.

Mr. Miliband: The hon. Gentleman will regret prolonging this discussion because I can assure him that we shall return to the point again and again in the years ahead. He obviously was not listening to what I said, because his own policy guide says in clear terms that the Conservatives do not support the tax and spending increases that the Government have announced. His own leader explicitly said:

"We will not match Government spending plans."

I do not know what could be clearer than that.

Mrs. Gillan *rose—*

Mr. Miliband: I beg the hon. Lady's pardon, but I shall ask her to intervene once I have made my point.

It is not just the Opposition's words but their actions that tell their position. Every time they have had a chance to vote on spending increases they have not, it is true, quibbled, but they have sought to tear up the spending increases and deny them to schools. On money to fund the new deal for schools, which will be of interest to my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), the Opposition voted against. On cutting class sizes, they voted against. The 1998 spending review, which raised school spending by £340 per pupil, they denounced as reckless. The 2000 spending review raised spending by a further £370 per pupil but was described as irresponsible and imprudent. The 2002 spending review delivering this year's rises in teachers' pay was denied the support of the Opposition.

The Conservative party is a party of serial quibblers, serial opposers, and serial voters against money for schools, money for teachers, money for books and money for buildings.

Mrs. Gillan: I seek some clarity from the Minister. He says that everything in the garden is rosy and that so much money is coming down the line from the Government that our schools, teachers, governors and parents have nothing to worry about. Can he give me a clear recommendation for the parents of the children who go to Chalfonts community college? Would he tell those parents not to pay the £20 per term for their children's teachers and equipment, or would he tell them to pay the money because it is necessary? May we have some clear guidance on that? Is the instruction to the parents to pay the money to maintain the school or not?

Mr. Miliband: I could not have made clearer at the beginning of my speech the fact that there are serious problems in some schools. I must have said so up to half a dozen times. Of course I do not pretend that everything is—

Mrs. Gillan: Should they pay?

Mr. Miliband: The hon. Lady was very patient in waiting to ask her question, but might show a bit of patience in waiting for the answer. I did not say that everything in the garden is rosy. It would be absurd of me to make a recommendation to parents of a school in her constituency without knowing any of the details. Indeed, it would be quite wrong of me to do so in any case. For many years schools have undertaken fund-raising drives in all sorts of ways. It would be odd of Ministers to give them commands. I do know that the efforts of parents and the wider community to raise funds for schools are much better suited to a situation in which funding is rising rather than falling.

Mr. Damian Green: It is not.

Mr. Miliband: The hon. Gentleman says so, but we have been through this before. When his party was in office between 1992 and 1997 spending fell by around £100 per pupil in real terms.

I do not want to try the patience of the House, so I shall try to come to a conclusion.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): I do not think that my hon. Friend is trying anyone's patience. Does he recall visiting Hyde technology college in my constituency, and has he seen that results there have gone up from 50 per cent. of students gaining five A to C grades to 63 per cent. of students doing so? Will he agree to visit some more schools in my constituency so that he can try to have the same effect?

Mr. Miliband: I wish I could have that effect on every school in every constituency that I visit. I do remember my visit to Hyde technology college, which is an extremely impressive school boasting committed teachers, governors and pupils. I am delighted to hear of the significant increase in GCSE performance. We announced A to C rates for entries at GCSE in August, and the evidence that I heard from Labour Members in the Lobby last night was that rates of achievement of five A to C grades by pupils around the country far exceed that. The evidence that my hon. Friend has just adduced is relevant in that regard. I take seriously his further offer of hospitality and look forward to trying to take it up on some occasion.

Schools face serious problems this year, as I have repeatedly said, but we are determined to overcome those problems in partnership with head teachers and local authorities. This is the year when the majority of secondary schools will achieve specialist status. This is the year when 1,400 of our toughest schools receive the leadership incentive grant. This is the year when capital investment tops £3.8 billion a year and when teachers have the first contractual change in their work load for a generation.

According to all the international comparisons, we are doing well, but the Government are determined to do better. That is our commitment and I commend our amendment to the House.

5.50 pm

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): May I apologise for not being my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis)? I am not entirely sure that is something for which I should apologise, as there is little I can do about it, but I wanted to underline the point that the debate will be much poorer without his searching, yet always constructive, critique of Government policy. Even as I speak, my hon. Friend is pushing back the frontiers of education in some other place—not, of course, the other place—and I am bereft of his counsel.

I feel somewhat exposed standing here without a Dispatch Box or my customary barrier to lean on, and heavily outnumbered to boot. However, as the Government have adopted an anti-bullying strategy, perhaps I can afford to relax—*[Interruption.]*. An hon. Member points out that the strategy is only for the under-fives.

Unsurprisingly, the proposition is that the Government are a bad lot. They have got school funding wrong, have tried to blame local authorities and, in triggering redundancies, have jeopardised promising agreements to reduce teacher work loads and created problems for teacher recruitment and retention. That, I understand, is the objection, as set out by the Tory motion.

That thesis was significantly improved by the Liberal Democrat amendment, which unfortunately was not chosen. Our amendment pointed out that previous Conservative Governments created, if anything, bigger financial problems for schools. That sophistication adds a measure of fairness and historical perspective to the original motion.

The Government amendment appears to consist of a recognition of the problem, a clutch of partial truths and a dose of self-congratulation. I fail to see why the refined Liberal Democrat amendment should not commend itself to any rational Member of the House and I shall endeavour to provide evidence.

When it became apparent that schools had problems, the Government clearly, and perhaps genuinely, thought that their ambitious plans to pass money to schools had been foiled by avaricious or acquisitive local authorities, which might have used the money for other purposes. On 2 May, and even before, they began an assault on local authorities that must, I guess, retrospectively embarrass Ministers and which they will not want repeated or even alluded to in this place. However, although it is tactless of me to mention it, we need to dwell on it for a while.

By the time the Select Committee on Education and Skills had got around to examining the fiasco and Mr. Normington had given his evidence, even the Government's advisers were talking not of the perfidy of local authorities but of the failure of modelling—whatever that means. In essence, in ordinary parlance, they had got their sums wrong.

It is unkind of me to rake the matter up, as I am sure that Ministers would like to bury the infamous press release of 2 May, which contained the amusingly ironic statement:

"The purpose of this exercise is not to apportion blame."

It seems to be commonly agreed that if one took the additional money given by the Government—and there was additional money—subtracted the effect of increases for national insurance and pensions, the effect of the salary improvements this year and last year, the differential effect of the new local government finance system, the effect of the withdrawal of the standards fund, added inflation and rolled it all up, some schools would receive no real-terms increase. That is not only possible, it actually happened. There is incontestable evidence that it happened in many parts of the country and the extent is becoming increasingly clear.

Only this week, a paper from a constituency adjacent to mine carried a telling headline, which was promoted neither by me nor by my party. It stated simply:

"Whitehall dunces get new term budget sums wrong."

That is a fairly accurate summary, in journalistic speak, of what actually happened. That it happened is evidenced by the Secretary of State's statement to the House on 17 July, which was penitent but, in the view of many, possibly not penitent enough. There was no mention of duplicitous local authorities, but no real apology either. In fact, it contained some rather robust warnings of the future consequences of any duplicity, imagined or real. On the positive side, schools were given guarantees, stability over a period and early notice of their budgets, and they were cushioned against fluctuations and inflation—all entirely desirable features in any financial environment—but everything hinges on something called the school funding spending share, which Ministers will fix rigorously.

I know two things about the new deal for schools. First, it will be discussed with what are now known as the Government's partners in education. Secondly, the aspiration is that things will be transparent. Sceptics and perhaps even cynics will see the Treasury's hand in that, because things are not transparent. Could it be that the Treasury or the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister would like the school funding spending share to be opaque, rather than transparent? Could it be that it is not so much a generous promise by the Secretary of State to open his coffers, but more an instruction to councils to extract more cash from council tax payers?

We will find out soon enough, but we may be back to the old game of standard spending assessments and passporting, which have long since been rumbled and will continue to be so. That may be unkind: the Secretary of State impresses me as a man of natural generosity. *[Interruption.]* I will apply that comment to other Ministers as well; perhaps they have the same disposition. The Secretary of State is even prepared to make handouts from his own Department's money, and he referred in his statement to something called end-of-term flexibility, which most of us would call an underspend. Hon. Members would agree that £1.2 billion, or whatever the figure may be, is an awful lot of flexibility and that school bursars would genuinely like a bit of flexibility too.

A key problem in the new settlement—I should like the Minister to listen to this specific point and to respond to it—is that local authority special education budgets will be constrained under the new regime. Local authorities will be constrained in the amount by which school budgets increase. Everyone accepts that special education budgets are demand-led—they are controlled by the rights of parents and those of the children themselves—and that individual cases can be

[Dr. John Pugh]

extraordinarily expensive. The net effect of that artificial constraint can only be to open the door to worrying litigation involving individual cases, as councils try to constrain their budgets in line with an artificial limit and seek to keep down costs. I want to flag up that concern, and I should like the Minister to respond to it in summing up.

Moving to the positive side, the Secretary of State and other Ministers will be reassured to discover that I am sending a copy of the reassuring statement issued on 17 July to every school in my constituency, and I hope that, in turn, it will be pinned up in staff rooms, so that staff and governors can study it in the dark days of November and February. It will act as a powerful reassurance for their doubts. If, perchance, all does not come to pass as they expect, they will know who has misled them.

Teachers will not necessarily be reassured by the current tranche of statistics thrown down by the Government. They will not be reassured by people telling them that there are an extra 25,000 teachers because that figure includes trainees, instructors and people without qualified status. They will not be reassured by talk of 3,000 more graduates opting to teach because they read the papers and know that one in three people gives up the profession after about three years. They know for a fact, from their own experience, that there are acute shortages in some subjects and in some areas, such as the south-east. They know that, according to *The Times Educational Supplement*, 700 teachers were made redundant this year and that four times that number of jobs were not renewed. As has been said, the school work force statement issued today has given no comfort that things will get a great deal better. It has certainly given the teaching unions and schools no such comfort, and those figures, which show a decline, were documented before the current fiasco, so there may be worse figures to come.

It is worth standing back and asking who—apart from parents, staff and the Government—is a significant casualty of this sad episode in educational history, where the Government got their sums wrong, as we all have to acknowledge. My local constituency research seems to show that there is another major and perhaps unspoken casualty—classroom assistants. Their terms and conditions of employment are less certain and it might be easier to let them go when financial circumstances get worse. Any sizable reduction in their numbers could have near fatal consequences on the work load agreement. There seem to be problems with the agreement anyway—perhaps expectations are pitched too high—but whatever its merits, it will not work if budgetary pressures lead to the shedding of support staff. That piece of information might be shown to be true later this year.

Added to that, no Minister has given any guarantee that the money for the work load agreement will be ring-fenced. For all that I understand, it might well be muddled in with other expenditure. The money will be in the local authority grant and people will be asked to identify it. That might be a symptom of Treasury caution overriding the natural generous instincts of Education Ministers. I shall be glad if the Minister contradicts me on that point but I doubt that he will, and nor do I think that he will give me any guarantee that no child will be taught by unqualified staff next year—we have every expectation that many will.

To sum up, there is clear substance in the Opposition's charge that the Government have imperilled what is, on the face of it, a decent initiative. It must be said that there is little evidence of the Conservatives wanting to provide additional substantial resources to improve matters. We must accept that the Government are guilty of blundering rather than callous deceit. They have found their exposed position uncomfortable and they do not welcome a re-run. They know for a fact that educationalists are not stupid and that they are hard to deceive. Their only option now—I commend it to them—is to take the path of complete honesty and transparency. They should not hide behind local authorities or obscure formulae but give schools the financial stability that they need to do the job that the Government and the country want done.

6.2 pm

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West): Before I start my speech, may I apologise to the House? I am supposed to be at another meeting at the moment and I shall have to attend it when I conclude my remarks, although I shall be back as soon as I can afterwards. The great virtue of that is that it gives me the best incentive to keep my remarks as short as possible.

I especially wanted to speak in the debate because I could not help but feel that Opposition comments in support of the motion demonstrated a collective amnesia about, or airbrushing from, the educational or local government history of funding for education. I felt moved to speak because I was chair of finance for Sandwell metropolitan borough council for five years. The council is a major unitary authority in the black country that is typical of many deprived urban metropolitan borough councils with specific educational problems. I could not help but remember the funding arrangements that existed during the years when the Conservative party was in government.

I have researched a few statistics. Between 1992 and 1997, the collective cuts that Sandwell metropolitan borough council had to endure amounted to £42.9 million. I remember that because the local authority was so concerned about maintaining education in the borough that it tried to minimise the extent of the cuts that would apply to education. However, notwithstanding that specific policy, the fact that education represented 60 per cent. of its total budget meant that it could not make the cuts required to stay within its capping levels without affecting funding for education. Indeed, over that period there was an £18.3 million cut in education spending, an average of about £3 million a year.

Andrew Selous: If the hon. Gentleman is maintaining that the Government's difficulties are minor compared with what happened during the Conservative years, how does he account for the fact that Michael Clapham, who represents heads in east Yorkshire, said:

"In the last 12 years, this is far and away the worst budget settlement that I have had to manage as a head teacher"?

That includes the last six years of the Conservative Administration.

Mr. Bailey: I cannot comment on Michael Clapham's perspective, but I know that my local authority is not alone in its experience. Between 1992 and 1997, my local authority shared a common experience with nearly every major industrial metropolitan borough authority in the country. I am sure that any head teacher within those authorities would make the same comment and I think that more head teachers would share that view of the situation.

The legacy of the funding policy that we inherited in 1997 was that although standards were rising in Sandwell, they were not rising fast enough. The local authority recognised that there was much more to do. We had a disproportionate number of schools with appalling physical accommodation, including a disproportionately high number of temporary mobile classrooms and a shortage of teachers. I am not whinging specifically on behalf of Sandwell; the experience was common to many local authorities. However, we recognised the challenges that faced us and we managed them.

I contrast that with the situation five or six years on. The national figures given by the Minister demonstrate the huge increase in education funding, which is now a higher proportion of our gross domestic product than when the Tories came into office. I can say for sure that it is paying dividends. Sandwell is one of the authorities involved in the excellence in cities programme and I know that there have been measurable improvements in key areas of our educational performance. Just last year, Sandwell's maths results were up 4 per cent., its science results were up 3 per cent. and its information and communications technology were up 10 per cent., all of which were above national targets. There is no doubt that that is a direct result of the investment in local authorities such as Sandwell.

Sandwell's A* to C GCSE results were up 2 per cent. Five of its secondary schools had their best ever results, two of them in my constituency. The results of Wood Green school, a specialist school benefiting from the range of funding available to such schools, are up 63 per cent., which is above its target of 50 per cent. In addition, virtually every school has improved its physical environment. There is investment in the infrastructure and that, too, is playing a part in improved standards throughout the borough.

The funding arrangement that existed before the arrangements were revised this year discriminated against local authorities such as Sandwell. We recognise that changing them would cause difficulties, but in the interests of both equity and improving the performance of areas that hitherto had suffered from underfunding and underperformance, it was necessary. However, the procedures incorporated into the revised funding arrangements to ensure that all local authorities benefited from a real-terms increase in funding were a fail-safe measure that never existed for authorities such as Sandwell under the Tory Government.

I believe that the Government's proposals for assisting with the budget arrangements of those local authorities that are having difficulties should, in future, play a considerable part in helping those authorities to sort out their short-term budget problems. I know from my local authority experience that the last-minute announcement of the funding mechanism causes schools enormous difficulties. The lack of flexibility in how they can use collective and individual balances, or the balance of capital and revenue expenditure, also causes difficulties.

The £800 million available as back-stop funding for schools in difficulties will be an enormous help in certain circumstances. We recognise that with the huge range of school funding regimes and the differences in local authority expenditure, it is incredibly difficult to provide a funding arrangement that will effectively protect every single school in the country from difficulties. However, the mechanisms that the Government have proposed will provide flexibility and assistance that I do not remember receiving from the previous Conservative Government when I had to cope with such funding problems.

The Government have handled a difficult situation with some sensitivity. We must recognise that this has been an exceptionally difficult year, with changes to teachers' pension and salary arrangements and a substantial drop in pupil numbers. A number of difficulties came to a head at once, but the Government have listened to local authorities, they have taken steps and they are prepared to put their money where their mouth is. Out of that will come a more effective, focused funding regime that will help the schools that most need it to raise standards where they most need to.

6.12 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): "Education, education, education" and "tough on the causes of crime" are very slick phrases that Labour has used, but the situation now is that the British people simply do not trust a word that the Government say.

I suspect that the Minister for School Standards has to go to another meeting, so I should perhaps first put on record my reason for speaking in this debate. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) suggested earlier, representatives from Southend education authority were to meet the Minister at 3.30 this afternoon. There can be no criticism whatever of the Minister for his having to postpone the meeting. My hon. Friends called for this debate today, and it is just one of those things. It is not for me to speak for my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East, but I suspect that he was disappointed because, much earlier, he had specifically asked for a meeting with the Secretary of State.

That being said, I say to the Minister for School Standards that I hope that nothing in my speech will sour the tone of our meeting, which I believe has been rescheduled for November. I am very anxious to work with the Government to get the best possible settlement for children in Southend.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Does my hon. Friend agree that as we have waited a while for a meeting, and it is now the beginning of September, we should have that meeting as soon as possible, not in November?

Mr. Amess: I know that the Minister will be abroad for a while on parliamentary duties. Many of the

[Mr. Amess]

representatives coming from Southend are teachers and head teachers. It has been somewhat difficult to pull the dates together. I suspect that that is why—I say this gently to my hon. Friend—the meeting will be in November. Who knows, perhaps we might even be—

James Purnell: In an effort to ingratiate himself with the Government Front Bench, the hon. Gentleman might start by talking about the fantastic examination results that we have just had, where they have come from and whether the extra funding that we provided has made any difference to the results.

Mr. Amess: That is certainly on the list. I shall be joining the Minister in his congratulations to local children in Southend.

Given the amendment to the motion of Her Majesty's loyal Opposition, the pattern of the debate is already established. The Opposition, as is our job, are holding the Government to account. The Government and their partners in crime, the Liberal Democrats, want to talk about what happened during the last Conservative Government. They do not want to consider what has been happening in the more recent past, and we are moving on to seven years of Labour government. They can try that, but it will not wash with the general public, who are interested only in what the present Government are doing. In terms of education, they will regret that since 1997 the Government have centralised everything. If I were to be asked to analyse where the money is going, I would say that too much is going on centralisation.

I suppose that the violins will come out now, but teaching used always to be seen as a vocation. Teacher retention was highlighted in a recent survey by the General Teaching Council, which found that across the nation a third of England's teachers are expected to leave teaching within five years. Among the main reasons cited by teachers for their wish to leave the profession are badly behaved pupils, an excessive work load, initiative overload and a target-driven culture. Thirty-four per cent. of teachers expect to leave the profession within the next five years. That says it all. Teachers no longer see their profession as a vocation.

I know that Labour will say, "Look at all the wonderful IT units that Members are being asked to open every week. Look at all the marvellous sports facilities. Trevor Brooking is opening a new sports facility next week at Belfairs school." However, the survey shows that teachers have never left the profession because they felt that they were teaching in a dump. It was never like that. I do not believe that teachers were leaving the profession because of physical circumstances. The situation is much more serious than that. I hold the Government to account because I believe that there has been centralisation.

Jonathan Shaw: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is interesting to note that the survey does not show that teachers are mentioning pay? Is that not a reflection on the fact that the Government have invested in pay, and that that factor is not in the list?

Mr. Amess: It does not appear to be in the list in the survey, but it is on every other list.

I gently refer to the Annunciator screen, which shows that I am not speaking. It shows that the hon. Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey) is still on his feet. I do not know how that is taken into account in terms of time.

I wish to respond to the intervention about examination results. Four of my five children are still at school. I rejoice with the Minister for School Standards that my oldest daughter got an A and two Bs and will be reading English and drama at Queen Mary college. It is a splendid university which rejected her father more than 30 years ago. I am delighted that St. Bernard's school did not only produce Helen Mirren; it was responsible for providing my daughter with a splendid education. My youngest daughter is about to start there. My other daughters are at Southend high school for girls and at Westcliff high school for girls. I never forget that it was the Labour party, supported by its partner in crime, the Liberal party, which did everything it could to undermine grammar school education. Opposition Members like to send their children to grammar schools, but we found in Southend that we had to fight Labour to retain our four grammar schools.

The House may also be interested in another piece of information. My research assistant comes from a staunch Liverpudlian family. His parents wanted the best for his son, so they sent him to a private school. He is a staunch Conservative because he wants to thank the last Conservative Government. When his father lost his job, the assisted scheme enabled him to stay and enjoy private education.

Jonathan Shaw: Would the hon. Gentleman assist the House and tell us what a staunch Liverpudlian is?

Mr. Amess: Someone who is still proud of Liverpool—I see that the hon. Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) is in the Chamber, so I must be careful—and speaks with a strong Liverpudlian accent.

As for Southend, I am advised by our education department that we have nine primary vacancies, 19 secondary school vacancies for teachers and two vacancies in our special schools. The Minister for School Standards has probably had a chance to glance over the agenda for a meeting that we were going to have. We would have discussed the effects of Southend's low formula spending share settlement on schools' budgets in Southend and the passporting of £700,000 over and above the required sum. The second issue that we were going to explore was the marked effect of cuts on our high-achieving schools in Southend—sadly. Southend high school for boys has had to remove Latin from the curriculum for the first time in its history. We would have discussed those who have followed the Government's instructions in schools serving areas of considerable disadvantage, and the narrowing of the attainment gap. The Government have said that poverty is not an excuse for low achievement, but some of our schools are having to dismantle the staffing structure that has brought about excellent achievements. When the Secretary of State came to the Dispatch Box on the day before we rose for the summer recess, more money was pledged for next year but, of course, the damage had already been done.

The final matter that we wanted to explore with the Minister for School Standards was the borrowing that some schools have had to make from the local authority

to get through this year. Next year's settlement will be low, and those schools simply cannot sustain that deficit.

I wanted to share with the House three comments by head teachers of schools in Southend. None of their letters was politically motivated—they were simply written when the ramifications of our financial settlement began to bite. I shall not name the first head, who said:

"I am not one of those headteachers who constantly complains about a shortfall in their budget. However, the proportion of my budget that has been attributed to staffing costs has risen from 82 per cent. last year to 90 per cent. this year. Obviously this makes all other aspects of school management difficult, although I have managed to set a balanced budget. This budget does not, however, allow for the extra staff and other resources that I would wish in order to achieve an improvement in school results."

National insurance contributions were mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green), and the head teacher says that NICs, together with an increase in teacher pension contributions, are

"having a huge effect on a largely people-based environment."

That says it all. It does not matter what the schools are like—if there are no good-quality teachers, schools will struggle to provide the sort of education what we want.

The head teacher went on to say:

"The consolidation of teacher salary grades from point 9 down to 6 is also biting hard this year as more staff become eligible to apply for the upper pay threshold."

Finally, she said:

"By good housekeeping I am fortunate to have a carry forward figure that allows for some maintenance and refurbishment to take place, but I cannot do this from the . . . financial government income."

I will name Mr. Frank Keenan, headmaster of St. Thomas More high school for boys, who would have been at the meeting with the Minister and represents secondary heads in Southend. He says:

"several schools in Southend are forced to declare deficit budgets in this current year (including my own), and we are having to meet L.E.A. officers to draw up four-year recovery plans. In my school, we are in the absurd position of having a £3 million new extension project due to open in September, but we will not have the money to clean it or maintain it!"

That is an absurd situation.

The third and final letter comes from a head teacher at the largest primary school in Essex, which has the biggest education authority, although Southend is unitary. She says:

"Our school is very successful but also very vulnerable. Our current budget deficit of £170,000 will place our school at risk. Our success depends on good will. Redundancies and the threat of redundancies undermines the good will that keeps our school open to children and their families from 7.30 am to late at night . . . We have been told to come to terms with running a 'less successful school'. That can never be right especially in the current context with its emphasis on equal opportunities for all young people . . . We have made cuts. We are not replacing teaching staff and support staff who are leaving (value of £70,000)."

I hope that when we meet, the Minister will have had an opportunity to reflect on the points that I have made.

One of our local newspapers, the *Southend Evening Echo*, cribbed a recent story in *The Sun* calling for private tutors to be subject to the same legislation as state school teachers. I shall not name the gentleman in question, but it has come to light locally that a private tutor—I am thinking here of morale in teaching generally—is still teaching despite having been caught with indecent images of children on his home computer. He was not charged, but received a police caution and was placed on the sex offenders register for five years. Teachers are drawing to my attention the fact that, as the law stands, a person who is placed on the sex offenders register is barred from teaching in a state school, but not prevented from giving private tuition. Will the Minister reflect on that issue and perhaps write to me, so that we can at least have some guidance locally?

I come to the end of my speech feeling confused about how long it has lasted, as there seems to be a problem with the monitor. This year's funding crisis in the education system has led to what one head teacher calls

"far and away the worst situation I have ever had to manage."

The over-centralisation of education has created a situation of huge complication, and no one understands the way in which the system works. Despite showering the education system with money, the reality is that teachers and parents are all suffering the effects of the Government's regime of command and control.

I think that the Government, in their seventh year in office, have lost for ever the trust that they had. They have broken their promise that extra money would get to the schools where it would make a real difference to standards. That is what has happened in Southend. Parents and teachers have a right to be cross about the crisis in our schools. Thousands of children face the new school year with fewer teachers and support staff than ever before. For the Government to accuse local councils, schools and the School Teachers Review Body of being responsible for the funding difficulties is an absolutely shameless piece of buck-passing.

At the 1997 general election, we can all recall seeing in the wee hours of the morning all the Labour supporters gathered together, at a time when they thought that it was trendy to be associated with celebrities, to the sound of the D:Reem song, "Things Can Only Get Better". I do hope that they still have a copy, because the incoming Conservative Government will play it with relish.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Before I call the next speaker, I should tell the House that I am aware that the Annunciator is not working properly. This is the second day running that it has happened; I think that computers may have gone down. However, there are clocks under the Galleries that hon. Members can see—and, of course, the Chair keeps a very close watch on exactly how long they take in making their speeches.

6.31 pm

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): Despite Southend's disappointment, I can assure the House that the Minister is making himself available to meet delegations from schools—I was pleased to accompany one from Medway earlier today. In my area, we have a standstill budget and there has been one redundancy. We welcome the additional £1.3 million of extra funding following our initial budget settlement, but the council

[Jonathan Shaw]

had to go into its reserves, and for a small authority £3 million is not a sustainable sum. We have concerns about next year, but look forward to being given the details later in this Session.

The Select Committee on Education and Skills will certainly work rigorously on behalf of the House of Commons to ensure that the Secretary of State provides clarity and delivers on what he has told us about better settlements for schools. If hon. Members have any doubt about that, I point out that although it is a Labour-dominated Committee, the last time the Secretary of State came before it I was described on "Yesterday in Parliament" as the Tory MP for Chatham and Aylesford.

It is important to recognise what is happening today in the teaching profession. Ofsted reports that we have the best teaching work force that we have ever had; we need to say that a little more often. I have an interest, because yesterday my daughter had her first day at St. Katherine's school in Snodland in my constituency—an excellent school, led by an excellent head, with many new resources that are evident to parents and teachers alike. We should applaud the work that teachers do, which is delivered through students' examination results. Every year, we hear the same denigration of exam results. What does that say to students, parents and teachers? What does it do for their morale? If more students pass, the complainers say that exams are too easy; if fewer pass, they say that schools are failing. De facto, what they want is for results to remain the same for ever. Well, that is not going to happen, is it? It is reported that by 2010 some 180,000 to 250,000 extra students will be presenting themselves for university places. That is something to celebrate, but it also creates a demand for funding.

As well as acknowledging the work force, we must work out how to continue to recruit. The age profile of teachers is worrying. Within the next 15 years, 45 per cent. of teachers will be in their 60th year. That is a serious matter. The Teacher Training Agency reckons that it must recruit between 30,000 and 35,000 teachers a year. Complaints by Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen about the agency's advertisements therefore miss the point. We need more people to come into our schools and take advantage of the additional resources that the Government have provided, not least the £6,000 that is made available to students who take the courses.

I have spoken to several friends who are either on or have recently completed their teacher training. It is a very demanding course, which is reflected in Ofsted's claim that we have a skilled and able work force. However, we should consider some of the detail about our teacher work force. For example, we must examine the need to promote more ethnic minority teachers. There are currently 9,100 teachers from ethnic minorities in our schools. That is approximately 2.4 per cent. of the work force.

When the Select Committee visited Birmingham, concern about underperformance, especially of Afro-Caribbean boys, and the woeful lack of role models in schools was apparent. We met some role models, but they were few and far between. I am sure that all hon. Members would like there to be more. It is obvious that if we are to promote standards in all the different communities in our society, we need role models in front of the class. The Teacher Training Agency advises us that the position is improving and I know that Ministers take the matter seriously. All hon. Members should take any opportunity to encourage those from ethnic minority backgrounds to go into teaching.

Andrew Selous: I agree wholeheartedly with the hon. Gentleman's points. Indeed, I am proud to sponsor a reception by "Black Boys Can" later in the Session. He mentioned "promoting" more ethnic minority teachers; I wonder whether he meant "recruiting" many more, with which we would all agree, rather than promoting on merit, irrespective of race, colour or creed.

Jonathan Shaw: I meant promoting the exciting opportunities in teaching to ethnic minority members of our community.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I agree with the hon. Gentleman, but does he agree that a further group—male teachers in primary schools—is sadly lacking?

Jonathan Shaw: That is right. At the primary school of which I am a governor, we are fortunate in having two mature male teachers and one younger male teacher. That makes a genuine difference. The school is in a deprived socio-economic area and many pupils do not have a positive male role model outside school. The hon. Gentleman is therefore right and we have discussed the matter with the Teacher Training Agency. Again, we must consider not only teachers per se but detailed matters such as ways in which to get, for example, black teachers and male teachers into specific schools.

We should also do more to encourage mature students, who have had careers elsewhere. Increasing numbers are coming into schools, and the Open university advised the Committee that mature students progressed far more rapidly into senior management grades than younger students. They bring in their experience from outside. We should applaud the Government for the fact that the £6,000 is available, making it possible for many people to consider changing career and going into the teaching profession.

It is important to keep people in the profession. The Committee also heard about the wide range of initiatives being undertaken by local authorities, in terms of providing opportunities for teachers to leave their schools for a period and to take up certain initiatives, so that their careers can become more varied. People are increasingly looking for that, and those initiatives, which play a vital role in the infrastructure of our teacher workforce, are to be applauded.

The Conservative party is casting doubt on the future of local education authorities. New Zealand got rid of all its LEAs, but the Government there have now had to create their own authorities throughout the country. An infrastructure is required, when schools are struggling, to work out who is going to run the special needs provision, meet the transport requirements, and so on. Most schools cannot operate in isolation. I am sure that successful schools, which cater for the higher socio-economic groups in society, can do so, but schools in inner cities with particular needs need special support.

In Birmingham, the Committee noted the work of an education authority that was applauded by teachers and parents. That does not often happen. There are not always tangible outcomes that we can point to, to show that local education authorities have made a difference in terms of examination results. We know, however, that support—providing training, running effective services, and so on—is vital, and that support can be provided far more economically by an overarching body such as a local education authority.

Another important job that the Teacher Training Agency is doing is recruiting returners. There are thousands of people out there who have taught, and who have perhaps not considered returning to the classroom. "Golden comebacks" are now available—I think that they are worth between £2,000 and £3,000, but if I have got that wrong, I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will advise me. Those are available across the board, but there is a question as to whether that should be the case. We heard from the employers—the Local Government Association—that the situation is not the same everywhere. In parts of the country, there are no recruitment difficulties whatever. Should a school with a full staff complement in an area that does not have a recruitment problem be eligible for that money? I am not sure that it should, when there are dire problems in our inner cities. It is better to use the money where the resources are needed the most. The Government should seriously consider better targeting the "golden comebacks".

On passporting money into schools, of course local education authorities should pass on money to schools, but they cannot pass it all on. It is easy for Members to criticise one another here today, but the fact is that the Government have increased the percentage share that goes into the delegated budgets. But we, as Members of Parliament, write to our directors of education when people come into our advice surgeries with concerns about the special educational needs provision for children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or autism, for example, or about transport matters. If every penny is passed to the schools, where will the money come from to deal with the issues about which we make representations to the local education authorities? We all do it. We should reflect for a moment before saying that not all the money is being delivered to schools. We should bear in mind psychology and transport needs, for instance.

Given the Tories' record, when I consider the criticisms they make of the Government words fail me. I have been a governor of Kent schools for many years. Every October we would receive a note from the education authority telling us to start thinking about cuts. Head teachers say, understandably, that this is their worst year ever, but in fact it is their worst year ever under a Labour Government.

I believe that the Government are committed to improvement. There are so many examples of extra investment in all our constituencies. For instance, the school of which I am a governor had a nursery built under the last Labour Government's urban aid programme. There are only a handful of purpose-built nurseries in Kent, which has one of the largest education authorities in the country, because the authority consistently failed to spend to the level of its standard spending assessment. This school had to wait for an incoming Labour Government to enable its nursery to be refurbished under the new deal for schools against which both Opposition parties voted. That is the difference between the two sides.

Andrew Selous: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was paying attention when I intervened earlier, so I shall repeat what I quoted then. He said that the current difficulties were the worst that had been experienced under a Labour Government. What would he say to the head of an East Yorkshire school, Michael Clapham, who represents a group of East Yorkshire heads? According to him,

"In the last 12 years, this is far and away the worst budget settlement that I have had to manage as a head teacher".

That includes six years under the last Conservative Government.

Jonathan Shaw: The hon. Gentleman need only look at the record and see how much has been spent on education. I cannot account for how much the Yorkshire authority passed to that particular school, and we see variations throughout the country; but the hon. Gentleman will know that, notwithstanding all the computer suites, new classrooms and additional learning support assistance provided in Bedfordshire, the same is happening in Kent and elsewhere.

I think the Government have acknowledged that this has been a particularly difficult year. The Conservative Government did not acknowledge that in any year; all that they did was cut and cut. It will take a long time for this Government to deal with the backlog that has resulted from the Conservatives' failure to invest, but I know that—as with the nursery in my constituency—they are committed to doing so.

6.48 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): Like others, I begin by congratulating pupils in schools in my constituency on their excellent work over the past year. Their results have been excellent. I also pay tribute to work in Bedfordshire's lower schools. Pupils at that stage do not take exams, but Studham lower school, of which I am a governor, was visited by the strategic director of education for Bedfordshire because it had done so well over the year. I congratulate the children, and also the excellent teachers and other staff who brought about such a high standard.

In the context of exams, though, I think there is a need for an independent Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, given the A-level fiasco of recent years and the beginning of a lack of trust in our examination system among the public. That lack of trust is a great pity, and it devalues the hard work and excellent results that we have rightly celebrated today.

Mr. Bailey: The hon. Gentleman speaks of a fiasco and of undermining trust, but the Select Committee looked at this issue and in fact, very few A-levels were misgraded. When we looked at the picture closely, it was nothing like a fiasco.

Andrew Selous: The hon. Gentleman's Government made an excellent decision in making the Bank of England independent—it had not been done before and

[Andrew Selous]

it proved successful—and with that in mind I would encourage him to be a little more far-sighted here. I can see absolutely no downside to making the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority independent; indeed, doing so would provide considerable strengths. It would offer a general reassurance to parents, pupils and teachers throughout the country that there was absolutely no interference whatsoever from Ministers of any Government.

It is no good looking at historical perspectives during this debate, for one very simple reason. We are talking about children's life chances as they go through school today, not the care and maintenance of some wonderful historic building. This is not a question of saving a little on exterior renovation this year because times are hard, and saying that we will come back to it in five or ten years' time. We know that children have one chance. They experience some critical times in their education as they go through lower school and enter middle school, so they must have the right environment. That is why the Opposition were right to call for this debate today, and to hold the Government to account for what has gone so very badly wrong this year. We do so in the hope that there will be no repetition in future years of what has happened this year, for the sake of all our children.

I shall return to a point that I have made twice already during this debate, because Labour Members seem to be experiencing some amnesia about what happened in previous years. They seem to think that everything was always terrible during the Conservative years, but many people have reinforced the comment by Michael Clapham, who represents heads in East Yorkshire, that this is the worst budget that he has had to deal with for 12 years. *[Interruption.]* I make that point a third time so that perhaps it might be heard. In my constituency, experienced governors of long standing who are incredibly committed to education have told me the same thing. Indeed, one governor actually put his own house on the line to protect his school's budget.

James Purnell *rose—*

Andrew Selous: I give way to my former Select Committee colleague.

James Purnell: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He has made the same point three times now, but does he recognise that in 1997, funding in education as a proportion of gross domestic product was more than 20 per cent. lower than the current level? Does he think that results in his constituency would be better or worse if funding were cut by 20 per cent., which I believe is his party's intention?

Andrew Selous: That is something of a cheap shot, I am afraid. I stood on a manifesto pledge of increased education spending, to which I am personally committed. The hon. Gentleman can trade statistics, but I have told him what heads are saying about their current funding difficulties. We are talking about children in education today turning up at their schools at the start of this term and finding that there is a shortage of teachers.

James Purnell *rose—*

Andrew Selous: I have given way to the hon. Gentleman once and if he does not mind, I shall make a little progress and develop my remarks.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew Selous: I will certainly give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Beggs: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way to me. Will he accept that this is also the first year ever that there has been universal discontent among head teachers in Northern Ireland? Their discontent is such that they actually sent a delegation here to make representations to all parties, because of their concern at the shortfall in funding available to be spent for the benefit of pupils in Northern Ireland schools.

Andrew Selous: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for providing the perspective from his part of the United Kingdom; indeed, he reinforces the point that I was making.

A look at the figures reveals the national picture. A survey undertaken by the Secondary Heads Association, in conjunction with *The Times Educational Supplement*, shows a reduction nationally of some 3,400 posts in English comprehensives. Of those, 730 were made redundant and a further 2,789 teachers and 1,152 support staff were simply not replaced. Furthermore, 75 per cent. of the lost posts were in schools where the roll had either remained static or had risen—a point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), a former Secretary of State for Education.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Stephen Twigg): The hon. Gentleman is correct to identify concern about schools where teaching posts have been lost and teachers made redundant, but will he respond to the point made by my hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards earlier—that the figure for schools that have taken on extra teaching staff exceeded the loss figure that the hon. Gentleman just quoted? The net figure is in fact an increase in the number of teaching staff in those schools.

Andrew Selous: I am not sure that I entirely understand the Minister's point. He is looking at the national picture, but I have quoted figures from the national picture that do not seem to back up what he said. I agree with the Minister for School Standards that more people are coming into the teaching profession. That is excellent, but nationally we are talking about a loss.

I should like to talk specifically about my own constituency, which I obviously know well. On 8 July I asked my local education authority about the number of teachers either made redundant or not replaced in the

constituency. The list I received from the local authority showed the following. Cedars upper school in Leighton Buzzard lost five teachers and one administrative officer was not replaced. St. George's lower school, also in Leighton Buzzard, lost two teachers. At Priory middle school in Dunstable, four learning support assistants were not present this September. Greenleas lower school, also at Leighton Buzzard, lost one teacher and one non-teaching member of staff and Dunstable Icknield lower school lost one teacher. The Thomas Whitehead lower school in Houghton Regis lost the equivalent of half a nursery nurse.

I know from correspondence with many other schools in my constituency that those figures do not supply the complete picture. I can think of a lower school in Dunstable whose deputy head teacher has not been replaced this September, and the school managed its deficit only by its head taking on an extremely heavy teaching commitment. That worries me because when a head has such a commitment, along with all the extra work in running the school, it amounts to an intolerable burden.

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): Will the hon. Gentleman tell me how the schools in his constituency are tackling the problem of falling rolls? Are the losses, either in the shorter or longer term, associated with falling rolls in any of the schools that he mentioned?

Andrew Selous: No, Bedfordshire is an area of great population growth. Currently the population of our towns and country areas is growing, though none of the schools that I mentioned is in a rural area. It is not an area of population decline. That may be the hon. Lady's experience, but it does not apply to Bedfordshire.

The spectacle that we witnessed earlier this year—of the Government trying to blame everyone other than themselves—was not attractive. Local education authorities were first singled out for blame, but when the figures were examined, it was found that few had behaved improperly. My own authority of Bedfordshire was proved to have passed on all the money that it should have done—and, indeed, more.

I am extremely concerned about the governors and head teachers who have to set school budgets at the start of every year. In common with many other hon. Members, I would like to see an increase in the core mainstream funding of schools from around the present 70 per cent. to a much higher figure of perhaps 80, 85 or even 90 per cent; and a reduction in the 30 per cent. that schools have either to bid for or are allocated later in the year. There a number of very good reasons why we should do that.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, proceedings on the Motions in the name of the Leader of the Opposition may be proceeded with, though opposed, until Eight o'clock.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Question agreed to.

Andrew Selous: It is incredibly difficult to set a school budget if one is not clear about exactly what moneys will be allocated at the start of the year. The person who sets a school budget will probably be the chair of the finance committee. That person will be a school governor with a full-time job and a family, who probably undertakes other activities in the community as well. It is extremely difficult for such people to plan properly in respect of staff and major capital programmes if they are not sure what money they will get during the year.

I take the point made earlier by the hon. Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey) that some money does have to be retained at the centre, for special needs. He gave the interesting example of New Zealand, where they got rid of LEAs and then had to reinstate them. If that fact was unearthed by the Select Committee, it shows the value of those Committees looking at what is happening around the world. I therefore do not advocate the abolition of LEAs, but I believe that the balance between direct funding to schools and the money retained by either central Government or the LEA is wrong. I should like to increase the 70 per cent. figure by a large amount.

Mention has been made in the debate of new teachers coming into the profession. I acknowledge that the figures are healthy, and show that more people are going into teacher training college than was the case last year. I suspect that that is partly the result of the golden hellos that have been introduced, which will go some way towards paying off student loans. That is all well and good, and the measure was a sensible one for the Government to take.

However, I am very worried about retention in the teaching profession. It is a real issue. All hon. Members know that, in any great public profession—such as teaching, medicine or the police—there are huge advantages to be gained from continuity and experience. Teachers who have been in the profession for many years will have coped with many difficult situations, and they therefore bring great wisdom and depth of experience to the job. It is extremely worrying that so many teachers leave the profession after only three or four years.

I was very interested in the research mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) into the reasons why teachers are leaving the profession. About six months ago, I went into an upper school in my constituency as part of a citizenship education programme. The day's activity went extremely well, but I found myself in sole charge of a class. I do not think that it was supposed to happen: the children were about 15 or 16 years of age and quite lively. The class was fairly large, and I found getting the children's attention and saying what I wanted to say quite exhausting. The exercise had to do with setting a local authority budget, and I wanted to look at the children's priorities for the community. That was not something that they had considered before, but I hasten to say that it was the school's idea, not mine. It was a very good exercise, and I was trying to get them to think about the different needs of the community.

Mr. Bailey: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the exercise would have been considerably more difficult if it had been held eight years ago?

Andrew Selous: I might say that that makes it 15-all, but the intervention was not relevant to my point.

[Andrew Selous]

I found it personally draining to have to keep the pupils' attention, to keep order and to stop conversations going on at the back of the class as I got pupils to focus on what we were trying to do. I did that three or four times in a couple of different classes one morning. As I left, I said that that was indeed fairly draining work which gave me a good insight into the problems that teachers have day in and day out. I understand from the survey undertaken by the General Teaching Council in January that the main reasons why teachers leave the profession are badly behaved pupils and the constant struggle of having to keep discipline when they want to impart knowledge and teach their subjects. How much that saps morale is difficult to know for anyone who has not done it.

That is why I will see the Secretary of State at 11 am tomorrow to raise the issue of antisocial behaviour and parenting in relation to schools. I am going with the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) who shares my concerns. It is no surprise that we are joining together to do that—Members on both sides of the House are concerned. It is time that we came together across the country to agree that the situation is intolerable. The problem was highlighted recently by the chief inspector of schools, David Bell, for whom I have great respect, and whom I know reasonably well because he is a former chief executive of Bedfordshire county council and I have travelled to London with him by train from time to time. He made some interesting comments two or three weeks ago about the extreme difficulties that primary and lower schools have when children arrive lacking any sort of the social skills that would have been taken for granted 10, 15 or 20 years ago.

Jonathan Shaw: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that his comments about the chief inspector endorse the work of the sure start programme in the most deprived areas? He has said time and again that he welcomes extra money for teacher recruitment and various initiatives, but when it comes down to it, he votes against that money.

Andrew Selous: The hon. Gentleman keeps resorting to relatively cheap attacks. I was trying to engage in discussion about a matter that I think is of important cross-party interest. There is a national problem, whether we are Labour, Liberal, Conservative or anything else. That is why I am joining a Labour Member tomorrow in seeing the Secretary of State.

We can argue about the mechanisms by which we deal with the problem. Sure start will have its advocates but since that initiative does not apply to my area—even though we have extreme pockets of deprivation—I cannot speak of it from first-hand experience. I can say that the work done by home start, which is to be expanded and of which there are examples in my constituency, is excellent. I myself would try to empower parents more, perhaps helping those who have not had the benefit of being well parented themselves to improve the way in which they parent their own children. There are different ways to approach the problem, but I am convinced that we must recognise that there is a national problem. We cannot expect teachers in lower and primary schools to do that work as well as teaching children. We need a national agreement, and the challenge for the Government and the country is to do something about the social skills of young children in the same way that we have tried to make improvements in other areas.

I agree that more male teachers in primary and lower schools are needed. In all the lower schools that I have visited in my constituency over the past few years, I have seen probably only one or two male teachers. The presence of such teachers is important, particularly for those children who do not have a father at home or a male role model in the household. We all know of wonderful examples of male teachers in lower and primary schools who are excellent role models to whom children relate well, which is important for their development. We need to take that seriously.

7.9 pm

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): What is this debate really about? It is really about spreading cynicism about education in this country. The Opposition cannot stand the facts that education results are improving and extra money is going into our schools—and they cannot promise to match it, so they are trying to erect a smokescreen and distract people's attention from the real improvements on the ground.

Teacher shortages are an issue. Some schools have experienced quite severe problems, which was acknowledged by my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench. However, may I draw people's memory back to the days when the Conservatives adjusted the education funding formula? There were no floors and ceilings and local authorities had to make cuts of millions of pounds overnight.

Andrew Selous: No one in the Opposition believes that the Government set out to bring about the loss of hundreds, or probably thousands, of teacher and learning support assistant places. Does the hon. Gentleman accept, however, that the means whereby the Government have chosen to fund education mean that they have given with one hand and taken away from school budgets with the other? It is sheer incompetence and a failure to understand both education funding and the effects of increases for pensions and national insurance that have brought us to the current problem.

James Purnell: I do not accept that at all. As the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg), has just explained to the hon. Gentleman, the overall number of teachers has risen. There is a big change in the funding formula, with associated transition costs, but my point to Opposition Members is that a severe contrast is offered by the days when millions of pounds were cut from local authorities such as mine to gerrymander the funding formula to allow Wandsworth and Westminster to set extremely low taxes. We all remember exactly why that was done.

The change was justified. When I was selected for Stalybridge and Hyde, in every school that I visited, I was asked to make my first priority a change in the funding formula. The borough was one of the most deprived in the country, yet it received thousands of pounds less than neighbouring authorities because the

funding formula at the time reflected only ethnic diversity and geographic scarcity. The Labour Government have changed the formula so that it properly reflects deprivation.

At last, having suffered for between 10 and 15 years due to the gerrymandered funding formula, we are receiving an amount of money that properly reflects the deprivation in our schools. Despite the degree of deprivation in my area, we achieve excellent results. That is what I want to highlight. In contrast to the Opposition's attempt to spread cynicism, we should be optimistic about the results in our schools.

Why do the Opposition want to spread cynicism? They have to convince people that the state cannot achieve what we are setting out to achieve. They have to convince people that things are hopeless, that people might as well not invest in public services and that, if they can afford it, they should use their money to send their children to private school, or perhaps their children will get into a selective school.

We are saying that the state can work; we can invest in public services and it will make a real difference. The Tories try to distract people from that, but the evidence is clear—from looking at local papers or from people talking to their neighbours. That may be why the opinion poll results covered by *The Times* earlier this week were much less bad than people may have expected.

We must continue to listen to people and deal with their concerns, but perhaps rather than looking at the flim-flam inside the beltway around Westminster—the media hype—people are actually looking at their schools and hospitals and thinking that, yes, they are starting to get better.

In contrast to the Opposition's cynicism, I want to draw the House's attention to a few results in my area this summer.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

James Purnell: No, I have limited time and the hon. Gentleman was not in the debate, so I shall try to bring my—

Mr. Turner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

James Purnell: I have already—

Mr. Turner: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) is not giving way.

James Purnell *rose—*

Mr. Turner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way? He accused—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

James Purnell: I have already referred to the incredible results for higher technology where there was an improvement from 50 to 63 per cent. That includes 71 per cent. gaining five A to C grades among the Bangladeshi community, which is nearly three times the achievement nationally. That is a great credit to Denise Spence and her colleagues, and I hope that the House will join me in congratulating that school on its results. All Saints Catholic college, which has just applied for specialist status, has improved its results from 43 to 45 per cent. of pupils achieving five A to C grades.

The results at Dukinfield Astley—another school that the Minister for School Standards has visited—have increased from 26 per cent. last year to 43 per cent.—an improvement of nearly 20 percentage points in a year. West Hill has just reached an agreement with a local company, Atofina, to invest thousands of pounds in the new school and its specialist status. West Hill's result—62 per cent.—is up on last year, and I hope that the House will also join me in congratulating that school on its results. Longdendale, which achieved specialist language status last year and an outstanding result this year—44 per cent.—in what is, in some cases, a very deprived catchment area. Mossley Hollins's result was 24 per cent. last year, but it has gone up to 41 per cent., so I congratulate Drew Duncan and his team on achieving those results.

New school buildings have been built at Alder secondary school, under Bob Wakefield, and there are new primary schools at Pinfold and Arundale on an estate where not one new school building was built during the entire time that the Conservatives were in power. I visited the old buildings several times. Frankly, it was a disgrace that people were being taught in prefabs in the school grounds and squeezed into corridors and other spaces because the classrooms were not in a proper state to be used for teaching. The library was even closed down.

When the Opposition talk about school funding, they should ask themselves whether they could pledge to match our education results. They say that they will match our spending on defence and international development, but they also say that they want to make savings. They cannot say that they will match our education results. The hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) says that he stood on a platform of increasing education spending, but he has had to vote several times against spending increases. If the Opposition ever did get into government, they would have to make cuts.

Andrew Selous: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

James Purnell: No. I am afraid that I have limited time.

Copley school is proud of being a comprehensive—it is far from being a bog standard one—and it has managed to improve its results from 41 to 57 per cent. this year. That concludes the roundtrip of the secondary schools in my constituency.

Finally, I congratulate the staff of those schools, as well as their pupils and governors and not least the local education authority, which has played a crucial role in improving schools in my area. Overall, our results went from 42 to 47 per cent. last year. That fantastic achievement is a testament to the effect of spending more money in schools, while having proper challenge

[James Purnell]

and support from the LEA and central Government. I congratulate them, and I hope that the House will do so as well.

7.18 pm

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak in the debate. I do not intend to reiterate the arguments that have been developed so well by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) and my other right hon. and hon. Friends today. I want to consider some of the other issues that may have given rise to the problem—I will not call it a crisis—of teacher recruitment and retention, and I wish to try to distinguish between the two because all too frequently they are combined and they need to be taken apart, although the phrase, "teacher shortage" may represent convenient shorthand.

The first symptom of the problem is that many schools have an unbalanced age profile of teachers. In schools such as those in London, there are far too many young and inexperienced teachers, many of whom come from overseas. They need a great deal of support. In other schools, there is perhaps a disproportionate number of more senior teachers. I speak of the schools in my constituency. Such a disproportion is greatly to their advantage in some ways because those teachers bring experience and maturity, but they do not necessarily bring novelty and vigour of the kind that might be expected of younger teachers.

There are problems with turnover. Some schools suffer turbulence—too much turnover—while others suffer stagnation because too few teachers are sufficiently ambitious to want to move on and some might be perceived to be coasting toward retirement. Both situations are unhealthy for teachers, schools and pupils and, I dare say, the future of pupils. It is difficult to get the right balance between recruitment and retention and we cannot always blame the Government or the Opposition for failing to achieve it. The problem is not necessarily related to funding.

My colleagues have made the case on funding but I shall point out other symptoms: the shortage of subject specialism and the movement of teachers to the private sector, which was recognised by the Teacher Training Agency's survey. I shall examine several causes of those symptoms that have nothing to do with money. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) on pointing out one during the closing minutes of his speech. The great difficulty associated with teaching pupils with few or inadequately developed social skills should be recognised. We need to tackle the problem at the root. Although I recognise that home start and sure start are part of the Government's prescription for tackling the problem, they are not tackling it at the root by asking why such children were so badly parented. I fear that one reason is the breakdown of families. I know that it is unfashionable to talk about the damage caused by the breakdown of families but it is time that we recognised the dramatic problems that serial parenting causes to the self-image of pupils and youngsters.

The second great problem for teachers is lack of support from parents, which is associated with a sort of rights culture. The party of which I am proud to be a member has promoted the rights culture in education. It has promoted choice and what are considered to be market mechanisms but it has not necessarily always been successful at promoting a responsibilities culture to accompany the rights culture, although I accept that it is more difficult to do that. A rights culture without a responsibilities culture means that parents sometimes do not accept that their child can do wrong or that a teacher has not only the right but the duty to discipline a child or put him back on the right track if he goes wrong. If one fails to provide teachers with support and effective sanctions, they will fail to maintain discipline, which is one of the key factors that is causing teachers to leave the public sector and, in many cases, teaching altogether.

A third element of the problem is the inadequately supported integration of pupils who sometimes have profound special educational needs. The Government are capping the money that local education authorities may hold back. I associate myself with the remarks made by the hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) and hope that the Minister will be able to guarantee that that will not lead to artificial capping of the amount spent on special educational needs because support for pupils with SEN represents support for every child and teacher in the schools that such pupils attend. There is too much inappropriate treatment of such pupils, and there are sometimes inappropriate attempts to integrate them when they, their parents and their teachers do not think that that can work. So that is a third problem that has nothing to do with money.

The fourth problem that has nothing to do with money is bureaucracy, work load and initiative overload, as identified by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess). The Government recognise those problems, but they have not been sufficiently effective at reducing teacher work load, although I know that the work load agreement is designed to have that effect and if it is right for teachers, heads and governors, it will be implemented.

The last problem is that of the allegations, sometimes unfounded, against people in the teaching profession. I refer to that principally because of a situation that arose in my constituency in the past few weeks, but the issue is of general concern. I know that teacher unions in particular are gravely concerned about the consequence for teachers of losing their professional, if not their literal, lives as a result of allegations that might not stand up in a court of law. I hope that the Government will examine that problem with the greatest possible care to discover whether there is a way to ensure that teachers get through that heart-rending time in their lives without necessarily losing their professional standing. It may be that after conviction it is right that they lose their professional standing, but currently, they lose it the moment that they are accused and suspended. We need to recognise that problem and tackle it.

7.26 pm

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): Like many hon. Members, I meet head teachers on a regular basis. Last year I met a number of heads in my constituency to talk about their ongoing needs. Like many other local authorities, my authority has many schools that face

significant pupil shortages, a situation that will become more acute over the next four years before the trend is reversed. We all know that staffing numbers are primarily based on pupil numbers. Moreover, the shortage of pupils this year will only be acknowledged by the local authority the following year.

Despite a huge effort by some of my schools, they will have no choice but to make teachers redundant because there will be an insufficient number of pupils to support existing posts. No one likes to make anyone redundant under any circumstances. We should all like to keep teachers on indefinitely, hopeful that things turn around. Head teachers have rightly pleaded for funds in the hope that that transient set of affairs will pass quickly.

The situation is not new. It has been occurring on a regular basis for the past 30 years. However, the previous Government did not respond to the problem. There was nothing: no extra money and no promises. Head teachers had no choice but continually to increase the number of pupils in each class in an attempt to balance the books while squeezing every other budget they controlled. The only growing budget in schools before 1997 was under the control of the parent teacher association. Like millions of other parents who sent their children to school in the dark years, I sent a regular sum to the school to pay for fundamental things such as paper, pens and text books. Every year the request for extra money grew as budgets shrank. It was utterly depressing and totally indicative of what we could expect from a Tory Administration.

I was elected to serve the people of Crosby in 1997 when many children were being educated in buildings that should have been condemned. As an engineer, I think that I can make that evaluation accurately. There was a conspiracy of silence on the extent of the problem. There was an absolute acceptance by head teachers and teachers alike that there was no point complaining or asking for money to repair leaking roofs or defective buildings because it would not result in a response. Indeed, the head teachers in my constituency were right. When I asked how much funding was available for emergency repairs, the local authority told me that £40,000 was available for 23 schools, but the money had not been allocated because there had been no emergency to warrant the funds. I found that an appalling statistic.

When I visited one school to watch an assembly and wondered why the children were sitting in an extraordinary geometric configuration, I was told by the head teacher that they had to sit like that because bulbs had dropped from the ceiling the previous year, and the school had been told by the local authority that no funding was available to solve the problem, so teachers had better move the children out of the way just in case one dropped on their heads. I then went to another school where children were educated in portakabins, and even those were delineated because if the children had been sitting in certain parts of the portakabin they would have fallen through the floor. That was considered to be an acceptable place to educate our children.

The situation has changed radically under this Government. The £40,000 has been replaced by over £8 million. I have visited head teachers in my constituency who have been begging for a new school for 25 years, and who, when I told them that their request had been granted, burst into tears. Some of those teachers have spent their entire lives striving to improve the lot of their pupils, and it was a particularly futile exercise under the previous Conservative Administration.

The most damning indictment of that Administration was the type of facility that they afforded children with learning difficulties. I have a daughter with a learning difficulty; I know just how bad it has been. The schools allocated to the children in my constituency were disgusting. This year, I broke into tears when I visited two schools, one for children with severe learning difficulties and one for my child. Finally, we have schools that tell us as a society that we have a respect and regard for the most vulnerable among us. That cost money, and that money was made available by this Government. It is an asset, and that facility was totally ignored by the Conservative Administration.

A significant amount of money has been poured into every school in my constituency, not just for building, but for huge programmes such as sure start which have made an enormous difference by bringing children in deprived areas into the school system at age three and four. Extra teaching assistants and extra teachers in classes have made a difference.

I want the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) to be able to speak, so I shall conclude my remarks by quoting a fantastic teacher in my constituency, who had to wait the length of her career to get extra money that recognises her ability and her desire to stay on teaching children. She said, "It's been a bit of a bad year, but I'd have this year each and every year in preference to another year under the Tories when it was absolute mean misery."

7.32 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) because she spoke with great passion, even if, at times, she was defending the indefensible.

The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) accused Opposition Members, of all people, of spreading cynicism. I have to tell him that there are only two possible conclusions to be reached, and both have been canvassed in this excellent debate, about the situation in many parts of the country. Either the Ministers involved are innocent but incompetent clowns, or they are indeed cynical manipulators. All this talk about education, education, education, which is now heard only on the Opposition Benches, may have got the Government into power in the first place, but those chickens are coming home to roost in no uncertain fashion, particularly in my constituency. It is difficult not to see all that. If one gives Ministers the benefit of the doubt and assumes that they are not incompetent, it is easy to view the situation as part of a cynical attempt to divert resources away from the south-east, which we have seen happening in many areas.

I have categorically to assure the Minister, with I hope at least as much passion as the hon. Member for Crosby, that there are real problems in my constituency, as there are elsewhere. When they began to emerge, Ministers followed plan A, which was to try to blame the situation on the LEAs. East Sussex made a robust

[Mr. Nigel Waterson]

rebuttal, which was eventually accepted by Ministers and officials. It was then suggested, as a temporary get-out, that the capital budgets could be raided. I pointed out earlier in the debate that that was met with laughter and disbelief in some of our schools, because any major works are normally done in the school summer holidays, and the builders had already long been commissioned do the work, so that simply was not feasible.

All our primary and secondary school head teachers in Eastbourne got together and issued a joint press release in the summer which said:

"Headteachers in the Eastbourne area are having to make dramatic cuts within their budgets, arising from the underfunding of schools from central government. All schools in the area have been affected by the funding crisis, with many going into debt, and all having to reduce spending significantly."

It went on to say:

"Pupil:teacher ratios will rise across the town."

The head teachers estimated that £2 million has been taken out of school budgets across Eastbourne in one year. Mr. Ian Jungius, head teacher of the excellent Willingdon community school, just two minutes' walk from my home, said that his school was looking at an approximate shortfall in this year's budget of £130,000, which was based, he said,

"on just repeating what we did last year".

He referred to issues such as the increase in national insurance, the 5 per cent. increase in employers' contribution to pensions and the impact of changes in the area cost adjustment. He said:

"I do believe East Sussex has passed on the money it should and is not holding back anything at the centre."

That view is supported by all the other head teachers in my area. Mr. Jungius talked about the particular problems faced by schools such as his, where the formula is based on the pay of an average teacher on point 5 of the main pay scale. However, in his case, 87 per cent. of his teachers are above that nominal average. He has missed his vocation as a politician, because he put the problem very succinctly:

"Charles Clarke's announcement allowing us to use Formula Capital as we wish for one year only, is in itself an admission on his part that they have got the funding wrong."

Of the Opposition, perhaps unfairly, he said:

"I am amazed that there has not been more of a furore on this."

Well, the furore is happening now. Mr. Jungius went on to say that he was losing two members of his teaching staff and two support staff, and expected to lose two more teachers next year.

The head teacher of Eastbourne technology college—the sort of school, I should have thought, that the Government were trying to support—said:

"I have had to increase class sizes as I am not able to replace teachers who are leaving."

The head teacher of Bishop Bell Church of England school, an excellent secondary school, said that they were £70,000 short compared with last year's budget. Ratton school, a specialist college in the performing arts, talked about

"cuts in building maintenance, staff training, and the money . . . for books and equipment."

Cavendish school, another excellent secondary school, has been looking at how it can reduce the number of teaching staff by natural wastage, a reduction of investment in information and communications technology and the abandonment of plans to staff an inclusion unit—another pet project that the Government say they favour. The Downs school says that it has

"decided to cover one class with a temporary teacher for one term."

However, next year, it may have to disband that class altogether. Motcombe school talked about reducing non-contact time for its teaching staff and its special educational needs co-ordinator and so on. Ocklynge school, the largest junior school in Europe, has had to make savings, partly by reducing teaching assistant hours. The head, Mr. Trott, said:

"On average each teaching assistant has seen a 13 per cent. reduction in their hours."

A quote from a letter from West Rise junior school in a challenging part of my constituency says it all about what is happening in the real world rather than on Planet Clarke. The head teacher, Mr. Kent, said:

"We are also writing to the parents to ask if they can provide replacement pens and pencils as we cannot continue to replace stock."

We have heard from hon. Members about a lot of schools across the country that require contributions from parents, who are often already hard-pressed. The truth is that out there in the schools there are major problems of underfunding and natural wastage, as it is called, of teachers—teachers are simply not being replaced. We have seen the overall figures, and have been given many examples of schools in Members' constituencies. Will Ministers stop staring the truth in the face and pretending that the reality is different? Will they accept the reality and apologise if they feel up to it. However, they should at least move on and try to tackle those problems in my constituency and elsewhere.

7.40 pm

Mr. Charles Hendry (Wealden): This has been an interesting and excellent debate. There have been some powerful contributions, particularly from my hon. Friends who have recognised fully the extent of the problems in schools in their constituencies. My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) spoke with his customary passion and enthusiasm for Southend and the issues that are there. He gave real demonstrations of the effects of the bud[redacted] cuts within his constituency. He highlighted subjects that are being cut and physically being removed from the curriculum. He spoke of schools having to borrow money from the local education authority and of excellent new facilities that are kept closed because there is not the money to clean and maintain them. The description of one of the heads, which we should have ringing in our ears, is that this is the worst situation that he has ever had to manage.

My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) reminded us that primarily the debate is about children's education and said that their interests should be the focus of our attention. He gave detailed figures to show the extent of the problems both locally and nationwide, and made a

strong case for moving more funds through directly to schools. My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), as ever, made a powerful case and showed why he is such an excellent member of the Select Committee. He effectively highlighted the range of issues that are not related to funding but determine the quality of education in our schools.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), my parliamentary neighbour, gave a realistic assessment of the real problems facing us in east Sussex, which I wholly endorse. Heads have been universal, in my experience, in sensing that the county council has done its very best in passing on funds to schools, and that it has been the Government who have been the villain of the piece.

It is disappointing that in responding to my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green), who opened the debate, the Minister for School Standards ignored virtually every one of the key points that my hon. Friend had highlighted. He did not refer to the increase in national insurance contributions or in pension contributions, which have caused so many of the problems. He did not highlight the fact that so many schools are having to put deficit budgets in place or are having to raise their capital budgets to keep going. He did not talk about the scrapping of the school achievements award. He did not refer to the appalling fact that one school in five is now asking parents to make contributions simply to meet their bills.

If the situation is as good as the Minister makes it out to be, why is it that people like the head of the Secondary Heads Association, Ann Welsh, are saying that this year's cash crisis will have repercussions for many years to come. Why is it that the leader of the heads in east Yorkshire, as brought out on so many occasions by my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire, is saying that these are the worst figures that he has had to deal with for 12 years?

The Minister questioned our position on the work load agreement. We have always supported that agreement in principle, but we have questioned whether it would work. The Government should be cutting the red tape, cutting the number of targets and cutting the plethora of new initiatives, which would do much more to reduce teachers' work loads than anything else that the Government could do.

The Minister has been going to great lengths to tell us why this is not the Government's fault. Of course, nothing is ever the fault of this Government. It is the same old strategy. First, deny that anything is wrong; then insist that the facts are not as they really are and that the statistics and surveys are flawed. If that does not work, question the principles of those who are criticising the Government. Above all, find someone else to blame, preferably somebody who does not have access to a media machine to help them put their case. Alastair Campbell may have moved on but his spirit lives there still.

The Minister is doing what Ministers have done through the ages when they have lost the argument: he has gone into denial. He is pretending that the reality is other than it is. He believes only the press stories that support his side of the argument. He believes that the teachers and governors who call out for help are only a small minority. But Ministers have lost the plot and, much more importantly, the trust of students, parents and teachers. When we consider the contributions made by Labour Back Benchers, it is easy to see why.

The hon. Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey) made an astonishing speech. He spoke for 10 minutes, but spent five minutes on the last Tory Government, three minutes telling us that everything was improving and two minutes saying that the problems were all due to the old funding system. He did not utter a single sentence about the problems facing a single school in his constituency. There was not a word about the shocking growth of red tape, which takes up too much of teachers' time, nor a mention of falling teacher morale. I hope that he will send that speech to every head teacher in his constituency and ask them if it represents their views as well.

Mr. Bailey: I took the trouble to check the situation in my constituency. Teacher numbers are rising and morale, educational standards and funding are high. That is precisely why I did not see any cause to complain about the funding arrangement for local authorities such as Sandwell.

Mr. Hendry: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will also send that contribution to every head teacher in his constituency. I would like to see every letter that he gets in return accepting that the situation is as he describes.

The hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw) spoke for 17 minutes. He spent three minutes saying how standards were rising and six minutes making important points about teachers— we all agree with his concerns about the age profile of teachers. Indeed, we agree with the point made by the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) about the problem of a lack of male teachers in primary schools. The hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford spent five minutes speaking about the future of LEAs and three ritual minutes attacking the Tories. However, he spoke not one word about a single school facing problems in his constituency. I hope that he sends his speech to his head teachers.

Then we come to the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell), who really is the hon. Member for Planet Zog. He spent most of his nine minutes attacking the Tories and the rest of that time saying that everything was going well. He told us that everybody outside Westminster was down at their local saying how good the schools and hospitals were in their constituencies. Where does he live?

James Purnell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hendry: There is no time, and the hon. Gentleman wasted his.

James Purnell *rose—*

Mr. Hendry: Oh, go on then.

James Purnell: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that GCSE results have improved in this country?

Mr. Hendry: I celebrate the fact that GCSE results are improving. I want them to continue doing so; as parents,

[Mr. Hendry]

we are delighted about that. [HON. MEMBERS: "The students are leaving the Gallery."] That is because they know that I have won the argument. Again, I hope that the hon. Member for Planet Zog will send his speech to all the head teachers, including those at Longdendale and the other schools to which he referred, and say "Can you reassure me that I am right that there is not a single problem in these schools?"

This issue is not merely about politics and semantics, but about teachers' livelihoods and children's one chance of success in education. Frankly, they do not care whose fault the funding crisis is; they simply want it sorted out—and quickly. This is 21st century Britain and we are six years into a Labour Government who promised to put education at the top of their priorities. However, that is not the way in which those in education see the situation. At the start of a new school year, they are feeling the strains more than ever. Their budgets are under pressure and they are being forced to put on hold projects that they have been working on for years, and maybe even cancel them, in order to use their reserves to pay the bills.

It does not have to be like that, however, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford said. What we need is a simple formula without the mirrors, clawbacks and tricks, so that head teachers know how much they will be getting, so that there is no confusion about whether money has been passed to the LEA and whether it has passed the money to the individual schools, and so that they can look ahead with certainty and confidence. The Government must act to ensure that this crisis is not repeated in future years.

I hope that those who vote with the Government tonight will not visit schools in their constituencies this weekend, on Friday—*[Interruption.]* They will obviously not visit at the weekend, but they might do so on a Friday. If they do so, I hope that they will have the courage to tell those schools what they have done today. They had the chance to say that schools are suffering, but they did not. They had the chance to say that they understand that teachers' morale is low, but they walked away. They had the chance to call for a better system of school funding in future, but they sat on their hands. Above all, they had the chance to stand up for the students, parents, teachers and governors in their constituencies, but looked the other way when they were most needed.

We have drawn attention to a crisis in schools the length and breadth of this country—a crisis that explains why morale is so low and why so many outstanding teachers are looking to get out of education altogether. The Conservative party has drawn attention to those problems, while the Government insist that they are not worthy of debate. I urge the House to support the motion.

7.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Stephen Twigg): I thank hon. Members on both sides of the House for their contributions to an interesting and wide-ranging debate. I shall respond briefly to the specific points that they made on behalf of their constituents or more generally.

In a reasoned speech from the Liberal Democrat Front Bench, the hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) raised several issues. I should like to respond to one in particular. He expressed his support for the principles of the work load agreement, but suggested that we might ring-fence the money for that agreement to ensure that it is spent. That is precisely the wrong way for us to go. We want schools to be able to exercise their own judgment to ensure that the money is spent in a way that is relevant to their own particular needs.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey) put a powerful case, which he just had a chance to reiterate, for the excellent progress that has been made in his constituency.

The hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) criticised Liberal Democrats and Labour Members for talking about the previous Conservative Government and its record. That is a bit rich coming from someone who still reminds us about the winter of discontent. Nevertheless, he raised some important issues, particularly on the regulation of private tutors in relation to the sex offenders register. I promise to write to him about that.

In an important and interesting speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw) reminded us that Ofsted says that we have the best teaching work force ever. He also talked about the importance of attracting more ethnic minorities into teaching and, beyond that, into leading positions within our schools. The debate suggests that that enjoys widespread support across the House.

The hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) made a thoughtful speech in which he focused on the retention of good quality teachers. That is clearly an important question that we need to address.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) made one of the best speeches of the debate in which he reminded us of the motivation of some Conservative Members in spreading cynicism about our public services. He praised the evidence of improvements that he has seen in his constituency; I join him in praising the excellent progress at Hyde technology college, particularly the results achieved by Bangladeshi pupils.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) made an interesting speech in which he focused on some of the issues beyond funding. Hon. Members of all parties have a duty to address the balance of rights and responsibilities of which he spoke. He said that we should talk not about a crisis, but about problems. I accept that, and it is reflected in the Government amendment. There are problems, but the situation is not a crisis. The hon. Gentleman's thoughtful contribution bore that out.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) reminded us of the legacy that we inherited from the Conservatives in 1997. The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) explained some of the challenges in his constituency.

We recognise that there are difficulties and we accept our share of the responsibility for them. We want to work to ensure that we get it right in future, as my hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards said at the start of the debate.

David Taylor: My hon. Friend probably agrees with me that Conservative education policy is vacuous, innumerate, dishonest and self-serving. However, this year's settlement has caused genuine difficulties in Leicestershire, which has the worst-funded local education authority. Will he agree to receive a delegation from Leicestershire when the pattern for next year's expenditure is known so that we can reassure heads in North-West Leicestershire and elsewhere that their difficulties will be resolved by the change in direction?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. That was rather long for an intervention.

Mr. Twigg: I am happy to give my hon. Friend the commitment that he seeks to receive such a delegation.

The hon. Member for Southport set out some of the additional costs that have formed part of the picture of this year's funding, including £568 million extra to secure the teachers' pension scheme. Do the Opposition believe that it is wrong to provide that extra money to secure the teachers' pension scheme for the future? What about the extra money for national insurance costs that schools throughout the country face and that will support improvements in the national health service and better pay for teachers? Do they oppose better pay for teachers, for which teachers have argued for years? For 18 years, the Conservative party ignored teachers when they said that they wanted better pay. The Government have listened, acted and got the extra pay for teachers. That is part of the picture of school budgets.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): Will the Under-Secretary give way?

Mr. Twigg: No, I have only three minutes.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West talked about the official Opposition's collective amnesia. Let us compare the past six years with the previous 18 years. In 1979 to 1997, the number of teachers fell by 50,000. Between 1997 and today, there has been an increase of 25,000. That shows their record and our record. Spending on education as a proportion of gross domestic product was 5.3 per cent. in 1979–80. Yet in 1997–98, it was 4.5 per cent. If the Conservatives had maintained spending as a proportion of GDP at the level that they inherited from us in 1979, almost £50 billion extra would have been spent on education when they were in government. It has taken six years of a Labour Government to restore education spending to 5.3 per cent. We should be proud of that record.

Several hon. Members mentioned the importance of investing in school buildings. For decades, we failed to do that and we have seen crumbling buildings in communities throughout the country. As my hon. Friend the Minister said, we inherited a position whereby capital spending on schools in 1996–97 was less than £700 million for the entire country. This year, the figure is £3.8 billion—a fivefold increase in capital investment in our schools. That makes a genuine difference to the life chances of children in communities throughout the country.

As my hon. Friend the Minister said earlier, last year's Conservative policy guide stated:

"Conservatives do not support the tax and spending increases this Government have announced."

In December, the Leader of the Opposition told *The Daily Telegraph*:

"We will not match Government spending plans."

Let us judge the Conservative party on its record—its voting record since 1997 and, more important, its record in government before 1997.

We acknowledge this year's difficulties. We are not saying that everything in the garden is rosy. We are working with local government, with schools and with head teachers to ensure that we get this right for this year, next year and the long-term future. That is because our commitment is to education. On this side of the House, we put investment in schools and hospitals first; that is our priority. It is not the priority of the Conservative party. That is why I commend the Government's amendment to the House.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 171, Noes 277.

Division No. 300] **[7:59 pm**

AYES

Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*

Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Wilshire
Mr. Mark Field

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, rh Peter
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda

Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Vernon Coaker and
Mr. Fraser Kemp

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 269, Noes 169.

Division No. 301] **[8:13 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, rh Peter
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*

Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and Vernon Coaker

NOES

Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Syms and Mr. Mark Field

Question accordingly agreed to.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House applauds the significant increase in funding made available by the Government to schools since 1997 and the increase in standards schools have achieved; recognises that

schools have had extra costs as well as extra investment this year; welcomes the statement to the House on 17th July by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills announcing measures to bring stability to school funding in 2004–05 and 2005–06, including a guarantee of a minimum per pupil increase in funding for schools, and maintaining and inflation-proofing the income that schools will receive from the Standards Fund; supports the consultation his Department is undertaking with representatives of head teachers and local education authorities; welcomes the fact that there are around 25,000 more teachers in schools and over 80,000 more support staff than there were in 1997 and more teachers with Qualified Teacher Status in schools than at any time since 1984; acknowledges three years of rising recruitment to teacher training and the 3,000 more graduates who have accepted training places than this time last year; and welcomes a 25 per cent. fall in the number of unfilled teacher vacancies between 2002 and 2003.

ADJOURNMENT (CONFERENCE RECESS)

Ordered,

That this House, at its rising on Thursday 18th September, do adjourn till Tuesday 14th October 2003.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT CHANGES: AMENDMENTS TO STANDING ORDERS

Motion made,

That—

(1) Standing Order No. 94 (Scottish Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)) be amended in line 2 by leaving out the second 'Scottish' and inserting 'Scotland';

(2) Standing Order No. 103 (Welsh Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)) be amended in line 2 by leaving out the second 'Welsh' and inserting 'Wales';

(3) Standing Order No. 119 (European Standing Committees) be amended in the table in paragraph (6), as follows:

(a) in line 5, by leaving out 'Transport, Local Government and the Regions' and inserting 'Transport; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister';

(b) in line 12, by leaving out 'Lord Chancellor's Department' and inserting 'Department for Constitutional Affairs (excluding those responsibilities of the Scotland and Wales Offices which fall to European Standing Committee A)';

(4) Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments) be amended in the Table in paragraph (2), as follows:

(a) before item 1 insert

'1	Constitutional Affairs	Department for Constitutional Affairs (including the work of staff provided for the administrative work of courts and tribunals, but excluding consideration of individual cases and appointments, and excluding the work of the Scotland and Wales Offices and of the Advocate General for Scotland) 11';

(b) leave out the item relating to the Lord Chancellor's Department inserted on 27th January;

(c) in item 16, leave out 'Welsh Office (Office of the Secretary of State for Wales (including relations with the National Assembly for Wales))' and insert 'Wales Office (including relations with the National Assembly for Wales)'; and

(5) the Order of 5th November 2001 relating to Liaison Committee (Membership) be amended, in paragraph (2), by leaving out 'Lord Chancellor's Department' and inserting 'Constitutional Affairs'.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT

Motion made,

That Mr Michael Meacher be discharged from the Environmental Audit Committee and Mr Elliot Morley be added.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Housing (Easington)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

8.26 pm

Mr. John Cummings (Easington): I am pleased to have this opportunity to raise housing investment in my constituency, which is a vital element in the overall regeneration strategy of Easington district. A large proportion of housing in former mining settlements, including Dawdon, Blackhall, Easington colliery and Hordon, were directly associated with the mining industry. Consisting mainly of terraced properties, the housing was largely built by private coal companies in the late 19th century and the early part of the 20th century. After nationalisation of the mines in 1947, the colliery housing, as it was then known, was taken over by the National Coal Board and passed into the ownership of British Coal.

Demand for traditional terraced housing for families in the former mining villages has declined as new estates have been built, providing off-street parking and gardens where children can play in safety. With the gradual closure of the pits, colliery housing has been sold off, in some cases in lots consisting of dozens of properties to housing associations, and in others to private landlords in large blocks. Properties were also sold individually.

The main issues for the private rented sector of housing stock in Easington are oversupply, the large number of vacant or void properties, the growing prevalence of antisocial behaviour and lack of investment. Local residents, many of whom were formerly tenants of British Coal, find their quality of life and the value of their properties in a spiral of decline that mirrors the decline of their physical environment. The communities are deteriorating, and people who own their own houses find it difficult to sell them in a declining market.

Private landlords are buying the properties, renting them out with scant regard to tenancy conditions and further compounding the problems. Many private rented properties, often offered for short-term lets, are poorly maintained, further contributing to deterioration of the area. In parts of Easington colliery, landlords appear simply to have abandoned properties and boarded them up. Particular properties have been empty for several years, again adding to the appearance of neglect and dereliction in villages. Antisocial behaviour, often drug related, is prevalent in the private rented properties, in spite of the best efforts of the community safety partnership, the police and local authorities.

Once vibrant mining communities with a strong sense of identity are under immense pressure. The problems of antisocial behaviour, crime, generational unemployment, low skill levels, poor health, lack of disposable income and physical deterioration are eroding the very foundations of those communities. The local chamber of trade in Easington colliery is extremely concerned about the deterioration in its business and the increase in crime and vandalism that seem to go hand in hand with the general dereliction self-evident in many parts of Easington Colliery. Intervention is required from central and local government to address those issues strategically.

The district of Easington, with its sub-regional partners, commissioned a housing market study to help to quantify the problem and to assist in determining future policy. Following a comprehensive study, a housing needs survey was completed by the district council in 2003. It revealed some startling figures about the current needs and circumstances of people living in the district of Easington, to which I shall return in a moment.

The report points to a number of actions that the Government can take to alleviate many of the problems in the private housing sector. Proposals for the licensing of private landlords, linking registration to housing benefit applications, are certainly long overdue. The Government should also support moves to make regeneration quicker and easier, speeding up the compulsory purchase order process, especially where there are difficulties in tracing ownership. Planning and land use powers should be exercised in a sensible and appropriate, but not over-bureaucratic, manner. It is essential that we protect our countryside, our heritage and our award-winning coastline. It is equally vital that we create increased opportunities for investment in newly emerging business sectors to allow greater exploitation of market opportunities. It is essential, in rebalancing the economy of east Durham, to provide opportunities to arrest any further decline in our population and communities.

Additional funding must be made available to tackle private sector decline in former coalfield areas such as Easington, which are outside the Government's nine pathfinder market renewal areas.

Mr. Denis Murphy (Wansbeck): The problems that my hon. Friend describes in his constituency mirror almost exactly those that we face in Wansbeck, which is not surprising as the constituencies have similar profiles. Does he agree that the best way to tackle the problems is through a multi-agency approach, with the local authority, the Housing Corporation, the private sector and the residents working together? If he agrees, will he accept an invitation to visit Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, where such a partnership exists? I am sure that it would have many advantages for his constituency. If my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State has the opportunity, would she, too, like to visit my constituency?

Mr. Cummings: It is always a pleasure to visit my hon. Friend's constituency and I look forward to doing so, perhaps in the not too distant future. I thank him for that helpful contribution.

I was referring to the nine pathfinder market renewal areas. Resources need to reflect the long-term approach that is required to address the problems comprehensively. Funds must be long term and more flexible but targeted on achieving fundamental and agreed outcomes for many areas in the Durham coalfields. That is essential to effect change in a private housing market that is fast spiralling downwards. When the results of the housing needs and stock condition surveys were linked together and analysed, they indicated a special case of multiple deprivation, high housing needs and extremely poor housing conditions in both the public and private rented sectors in the Easington district.

I should like to take this opportunity to record some interesting figures on housing in Easington. Seventeen per cent. of residents in the district, which equates to about 6,400, say that their current accommodation is inadequate. Almost 5,000 homes require repair or improvement.

Single adults make up 34 per cent. of all households in Easington; 57 per cent. of householders are couples and 9 per cent. are single parents. Forty-two per cent. of households have incomes of less than £10,000 a year; 80 per cent. have incomes of less than the national average of £23,000. Over 51 per cent. of households were in receipt of financial support, of which 48 per cent. were in receipt of housing benefit. Those statistics give some indication of the scale of deprivation and need in the Easington constituency.

In assessing future housing requirements, the survey reveals that about 1,500 households plan to leave Easington in the next five years—45 per cent. owing to employment, 31 per cent. for family reasons and 22 per cent. owing to poor quality neighbourhood. However, to try to balance that, 1,280 new households will be forming, of which 50 per cent. would prefer owner occupation.

The most significant anticipated change is the major decrease—3,521—in the number of people aged 30 to 44. That is the biggest decrease in all age groups, and it involves the main economically active group. The over-65 age group shows a constant rise over the same period, with a total of 820 more people in that age group expected in the district by 2011.

The stock condition survey indicates a total stock of 11,974 council dwellings in all tenure groups. Work on the survey took place in January and February 2002, with the report being produced in June 2002. The survey was carried out on a sample basis, covering 1,205 dwellings, and was supplemented by information provided by the local authority. The survey identified 7,900 dwellings—66 per cent. of the stock—currently failing the decent homes standard, with that figure increasing to 8,122, or 67 per cent. of the total housing stock, likely to fail decent homes standards by 2004. The cost of rectifying those defects is estimated at almost £44 million for current and £30 million for potential failures.

Improvement works to enhance the council's stock of houses and bring it up to current, modern standards have been identified, costing £43 million. Work to non-traditional properties is currently assessed at more than £3.5 million, with further work required in 16 to 20 years' time. The incidence of structural defects in the council's housing stock is higher than average, with outstanding structural repairs amounting to more than £3 million. The district council has received a recommendation that £31.14 million be allocated to major repairs over the next 30 years, mainly to cover anticipated structural problems.

In the public sector, the council has taken the positive step of establishing an arm's length management organisation to deliver its housing service, subject to formal consultation with its tenants, as its preferred delivery option. I am delighted that Easington is one of the 13 local authorities that were successful in gaining ALMO status. Provided that the council achieves the required two-star rating for its housing maintenance service, £23.6 million will be invested in the council housing stock. The programme will be spread over 15 months, from January 2004.

Under the £1.5 billion national programme, Easington will continue to own its housing stock. It will retain strategic responsibilities for overall housing policies, while the ALMO will take over the day-to-day management of the properties, leaving the local authority to focus on major improvements and repairs.

The Minister for Housing and Planning said in announcing the results of ALMO round 3:

> "This extra funding will help improve tenants' quality of life and make substantial progress to ensuring all homes in the Easington District are in a good state of repair with modern facilities and services suitable for the 21st century."

That offer of substantial new investment was conditional on the council improving its performance and achieving a two or three-star rating for housing maintenance. However, I have every confidence that the housing management and maintenance delivery service is being improved and will be brought up to an appropriate standard. The feedback that I have received from council tenants in Easington, which might well be similar to that in other constituencies, shows that they would prefer the council to retain ownership and control of its housing stock rather than having their homes transferred to a housing association or independent company.

All is not doom and gloom in terms of private investment in Easington. Following the principle of comprehensive performance assessment, it is necessary to find a balance between the public and private housing markets. The district council is working on several key strategic targets, including reducing its housing stock by 400 properties a year, reconfiguring maintenance to give a 60:40 ratio of planned to responsive repairs, and maximising all available funds to achieve the decent homes standard that has been set by central Government to be achieved by 2010.

There has been significant private sector investment in Easington. Not least, £50 million of private sector capital has recently been invested in the new Dalton park outlet shopping centre, which is located next to the A19 at Murton. Northumbrian Water has invested more than £60 million on new treatment works. Peterlee has attracted substantial investment to its industrial estates and enterprise zones. Thanks to substantial private investment at Seaham Hall, we have one of the most prestigious hotels and conference facilities in the region. New infrastructure and industrial estates have been completed at Seaham to compliment the work already carried out to relocate the Seaham Harbour Dock Company and its associated distribution centre and warehousing. Incidentally, we also have some impressive call centres and traditional industrial units in Peterlee, should my right hon. Friend the Chancellor wish to follow up his suggestion of relocating civil service jobs from the capital. I have written to him separately on that issue.

I acknowledge the commitment of the present Government, especially my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, to coalfield regeneration. Much has been achieved since 1997. The difference is clear from new infrastructure and public and private sector investment. However, sadly, there is still much more to

[Mr. Cummings]

be done. In view of the success of the market renewal pathfinders, I appeal to the Minister to consider the introduction of some sort of special delivery vehicle that would extend the benefits of successful pilot schemes into areas such as Easington, which have a desperate need for additional private sector investment as part of a co-ordinated and strategic approach to housing renewal. The problem of private sector decline and multiple deprivation is not restricted purely to urban areas and conurbations. In many respects, the problem is much more acute in coalfield areas such as Easington, in which rapid industrial decline and demographic change have highlighted the need for private sector renewal.

I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to raise these extremely important issues. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response, and perhaps she would pass on my thanks to the Minister for Housing and Planning who visited my constituency last week and saw at first hand the areas to which I have referred.

8.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Yvette Cooper): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Mr. Cummings) on securing the debate and using it to raise a series of extremely important issues relating to housing in his constituency. I know that he is passionate and extremely knowledgeable about that. He is right that my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning saw at first hand several of the problems that face Easington during his visit there last week.

Easington is fourth in the index of multiple deprivation rankings, so in addition to the housing challenges that it faces, there are considerable economic challenges to tackle as well. As a consequence, Easington has benefited from a range of targeted regeneration and neighbourhood renewal programmes. The mainstream housing funding allocations to Easington have increased to reflect its position in the index. Nevertheless, my hon. Friend is right. Like other coalfield areas, Easington faces a series of problems, including low demand. Estates were often built within a walking distance of pits so that the community could walk to work. The infrastructure was frequently of a low quality. When the pits closed. the populations slowly and gradually moved away. Estates in my constituency also reflect those problems. It, too, is a coalfield area, with a high level of voids and a low level of local jobs, as my hon. Friend described. There is also the problem of antisocial behaviour.

The stable communities plan is not simply about tackling areas of high housing demand, but about tackling areas with low housing demand; it is also about the necessary link between economic regeneration and housing renewal. Too often programmes have concentrated on housing renewal and not on getting jobs to the area. Alternatively, they have concentrated on getting jobs to the area and encouraging economic regeneration, but not on housing renewal. As a consequence, local people who got a job moved out, contributing to the further decline of those estates and communities. We need to approach that problem by taking a full strategic look at the entire local housing market, both public and private sector, as my hon. Friend said.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Murphy) was right to describe the need for a partnership between the Housing Corporation and the private sector. I was interested to hear of the partnership in his constituency and I would be happy to visit it to see the work that is taking place. Many hon. Members have raised that issue, and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington, East (Mr. Kemp) listened to much of the debate.

The problems facing communities such as Easington are deep seated and will take time to turn around. We need to deal with the legacy of the past, but also build communities that will thrive in the future. We need to link housing and economic regeneration while also considering the other factors that are important for sustainable communities. As well as needing decent homes, people need jobs, good schools, shops, excellent health services and co-ordinated transport. The Durham beaches are returning to their former beauty, so the quality of the environment is also a factor. The Government office for the north-east is working with partners, including the regional development agency, to ensure that all those factors are taken into account.

My hon. Friend the Member for Easington raised some particular issues that I shall try to address in turn. He pleaded for us to consider how the market renewal pathfinder programme could support areas such as Easington. The nine market renewal pathfinders were chosen in areas where the problems of low demand are most acute. We do not have plans for further pathfinders. The intention is to share with non-pathfinder local authorities the lessons learned from the pathfinder programme so that they, too, can tackle problems of low demand.

Today I spoke at the annual conference of the coalfield communities campaign in Wales. Many delegates raised the problem of low demand outside the pathfinder areas but within coalfield communities. The campaign and English Partnerships are working together to assess the problem of low demand in coalfield areas and to determine where the hot spots are located. They have contacted local authorities across the country. My hon. Friend might want to ensure that Easington has contributed to the survey and their work.

Officials from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will be discussing the position with English Partnerships and the coalfield communities campaign, and they will be considering what approach to take to many of those areas, which, as my hon. Friend rightly says, are outside the current pathfinder areas but nevertheless face many similar problems and could benefit from the same approach. We need to look, too, at the role that regional housing boards can play in that regard and at the relationship with local strategic partnerships and neighbourhood renewal programmes.

My hon. Friend raised the issue of the number of homes in Easington that are below the decent homes standard and will continue to be for the next few years. The decent homes standard is particularly important because it is simply unfair in the modern world that some families should be living in houses that are damp, cold or inadequate in some way or another.

Considerable progress is already being made towards the decent homes standard, but we all have to recognise that considerable extra investment is needed. We have set out a series of ways in which local authorities and social housing providers can benefit from extra investment.

My hon. Friend is right to say that Easington was one of the successful candidates for the third round of the ALMO programme, which is welcome news for the area. That should allow the authority to bring the 8,000 properties that do not meet the decent homes standard up to that standard by 2010. It is one of 13 authorities allocated a share of £1.5 billion of funding, announced in July, which should mean that more than 185,000 homes benefit from increased investment over the next seven years. Easington needs to do more work with the Government office and the community housing taskforce to proceed with its plans, but if it is successful, there will be an immediate allocation of £23.6 million, and potentially up to £117 million for the whole of the programme.

My hon. Friend also mentioned some of the difficulties that can arise with private landlords. That is an extremely serious problem, and local councils can find that their hands are tied in tackling antisocial behaviour or poor housing in an area where a minority of private landlords simply do not recognise their responsibilities to maintain their properties at a decent standard and tackle such behaviour.

The problems that my hon. Friend described often arise in areas where there is low demand for housing, but we have to take action to prevent the damage and disruption that can be caused by unscrupulous and sometimes even criminal landlords. They not only harm their tenants but can undermine the whole community. It is totally unacceptable for private landlords to opt out of their responsibilities and to benefit from the problems of already disadvantaged communities such as Easington. There are landlords who acquire properties at very low prices and show scant regard for their responsibilities or the behaviour of tenants. There are even some who seek to hide their identity behind anonymous holding companies.

The Housing Bill is particularly important because it will introduce discretionary powers for local authorities to license all private landlords in parts of their area with low housing demand and problems in the private rented sector. Those powers will be available elsewhere to tackle serious antisocial behaviour in that sector. We hope that those powers will allow local authorities to control rogue landlords, who are a minority but can, nevertheless, cause problems that affect an entire community.

Where landlords fail to meet the requirements of a licensing scheme, local authorities will have the power to issue management orders against the landlords and assume control of the properties and the rental income. We cannot allow such antisocial behaviour to continue. We recognise of course that not all private landlords operate irresponsibly. There are significant opportunities for them to contribute to the objectives of the sustainable communities plan, and the private housing sector has a critical role in partnerships to address housing market problems in coalfield communities and low income areas. Local authorities will now have extra powers to do more to support improving homes in the private sector for vulnerable households who currently live in non-decent homes. They will also have wider powers to provide assistance to help owners and tenants to repair and improve their homes.

I agree with my hon. Friend about the need to support moves to make regeneration easier and quicker. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill contains measures to help in that respect. A considerable programme of action and investment is underway to provide social housing and to tackle problems with private housing and the housing market in general. In the end, we all recognise that the coalfield communities in areas that have suffered from a legacy of under-investment and a failure to address economic—

The motion having been made after Seven o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at four minutes to Nine o' clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 10 September 2003

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Assets Recovery

1. **Mr. Harry Barnes** (North-East Derbyshire): If he will make a statement on the work of the Assets Recovery Agency in Northern Ireland. [128486]

3. **Mr. Andrew Love** (Edmonton): If he will make a statement on the use of powers by the Police Service of Northern Ireland to confiscate assets. [128488]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): I have been informed by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary that the Northern Ireland branch of the Assets Recovery Agency has 10 cases which are currently under active investigation. I have every confidence that the Assets Recovery Agency is getting to grips with the problem in Northern Ireland. I am pleased to be able to tell the House that on Monday of this week the agency was granted a freezing order for £1.5 million-worth of assets allegedly derived from drug dealing. I believe that there is much more to come.

Mr. Barnes: My hon. Friend will be aware of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs and its interest in the genesis of the Assets Recovery Agency, as reflected in its report on the financing of terrorism. However, many problems arise from local hoodlums being involved in activities such as the drugs issue that she mentioned and which the Select Committee is investigating. Will she ensure that those areas are tackled?

Jane Kennedy: I welcome the interest that the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee takes in these matters, particularly the development of the Assets Recovery Agency. The agency will not only target the so-called Mr. Bigs and the kingpins of organised criminality, but will take a great interest in local hoodlums who, as my hon. Friend says, do so much to blight their communities.

Mr. Love: The agency was only established in February this year under new legislation which, by common consent, is complex. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that there are sufficient resources for both the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Assets Recovery Agency to ensure that we make inroads into drug trafficking, particularly among paramilitary groups?

Jane Kennedy: Through the work of the organised crime taskforce we have a better understanding of the nature of organised criminality in Northern Ireland and the links between organised crime and paramilitary organisations. However, there is also better co-ordination between the agencies in their efforts to tackle that. The Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Assets Recovery Agency remain in regular and close touch with my office about the resources that they require to complete their work, and I am confident that both organisations have the necessary resources. The Police Service of Northern Ireland is a highly effective police force. The drug squad in particular deserves special commendation by the House for its success in recent weeks.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): I congratulate the organised crime task force, PSNI and customs and trading standards officials on their recent successes, which prevented paramilitaries and criminals from benefiting from the sale of fake goods at Ballycastle and elsewhere in Northern Ireland. Can the Minister tell the House when an evaluation of the work of the Assets Recovery Agency will be carried out, whether she is willing, if necessary, to strengthen the legislation under which it operates, and whether that can be done without creating another all-Ireland body?

Jane Kennedy: The hon. Gentleman will know that I am in regular contact with the chief executive of the Assets Recovery Agency, her deputy and the Chief Constable. None of them has expressed any specific concerns about the legislative framework, but obviously the legislation will be reviewed in due course as a matter of routine. The Police Service of Northern Ireland already enjoys a close working relationship with its counterparts in An Garda Siochana. It could not enjoy the success that it does without that very good working relationship. At the end of May this year, senior representatives of both PSNI and the Garda met to discuss proposals to develop a joint cross-border organised crime threat assessment. I believe that we can further develop and cement those good working relationships. I am always open to further ideas about ways in which we can strengthen the performance of those organisations, and I will consider any such ideas that are offered.

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): Will the Minister give an assurance that all the necessary resources will be given to the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Assets Recovery Agency in their fight against organised crime and paramilitary fund-raising—a point that was made in the Select Committee's report on the financing of terrorism, to which the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) referred? On a more general point, will the Minister review the issue of resources for the police generally in the fight against crime in Northern Ireland? My constituents complain to me all

the time about the lack of response, manpower and police on the streets. Can the Minister ensure that adequate resources are provided to make sure that people are safe on the streets of Northern Ireland?

Jane Kennedy: As I have already said, I keep these matters under constant review and remain in very close touch with both the Chief Constable and the chief executive of the Assets Recovery Agency. I believe that the agency is being adequately funded. As the hon. Gentleman and members of the Select Committee will know, the initial budget was established at £13 million, but that will be kept under review. There are about 90 staff in total in the UK, and 17 of them are attached to the Belfast branch. I believe that the Belfast branch deserves particular commendation for the success that it has had in the very short period since its establishment.

Mr. John Taylor (Solihull): Is the agency adequately resourced by comparison with its counterpart in the Republic, or does the Minister share the serious concerns about that indicated by the Select Committee?

Jane Kennedy: The short answer is no. I believe that the Assets Recovery Agency is adequately funded and, indeed, that the Northern Ireland branch is adequately resourced, although I obviously keep such matters under constant review. The success of the agency is very important because its success will continue to underpin that of law enforcement agencies in Northern Ireland in their battle against organised crime.

Decommissioning

2. **Sir Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): If he will make a statement on the extent of verifiable decommissioning of illegally held weapons and explosives in Northern Ireland. [128487]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): There have been three acts of decommissioning to date—one by the Loyalist Volunteer Force and two by the Provisional IRA. Each has been verified by the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning in accordance with the Government's schemes and regulations.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I thank the Secretary of State for his reply. I congratulate his Minister of State on her membership of Her Majesty's Privy Council. I know no more charming member of the Privy Council.

Does the Secretary of State agree that verifiable decommissioning should have taken place many years ago? Will he give me an assurance that no further concessions will be made to any terrorist organisation—Sinn Fein-IRA or any other organisation—before such decommissioning has taken place? Otherwise, the whole process of confidence of the people of Northern Ireland will be undermined.

Mr. Murphy: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words about my right hon. Friend the Minister of State. I can testify to her intelligence and ability, as well as to her charm.

The hon. Gentleman is aware that decommissioning was a very important part of the Good Friday agreement. It is a vital part of ensuring that confidence in that agreement is maintained in Northern Ireland. He can also rest assured that the negotiations and discussions that will now obviously be important in coming weeks will, among many other things, deal with decommissioning as well.

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the retention of arms by any group distorts the whole political process, so it is crucial that all paramilitary activity be ended to ensure that we can restore a bit of trust in normal political processes?

Mr. Murphy: I agree with my hon. Friend. Of course, he is aware that the reason why we could not come to an agreement in March and April this year is that, although we achieved some successes, we failed at the end of the day to agree on how to deal with the items identified in the joint declaration as dealing with paramilitary activity. Those issues are still important and will be an important part of the negotiations that we face in the next few weeks.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): Does the right hon. Gentleman remember 27 November, when he was sitting beside the Prime Minister, who made it clear in answering a question that I asked him during Prime Minister's questions that there could be no further progress towards peace in Northern Ireland until the matter of acts of completion was dealt with—and that those acts of completion were not merely words, but real acts of giving up weaponry? Why is it that the legislation that will shortly be put before the House on Northern Ireland contains no mention whatever of acts of completion? Why is this important matter off the agenda when the Prime Minister said that there could be no further progress until—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the Secretary of State will manage a reply.

Mr. Murphy: The hon. Gentleman is aware that the one of the duties of the independent monitoring commission is to monitor paramilitary activity. That is crucial to the success of the peace process in Northern Ireland. He is also aware that the joint declaration defined that activity as including surveillance, targeting, procurement of weapons, incitement to riot and so-called punishment beatings. Those are all hugely important issues that we have to tackle. The task of the new commission is to investigate such activities, then to report to the Assembly and to me.

Belfast Agreement

4. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): If he will make a statement on the state of the implementation of the Belfast agreement. [128489]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): The central issue remains that only by restoring trust and confidence can we get stable and inclusive devolved institutions up and running again. We have taken positive steps towards that—most

recently, as I mentioned just now, with the announcement of substantive progress on the independent monitoring commission. It is also necessary to have clarity on the ending of paramilitarism and on the stability of the institutions, once restored. We will continue to engage with the parties in Northern Ireland, and I hope that that will lead to the early progress that we all want.

Mr. Robathan: It is now five and a half years since the Belfast agreement. Critically, as the Secretary of State said, terrorist arsenals remain intact and the institutions of the agreement are largely suspended. How does that leave the review of the agreement that, according to page 26 of the agreement, is planned for four years after its implementation, and which is due in December? There are no parties in the Assembly to call for the review. Will the review go forward and what is the Government's position on it, as a whole?

Mr. Murphy: The position is that it was decided in the Good Friday agreement—in paragraph 8, I think—that there should be a review after four years. People in Ireland, north and south, voted for the agreement, so they obviously expect the review. The hon. Gentleman is right to point out that it refers to parties in the Assembly. Of course, it was anticipated at the time that the Assembly would be up and running at the time of the review. Although the agreement is not a legal document, but a political document, we all hope that elections will be held before the year is out so that there will indeed be parties in the Assembly to participate in the review.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): Does the Secretary of State agree that the overwhelming consent of the people of Northern Ireland was given to the Good Friday agreement; that the principle of consent has always been central to Unionism; that that principle of consent is now accepted by all other parties in Ireland, north and south; and that if those parties that are trying to overthrow the agreement succeed in not having it implemented, they are completely overthrowing the principle of the consent of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland, which means that if there has to be a future agreement it would be confined solely to the two Governments to work it out together?

Mr. Murphy: Of course we do not want to get into the situation whereby it is for the two Governments to work it out together, as my hon. Friend suggests. It is for the parties and the Government in Northern Ireland to be able to come to a proper settlement. He is right to remind the House that the principle of consent is central to the Good Friday agreement and that people north and south overwhelmingly voted for that. I still believe that the Good Friday agreement is the best way forward and that the majority of people in Ireland believe that as well.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Can the Secretary of State confirm that it is still the Government's policy that there must be effective and substantial acts of completion—which is a euphemism for complete decommissioning and effective disbandment—before there can be a resumption of the Northern Ireland Assembly? Can he give his assessment of whether we will see early movement on effective acts of completion?

Mr. Murphy: I sincerely hope that there will be early movement on such acts. The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that in March and April we made considerable progress over a number of weeks—although not enough, of course, to be able to do what we wanted in setting up the institutions. I believe that by working on what occurred in March and April, and because all parties in Northern Ireland want to make progress, we can be hopeful that there will be progress on acts of completion in order to ensure that we can get the institutions up and running again.

The right hon. Gentleman is aware—more than anybody, I suppose—that we want to get not only the Assembly but the Executive up and running in Northern Ireland. The establishment of that Executive must be based on mutual trust, understanding and confidence among the parties that make it up.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): When the Secretary of State presents the Northern Ireland (Monitoring Commission etc.) Bill next week, will he ensure that the measure requires parties in the Executive to attend Executive meetings and north-south ministerial meetings as part of their duties and to ensure that they assume collective responsibility along with their ministerial colleagues? Will he ensure that the Bill deals with such breaches of rules or will they be put on the long finger again? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I ask for the private conversations, which are unfair to Northern Ireland Question Time, to cease before the Secretary of State replies?

Mr. Murphy: My hon. Friend is right that the independent monitoring commission will deal, among other matters, with political breaches of the Good Friday agreement. He also knows that the commission will report to the implementation group in the Northern Ireland Assembly. There will be an opportunity next week to debate that in detail. It is therefore up to the Northern Ireland Assembly to consider the best way to deal with such a report. I repeat that we shall debate those matters in greater detail next week.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): Does the Secretary of State accept that the implementation of the Belfast agreement is going nowhere unless and until the Northern Ireland Assembly is allowed to renew its democratic mandate? Will he therefore take the opportunity to confirm that elections will be held in the autumn and that there will be no further postponement, which would constitute cancellation?

Mr. Murphy: No one wants postponement or cancellation of elections. Earlier, I said that we all want the elections to take place before the year is out. I repeat the point that I made to the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble): that we want the other institutions as well as the Assembly to work again. Of course, we want the Northern Ireland Assembly to be up and running, but we also want the Government of

Northern Ireland to do those things that my fellow Ministers and I currently have to undertake on behalf of the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Does the Secretary of State agree that it is not enough for the nationalist community to give its support to the Belfast agreement and that we can have no lasting, stable political structures unless both sections of the community support them? The support of half the Ulster Unionist party, which represents less than half of the Unionist community, is not sufficient to provide that consent. Will he therefore allow politicians to get a mandate for new negotiations for an agreement that has the support of both sections of the community?

Mr. Murphy: I agree that, for the agreement to work, it must have the commitment of both sides of the community—Unionist and nationalist—in Northern Ireland. However, I disagree with the hon. Gentleman's analysis that the Unionist people are opposed to successful implementation of the Belfast agreement. He knows that the latest opinion poll in Northern Ireland showed that most Protestant and Unionist people want the agreement to work. I still believe that it is the best way forward.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): As the Secretary of State said, there has been agreement that the best way forward for all the people of Northern Ireland is reconciliation and the restart of the Belfast agreement. Given that the breakdown and suspension of the Executive last year was due to extra-political activity in Stormont, can he give evidence of willingness on the nationalist side, especially on Sinn Fein's part, to play a more constructive and positive role in bringing about the negotiations?

Mr. Murphy: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the importance of the republican movement in Sinn Fein and that of the IRA in ensuring that the IRA undertakes the necessary acts of completion so that people in Northern Ireland—nationalist and Unionist—can have proper confidence.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): I must take up the Secretary of State on an answer that he gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan). He implied that the four-year review for which the agreement provides could take place in December, whether or not the Assembly was in place. Is that seriously what he meant? Has he forgotten the provision in paragraph 8 of the agreement that the two Governments and the parties in the Assembly must summon the review?

Mr. Murphy: Of course I have not. I was present when the agreement was signed and helped to make it. I repeat what I said to the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan)—I was referring specifically to parties in the Assembly. The document in question is not a legal document. It is imperative that we have an Assembly up and running; that is what everyone wants. The parties in that Assembly will take part in the review.

Mr. Davies: It might not be a legal document, but it is a very finely balanced one that has resulted from extremely delicate negotiations, in which the Secretary of State took part. It cannot be unilaterally rewritten in part. This is just one reason among many why, if we are to make any progress in the peace process, the Government really must stop shilly-shallying and call an election.

Mr. Murphy: No one wants to rewrite the agreement; no one is suggesting that. I am merely pointing out to the hon. Gentleman the facts in relation to the paragraph 8 review. He is right to say that everyone wants an Assembly in Northern Ireland, but we also want a Government there and a review. I sincerely hope that all three will be achievable before the year is out.

Sea Fishing

5. **Ann Winterton** (Congleton): What assessment he has made of the future economic viability of the Northern Ireland sea fishing industry. [128491]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Ian Pearson): The Northern Ireland sea fishing industry continues to land top-quality fish that is much sought after at home and abroad, and I am confident that it has a viable economic future. The Prime Minister's strategy unit is currently undertaking a review of the medium-term prospects for the UK sea fishing industry as a whole, and hopes to report around the end of this year—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Lady asks her supplementary question, I would say again that the noise level in the Chamber is unfair to Members who wish to speak.

Ann Winterton: I rather regret that the Minister has not recognised that the first six months of this year have been the worst for the Northern Ireland sea fishing industry for many years, going back in some cases to the mid-1980s. Bearing in mind the industry's grim future, will the Minister therefore undertake personally to visit fishing enterprises in the Province that have been disadvantaged and suffered losses because of European Union decisions? Will he discuss with them retrospective and future aid to secure their future?

Mr. Pearson: The hon. Lady is clearly unaware that I meet representatives from the fishing industry on a regular basis. Following the decisions of last December's Fisheries Council, I immediately launched a fishing villages taskforce, which is due to report shortly, and which has members of the fishing community on it. We have also announced a vessel decommissioning scheme, and the Government have put in about £20 million to support the industry over the past five years. We are clearly listening, and we want to support the fishing industry to ensure that it has an economic and environmentally sustainable future.

David Burnside (South Antrim): The Minister seems to be badly out of touch with the fishing communities in Ardglass, Kilkeel and Portavogie. Is he aware that the white fish quota has already almost been met by the fishing fleet in that part of Northern Ireland? Will he speak to his opposite number during the next

negotiations in Brussels and get a proper, increased quota for white fish in the Irish sea? There has been a considerable increase in stocks, but the fishing industry in Northern Ireland is not benefiting from it.

Mr. Pearson: I am aware of the implications of the December decision on the swingeing reduction in tax that took place. I talk regularly to representatives of the industry and to UK and other European Fishery Ministers about this issue. It is important that we act on the basis of the best available science, and I understand that the industry disputes some of the science. We have to act on the basis of the science, however, and to take measures that are in the best long-term interests of the fishing industry to ensure that we have sustainable stocks of fish.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Is the Minister aware that when I was in Derry on Saturday, I was able to buy my fish with euros? In that respect, is Northern Ireland not the most progressive part of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Pearson: Northern Ireland is a very progressive community. It has done extremely well economically over the past five years. Its economic performance has been better than that of any other UK region, and I am convinced that it has a bright economic future, given a peaceful and sustainable society.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [128501] **Mr. Nick Hawkins** (Surrey Heath): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 10 September.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): Before listing my engagements, I know the whole House will join with me in sending our deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the British people—serving soldiers and others—who have lost their lives in Iraq since the House rose on 17 July. They were doing an extraordinary and heroic job in trying to bring normal and decent life to people in Iraq, and the whole country and their families can be immensely proud of them, even as they mourn them.

In particular, we should mention Fiona Watson, who was a servant of this House for many years with very distinguished service, and someone who is not British, the United Nations Special Representative Sergio de Mello, who tragically lost his life in the terrorist outrage on the United Nations building.

This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in House, I will have further such meetings later today.

Mr. Hawkins: Conservative Members echo the Prime Minister's initial words. Given the disastrous summer that he and his Government have had, what is his definition of "deceit"?

The Prime Minister: We all know what that is. As to the summer, it is important to recognise that the British economy is in better shape than virtually any other. There have been 1.5 million extra jobs since we came to power, we have had the best ever school results, a further fall in waiting lists, a halving of the number of asylum seekers, and we now have the pensioner tax credit, which gives help to pensioners for them to look forward to.

Mr. Mohammad Sarwar (Glasgow, Govan): Will my right hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to my constituent Fusilier Russell Beeston, following his funeral yesterday?

The Prime Minister: Certainly, we join my hon. Friend in offering our deep sympathy and condolences to the family of his constituent, as I am sure will everyone in the House.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): May I join the Prime Minister in paying tribute to our servicemen out in Iraq who are risking their lives, and particularly to the families of those servicemen who have lost their lives? It is also worth reflecting on the fact that one of our hon. Friends is still serving in those dangerous zones.

If it becomes clear that the Secretary of State for Defence misled the Intelligence and Security Committee, will the Prime Minister dismiss him?

The Prime Minister: I think it quite wrong that we make any assumptions until we see the Intelligence and Security Committee report, which is to be presented to me tomorrow. It would be wrong to comment on it before that is done.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Senior Downing street officials are already spinning their version of the leak. It is in the newspaper report. The point is that with new troop deployments in Iraq, surely it is absolutely essential that there be complete confidence in the Defence Secretary? How can the Prime Minister justify leaving him twisting in the wind, when it is in his power to end all the uncertainty and speculation and publish the report right now?

The Prime Minister: On the right hon. Gentleman's first point, if he has evidence that somebody from Downing street has put the report into the newspapers, perhaps he would produce it now, because I believe that to be completely untrue.

In respect of the Defence Secretary, we should recognise that over these past few months, under his leadership in the Ministry of Defence, we have won a magnificent victory in Iraq; our troops are now engaged heroically in rebuilding that country; and, if I may repeat what I said to the right hon. Gentleman, we

should see what the Intelligence and Security Committee, and, indeed, the Hutton inquiry, say when the reports are published.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister knows very well that his own officials are briefing on it even as we stand here. Is not the leaked report another nail in the coffin of this Government?

You can get rid of Campbell; you can even get rid of the Defence Secretary. But the lying and the spinning will not stop until we get rid of this Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: It is a measure of the right hon. Gentleman's objectivity that he has decided what the report says before it has actually been published. *[Interruption.]* It is no use holding up a piece of paper. Why does the right hon. Gentleman not wait until the report is actually published tomorrow? It is to be presented to me by the Committee. Perhaps in the light of that report tomorrow the right hon. Gentleman can make his comments clear. I simply say to him that, rather than deciding what that report or the report of the Hutton inquiry says before it is published, we should actually wait and see and not make up our minds beforehand.

Claire Ward (Watford): Today, booklets published by Tory-controlled Hertfordshire county council have been landing on the doormats of parents all over Watford who are due to send their children to school next September, telling them that consultations have taken place on the closure of Leavesden Green school and that the last intake of pupils will be in January next year. In fact no formal consultation has taken place, and councils have not even voted on the issue. The community is overwhelmingly against the proposal.

This is an outrageous deceit of the community, and an insult to democracy. Will my right hon. Friend ensure— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think the Prime Minister can answer.

The Prime Minister: Obviously I am not aware of the details of the consultation in my hon. Friend's constituency, but I think she has made a powerful case.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): When President Bush delivered his televised address to the United States a couple of days ago, he specifically chose not to refer once to weapons of mass destruction. Does that mean that we can now expect the Prime Minister to follow suit?

The Prime Minister: No. The reason we went to conflict is absolutely clear—the evidence of weapons of mass destruction. We should allow the Iraq survey group to do its work; but as I have said to the right hon. Gentleman on many occasions, the notion that the issue of Iraq and weapons of mass destruction was invented by British or American intelligence is absurd.

I remind the right hon. Gentleman that last November the whole United Nations came together and agreed that as a result of Saddam and his attempts to develop weapons of mass destruction, he was a security threat to the entire world. This is not an issue to do with British or American intelligence. It has to do with the stated facts, mainly contained in UN weapons inspectors' reports.

Mr. Kennedy: Given that the position in Iraq remains dangerously unstable, given that Iraqi citizens are still being denied basic necessities and resources, and recognising—as the British public do—the need to bolster the safety of our forces in the country, does the Prime Minister not realise that what the public also seek from the Government is a clear lead in the attempt to internationalise the situation there under the auspices and authority of the UN itself?

The Prime Minister: Today there are already more non-US and non-UK troops in Iraq than there are UK troops—some 15,000. The new UN resolution will help to bring in further troops. It is true that the situation in Iraq is extremely difficult, but it is worth pointing out that much progress has been made. For example, all the hospitals are now open and functioning, and some 5.5 million children managed to take their end-of-year exams in June and July for the first time in ages. It is also the case that we are doing our level best to get the country back on its feet. We now have an Iraqi governing council that actually represents the people of Iraq.

The right hon. Gentleman says, "Should we not be worried about the situation?" Yes, of course we should, but the answer is not to run away from Iraq. The answer is not to turn our back on the task. The answer is to see the task through, because it was the right thing to do at the time, it is the right thing to do now, and we will get the job done.

Iraq

Q2. [128502] **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): If he will discuss the military position in Iraq with President Bush.

The Prime Minister: I have regular discussions with President Bush on a wide range of issues, and of course that includes the continuing military operations in Iraq.

Mr. Dalyell: In the light of the letter from Captain Peter Kimm, Royal Navy retired, to which I drew the Prime Minister's attention on Monday—it was published in *The Times* on 29 August—did certain of the chiefs of staff, led by the then chief of defence staff, without the knowledge of the chief of air staff, express their unease to the Prime Minister on Sunday 9 March about going to war in Iraq, not least in relation to the legality of what he and President Bush were asking the forces to do?

The Prime Minister: No, that is not correct—none of the chiefs of staff expressed such unease to me. If I may I shall quote to my hon. Friend from the then chief of air staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Peter Squire, who said on 31 August:

"As far as I am concerned there's absolutely no truth in it whatsoever."

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest): May I thank the Prime Minister for paying tribute to those who have died in Iraq, and draw his attention to the case of Ian Rimell of Kidderminster, a bomb disposal expert who was working for the Mines Advisory Group? He was murdered while driving home from his work defusing shells, while in a clearly marked MAG vehicle. May I also ask the Prime Minister to express his sympathy to Mr. Rimell's wife and three grown-up children, who are devastated by this pointless loss, which was not due to his work? Does the Prime Minister agree with me that the only fitting memorial for Ian Rimell is the establishment of a humanitarian, protected zone for workers who are doing this crucial business of defusing mines and shells? Will he consider instituting that?

The Prime Minister: I am deeply saddened to learn of the death of Ian Rimell and of the serious wounding of his colleague Salim Ahmed Mohammed, which took place near Mosul on 4 September. I pay tribute to Ian Rimell and to the other people doing similar work in Iraq.

UK and Danish teams have to date cleared some 350,000 unexploded munitions in Iraq, and it is worth while mentioning that as well as our serving soldiers, there are many people in Iraq from non-governmental organisations—they are doing tremendous humanitarian work—whose lives are also at risk. I have to say, however, that their lives are at risk from people who do not recognise any humanitarian zone, and who do not recognise any concept of humanitarian protection. These are people who have committed outrages on the United Nations and on people worshipping at the mosque in Iraq. These people are terrorists who want to stand in the way of precisely the type of Iraq that Ian Rimell and others wanted to see. The best memorial to him, in my view, would be to make sure that we see the job done and create an Iraq that is stable, democratic and prosperous.

Engagements

Q3. [128503] **Mark Tami** (Alyn and Deeside): Antisocial behaviour, often fuelled by under-age drinking, continues to blight many of our areas. Will my right hon. Friend join me in urging the police to take tougher action to combat drinking on our streets, particularly by juveniles?

The Prime Minister: The provisions of the Licensing Act 2003, which I think come into effect today, will give the police additional powers in respect of the abuse of alcohol, and in particular in respect of cracking down on antisocial behaviour caused by alcohol. These measures, along with the other measures in the legislation that we are introducing on antisocial behaviour, give the police hugely important additional powers in dealing with what is, in many constituencies up and down the country, the single biggest issue of concern to people.

Q4. [128504] **Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): Given that the Prime Minister has a copy of the Intelligence and Security Committee report, what reason does he give for not publishing it today?

The Prime Minister: The proper procedure is that the Intelligence and Security Committee present the report to me tomorrow. That is the right way of doing it, and it should be done in accordance with the procedure that we laid out. It would be quite wrong of us to do it in any other way.

Q5. [128505] **Mr. Iain Luke** (Dundee, East): Prime Minister: you are an outstanding example of a Scot who has benefited from coming south to study at one of the UK's most prestigious universities. Will you accept that concern exists that the top-up fees proposal will deter Scots from following suit, and create a golden triangle of research-based universities in the south-east, to the great disadvantage of universities throughout the UK? Recent polls have shown that 80 per cent. of people are opposed to the proposal. Will my right hon. Friend now think again?

The Prime Minister: What surely is important is that universities get additional access to funds, either from the taxpayer or through a contribution from students once they graduate. It is also important that we widen access so that more and more people go to university. We have said that we want half of all school leavers in this country to go to university, but we cannot do that unless we extend the funds available to universities. That is precisely why it is important that we proceed with the reforms that we have set out. It would be disastrous to adopt, for example, the policies of the Conservative party, which would mean 100,000 fewer students going to university every year.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): In public, the Government say that the European constitution is just a tidying-up exercise. In private, we know that the Prime Minister has said that it is absolutely fundamental and will define the relationship between Britain and the rest of Europe for generations. Which of these two faces of the Government should we believe?

The Prime Minister: Of course the outcome of the convention is absolutely fundamental, which is why it is right that we secured the positions on foreign policy, defence and tax that preserve Britain's identity as a nation state, at the same time as making the changes necessary so that Europe at 25 can govern itself and operate effectively. That is why the draft constitution for Europe is good for Europe and for Britain, and essential if we are to make enlargement work and secure British interests.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Earlier this year, the Prime Minister said that if the European constitution were about fundamental change, he would hold a referendum. He has told his Cabinet in secret that it is absolutely fundamental. So where is the referendum?

The Prime Minister: The outcome of the constitution, of course, is fundamental, which is why it is important that we have secured the positions that we set out. What I said to the right hon. Gentleman was that if we ended up in a situation where we were giving up, for example, our right to set our own tax rates, it would be appalling; but we are not. The right hon. Gentleman is opposed to

any constitution in Europe at all and would veto it. We see that that is what the Conservatives nod their heads to. Let us try the old game with him: there are 25 Governments in Europe, some Labour, some Conservative. Name me one that is in favour of his position.

Mr. Duncan Smith: What is absolutely clear is that the Prime Minister says one thing to his Cabinet and another thing to everyone else. Whether it is the Kelly tragedy or the TUC speech that he never actually delivered—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House must allow the Leader of the Opposition to speak. *[Interruption.]* Mr. King, you must be quiet.

Mr. Duncan Smith: They do not want to hear it because it is true. Whether it is the Kelly tragedy, last night's TUC speech that he did not actually deliver or the deliberate deceit about the European constitution, is it not true, now as ever, that no one will ever believe a word that the Prime Minister says any more?

The Prime Minister: In relation to the European constitution, I note that the right hon. Gentleman could not tell us a single other Government who support his position. So that the country understands, his position would mean that he would go to the conference in Italy in a few weeks and veto the whole thing. No one else would support him and the Conservatives would then get to where they want to be: saying that Britain should get out of the EU. That is their game; it is what they want.

On trust, the additional jobs in our economy are important, as are the lowest inflation and mortgage rates. The fact that we have the lowest long-term unemployment in this country for more than 30 years is important, as is the fact that we have 25,000 extra teachers and 50,000 extra nurses. Also, the fact that every single aspect of NHS waiting is better than in 1997 is important. That is what we were elected to do and what we will continue to do.

Phil Sawford (Kettering): I welcome the publication of the Green Paper "Every Child Matters", which seeks to address the problems, issues and failures highlighted in the Laming report. I welcome also the proposal for a children's commissioner. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that sufficient parliamentary time is available to get this measure through as quickly as possible? Will he ensure also that there are clear lines of accountability for the welfare of our children in the future?

The Prime Minister: I think that the proposals that we set out in the Green Paper on children will help enormously. I know that my hon. Friend would want to put the proposals for the children's commissioner alongside the other measures that the Government are taking to help some of the most disadvantaged children in our country. The sure start programme has, I believe, been enormously successful along with additional child benefit, the working families tax credit, free nursery education and more child care places for many families in the most disadvantaged parts of our country. Step by step we are trying to create a situation in which no child is denied the opportunity to make the most of their abilities, but that can be done only if we keep the investment going through to our local communities.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Given that the Prime Minister is one of the few people left in Britain who does not think that the September 2002 dossier was sexed up—

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): He had an e-mail from Gilligan!

Richard Ottaway: Can the Prime Minister explain how inserting chemical and biological material into battlefield mortar shells or small calibre weaponry poses a threat to the region or the stability of the world?

The Prime Minister: First, in respect of allegations about the dossier, perhaps it would be right to wait for the publication of the Intelligence and Security Committee report tomorrow and, indeed, the Hutton inquiry report at a later time. In respect of the Conservatives' position, however, their opportunism on the issue of Iraq is absolutely unbelievable. Here they are, yet as I recall it, they as a political party were urging me to take action against Saddam. The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) was urging that long before the dossier even came along. Now they go around the country saying that we were duped and misled by this terrible Prime Minister who got us into the situation of conflict. What they should learn over time is that, if they want to be an effective Opposition—never mind an effective Government—a little less opportunism would be a good idea.

Q7. [128507] **Chris Ruane** (Vale of Clwyd): The Prime Minister will be aware of my one-and-a-half hour Adjournment debate this afternoon on seaside town regeneration, and I hope that he finds time in his busy schedule to attend it. Failing that, will he support the calls for a dedicated Minister to be responsible for seaside town regeneration? Will he also support the call for ring-fenced funding for seaside regeneration similar to the amounts given to coal, steel, rural and inner city communities?

The Prime Minister: Actually, I am aware of my hon. Friend's Adjournment debate—it is on the Order Paper. It is worth pointing out to my hon. Friend that, for the first time, we are making sure that seaside towns, some of which may be relatively prosperous, but many of which have real pockets of deprivation and poverty, are eligible for assistance. My hon. Friend will know that there are two communities in the area that he represents which have had hundreds of thousands of pounds of funding, and we obviously want to do anything more that we can to assist them. The fact that these seaside towns are now recognised as suitable for the new deal for the regeneration of local communities shows that we recognise that although, as I said, there is prosperity among parts of our seaside communities, there is also a great deal of poverty and deprivation.

Q8. [128508] **Sir Michael Spicer** (West Worcestershire): Why are the Government currently borrowing at the rate of £35 billion a year, when only four months ago the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that the figure was £24 billion?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman should wait for the pre-Budget report for the figures, but if he looks at the debt:GDP ratio, it is a darn sight better than it was when his Government were in power. I seem to recall that he was a Minister in the previous Conservative Government when interest rates were between 10 per cent. and 15 per cent., 3 million people were unemployed, and borrowing reached £80 billion. Whoever else can give us lessons on prudent finance, it is certainly not the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the reasons for the relative lack of interest on the part of the British people in the European Union is the widespread belief that it is effectively the fiefdom of the political elite? In addition to other good reasons for holding a referendum on the new constitution, would not such a move instil greater interest among the British people in EU matters and effectively show them that their views really do matter on these vital issues?

The Prime Minister: I think that my hon. Friend should have a little more faith in our parliamentary debates to deal with the issues. In joining with the Conservatives and calling for a referendum, he should bear in mind the fact that Ted Heath did not have a referendum when he took us into the European Community, nor did Margaret Thatcher on the Single European Act, nor did John Major on Maastricht. I repeat that if there were a change in the fundamental nature of our constitution, a referendum would be right, but there is not. My hon. Friend should realise that Opposition Members who call for a referendum want it as the first step in a two-step process to get us out of Europe—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Yes, they do—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It seems that every time the Prime Minister stands, some hon. Members want to shout. That will not be allowed and I will not tolerate it.

The Prime Minister: I was merely pointing out gently that the Conservative party proposal—which we will not follow as a Government, which is why I comment on it—is a two-stage process, first to paralyse Europe and then to withdraw. That would be a disaster for our country.

Q9. [128509] **Mr. David Ruffley** (Bury St. Edmunds): For each of the past six years under Labour, the tax burden has been higher than the one that it inherited. In the interests of the British taxpayer, will the Prime Minister take this opportunity to rule out further increases in national insurance contributions in this Parliament?

The Prime Minister: First, if the hon. Gentleman looks at the Conservative Government as a whole, he will see that the tax burden was higher than at present in most of the years for which Mrs. Thatcher was in office, at least. Secondly, I make no apologies for raising national insurance. It was a difficult decision, but it was the right decision because it allows us to put extra investment into our national health service. If the Conservatives oppose that tax increase, perhaps they would say how they would fund the extra investment in the health service that is delivering better cancer care, better cardiac care and reduced waiting lists.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Denby Poultry Products factory in my constituency has been at the centre of a massive meat fraud conspiracy that released tonnes of condemned poultry waste to shops, hospitals and schools? Will he take urgent action on failings in the meat inspection system and the legislative framework identified by Amber Valley council officers and Derbyshire police, and will he congratulate them on their persistence in pursuing the case over several years and securing the convictions of six men involved in that appalling conspiracy?

The Prime Minister: I agree. My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point about the importing and exporting of illegal meat products. That is the reason why the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Customs and Excise have been working hard on the issue. I assure her that we will continue to take every possible action to stamp the practice out.

Q10. [128510] **Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): As the Prime Minister has ruled out a referendum on the European constitution, despite the fact that it is absolutely fundamental—as he said today—will he give a complete undertaking that if the other place rejects the proposals, he will not apply the Parliament Act?

The Prime Minister: We will maintain the position that we have set out because we believe it to be right. I repeat that the outcome of the constitution process is, of course, absolutely fundamental, but it is the right outcome for us. If we were to give any of our main positions away—on foreign policy, defence or tax—it would be a different matter. But we are not going to do that. We are going to secure every single one of those red lines. We have already principally done so in the outcome of the Convention and we will do it again at the intergovernmental conference. The hon. Gentleman and others should be honest about their position. They want to veto the European constitution, which would end up paralysing progress in Europe, as the first step to getting Britain out. That is a position that we as a Government will not adopt.

Q11. [128512] **Tony Cunningham** (Workington): I have several successful manufacturing companies in my constituency, including New Balance, which produces world-class athletics shoes, and M-Sport, which produces the very successful Ford rallying car that recently won world championship rallies in Finland and Greece. However, some manufacturing companies are struggling. What more can the Government do to help and support our manufacturing industry?

The Prime Minister: It is true that the manufacturing sector in our country has been through difficult times, as has the manufacturing sector in the major countries round the world. Indeed, manufacturing output has fallen by 1.5 per cent. in the US, 2 per cent. in Germany and 3.5 per cent. in Italy, so obviously the situation is not confined to us. I have to say, however, that the most recent figures on manufacturing output show an upturn. The most important thing is to carry on with the investment in the measures that will improve skills and productivity, and science and technology, and with the research and development tax credits introduced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. Above all else, we must maintain our economy's stability because, in the end, manufacturing—like any other part of our economy—depends on that stability in order to make progress.

Q12. [128513] **Mr. Philip Hammond** (Runnymede and Weybridge): Three years ago, the Government stated unequivocally that they would veto any attempt to incorporate the European charter of fundamental rights in EU law. Yesterday, the Government said that they would horse-trade on incorporation at the intergovernmental conference. Given that history, what confidence can the British people have that the remaining so-called "red-lined" areas—defence, foreign policy and taxation—will not be sold out in the same way, either at the IGC or later?

The Prime Minister: We made it clear that we will not sell out the issue of the European charter on fundamental rights. There is no way that that should extend the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. In my view, that position will be secured at the IGC that is coming up. I have to say to the hon. Gentleman and other Opposition Members that, overall, this constitution is right. If we expand Europe from 15 members to 25, we must have a more effective and efficient way of working. If we simply sit there and say no to everything coming out of Europe—to extensions of qualified majority voting even when that is in our interests, to the first involvement of national Parliaments, or to a full-time President of the Council which will hugely strengthen the nation state—we will not advance this country's interests, but betray them.

Licensing and Registration of Gangmasters

12.31 pm

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to register and license gangmasters in the agricultural and food processing industries.

To begin with, I should like to pay tribute to my predecessor Sir Richard Body for his tremendous and unstinting work in this area.

The term "gangmaster" is not new. Ganging has been conducted in the fens and East Anglia for as long as anyone can remember. Ganging refers to the provision of casual labour for agricultural work.

The need for such casual labour used to be seasonal, but that is no longer the case. Increased consumer demand and changes in supermarket practices that demand consistency of supply 52 weeks a year for pre-packaged and pre-prepared goods now mean that demand for such casual labour is all-year round. Producers and packhouses now import produce when their own supply cannot meet supermarket demand. These imported goods are prepared, packaged and dispatched to supermarkets around the country 364 days a year.

The gangmaster system is not any longer confined to the agriculture and horticulture industries. Ganging has now spread to any sector where there is demand for casual labour. It pays an important role in the fishing, catering, construction, cleaning and retail industries. These highly organised gangs of labour move around the UK fulfilling different labour requirements in different industries, often on a daily basis.

I do not seek to make the gangmaster system illegal. It has to be recognised that gangmasters play a vital role in many industries, particularly in the agricultural sector. Ganging is an essential tool that provides efficient and cost-effective labour for the production of food in the UK. The role of gangmasters is even more important when considered in the context of the pressure placed on producers and packers by the supermarkets. Being a gangmaster is a legitimate business, providing large numbers of workers at short notice. A number of gangmasters pride themselves on their good working practices.

Historically, gangmasters used to employ labour from the immediate locality to bring in the harvest, but packagers, producers and the industry are now hugely dependent on migrant labour. The point must be made, however, that without that migrant labour the food industry would not be able to operate. It has been said that 95 per cent. of the horticulture industry is now dependent on foreign labour. To give the House a sense of the scale of the problem, half the 72,000 casual workers employed in the industry are provided by gangmasters. It has been calculated that 20,000 workers per annum are employed by the gangmaster system in a 16-mile stretch between Spalding and Boston, and a further 20,000 workers are employed in the stretch between Spalding and Ely. However, the real scale of the problem is unknown. It is out of control to such an extent that gangmasters travel to Europe to recruit workers directly.

I am sorry to have to tell the House that some suppliers of gang labour use abusive, evasive, intimidating, fraudulent and exploitative working practices. Regular and significant offences include unlawful deductions from wages; the use of casual workers in receipt of benefits; the use of illegal immigrants; evasion of tax and national insurance payments; non-registration of VAT; evasion of payment of VAT to Customs and Excise; and the use of under-age workers. The implications of those practices are not only the human misery and suffering of the exploited individuals, but significant loss to the Exchequer; damage to legitimate providers of labour owing to undercutting from illegal operators through unfair competition; and damage to the reputation of the entire food chain.

To make life more difficult for the authorities, gangmasters often subcontract to smaller, untraceable labour suppliers, which means that no paper or audit trail is provided. Although the initial gangmaster may be legitimate, the subcontractor may not. It is thus important that all subcontracting gangmasters be included in any scheme, and they must also be licensed.

The House should be under no illusion: this is a multimillion-pound business—so much so that the police believe that professional criminal gangs from around the world have moved into the casual labour market in the UK to exploit the current legislative loophole. Some illegal gangmasters have contacts with migrant importers, who charge people to come to the UK, promising them employment. Once an individual is in the UK, often in massive debt, they are found accommodation, which is often substandard. They are provided with transport to and from their place of work. The transport and accommodation costs are deducted from the worker's pay packet, along with tax and national insurance payments. However, as many of the workers are in this country illegally, there is no justification for many of those deductions, which are inevitably not passed on to the relevant authorities. The worst of the examples brought to my attention is that of an eastern European woman employed by an illegal gangmaster. Her gross wage was £149, but after deductions for accommodation, food and transport her net pay was £19.

If a worker complains or queries deductions from their wages, they can find themselves on the streets, homeless, penniless and passportless. More often than not, however, the van that takes them to work will not turn up, and as many of them are housed in rural areas where transport is limited, if the van fails to arrive there is no work.

There is an atmosphere of intimidation permeating illegal ganging. Stories of verbal and physical abuse are widespread and subsequently generate an understandable reluctance to come forward, so much of the evidence is anecdotal. Indeed, the last reliable statistical data are from 1995; they emanated from the agricultural compliance unit, which identified more than 5,500 gangmasters and, by investigating them at that time, managed to recover £537 million in unpaid tax.

The Government have recognised that the situation is deteriorating and that the prevalence of illegal gangmasters is increasing. In 1998, Operation Gangmaster was established to look into the problems of illegal ganging. However, it is clear from evidence to the recent inquiry into gangmasters conducted by the Select Committee on Environment, Transport and

[Mr. Mark Simmonds]

Regional Affairs that the Government have so far failed in their efforts to tackle the problem. They admit that no one has any idea of the extent of the difficulties.

Five years on, Operation Gangmaster has no overall budget, reports to no Minister, has no identified aims or goals and no time frame by which anything must be achieved, and the relevant individuals in each Department with responsibility for Operation Gangmaster have not met during the past year. It is no wonder that little is being done, that nothing is being achieved and that the problem is getting worse.

The Government have no idea of the number of migrant workers—illegal and legal—involved in the problem, how long they have been in the UK, where they are located, where they are working, what they are doing, or whether they are being exploited or intimidated. It is essential to confront those issues for the sake of local economies and the workers themselves.

The fundamental step in combating the problem is to establish a legislative framework to introduce a compulsory code of practice. All gangmasters and subcontractors must abide by that code to obtain a licence and to be allowed to organise casual gang labour. Registration must be kept simple and unbureaucratic, unlike the existing voluntary codes, which are clearly not working. If gangmasters fail to comply with the legal obligations, they must be removed from the register and not be allowed to operate as gangmasters. An annual levy would be charged to make the scheme self-financing.

Any scheme must take into account the importance of the need to maintain flexibility in the labour market and must not add further to the burden on the agriculture and horticulture industries. Such schemes have existed before—for example, under the Agricultural Gangs Act 1867. In the 1940s, there was a licensing scheme administered by magistrates. In 1973, a scheme worked reasonably successfully, alongside the White Paper on employment.

Such a self-financing legislative scheme is supported by supermarkets, producers, farmers, packers, the National Farmers Union, the Fresh Produce Consortium, the trade union movement, legitimate gangmasters and many hon. Members.

In conclusion, it is not acceptable to have many thousands of vulnerable legal and illegal workers being transported across the country and being exploited. It must stop. It is essential that we must encourage the legitimate supply of labour to the detriment of the illegal and illegitimate.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Mark Simmonds, Mr. John Hayes, Mr. Peter Luff, Mr. Henry Bellingham, Mr. Mark Prisk, Mr. John Baron, Mr. Mark Hoban, Mr. Mark Field, Mr. George Osborne, Mr. Peter Duncan and Mr. Hugo Swire.

Licensing and Registration of Gangmasters

Mr. Simmonds accordingly presented a Bill to register and license gangmasters in the agricultural and food processing industries: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 21 November, and to be printed [Bill 156].

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will of course be aware that the House is voting in deferred Divisions at the moment, as indicated on today's Order Paper. Will you perhaps cause that to be looked into, as the House is voting on matters that were debated in early July and thus being asked to reach a decision some two months after they were debated in Committee? That is surely ridiculous, and yet another sign of modernisation going fairly crazy. Should it not be reviewed?

Mr. Speaker: All I would say to the hon. Gentleman is that Members of Parliament have a long memory.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I should be grateful if you could provide me with some guidance on the procedures of the Intelligence and Security Committee of the House. Is it the case that, once the Committee submits a report to the Prime Minister, he decides when that report is published?

Mr. Speaker: All I say to the hon. Gentleman is that, thankfully, that is not an issue for me; it is not a Committee of the House, so he will have to make his inquiries elsewhere.

Opposition Day

[16TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Fairness and Security in Old Age

Mr. Speaker: We now come to the first debate on the Opposition motions. I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

12.44 pm

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I beg to move,

That this House believes that this Government has failed to deliver fairness and security for older people; is concerned that home care services for older people have been cut back and that the Government has presided over the collapse of the care home sector through botched regulations and underfunding; condemns the Government for putting in place rules that allowed thousands of elderly people to be forced to give up their life savings and homes to fund their continuing healthcare; believes that the Government has failed to tackle the pensions crisis both for current and future pensioners, putting in place a complex system of means-tests that fails to get help to the poorest pensioners, whilst heaping extra costs on pensioners by relying on the unfair Conservative council tax to fund local services; is concerned that many pensioners will suffer as a result of the closure of local post offices, a problem made worse by the Government's plans to scrap the pension book and introduce direct payment; and calls on the Government to stabilise the care home and home care sectors, offer security and real choice to older people, simplify the pension system, boost the basic state pension and abolish the council tax and replace it with a tax related to ability to pay.

Liberal Democrats have called this debate because we believe that the Government have failed to deliver fairness and security for older people in this country. It is convenient that we are debating this subject today, because many hundreds of our constituents from the National Pensioners Convention and many other pensioner organisations up and down the country are coming to this House to lobby Members of Parliament about their concerns. Their message and ours is that older people feel cheated by this Government—cheated out of their life savings to pay for their care, cheated out of a decent pension and cheated out of a reasonable standard of living by an unfair and ever-rising council tax.

A growing concern exists among older people that there is a crisis in our care system. Day after day, more and more care homes are closing their doors, but where are the extra home care services to make up the difference? As care homes close their doors, where are the provision in people's own homes and the staff to enable people to continue to live in their own homes?

Since the peak in 1996, some 74,000 care home places have been lost in this country. In the 15 months to April this year, a further 13,400 places have been lost. The prospects remain bleak. The number of new registrations of care homes is falling even faster than the number of closures is rising.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): To underline my hon. Friend's point, is he aware that in Cornwall so many care homes have been closed that people have had to be transferred into our hospitals, taking up beds that are then blocked for those who should be there?

Mr. Burstow: My hon. Friend makes an important point, to which I want to refer in a moment.

As a consequence of that lack of care home capacity in our communities—and the lack of foresight on the part of this Government that has allowed a shortage of supply to arise in more and more places—growing numbers of people are getting stuck in hospitals when they are ready to go to a care home.

In the 15 months to April this year just 96 new homes were registered for care of the elderly in this country. I repeat: 96 in 15 months. Since 1997, the number of people receiving home care has fallen by 110,000: almost a quarter of home care places have been axed in this country since 1997. Social services departments have always been gatekeepers of services, but increasingly the elderly are finding the gateway to those services firmly locked, and opened to them only when they are at death's door or in desperate straits. More and more councils are rationing services. Who picks up the pieces? It is the relatives, the husbands, the wives, the parents, the children—all of them carers. They find themselves asked to carry on that caring role for longer and longer because adequate provision of social care services is not available to support them in that role, and indeed when they can no longer carry on in that role.

At the same time, the Government have driven through half-baked plans to put a price on the head of every elderly person who is stuck in a hospital bed. Of course we want older people to receive the right care in the right place at the right time, but this Government's obsession with targets and fines runs a risk of more and more elderly people getting the wrong care in the wrong place at the wrong time. As the number of people labelled as bed blockers falls—and it is falling—the number of people returning to hospital as emergencies is rising. The Department of Health's own figures show that there has been a 23 per cent. increase in the numbers of elderly people over the age of 75 returning to hospital within less than 28 days of being sent home. That is a startling figure. Indeed, the last available set of figures for the whole of a single year show that 140,000 people over the age of 75 are now being put through the misery of being discharged prematurely only to return to hospital within 28 days of that discharge. That makes no sense at all. The research that has been done on emergency readmissions shows that two in five could have been avoided. The NHS must do more on that, and the Government, by their fixation on delayed discharge, are overlooking that problem and failing to tackle it.

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): Both the hon. Gentleman and I are parliamentary representatives on the Greater London Forum for the Elderly, as he will be aware. As he also knows, the forum is having a community awareness week in October, in which it hopes to bring out clearly the problem of care homes in London, which is particularly acute. I would be glad if he made note of that.

Mr. Burstow: I certainly do make note of it, and in a minute I shall quote some examples from a report of the National Audit Office that demonstrate clearly that in London and the south-east we have gone beyond meltdown in the care home system. There is an excess of demand over supply when it comes to care home capacity. The NAO report states that

"for London and the south-east as a whole demand exceeds supply. There is a particular shortage of beds affordable to councils."

[Mr. Burstow]

Increasingly, because the capital is funded to a higher level than elsewhere for social services, it can afford to poach places outside London. Increasingly in Kent and other parts of the home counties, London councils are competing with local councils for care home beds, and they are able to outbid local councils, making life even more difficult for many others outside London.

The problem of demand outstripping supply is not confined to the capital and the south-east. It is becoming a widespread issue. It is not only a matter of a growing shortage of places, for there is also a shortage of staff. Again, the NAO warned the Government earlier this year, when it said:

"Both residential and home care capacity are constrained by shortage of care assistants in the public and private sectors, who carry out many of the more basic but vital tasks. Potential applicants in some parts of the country are currently able to earn higher wages by working, for example, in supermarkets."

The reality is that in too many places care home owners fear the day that a new supermarket opens because they know that it will have an impact upon their ability to continue to provide a quality of care for the residents in their home.

A shortage of places and staff means less choice for older people. It leaves families struggling to find a good care home on their doorstep. For many, the choice is simple: sending granny or granddad miles away or topping up what the council is willing to pay to get into what they hope will be a better home. Not only do the Government expect the elderly to spend their life savings and to sell their homes to pay for care. It seems that they are now content to stand idly by while the children of older people also pay for their parents to be in the right care home. No wonder these people feel that the system is unfair. No wonder so many of them feel insecure.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): The hon. Gentleman knows that £4.5 billion of private money is spent on residential care, which is equivalent to 1.4p on income tax. Is his party saying that it would pay that private money? If the hon. Gentleman and his party are not going to fund it, he should shut up and move on to something else.

Mr. Burstow: So the hon. Gentleman is telling me that a debate about the future of older people and their security should not include care homes and should not pinpoint the key reasons why care homes are going out of business. Is that what he is telling us? Many people outside the Chamber would be appalled to hear that that is what the hon. Gentleman is saying.

Geraint Davies *rose—*

Mr. Burstow: No, I will not give way.

The hon. Gentleman makes a point about money. I shall deal with funding shortly.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): Is my hon. Friend aware that in my constituency two care homes have closed recently? A constituent told me last week that having moved her grandmother to the Gatehouse care home in Dawlish, only for it to be closed six months ago, she then moved her to the Kiniver care home in Teignmouth last week, only to discover that it is closing. Is it not the cost of the Government policy that elderly people are moved from care home to care home at a time in their life when they are least able to cope?

Mr. Burstow: Sadly, what my hon. Friend has described is all too often now the reality for people in care homes. People can be given notice of no more than four weeks that their care home is about to be closed. The trauma of being evicted from a care home can shorten lives and result in people losing their lives. My hon. Friend is right to highlight that concern. There is a fundamental lack of security of tenure, which means that people can easily be passed from pillar to post in the way that he rightly describes.

I have said that the Government are presiding over a back-door tax on the frail and elderly and their families. As the gap between care home fees and what councils are willing to pay widens, more and more families are forced to choose between eviction or topping up the care home fees. It is no wonder that so many older people feel betrayed by the Government.

As more care homes close and demand outstrips supply, the problem can only grow. The plain and simple fact is that the market for care homes is still in freefall. Fee levels are at the heart of the matter. Councils cannot or will not pay a fair rate for care. Yet fees must rise if care homes closures are to be halted. That is not only my view, and it is not only the view of a number of organisations from Age Concern and Help the Aged to the King's Fund, as well as many others. It is also the finding of the Government's research last year. The research states:

"An increase in care home fees paid by local authorities was the change that might have prevented home closures identified most often by providers."

That was one of the findings of research commissioned by the Government from the Personal Social Services Research Unit. It seems that that finding has not yet landed on Ministers' desks. It certainly has not impacted upon their consciousness to the extent that they have acted to make a real difference.

Have fees risen enough to make a difference? Earlier this year I received a letter from the National Care Homes Association, which said:

"This year . . . Local Authorities have awarded a fee increase of between two and five per cent. These fee increases came into effect in April. At the same time care homes have had to face additional 'on costs' imposed by the Government."

The association goes on to list the 6 per cent. increase in the national minimum wage, the 20 per cent. increase in the fees that care homes must pay to be inspected by the National Care Standards Commission and the 130 per cent. increase in charges for criminal record checks for new employees. None of these increases is wrong in itself, and none of the services is wrong in itself. But for all of them to have been overlooked by the Government in their funding settlements, which means that councils cannot passport the money through to cover the extra costs, means that care homes are increasingly working with a bottom line that does not make any sense to the owners or their bank managers.

This means increasingly—certainly in my constituency—that those running care homes look at property values and judge that they have been in the

business long enough and that it is time for them to retire. They close their care homes and realise a profit by selling them for something else. The victims are the people who, as a result, get passed from pillar to post, having been told that they must move from one home to another.

I want to make it clear that, for us, the issue is not about the livelihoods of care home owners; it is all about the lives of care home residents. A care home can close in just four weeks. A resident has no security of tenure. As I have said, it is a traumatic experience to be told that a home that you have lived in, possibly for many years, is suddenly to be denied to you. That experience can be terrible. It can shorten lives, and in some cases it has cost lives.

Most of those deaths—those tragedies—go unnoticed and unreported. However, earlier this year two cases widely highlighted the plight of the frail elderly. These were the tragic deaths of Winnifred Humphrey and Violet Townsend in different parts of the country, Kent and Gloucestershire. Winnifred Humphrey was forced to move home because her council was not willing to pay the home's latest care home fees. She died 16 days after her move. Violet Townsend was forced to move when the home she had lived in for eight years stopped subsidising council-funded places.

The question of charitably run care homes subsidising state-funded placements is a big issue. Two years ago, the charitable sector was having to find more than £184 million a year to plug the gap between what councils were paying and what was necessary to provide a decent quality of care for older people in care homes. As a consequence of being forced to move, Violet Townsend died five days afterwards. I hope that the Minister responsible for these matters at Westminster has had the opportunity to study the report commissioned by Gloucestershire. It was a local inquiry into the events surrounding Violet's tragic death. I shall quote the report's conclusions. It said:

"The funding required to support the provision of residential and nursing care beds has not kept pace with the growth in the market resulting from improved healthcare and subsequent changes in demography including longer life expectancy. National research and local experience shows that funding initiatives tied to current government priorities do little to address the underlying weakness in the funding structure. When seeking to supplement a shortfall in resources for residential and nursing care, the Council is obliged to balance the risk to its other social care responsibilities, notably in services to children.

Market forces including recruitment and retention problems, increased care standards and rising expectations are resulting in a shrinking care home industry. The Council, working in partnership with the care home industry, is seeking to secure future provision by developing a mutually acceptable contract strategy. In the longer term the Council may be priced out of the market unless additional funds are available to pay the level of fees required to attract private capital investment in new build provision that is compliant with the improved care standards."

What will the Government's response be to that report and to many others like it?

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): I have been listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman, and accept what he is saying about the tragedy of those two cases. However, care homes close for various reasons—not just because of lack of funds, but often because they do not come up to the new care standards. I would expect the hon. Gentleman from his political perspective to accept that that is quite right. However, what is the solution to the difficulties caused by the closure of care homes that simply do not come up to the standards that we expect in a modern care service?

Mr. Burstow: The hon. Lady makes an entirely fair point. At the moment, care home residents have less security of tenure than a council tenant or a private tenant. We are arguing that they need greater security, and we need a procedure for care home closures—there will be closures, because there are bad care homes that should be closed—that is slow-paced and meets the needs of the individuals. It should not be rushed to meet the needs of the social services budget or care home owners' priorities in selling their care homes. That is what we want, as it is not standard practice everywhere. The findings of the inquiry in Gloucestershire show that there are lessons to be learned from the way in which the tragic circumstances of Violet's death were handled, and changes in procedure will be required in future.

The Government's response to the problem is apparent in their amendment—it is simply to pat themselves on the back and to say what a wonderful job they are doing and that everything in the garden is rosy. Good regulations and higher care standards are something that we all want, but the Government, in fact, have managed to pull off a double whammy of botched regulations and, as a consequence of their botched introduction, poor standards. The care standards that were introduced in April 2002, only to be ditched in July 2002, were for many care home owners the final straw. During the passage of the legislation in 2000, the Government said that better standards would be cost-neutral. Larger rooms, wider doors, lifts and many other physical changes are required to bring homes up to standard so that that they are fit not only for today but for future generations. The Minister has stuck to the line that that need not cost more, which was nonsense in 2000 when the legislation went through the House. When the penny finally dropped with Health Ministers, they ran away from higher standards and the higher costs of meeting them, and waved away the physical standard requirements for the care home sector. The standards for care homes for disabled children and adults are in practice and detail higher than the standards that will apply to the care of the elderly. What happens to an adult in a care home who makes the transition to an older persons' home? Suddenly, they are told that they have to start sharing again because standards do not require the provision of single rooms in a care home for the elderly. Such changes are the result of the Government's ill-thought-out approach. Yet again, elderly people face discrimination solely on the basis of age.

Discrimination does not end there. In February this year, the health service ombudsman published a highly critical report on long-term care. She found that the NHS had adopted unfair, even unlawful, rules for deciding who was entitled to fully funded continuing health care. Despite court judgments and the ombudsman's rulings, the Government have done next to nothing to put that injustice right. They remain in denial about the fact that they have done anything wrong at all. However, the guidance issued by the Department of Health under this Government's watch

[Mr. Burstow]

has served only to obscure the legal position and left the NHS locally to draw up its own rules. Those rules amount to age-based rationing of health care. Once assessed—and thousands never even get that far—people who are turned down are directed to social services and are means-tested. It is a scandal that for so long the sick elderly in need of health care have been forced to sell their homes to pay for services that they thought throughout their working and taxpaying lives they would receive free when they needed them.

We are not talking about personal care or the recommendations of the royal commission on long-term care. We are talking about the law of the land, dating back to the institution of the national health service and the principle that health care is free on the basis of need. For far too many elderly people, that is not the practical everyday reality—they are denied that right and are charged for going into a care home. In too many cases, the rules mean that people only qualify for NHS funding when they are at death's door, yet no law was ever passed to draw the line between what is free and what is paid for. It has been done instead by poorly drafted guidance and neglect. Ever since the ombudsman reported in February, Ministers have stonewalled on the Government's response. I hope that when the Minister stands at the Dispatch Box today, he will offer a sincere apology to the families who have had to battle for so long to get their rights recognised and who had only the ombudsman to rely on to get change and recompense for what they have lost.

The problem is not just unfairness and insecurity in care—the same goes for pensions. The withering away of the basic state pension started under the previous Government, but it has continued under this one. Today's basic pension is a weak foundation on which to build security in old age. Women do particularly badly, and their relative position in the past decade has not improved. The basic pension should be a strong foundation for income in old age. The oldest pensioners, as we know—indeed, even the Chancellor now accepts this—are the poorest pensioners. We believe that they should receive much more as part of their basic state pension.

I shall now come on to the questions asked by the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies). If the money that the Government are ploughing into mass means tests for the pension credit were spent on a better basic pension, the figure that my hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) reported to the House a while ago would be of great interest. The over-75s would receive an extra £19 week in their basic pension—no questions asked, no forms to fill out. Even the Government accept that the basic state pension is not enough, which is why they are introducing the state second pension. I had the doubtful pleasure of serving on the Committee that considered the legislation introducing that pension. The trouble with that measure is that, after 40 years of making contributions, someone retiring on a full basic pension and a full second pension will be so poor that they will immediately have to apply for means-tested support.

The basic pension and the state second pension both leave pensioners in poverty, so the Government are introducing the pension credit to fill the gap. However, they have introduced more complication and confusion in the system. Complication and means testing lead to lower take-up. The Government think that 3.8 million pensioner households should be entitled to the pensioner credit, but the reality is that by next year Ministers expect just 2.8 million of them to be receiving it—1 million pensioners will, on the Government's own figures, be living below the Government's pensioner poverty line.

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): What the hon. Gentleman is saying is at odds with my own experience. Thousands of pensioners in my community are accessing the Pension Service, and I have repeatedly been told that it is as easy as picking up a phone—the work is done for claimants, and they get returns within days. If that is not the hon. Gentleman's experience in his area, may I suggest that he ask some questions, as that service is available in many other parts of the country?

Mr. Burstow: The Minister may be able to deal with that puzzle in a minute, because the Government's own figures are based on the assumption that they will fail to get 1 million pensioners into the pension credit. It is for the Government to explain why there is such a difference between what the hon. Lady has been led to believe is happening on the ground and the Government's expectations. Our experience of the system leads us to believe that it will require regular reviews, which means that in reality it will be complicated.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): May I bolster the point that the hon. Gentleman is making by pointing out that as recently as this morning the Secretary of State himself gave evidence to the Select Committee on Work and Pensions? He accepted my figure when I suggested that 1 million pensioners entitled to the pension credit would not be claiming it, and he expressed a blithe confidence that, despite all the problems with tax credits and the Child Support Agency computer problems, things would be done seamlessly and efficiently when the day dawned in October.

Mr. Burstow: The hon. Gentleman has made a useful point in demonstrating the Minister's acceptance of the figure that I have given. I hope that when Ministers respond to our debate they will do more to allay the concern of many Members about the way in which the pension credit system will operate.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Is the hon. Gentleman arguing that, by next year, 2.8 million pensioner households will be better off as a result of the introduction of the state pension credit—a measure introduced by the Government which his party opposed? Is that what he is saying?

Mr. Burstow: What I am saying is that I am more ambitious than this Government. I do not believe that 1 million households should be left in poverty, but the Government seem to be complacent about that and prepared to accept it. They are complacent about the

situation even in 2006, as they expect 800,000 of our pensioner households to continue to live in pensioner poverty.

Miss Begg: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burstow: I have been generous in giving way and I have given way to the hon. Lady, so I wish to make some progress.

That poverty is made worse by huge council tax increases. The most recent Government figures show that the poorest 20 per cent. of pensioners pay almost four times as much of their income, even after benefits, on council tax as the top 20 per cent. Council tax has a disproportionate impact on the poorest.

Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): I support what my hon. Friend is saying about council tax. In May, I presented a petition on behalf of 5,000 residents in Weston-super-Mare who were concerned about the existing rates. We are now talking about next year, when there will be a further whammy. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that people are very concerned about fairness and ability to pay?

Mr. Burstow: My hon. Friend is right to underscore something that many outside the House feel—council tax has now become the unfairest tax in Britain. It really does hit hardest the poorest and most vulnerable. That is why during the Budget process in this place, we argued that there should be a £100 across-the-board cut in this year's council tax as a way of beginning to alleviate and ameliorate the impact of council tax rises. It is also why the Liberal Democrats still believe that what we need is a fair income tax-based solution to raising local taxes. The Government say in their amendment simply that they are reviewing council tax. Six years after coming into office, they are still reviewing. While they do so, pensioners are getting poorer.

Our motion also addresses the concern felt by many pensioners about the loss of their pension books and the introduction of what the Government confusingly call direct payments. We now have direct payments in the Department of Health and the Department for Work and Pensions. They are totally different and confusing on the ground. Payments into banks, building societies and post office card accounts may make sense for some people, but the option of keeping the pension book should not be discarded so casually. The Government are introducing the post office card account, but it is difficult to apply for. People have to go through six separate stages to make an application, and the account is difficult to use in practice. For example, my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) found back in July that only one in 10 post office card account applications had been processed. Let us hope that the Government have been able to speed that up.

Even now, it is not clear what happens to pensioners who have an account who fall ill suddenly and have not made any prior arrangements allowing someone else to use their personal identification number. Indeed, if someone else uses their PIN, they will lose their eligibility for a card account.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burstow: I am afraid that I shall not give way at this point.

The same point applies to those who are relying on a number of different carers. We are still waiting for the Government to spell out the details of their exception scheme. If pensioners feel that the pension book suits their needs, they should be allowed to keep it.

We initiated this debate because those are the issues and concerns that are on our constituents' minds. They are on the minds of those who are lobbying Members of this House today. On the ground, people are seeing care homes closing, and confronting the difficulties of finding a good care home for their loved ones. People are forking out a fortune to pay for what they believed was free health care and struggling to make ends meet while coping with a meagre pension and huge council tax rises. This Government have had six years to start to deal with those issues. As a result of their failure, thousands—indeed, millions—of pensioners in this country still feel insecure and feel that this Government are not giving them a fair deal.

1.14 pm

The Minister for Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes that from 2004–05 Government will be spending £9.2 billion extra per year in real terms on pensioners compared with the 1997 system; notes this is £5.7 billion more than if the basic state pension had been linked to earnings; recognises that the poorest third of pensioners will be £1,600 a year better off in real terms compared with the 1997 system; applauds Government action for older people on health and social care, fuel poverty, transport and lifelong learning; approves of action to stabilise the care home sector by increasing resources available to councils to increase care home fees where required; supports the Government's commitment to increase resources available for social services by on average six per cent. a year in real terms over the next three years, the expansion of intensive home care support, and the largest ever sustained increase in funding for the NHS; welcomes the real terms increase of 25 per cent. in grant to local authorities since 1997, and the review of the balance of funding between central and local government; further welcomes the successful introduction of universal banking services, giving Post Office access through a number of current accounts, basic bank accounts and the Post Office card account; congratulates Government on its intention to bring in Pension Credit from October; notes eligible households stand to gain on average £400 a year; and applauds the actions of the Government which result in over 1 million people being ready to receive Pension Credit who will gain more money than they had before."

We very much welcome this debate on fairness and security in old age. Clearly, the ageing of the population is one of the major challenges for societies such as ours. Indeed, it is the major factor behind what I might term the rise of demographic politics, although low birth rates across Europe and much of the western world are another major factor behind demographic politics. We face serious challenges and there are some serious questions to be asked and answered.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) raised many such questions, and many of them have huge resource implications. In debating these matters, however, we must avoid two dangers. The first is an excessive negativism and pessimism about the ageing of our population. Let me turn to the words of a former tutor of mine, Professor Richard Titmuss of the London School of Economics:

"Viewed historically, it is difficult to understand why the gradual emergence in Britain of a more balanced age structure should be regarded as a 'problem of ageing'".

[Malcolm Wicks]

I think that that is a text for our times, although the book was published in 1963. Let us avoid pessimism about ageing. The second danger is any temptation to suggest that there is some conflict between different generations or that they are in a battle for resources. Incidentally, I am not accusing the hon. Gentleman of falling into either of those traps, but trying to make two broad points.

In looking at the demography of ageing, we need to address two trends. First, there are many ways in which we can paint a statistical picture of the general ageing of our population. Back in 1901, a few years before Lloyd George introduced the old-age pension at the generous rate of five shillings, the 65-plus population represented some 5 per cent. of the overall population. Those aged 65 and over now represent approximately 16 per cent. By the middle of this century, 2051, that level will rise to 24 per cent. However, there is another trend that we need to understand—the ageing of the elderly population itself and the rise in the number of people in their 70s and 80s. Back in 1901, only 61,000 people were over 85, but the figure is now 1.1 million and it will be 3 million by 2051. The ageing of the population has major implications for pensions issues and the ageing of the elderly population has particular implications for the social and health care issues that the hon. Gentleman raised.

To give another bit of broad context, we also need to recognise the life cycle of the typical 21st century Briton. The Briton of the 21st century may well spend 20 or even 25 years in education and training, preparing for economic activity. That hugely contrasts with the situation of their grandparents and great grandparents, who would have left school at 14. Of course, although when people retire—we all hope that they will be able to retire later if they wish to do so—they may currently face retirements lasting 20 years, as the century progresses, they may last 25, 30 or more years.

I mention those facts because, in terms of such demography, we need to ask serious questions, as we are doing, about how we will afford education for a long period at the start of people's lives and decent retirements at the end. Although we often have separate debates about those issues, they are linked in terms of resources and life cycles.

We should also avoid generalisations about "the old". We all fall into that trap, and I shall probably do so today. However, when we consider groups of elderly people—some now talk about ageing starting at 50, which I can hardly believe—we are clearly talking, in the light of the fact that some people are now surviving as centenarians, about different cohorts of people with different needs, and about different financial and social circumstances. Such cohorts have different interests and may not agree with each other about the allocation of resources, and we should recognise that.

While much of our debate is perfectly properly about the rights of elderly people to decent health and social care, and decent retirement pensions, let us also remember and pay tribute to the fact that this generation takes very seriously not only its rights, but its duties and responsibilities. It takes its responsibilities seriously in terms of volunteering. Many of our volunteer army are the younger old, who are often looking after the older old. Many are carers of spouses with dementia or children with serious conditions. We need to recognise the responsibilities taken on by the old, as well as their rights, and obviously we need to combat age discrimination.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): The Liberal Democrat spokesman highlighted one or two cases in which older people had had their human rights breached, which often takes place in a care setting. Does the Minister agree that sometimes older people find it difficult to defend and promote their rights? Is it not about time that they had a human rights commissioner who could work on such breaches, as I suggested to his ministerial colleague a week or two ago?

Malcolm Wicks: In terms of the broad agenda, I shall focus mainly on incomes and pensions, while the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman), will address other issues. We are all sensitive to the fact that when people who may be in their final years of life need to move to various kinds of institutions to be cared for, often by strangers, potential breaches of human rights come very much to the fore. I am sure that that unites all hon. Members, whatever our policy positions. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is very mindful of the issue.

Mr. Bercow: Given that higher take-up of pensioners' benefits demands greater simplicity in the system, does it in any way trouble the Minister that, as was said of the Schleswig-Holstein question, only three people have ever understood the complexities of Government pension policy, one of whom is dead, while the second is mad and the third has forgotten the answer?

Malcolm Wicks: I think that I personally knew all three. I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's point. I shall talk about pension credit, which he may have in mind, in a few moments.

One of the issues involved in rights is that of outlawing age discrimination. It is extraordinary that at the very time that, demographically speaking, more of our citizens are elders, there remains absurd discrimination against older workers that bars people from the work force. We have several programmes to deal with that, and we are going to outlaw age discrimination. That will come into force in October 2006.

Mr. Burstow: Will the Minister take the opportunity to confirm on the record that when he says that the Government are committed to dealing with age discrimination, he means that they are focused only on the workplace and will not tackle—in other words, they will tolerate—discrimination against older people in welfare and health services and in many other aspects of their lives?

Malcolm Wicks: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman did not pay tribute to the fact that we are the first Government to outlaw age discrimination. In a range of arenas in the private, voluntary and public sectors, we need to be on guard against such discrimination—not least in the national health service, where we have taken major steps in that respect.

Our strategy for older people involves a number of strands, but I would emphasise the need for all pensioners to have a decent and secure income in retirement, opportunities to remain active in later life—there is a role for employment, of course, but also for education, lifelong learning and community activity—and a better and more co-ordinated health and care system to promote the independence of old people. It is also important at central level—even more so at local level—that we involve older people themselves in running and consulting on such services.

I turn to incomes and pensions. That is my brief, and it is extremely significant to the debate. We are tackling pensioner poverty and will continue to do so. Our approach strikes a balance between providing a solid foundation of support for all, looking after the needs of all older people through pensions while targeting support at those who need it most. We make no apology for targeting the poorest pensioners. Income support through the minimum income guarantee introduced improvements, which have increased in line with earnings since 1999. Current rates are £102.10 for single pensioners and £155.80 for couples. The winter fuel payment benefits all older people, providing an additional £200 a year for around 11 million pensioners. From this winter, there will be an extra £100 for households containing someone aged 80 or over, benefiting an estimated 1.9 million people. In addition, free TV licences are available for all those aged 75 or over, without any income test.

In 2003–04, the Government will spend around £8 billion extra a year on pensioners as a result of policies introduced since 1997. Although much of that benefits all pensioners, as I have been at pains to emphasise, it includes £3.75 billion more on the poorest third of pensioners. It is a matter for debate in this House as to whether Opposition parties agree with our determination to target extra resources on the poorest, but we think that that is right in terms of social justice. That figure amounts to almost six times more than would have been provided by an earnings link to the basic state pension since 1998. Those who argue simply for the re-indexing of the pension with earnings must recognise that that would deny extra help to the poorest. As a result of our measures, the poorest third of our elders will be approximately £1,600 a year better off.

Rightly, it has been noted that many of the poorest among our elderly population are women. There are two reasons for that—women's increasing life expectancy and, more importantly, the fact that their work patterns mean that they are less likely than men to have occupational pensions and their savings may have diminished. About two thirds of pension credit beneficiaries will be women. We need to highlight that in our campaigns on take-up.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon) *rose—*

Annabelle Ewing (Perth) *rose—*

Malcolm Wicks: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman first, because I am not a sexist, then to the hon. Lady.

Mr. Webb: Can the Minister confirm that his statistics on the average gain for poorer pensioners are based on his Department's simulation models, which assume, incorrectly, that every pensioner takes up all his or her entitlement?

Malcolm Wicks: I will deal with the methodology of the statistics in a note to the hon. Gentleman, if that is satisfactory.

Annabelle Ewing: On the crucial issue of take-up, I want to ask the Minister a question that I asked in a previous debate, when I am afraid that I did not get an answer. Will a specific take-up target for pension credit be set for Scotland, and if not, why not?

Malcolm Wicks: We have estimated figures on the numbers of people who are entitled to pension credit in Scotland, as well as in the regions of England and Wales. I am coming to the issue of take-up. I hope that even those who oppose the introduction of pension credit will help us in the campaign, and that all people who are entitled to the benefit will claim it.

Pension credit will be introduced from October this year. For the first time in the history of the welfare state, the Government will ensure that it pays to have saved above the foundation of the basic state pension. Pension credit will reward people aged 65 and over for some of the savings and incomes that they have built up for their retirement. In the past, those who managed to save a little were left no better off than those who had not saved at all. People with capital of £12,000 or more could get no help at all, however low their income. That is the historical situation; no doubt the Conservative spokesman will seek to defend it.

Pension credit is less complex, less intrusive and less bureaucratic, and will give people more. Around half of all pensioner households will be eligible and stand to gain, on average, some £400 a year. The application process has been designed to be straightforward. It involves a simple telephone call on a free phone number. People are sent a form to check, sign and return to the Pension Service. I say to old people who, despite our best efforts to design a simple form, understandably find form-filling difficult, as many of us do, "Throw it in the bin and make the telephone call. In a 20-minute call, one of our trained staff will fill in the form for you. You simply have to verify it."

From the age of 65, most pensioners will have their entitlement fixed for five years, during which they need to report only major life events. We are thus doing away with the weekly means test. We need to communicate to elderly people that the pension credit does not mean an old-style means test. Since April, we have issued mail shots to approximately 1.3 million pensioner households and we shall write to remaining households in the next nine months. I hope that hon. Members understand that that is a colossal exercise and it would be wrong to try to write to all pensioners in the same week or even the same month; we do not want to gum up the administrative works. We are therefore undertaking the work gradually and sensibly for public administration.

People who apply at any time up to October next year will have their credit backdated to this year so that no one will lose out. Of those who have already been through the process—mainly people on the existing

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minimum income guarantee who have been transferred to pension credit, but also others—we estimate that, even at this early stage, more than 1 million will get more money than they received previously.

Mr. Waterson: Does the Minister agree with the comments of Mr. Mervyn Kohler of Help the Aged that the Department has designed a system so byzantine that no one can understand it?

Malcolm Wicks: No, I do not. The hon. Gentleman does not appear to understand that the fact that people do not have to fill in the form and that one of our experts can fill it in during a 20-minute phone call—people have only to verify the details—is a major step from old-style means-testing.

I welcome the Liberal Democrats' choice of pension credit for the debate because they have an interesting track record that should be understood. They opposed its introduction. When the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) was not examining statistical methodologies, he stated on 25 March 2002:

"The savings credit neither rewards those who save today nor encourages people to save for tomorrow, and I urge the House to reject it outright."—[*Official Report*, 25 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 629.]

Mr. Webb: Very perceptive.

Malcolm Wicks: The hon. Gentleman clearly stands by his comments, since he judges them to be perceptive. I am glad that someone does.

If we follow the hon. Gentleman's advice and spend all our pension credit money on increasing the basic state pension, we could increase the maximum rate from £77.45 to approximately £90. However, that would mean losses of around £30 a week for households that receive pension credit. The Liberal Democrats need to explain that to older and poorer people: if the Government foolishly followed their advice, the poorest would be denied £30 or more a week.

Although I do not agree with the Liberal Democrats' approach, I at least respect it and understand their position. However, it is curious to compare their opposition to pension credit with their comments in the Brent, East by-election campaign. I have a piece of paper which is so interesting that I shall subscribe to future editions. It is called "Focus on Pensions" and discusses pension credit. Since we are considering "honourable gentlemen" in the House and outside, I assumed that the headline might read "Scrap Pension Credit" or possibly "Take Away £30 from the Poorest Pensioners". However, it is: "Are You Missing Out?" The article states that "local Lib Dem"—they call themselves Lib Dems—campaigner Sarah Teather

"has launched a major campaign to urge all local pensioners to apply for the new Pension Credit".

She said:

"I want to make sure that all pensioners in our area who are entitled to the new Pension Credit actually claim it."

Once again, we understand that being a Liberal Democrat means never having to be consistent. What hypocrisy! I hope that the hon. Member for Northavon or his colleagues will say whether they are for or against the pension credit, and whether they would back or scrap it. Answer came there none. Liberal Democrat Members opposed the pension credit in Parliament, campaigned for its success at the hustings and soon they will doubtless claim that they thought of it.

Mr. Waterson: The Minister has been generous in giving way. I promise not to try to intervene on his speech again, unless provoked.

The virus is spreading, because in my constituency the Liberals are writing to pensioners extolling the virtues of the pension credit and demanding to know whether they will take it up. I am pleased that there is no by-election in my constituency, but I gather that in Brent, East the "local Lib Dem campaigner"—how that phrase rolls off the printing presses—lives in Islington.

Malcolm Wicks: The hon. Gentleman is looking very well, doubtless with the benefit of a summer holiday, and I am sure that a by-election will be much delayed.

A major part of the discussion must focus on not only today's but tomorrow's pensioners. The Green Paper and our response to it are crucial to the pensions agenda.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): Unlike the Liberal Democrats, I strongly support the pension credit. I am pleased that such a policy has emerged from the demand in constituencies such as mine that were let down because small occupational pensions or savings were not properly taken into account. My supporters will deliver 35,000 leaflets to urge my constituents to apply for the pension credit.

However, having stressed the good points, I wish to raise a technical matter. When I was first elected to Parliament and means-tested benefits were examined, I was upset by the assumption that every £250 in savings resulted in an income of £1 a week. That has been changed and savings of £500 result in a notional income of £1 under the proposed pension credit. I believe that the figure remains excessive—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The hon. Gentleman must conclude his intervention.

Malcolm Wicks: That was an important and complex question. I welcome my hon. Friend's support for the pension credit. The Liberals are in some difficulties if they are honest on the pavement—a rare sight—and say that they are urging people to claim a credit that they would abolish if they came to power. However, that is a conundrum for them. The first £6,000 of savings are not taken into account. We estimate that 85 per cent. of those eligible for the pension credit will not have to bother us with details about savings. As he acknowledges, the withdrawal rate is more generous than it was in the past. We suspect that approximately half of all pensioners will qualify for pension credit, so there must be a cut-off point.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam made some rather negative remarks about payment modernisation and direct payments. There are important reasons why the changes are happening. Order books and girocheques are vulnerable to fraud and theft; about £80 million is lost in the postal system and elsewhere every

year. Sadly, on average, about 100 pensioners a week have their order book stolen, and some are mugged and seriously assaulted on their way to the post office.

It is vital that we recognise the importance of the post office network. The Government are putting a great deal of resource into the network: some £2 billion over the next five years, including £450 million earmarked to support the rural post office network. It is not for our Department, or, indeed, the Government, to ensure the future of every post office, but ensuring that the Post Office becomes a modern banking service offering Post Office card accounts and facilities that allow people to draw out their cash using other bank and building society accounts—as I do at our local post office here in the House, using my own bank account—will stop people walking away from the postal service. If we look at the statistics for before the change was introduced, we see that almost six out of 10 people in the newer group of pensioners—those who have retired in the last year or two—had their pension paid into a bank or building society account. That is why we had to transform the system.

To hear the Liberal Democrats whinge and moan about this issue, one might assume that applying for a Post Office card account was so difficult that only a few dozen people were doing it. In fact, I am advised that 1 million people have applied for one, and our working assumption is that some 3 million people will have them, although there may be more. It is up to the elderly person herself, not the Government, Ministers or the Post Office, to choose. I am sure that the new system will be a success. We are talking to the representative groups and listening to the issues as they arise. For those who find it impossible to access their money through a Post Office card account, or a bank or building society account, there will be a cheque-based exceptions service. We are working on its details, but I would like to assure the House that it will be there.

Mr. Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute): The Government's amendment to our motion refers to

"giving Post Office access through a number of current accounts".

May I draw the Minister's attention to the situation in Scotland, where the current accounts of the three main Scottish banks cannot be accessed at the post office? What are the Government doing to reach an agreement with the Scottish banks so that Scottish pensioners may have the same rights of access to their bank accounts at the post office as other pensioners?

Malcolm Wicks: I recognise that issue, and discussions with banks are proceeding.

Given that I am the Minister for Pensions, I have understandably focused on pensions issues, but it is important for us to recognise, as the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam did, that there is a wider agenda. A specific issue that is close to my heart is the need to attack fuel poverty. As a young researcher, I worked on the appalling problem of hypothermia, which became known as the "old and cold" problem. It is a scandal that people die in the winter simply because they are too cold to live.

I am proud of the way in which we are tackling the problem. There is still some way to go, but the UK fuel poverty strategy, published in November 2001, was the first of its kind in the world. It set out a coherent programme to end the blight of fuel poverty for vulnerable households by 2010. What have we done so far? In England, the home energy efficiency scheme—now marketed as warm front—has assisted more than 600,000 households, and more than 30,000 new gas central heating systems have been installed. Grants have been increased to £2,500 for the over-60s. I am sure that all hon. Members who have visited elderly people benefiting from the scheme and seen the joy on their faces as they realised that they could now live in a warm home will back the project. The scandal of fuel poverty must be eradicated; it is a 19th century problem that should not have lingered on into the 21st century.

In terms of a healthier old age—which will be dealt with by the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet—the extra resources that we are putting into the national health service are absolutely vital, as are the extra resources that we are putting into social services. My hon. Friend will also deal with some of the issues raised by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam in that regard.

We have set out programmes to improve the health and well-being of older people in the national service framework, which was published in March 2001. The framework delivers the commitments to older people made in the NHS plan. It tackles the differing levels of access to services and is rooting out age discrimination in the national health service. The framework will raise the quality and standards of health and social care for older people.

Richard Younger-Ross: I wonder whether the Minister feels any frustration towards the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, in so far as the pensioners who are here protesting and lobbying today are concerned about the rise in council tax, which is a consequence of decisions made by the ODPM. The increase in Devon was 28 per cent. this year, and is likely to be 11 per cent. next year. Does that not undermine what the Minister is trying to do? Is it not time for him to say to the Deputy Prime Minister that one of the best ways to help pensioners is to axe the tax?

Malcolm Wicks: It is, rightly, not the job of central Government to set the level of local council taxes. We all want to see more localism. It is, however, the task of central Government to fund local government adequately. In real terms, we have put in an extra £9 billion since 1997, and this year's expenditure settlement was above the level of inflation. These are issues that citizens have to talk to their local councillors about. That is why we have local government. Our job is to fund local government as best we can—I believe that we are doing that—and, in terms of old people's incomes, to pursue the programmes that I outlined earlier.

When I ask the many elderly people I know about the issues that count, they talk about safety, antisocial behaviour and the fear of crime. I talked to many people in my constituency over the summer about what was on their mind. It is always salutary to talk to people in the real world, as opposed to the world that some of us inhabit for too many months of the year here in Westminster. The issues out there are not always the same as those we discuss here; indeed, they are often

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very different. I have been struck by people's concern about crime and antisocial behaviour. We know that, among old people, the fear of crime is a major issue.

We are doing many things to address the problem. Eighty-five neighbourhood warden schemes have been developed or extended, working in communities to tackle the fear of crime. There are more police officers across the country. Schemes such as "locks for pensioners" have provided security upgrades for pensioners on low incomes who live in areas where the burglary rate is above average. We are investing £170 million in 683 closed-circuit television schemes across England and Wales to make our towns safer. These things are important. Transport is important, too. Access to public transport is absolutely vital, as are the half-fare discounts that we have introduced since June 2001, which have helped some 7 million older and disabled people in England.

In regard to adopting a positive approach to ageing, I would place an emphasis on education and lifelong learning opportunities. I once had the honour of being the Minister for Lifelong Learning, and I always recognised, as many elderly people do, that retirement is the new learning zone. Education is not just about younger people.

Mr. Webb: Yet another cliché.

Malcolm Wicks: The hon. Gentleman has a lot of learning to do, if I may say so. A good way to do that is to listen.

To illustrate the point that education is not just for the young, we once held a competition to find England's oldest learner. We found Mr. Fred Moore, who was then aged 107. Those of us who have been to online computer centres, to Learn Direct and to adult education institutions often find that the people sitting in front of the computers are our senior citizens. Why are they doing it? They are doing it to help them run their businesses, to pursue their hobbies as secretaries of various associations or community bodies, or simply to find out how to get into e-mail contact with their grandchildren or great-grandchildren who might live in the Antipodes or in Canada.

Education is vital if we are to take a positive approach to ageing, and an important component is to recognise that all age groups contain people who do not have basic literacy and numeracy skills. One of my happiest moments as a Minister was visiting an elderly lady of about 73, who, through community opportunities, had learned to read and write for the first time. She had become literate—an opportunity denied her at school and in her working life. Her delight that she could write—she was writing essays and so on—was a wonder to behold. Retirement as the new learning zone is an important theme.

This is a formidable agenda. Ageing is not a crisis facing societies, but it is a challenge and the Government are facing up to it.

1.50 pm

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle): I shall address my remarks to post office closures, as they are particularly apposite to what the Minister said about not being pessimistic about ageing. I intend to show that I am not pessimistic about ageing. I want older people to be able to exert their independence for as long as possible.

So far, three post office closures have affected my constituency: two in the constituency itself, in Fir road in Bramhall and in Grove lane in Cheadle Hulme, and one just outside the constituency in Grosvenor road in Cheadle. We have just passed the so-called consultation period for the closure of Cheadle road post office. My colleagues, local councillors and I invited local people to tell us about their circumstances and to say how the closures would affect them. There was only a short month in which to conduct the investigation, but we did so. Some of the messages we received were poignant. As we suspected, we found that we were dealing with real people living in real, linked, identifiable communities, based around local shopping parades at the heart of which is often the post office—not urban sprawl, as the Post Office terms it.

In other cases of possible closure, I have had occasion to speak with representatives of the Post Office about their so-called visits to the areas involved to get to know their characteristics. On close questioning and as a result of frequent letter writing, I found that their visits to local areas are based on geographic information systems. Those visits were conducted via computers; they were two-dimensional visits looking at streets and roads, with communities marked as grey shading around roads. Those representatives did not actually visit the area. That is not good enough; it certainly does not allow them to know what truly forms a community.

The present public consultation is a sham, as the postmaster has already made it clear that he has decided to close one post office, and in the other cases we have heard that he intends to do so. We are not quite holding our breath but we are waiting to see whether we will receive the same standard letter about the closure of Cheadle road post office as was sent about all the other closures.

We have received more than 100 individual replies about the matter, and many more have written to the Post Office team, and Stockport metropolitan borough council has also responded. The key point people made was that the distances quoted by the Post Office when they engage in consultation are as the crow flies, post office to post office; they do not take into account the additional distances that people often have to travel. The distance to alternative offices from more distant areas of my constituency, such as the lower parts of Buckingham road in Cheadle Hulme, Grange avenue and Warwick close, are much greater than the 0.7 miles quoted by the Post Office in the consultation.

The distances quoted do not take into account the particular circumstances when the alternatives are examined. The alternative Mellor road post office in Cheadle Hulme may be accessible once people get there, but people in wheelchairs and elderly, infirm people cannot cope with the steep climb up the road to get to it in the first place. It is therefore impractical, and there are no alternatives to get to that post office by bus.

Older and younger people recognised the valuable contribution that sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses make to the community, and the impossible position that the Government and the Post Office have created for them. My constituents, like

everyone else, use the post office for drawing their pensions, withdrawing money, buying stamps, paying bills by giro and using their council swipe cards, which the council introduced to make it easier for people to pay their council bills, and for posting parcels.

Elderly people told us what a difference it will make to their lives if they cannot access the post office. For example, Mrs. Menges of 2 Rosthernmere road can walk to the post office now; she would have to drive to Turves road and Mellor road post offices, where the parking is inadequate; Mrs. Wright, who also lives in Rosthernmere road, has a walking disability, so although she walks to the Cheadle road post office she could not walk to the others; Mr. Ford, of 35 Farley court is an 80-year-old who can walk to Cheadle road post office but would not be able to get to the alternatives; Mrs. H. Scott, aged 92, and Mrs. M. Jones, who is 89, both walk to Cheadle road post offiee in spite of disabilities, but they cannot be expected to get on the bus to go to the other post offices.

Dr. Al-Hassani can walk to Cheadle road post office in spite of having a disability but he, too, could not walk to the alternatives; Miss Holloway, who is 86, finds it hard to walk even to Cheadle road post office and certainly could not do so to the alternatives. Mrs. McDonagh of 105 Buckingham road suffers from chronic asthma, osteoarthritis and osteoporosis and is being treated for breast cancer. She could not reach the alternatives except by taxi, which she cannot afford. Mrs. Wellings is 86 years old and suffers from Parkinson's disease. Mr. Bean of flat 10, Regency Court is a younger person who is wheelchair bound and is looked after by his parents, who are in their 80s. They could not wheel him to alternative post offices, nor cope with getting him in and out of a car.

I could go on. Mr. Masters who, in spite of being 91 and blind still manages to get to the post office—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Chris Pond): Before the hon. Lady moves on, I hope she will recognise that decisions on consultation on post office closures or changes are matters for the Post Office. Does she accept that the Government share her understanding of the importance of local post offices to local communities, and especially to older people? Will she also accept, as my hon. Friend the Minister for Pensions said, that that is why we are putting £2 billion into the Post Office network, including £450 million for rural post offices, and why we welcome Post Office discussions with the banking sector to ensure that we can underpin the viability of the post office network by allowing it to offer banking services?

Mrs. Calton: I am extremely grateful for the Minister's intervention, because I hope that such thinking will go into the decision on Cheadle road post office. If it does, that post office will undoubtedly be saved or some alternative arrangements will be made. Unfortunately, that has not been the pattern so far in my constituency, and we await the results of the so-called consultation any day now, which we are concerned will affect real people in real communities. The fact that they do not live in a rural area but, according to the Post Office, in a so-called urban sprawl, means that they do not get as much consideration as people who live in rural areas.

We should maintain old people's independence, and ensure that they do not lose their links with the community. I tried the House's patience by reading out all those names, but there are dozens more people in the same position. If this post office closes—and I have no reason to suppose that it will be treated differently from the others—the cost of social services and health care will rise as all those people become isolated and dependent on others. I am delighted that they want to remain independent in their 80s and 90s. I glory in their desire to do so. The post office makes that possible, and motivates them to go out and collect their pensions by whatever means they choose. There is no local bank, and if the post office is taken away many of them will be unable to make the journey on their own. Along with local shops, the post office is central to their independence.

If the closure is really necessary, what will be done to promote and maintain that independence? It is not sufficient to say that more will be spent on social care and health, for these are people who want to live without those services. Could not post offices, with the Government's encouragement, form an association with supermarkets? Could there not be mobile post offices? They would be a valuable accessory to the mobile library in Stockport, which has made a real difference, although Stockport is an urban area surrounded by suburbs.

It is simply not right to say that the council tax is applied fairly. In my constituency, which is considered to be affluent, its application takes no account of the fact that 51 per cent. of people in the borough are receiving either pensions or benefits.

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): What concerns pensioners particularly is that while the state pension is the same throughout the country, council tax levels differ from mile to mile, and do not reflect the level of services. Some people pay less council tax than my constituents although they have free transport. Is there not a case for equal treatment?

Mrs. Calton: My hon. Friend makes my point for me. People in their 80s tell me that they cannot afford to live much longer because the council tax keeps going up. They can cope with everything else, but the council tax is becoming too great a burden. It is not fair to expect older people to retire having made what they thought was reasonable provision, and then find that the council tax is the biggest cost that they must meet each year.

The Government have a responsibility to communities, not just in regard to decisions on how much grant areas should receive and how much they should raise for themselves. The Government also have a responsibility when it comes to post offices and other small local services. The one thing of which I can be sure is that if those services are allowed to disappear, the Government and local communities will pay more in the long run.

2.5 pm

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): The hon. Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) ended by talking about the council tax. It seems to me that the Liberal Democrats are again being somewhat two-faced on the

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question of whether they want decentralisation or centralisation in the context of equality of services throughout the country. I am in favour of equality, but I am also in favour of decentralisation. I hope that the Liberal Democrats will forgive me if I am wrong, but I do not think I have heard them talk about council tax benefit today. They talk about ability to pay, but that is what council tax benefit is there for.

The difficulties that exist throughout the country this year, especially in the south-east, have been caused by councils' unrealistic views over the years on the level at which they should set their taxes. In my area of Wolverhampton, in the west midlands, we have had no such problems, because the Government's new formula redresses the historic imbalance affecting the rate support grant—now the formula spending share—that the city council used to receive.

Let me give an example to bolster my assertion that there was an historic imbalance in England. When I entered Parliament two and a half years ago, I moved into a property in the London borough of Lambeth. Like the property in which I have lived for many years in my constituency, it is in band D. I found that the council tax in London was considerably lower than that in Wolverhampton—not because Wolverhampton council is much more inefficient than Lambeth, as hon. Members probably realise, and not, as far as I can deduce, because the services provided for Lambeth residents are much worse than those provided in Wolverhampton. Given the considerably higher cost of conducting council business in London, I think the differential can only be explained by the historic imbalance of moneys from central Government. The adjustments that have been made surely redress that imbalance, as you may agree, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Neil Turner (Wigan): The house in Wigan that I have lived in for some time is in band C, but I pay exactly the same council tax as I pay in London, where my property is in band E. Does that not reinforce my hon. Friend's point?

Rob Marris: Indeed, and we as a Government are now working out how to redress the imbalance. That has caused difficulties in the past year, but it would have been wrong of the Government to back away.

Should the Government allocate the additional £9.2 billion that they are providing to all pensioners, or only to the neediest? That question has caused a key political division between the parties. Not surprisingly, I support the Government. As a socialist I have always wanted to focus resources on the neediest in society, and that means applying the modern means-testing regime that we are introducing to pension credit and the Government's minimum income guarantee.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): The hon. Gentleman has mentioned pension credit and council tax credit. Can he confirm that council tax credit is reduced by the award of pension credit, and that therefore the Government are effectively giving with one hand and taking away with the other?

Rob Marris: I do not believe that council tax benefit, as it is called, will have that effect, and nor will housing benefit, but I stand to be corrected by the expert Ministers present.

On targeting money on the neediest, figures from the House of Commons Library, which got them from the Department for Work and Pensions, show that expenditure on the minimum income guarantee for the financial year just ended—2002–03—was about £4.5 billion, at this year's prices. The projected expenditure on the pension credit for the next financial year—2004–05—is about £5.3 billion. There are 7.2 million single-pensioner households in the United Kingdom, and 2.8 million couple-pensioner households in which at least one of the couple is a pensioner. That totals about 12 million pensioners. If that pension credit money—the minimum income guarantee and the pension credit, totalling some £9.2 billion—were evenly divided, each pensioner would get £16 a week. That would take the basic state pension for a single pensioner from £77.45 a week to £93.45 a week—in contradistinction to the single pensioner with the minimum income guarantee, who gets £102.10 a week. In round terms, that is £9 a week more for the neediest pensioners. I salute and support the Government for doing that.

Mr. Webb: The hon. Gentleman, who is a member of the relevant Select Committee, is thoughtful and knowledgeable, and I have been following his argument with care. How does he reconcile the figure he has just given of £9 a week less for the poorest pensioners, if this money were spread evenly, with the absurd figure of £30 that the Minister quoted?

Rob Marris: I go by my own figures, although I always stand to be corrected. *[Interruption.]* I heard the Minister say £30 a week, but I go by my own figures. As the hon. Gentleman will agree, there would still be a considerable gap, even if his party's policy of introducing such a provision across the board were adopted. That is the key political divide, and it is one of the divides that we are debating today.

I want to move on to something that rarely gets mentioned in terms of this Government's provision for pensioners: the massive increase in spending on the NHS. Two thirds of NHS spending goes on older people, and I support that. Again, that is supporting the neediest, with provision free at the point of use. So, in examining what this Government have tried to do to assist pensioners, we should not overlook that magnificent investment in the NHS, two thirds of which is rightly benefiting pensioners.

I want to turn to the "pensions crisis", as the Liberal Democrat motion describes it. That phrase is very overworked and does not illuminate what is happening with pensions. In terms of pensioners' average incomes and the average amounts saved by prospective pensioners, there is no crisis whatever. Rather, as ever, there is an imbalance between poorer and better-off pensioners, which this Government are seeking to redress.

The difficulties for prospective pensioners and for certain recently retired pensioners in company schemes have been highlighted—if not made transparent—by the Government putting forward the financial accounting standard FRS 17 and by the minimum funding requirements for pension funds, which disclosed under-provision in some private companies' works pension schemes. Those difficulties came about partly because the stock market came down, but principally because many private companies—not all—would not put their hands in their pockets to make up shortfalls in private pension schemes arising from pension contribution holidays that they had taken when times were better. In other words, they took the money out in the good times, but did not put it in during the bad times.

There is also the scandal whereby managers of companies with company pension schemes suddenly retire when the company is about to go bust. They become pensioners three months later, when the company finally goes bust, and are thereby a different category of claimant from the poor working stiff who does not see the writing on the wall or have the inside information, is still employed and gets treated differently, in terms of their prospective pension, from the managers who have jumped ship.

The final salary scheme debate has been used by companies as an excuse to cut their pension contributions. When companies move to a money purchase scheme for new entrants, they cut their pension contributions greatly—on average, by about half the employers' pension contribution to the works pension scheme. Companies have used this as an excuse to lessen the pension emolument that they pay to their employees. Given what we have experienced in the past three or four years, in the medium term, final salary schemes in the private sector will wither and die, particularly for new pensioners. Such schemes were designed to provide security. People who worked for a company for 40 years, say, knew what pension they would get. If it was an eightieth-based scheme, they would get 40 eightieths on retirement—in other words, a half-pension. Every year they would clock up an eightieth and get a half-pension if they stayed with the company for 40 years.

However, the countervailing security is whether there is any money in the kitty to pay people out when they have done the 40 years. Those chickens have come home to roost, and in the medium term the work force, whether unionised—as they should be—or not, will not stand for a lack of security, whereby it is uncertain whether there will be any fund at all, or whether it will come anywhere near meeting promises that were made when in employment. Final salary schemes will be able to continue in the public sector because Government backing will be there to top up local authority schemes, for example, if necessary, but that will not happen in the private sector. We must look at this issue, because it is a question of how we view the term "security".

When we as a society focus, as we should, on the under-provision of pensions for women in particular, we must note that final salary schemes often discriminate against the low paid, many of whom are women. A cleaner, for example, who has been in a local authority final salary scheme for 30 years, doing the same job and paying the same contributions, would get 30 eightieths, but if they were a cleaner for 20 years and worked for the final 10 as a supervisor, they would get the 30 eightieths at a much higher rate, even though they had paid only 10 years' worth of higher-rate contributions. So, although there is often sex discrimination, overall we are talking about discrimination against the low paid.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): The hon. Gentleman is normally a fair man in these matters, but he has come perilously close in the past few minutes to suggesting that such schemes are closing because of the wicked, feckless actions of the bosses, who are grinding the faces of their poorer workers. He will agree that that is not so. Many of these schemes are closing for proper, prudent financial management reasons, rather than for the reasons he came close to suggesting.

Rob Marris: As a former Select Committee member and a former Minister in the predecessor Department, the hon. Gentleman is very knowledgeable about these matters. However, some schemes have indeed ripped off members, and the employers have been, to use his word, feckless. As he points out, other schemes are closing because it is financially prudent to do so, but what constitutes financial prudence in a given climate depends on how one got there and on how much money is in the kitty. Before he seeks to intervene on me again, I should remind him that I did mention the fact that part of the current difficulty with private pension schemes—but only part—is the downturn in the stock market. However, the stock market, like capitalism, is cyclical, and as I said, some companies that took pensions contribution holidays will not now put their hands in their pockets when times are bad. Instead, they are closing the scheme, which is despicable to say the least.

The Government are doing what they can in the current climate. We are in a transition phase, in that pensions have moved up the political and social agenda, which is a good thing. The Government are seeking to address some of the historical difficulties that have arisen under Governments of both political colours since the second world war.

A major step forward is the pension protection fund, which will be designed to help workers who are ripped off and find that their pension scheme has gone bust or is significantly underfunded. Sometimes they find this out very much toward the end of their careers. If a company scheme goes bust, there will be a 90 per cent. kick-in from the insurance. I am delighted to say that the pension protection fund will have a cap regarding the salaries of high earners. Solvent employers—this touches on the issue raised by the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell)—who choose to wind up their pension schemes, as they are legally entitled to do, will be required to meet their promises to that pension fund in full, and that will be policed.

It is a step forward that the Government are looking at the priority order that applies on company insolvency, which has had particularly adverse effects on long-serving members who are nearing retirement and may have decided to work an extra five years, perhaps because their children are in university; but that is another debate, Madam Deputy Speaker. However, if the person at the next desk or bench decides to go and, two years later, the company scheme goes bust, the person who already receives the pens on but who may

[Rob Marris]

have shorter service and may be slightly younger gets much better protection than the person who has worked there longer.

Finally, I am delighted that the Government are at last making serious noises about the situation for workers when their employment is transferred. Every Member knows that under the acquired rights directive and the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981, as amended, pensions are excluded. The EU made a mistake on that and the UK Government made a mistake in continuing that exclusion when we did not need to after the acquired rights directive was translated into domestic legislation in the UK. The Government addressing that issue is long overdue, and I hope that they do so to ensure that someone whose job is being transferred has protection for their pension as well as for their pay and conditions of work.

2.22 pm

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): I fear that I could not possibly bring myself to congratulate the Liberal Democrats on their motion today, but they have done the House a service in following the example of Her Majesty's Opposition yesterday and raising an important bread and butter issue that is of huge concern to our constituents. It is noteworthy that the Westminster village spends its time being obsessed by issues around the Hutton inquiry. However, there are many important issues in education, health, transport and taxation that are of great importance to our constituents on a daily basis, and I am glad to be able to take part in this debate today.

I agree with the Minister for Pensions, who said that excessive negativism should be avoided. He was irritatingly reasonable throughout most of his speech; not something we usually get from Ministers in this rotten Government. It remains to be seen how the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman), winds up the debate.

The Minister for Pensions is right to inveigh against excessive negativism, to point to the fact that we are all now, thank goodness, living longer and to state that better medicine is keeping us alive and in a better condition for much longer. That is a good thing. I agreed also with the Minister when he set out the Government's policy on age discrimination. As someone already in his mid-40s, I recognise that this is an increasingly important agenda and I approve of what the Government are doing in that respect.

I want to raise three issues. The first is the crisis in our care homes in Birmingham, a matter that I have raised in the House before and which remains extremely important and worrying. Secondly, I want to follow the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris) in his analysis of where the pensions crisis for existing and future pensioners now rests. Thirdly, I want to refer to an important point that was touched on briefly by the Minister—the effect of crime on the security of our old folk.

Sutton Coldfield, for local government purposes, is a part of Birmingham. I have watched with great concern the way in which the crisis in our care homes has unfolded and the apparent inability of Birmingham's Labour council or the Labour Government to do anything about it.

The issues behind care home closures were well set out by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow), who touched on the bed-blocking crisis, which is not directly associated with the problem but is close to it. He referred also to the fiasco of the Government's implementation and consequent withdrawal of the national minimum environmental standards for existing care homes, which caused great distress and anger across the country.

We know that demand for elderly care is growing. Between 2005 and 2020, over 130,000 more people each year will require residential care than currently receive it, an increase of 25 per cent. The number of people receiving domiciliary care has fallen by almost 100,000 since 1997, a fall of over 20 per cent. The number of care home beds available has dropped by 13 per cent. since 1997, a loss of 70,000 long-term care places.

According to the latest data published by Laing and Buisson in July 2003, 13,400 elderly care places were lost in the 15 months to April 2003 alone. A net 11,000 places were lost in the independent sector—often small, privately operated and voluntary care homes—in the 15 months to April 2003, an increase on the 9,600 places lost in the same time frame in the previous calendar year. A further 900 places in local authority-run residential homes were lost, along with an estimated 700 continuing care places in NHS hospitals. As a result of this capacity loss, supply has reached dangerously low levels; across the country, the average is 5.7 care home places per 100 people over 65. In the northern home counties, the supply ratio has dropped to 4.6, and in London it has fallen to as low as 3.8, one third lower than the average.

Despite frequent warnings from industry bodies and the Conservative party, the availability of care continues to decline. Sometimes closure is inevitable, and several speakers have referred to the huge human cost of those closures. The closure of care homes not only causes disruption to vulnerable residents; on the Government's own reckoning, as many as 1,000 people every year may be dying as a result of care home closures. In general, over-prescriptive, expensive and bureaucratic regulation has greatly exacerbated the crisis in the sector and has driven many recent closures, including those of some high-quality homes.

Hon. Members will recall the early-day motion tabled by me and my hon. Friends in respect of the Birmingham care homes crisis, which said:

> "That this House expresses its grave concern about the crisis in care for the elderly in Birmingham and elsewhere in England; is alarmed that over 80 care homes have closed in Birmingham over the last 18 months; recognises that a main contributory factor to this crisis is the decision by Birmingham Social Services to pay substantially less than the real cost of providing care for the elderly in care homes and that this practice is threatening to force good quality independent care homes out of business, causing grave distress and confusion to vulnerable, frail and elderly residents in Birmingham."

That remains the case. I have said that I am appalled that Birmingham social services paid private care homes substantially less than the real cost of providing care for the elderly in care homes, a practice that led, obviously, to the closure of many more care homes.

Mike Gimson, the spokesman for the Birmingham care consortium, which represents care home owners in the city, said that the consortium had been warning the council about the escalating closures. He said that the figures

"prove what we have been saying. It is a disgrace and there is worse to come as the pressure increases. We are now facing the under-provision of beds in Birmingham."

Birmingham has been particularly hard hit because of the action of local authorities that have discriminated against the private sector by paying fees way below the levels that they are prepared to pay to their own homes. Birmingham city council pays £570 per resident per week for its own social service places, but for private homes it is prepared to pay between £300 and £310 per week, and for nursing homes only £398 per week. That is an absolute disgrace. Approximately 100 private homes have closed within the past two years and last year Birmingham city council spent some £17 million on agency staff for social services. At the very least, that is indicative of the demoralisation of the department and its inability to recruit and retain staff.

Even the social services inspectorate has acknowledged that there is a problem with care in Birmingham. The city is officially designated weak and is zero-starred. The Government pump money into social services, but except for domiciliary care and sheltered housing, the money is not ring-fenced. The result is a huge underspent budget for domiciliary and sheltered housing, and money intended for residential care is diverted elsewhere. The situation in Birmingham cannot be allowed to go on. It is an abuse of council tax payers' money and an absolute disgrace. Today I call once again on the Government to take steps to resolve the problem.

My party has come up with a six-point plan for long-term care, which I have no doubt will be further elucidated by the Front Bench. One point was missing from the proposer's speech. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam accurately described much of the problem in the sector, but he did not go on to explain precisely what Liberal policy would do about it. Our six-point plan will reverse the decline in the number of care homes and remove unnecessary regulation, which is costly and often does not improve care. It will break down the rigid divide between health and social care, and lead to the greater integration of funding streams from health and social services. It will recognise the sacrifice of those who provide for their own long-term care, and make it easier for people to care for their elderly relatives in the home or in their own homes.

My second theme is the pensions crisis. Nothing could more accurately exemplify how the Government have been caught in the headlights of the pensions crisis than the fact that for a considerable period the Prime Minister did not even deign to appoint a Minister for Pensions. Let us first consider the crisis for those who are already receiving pensions. In spite of the Minister's warm words about his intention to reduce the gap between the richest and the poorest in the pensions sector, that gap has increased—not decreased—by 16 per cent. since 1997.

Let us examine the gross domestic product figures on how much we as a country spend on pensioners. Ten years ago we spent 6.2 per cent. of our GDP on pensioners, and we are now spending 6 per cent. Above all, perhaps millions of people are dependent on means tests. Soon many more will be dependent on them as a result of the pension credit. In 1997 some 37 per cent. of pensioners were means-tested; the figure now is 60 per cent., and it will not be long before it rises to 75 per cent.

Of course I acknowledge the need for some means-testing—that is right—but not up to 75 per cent. One has only to listen to the words of a former Minister with responsibility for pensions, the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who has warned about the debilitating way in which means-testing undermines dignity, when people feel that they have to go cap in hand to the state. Means-testing is unwise and should, where possible, be avoided. I believe that a system in which 75 per cent. of people stand to be means-tested is bizarre.

We have heard much discussion of the pension credit today, but I warn Ministers that they will find it extremely difficult to implement successfully. They have the example of the tax credit system to warn them of the dangers of implementing such new systems. I thought that the Minister might have been succumbing to the disease that afflicts Ministers of all parties in the social security sector, recalling what the previous Department was called—being persuaded by their brilliant officials that systems introduced through form filling and case management are essential in their complexity, but will work and be easily understood. History is littered with Ministers who believed that, but found to their cost that it was not true.

On the long-term crisis in pensions, the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West was quick to say that he did not believe that there was one. He and I have debated in the Select Committee whether "crisis" is an accurate term. I persist in believing that it is. The Government have as yet failed to respond adequately to the scale of the crisis. They have been advised by the CBI, the TUC and, indeed, the Select Committee, as well as numerous other lobby bodies on the importance of taking action, but, like rabbits caught in the headlights, they appear to find it difficult to know what to do.

Much talk has gone on in the House about the £5 billion per annum raid on pension funds, but I do not propose—important though it is—to rehash it today. More could have been done to prevent some schemes from closing, but even the stakeholder policy—one of the flagships of the Government's attempts to increase the amount of funded pensions—has been a lamentable flop. Practically no one in the target group has taken up the stakeholder pension, and the company schemes, which must be set up by law, have received very few takers indeed. Perhaps one bright spot for the Government is that they have at least had the wisdom to appoint someone of the calibre of Adair Turner as their pensions tsar. I hope that they will listen carefully to what he has to say when he reports to them.

The funded pensions policy, which was bequeathed by the last Conservative Government to the present Government, was a great success. At one point we had more funded pensions in this country than all the rest of Europe put together. It is crucial for the Government to produce a sensible policy for future pensioners who will be retiring. They have not yet done so, and it is a travesty

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[Mr. Andrew Mitchell]

that it is now nearly two years since we last had a debate on pensions in Government time. Such debates that have taken place have been on Opposition days.

Finally, I want to quote the right hon. Member for Birkenhead from an article in *The Sunday Telegraph*, and I hope that the Government will listen. The right hon. Gentleman said:

> "All too many families stand on the brink of financial disaster as they see their pensions snatched away from them. Failure to act will be punished by voters as surely as markets punish cuts in dividends. Government cannot continue to hide behind the claim it is consulting; it has been doing that for the past 6 years. What is now desperately required is action."

The right hon. Gentleman is entirely right.

My third point is about the way in which elderly people suffer disproportionately from crime in our society. As many hon. Members do, I conducted a survey on crime and related issues throughout my constituency. I was surprised by the massive response that I received, and particularly impressed by the emphasis on the debilitating effect of fear of crime. Fear of crime can have a massive effect on the quality of life of elderly people. It leads to exclusion from other activities in the community and a sense of isolation, and it certainly has an effect on health. A comparatively minor crime can have a disproportionate effect on elderly people and can be extremely traumatic for victims. The average age of victims of distraction burglary is 81, and it is a significantly under-reported crime because of the embarrassment that elderly people feel—wrongly—at being victims of it.

We need to see more police on the streets. The popular view that a policeman on the beat stops a crime only once every 33 years misses the point. Having police on the street is reassuring to our communities. The lessons from New York about the success of more precinct policing must be evident to everyone and they are certainly now evident to the Mayor of London. I greatly welcome the decision by my party to pledge to increase the number of police by 40,000, if we are successful at the next election. It is pleasing to know that in that happy event, 2,600 more police would come to the west midlands.

2.41 pm

Mr. Neil Turner (Wigan): I have some experience in this subject because of the previous job of my boss and because I have just had to do some work for my mother. I certainly do not recognise the picture painted by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow). My mother had to move from her home in Carlisle to the Wigan area, to be nearer to me, and I did much of the work involved. I found plenty of choice of residential homes and I managed to get her into a good one. It was brand new and around half full.

Wigan does not have problems with bed blocking, because many of our old people are cared for at home by our excellent social services department. That may be the answer: we have an excellent Labour-run council, as confirmed by the comprehensive performance review performed by the independent district auditor. The Sutton and Cheam local authority, of course, is not as good.

I also did not recognise what the hon. Gentleman—or the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell)—said about pension credit. I applied for the minimum income guarantee, as it then was, on behalf of my mother.

Mr. Webb: Why did she not do it?

Mr. Turner: She wanted me to do it because she has problems with her hearing. I was happy to do it and it took about 10 minutes. There were no byzantine forms to fill in and the only difficulty was trying to find out her national insurance number. The payment came through in about a fortnight and was backdated. The difficulties outlined by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam do not exist. The form-filling and other obstacles that he described do not happen for the majority of pensioners. They may arise in the Pension Service, but not for the person making the application.

Mr. Webb: I apologise if I sounded defensive when I asked why the hon. Gentleman's mother did not apply herself. My point was that she had the advantage of having an able and articulate son to deal with the system for her, because she did not feel able to deal with it herself. Had the money been added to the pension, the process would not have been necessary.

Mr. Turner: I shall deal with that point shortly. My experience is shared by hundreds of thousands of people. Most pensioners in my constituency find the system fairly easy, once they overcome the perception—promoted especially by the Liberal Democrats—that the scheme is difficult. It is not, and it puts people off when they are told that they have to fill in 40 pages of complicated forms.

My mother was notified a couple of weeks ago of how much she would receive from the pension credit, and it is significantly different from what she would have got had we followed the Liberal Democrats' proposals. According to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam, those over 75 would receive an extra £19 a week to add to the single person's pension of £77.45, so she would have received £96.45. She currently receives £102.50 under the pension credit. So according to the Liberal Democrats, my 90-odd year old mother should have her pension reduced by £6 a week. Others would benefit from their proposals. For example, Baroness Thatcher would get an extra £19 a week, and I am sure that she would find a good use for it. However, the Liberal Democrats will have great difficulty explaining to the people of Brent, East, let alone anyone else, why their proposal would mean that the poorest pensioners would lose more than £6, while those who are better off would gain £19 a week.

Pension credit is important in getting extra money to the very poorest. That is a socialist principle that I am happy to support. It is allied to the recognition that people who have small savings or a small pension should be rewarded for their thrift, not penalised, as in the past.

We must also face the problem mentioned by the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), which is the difficulty that some people have in accessing various services for pensioners. That is why we have made huge changes to the way in which the Pension Service

operates. A fortnight ago, I held a forum for pensioners' groups in the Wigan constituency. Members of the Pension Service staff came along to answer questions and give details of the pension credit, including the relevant telephone numbers. I shall visit the town centre again soon with staff from the Pension Service to ensure that people understand the pension credit and how to apply for it.

The whole point of setting up the Pension Service is so that it can play a much wider role. Far too often, pensioners are passed from one agency to another, from a local authority to the NHS and back again, or from one voluntary body or council department to another. It is a bureaucratic merry-go-round that can be debilitating for pensioners. The Pension Service is designed to be a one-stop shop to ensure that services for pensioners, be they public or voluntary, can be much more easily accessed. Pensioners can also obtain advice about the services to which they are entitled. People with difficulties hearing, such as my mother, seeing or understanding the forms will be able to contact the Pension Service and receive the help they need, perhaps including a home visit. It is important that the Pension Service be seen as part of an overall package with the pension credit to ensure that pensioners get their entitlements.

I applaud the Government's advances on pensions. We introduced the minimum income guarantee early to tackle pensioner poverty. We have also introduced the winter fuel allowance, free eye tests and free television licences. In real terms, £3 billion has been given to pensioners over and above what they would have received if the pension had been increased in line with inflation. The pension credit will mean an additional £2 billion from October.

I also welcome the introduction of the Pension Service to ensure that people can access services more readily and obtain the help that, all too often, they need. I welcome the help that the Government have given to future pensioners. We sorted out the problems with the state earnings-related pension, left by the previous Government. We also sorted out the problems with the financial services industry after the desperate mis-selling of private pensions, which left so many people high and dry with the loss of pounds and pounds a week. We have also introduced the state secondary pension, with the recognition that it gives to carers and the help it will give them in the future. Of course, we have also introduced stakeholder pensions. Despite what the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield said, people are taking them up, as they allow those who would not otherwise have a pension to have access to a pension for their future.

Most important in respect of the immediate future is the pension protection fund. It will guarantee that people whose company pension schemes have gone bust will get protection in the future.

I shall be happy to support the Government amendment and to oppose the motion.

2.50 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Turner) in these debates. One thing to have emerged from the debate is that, whereas Sutton and Cheam is clearly a near hell hole for older people's services, Wigan is a veritable garden of Eden. It is a place in which we should all aspire to grow old, under the hon. Gentleman's benign leadership.

I am told that I should begin by declaring an interest, in that I have some private pension provision of my own. This is my first outing, if that is the right word, as the newly appointed official Opposition spokesperson on older people's issues. In modern jargon, my brief is crosscutting, and although there have not been many signs of joined-up government in the debate so far, I can promise joined-up opposition on these issues.

Lots of important issues have been covered in the debate. I cannot do them all justice, but I shall start with the issue of care homes, which is close to my heart. There are many good care homes in my constituency, and they make up a significant part of Eastbourne's local economy. However, a number of very good ones have closed recently, as a direct result of Government policy. The Government were told—by us, by the Liberal Democrats and by everyone outside the House who knows anything about care homes—that they were making a massive error with their legislation on the matter. However, they blundered on and insisted on their proposals and, as we have heard, the latest figures show that 13,400 care home places disappeared in the 15 months to April this year.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) explained very graphically the particular problem in Birmingham. However, the problem is replicated up and down the country, with many good private care homes being forced to close. All too often, councils insist on paying themselves much more than they pay the private sector, even though the accommodation that they provide is relatively poor.

In collaboration with the Liberal Democrats, the Opposition attempted not that long ago to increase pensions significantly for older pensioners. We know that older pensioners are those most likely to be living in poverty. I am sorry to say that our attempt was defeated.

We have heard a great deal about funded pensions. My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield reminded us that they are a great British success story, but they are seriously threatened by a combination of factors. My hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) has rightly likened the matter to the film called "The Perfect Storm". The stock market has fallen, and people now live longer—although that greater longevity is of course welcome. However, other matters are within the Government's control, such as the Chancellor's £5 billion annual raid on pension funds.

There has been an apparent lack of urgency when it comes to tackling the problems. Another Green Paper has been published, but the Government could and should do a lot more to increase and restore confidence in funded pensions. At least one fifth of company pension schemes have closed in the past 12 months. That is all the more worrying, as the Watson Wyatt survey on which that information is based predates the extra burdens likely to be placed on companies by the Government's pension protection scheme.

The Government's stated aim is to restore confidence in funded pensions, which is vital. A whole generation of young people cannot be persuaded that putting money into pensions is the smart thing to do, because they see stories about problems with pensions every time they open a newspaper.

[Mr. Nigel Waterson]

The TUC, for example, has spoken about the erosion of the notion of shared responsibility, and has noted the decline of the mixed-economy approach to pension provision. The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris) outlined an even more dramatic problem that arises when companies go bust and take the pension fund down with them.

There is a great deal of work to be done. A policy of compulsion appears to be developing through the mists of Liberal Democrat thinking, but the Conservative party does not believe in compelling people to make particular pension provision. However, we believe that the forces of inertia should be harnessed, so that people have to opt out of that sort of provision for their futures.

That brings me neatly to the issue of pension credit. As I noted in an earlier intervention, we on the Select Committee on Work and Pensions were privileged to have the Secretary of State appear before us as a witness this morning. When I put it to him, he readily conceded that, even on the Government's projections, a million pensioners will not receive pension credit even though, on the face of it, they are entitled to it.

Two fundamental matters wholly undermine the Government's approach to the policy, and the crucial one is take-up. As with so many of these benefits, take-up is limited.

The Government have been very dismissive about criticisms of this flagship policy. Only recently, the Department criticised Mr. Mervyn Kohler, head of public affairs at Help the Aged, for his comments on the system. Clearly unbowed, he said:

"I'm afraid I rather upset them. It seems ministers are very tender at the moment. But it is not my fault if they design a system which is so Byzantine that no one can understand it."

That is going to be the reality.

The Secretary of State was almost alarmingly upbeat about the other matter that I put to him—whether the system can cope. The Child Support Agency offers an example of what happens when an old formula combines with a new technology, and now we have a possibly even more potent combination—a new formula and an old technology. It remains to be seen whether the fiasco of the tax credits, which caused our mailbags to be so full in recent months, will be replicated.

Some of the claims in the Government's advertising campaign for pension credit are simply wrong and untrue. The central claim—that every pensioner will now enjoy a minimum income of £102.10—is simply untrue. The guaranteed income will be a mixture of existing pensions, savings income and, where necessary, a pension credit top-up. However, any savings will be assumed to generate a notional income of 10 per cent. a year. That is not bad; I wish that I could plug into that sort of return, rather than the more realistic 3 per cent.

It is no wonder that the Department for Work and Pensions told *The Sunday Telegraph* that the publicity surrounding the pension credit had been kept "deliberately low key".

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North): Has the hon. Gentleman checked that point? As I understand it, the imputed income of a certain percentage applies only when a pensioner has savings of more than £5,000.

Mr. Neil Turner: The figure is £6,000.

Ms Keeble: I thank my hon. Friend. The basic savings level is £6,000. The imputed income applies for every £500 on top of that. Overall, that does not work out at a return of 10 per cent. on the savings total. That is important for people who might be thinking of claiming.

Mr. Waterson: The hon. Lady merely serves to show how complex the new system is for our constituents. I am sure that many hon. Members will be wondering what it will be like when their surgeries fill up with people who do not know whether they are entitled to make a claim.

Ms Keeble: I can understand it.

Mr. Waterson: Well, the hon. Lady has a good degree from a good university, but not everybody is as privileged—*[Interruption.]* She suggests that I might be able to understand it, but whether everyone will is another matter.

I said that there were two issues. The second is means-testing. My party believes that the entire system is moving in the wrong direction. In 1997, only 37 per cent. of claimants were on means-tested benefits. This year, with the introduction of the pension credit, that figure could reach almost 60 per cent., and it is projected to grow to 73 per cent. by 2025. There are thus two extremely worrying aspects: take-up and means-testing, which promote a cap-in-hand approach for poorer pensioners.

I shall touch on some of the other issues, especially those raised by the Liberal Democrat spokesman. We can all testify to the fact that big council tax rises are extremely regressive, especially for older people. In my constituency, the local council—sadly, it is controlled by the Liberal Democrats—put up its share by 38 per cent. this year, a staggering amount. No wonder the Liberal Democrats are dusting off their old proposals for local income tax, on the basis of "Please stop me before I do it again". If a local council, such as Eastbourne, can make such an increase under the current system, imagine what it could do if it could charge a local income tax, quite apart from the Liberal proposals for an energy tax, which would be even more regressive because utility bills are often painful for pensioners, for regional taxes, more taxes through the European Union and the Liberal version of a new inheritance tax.

Richard Younger-Ross: The hon. Gentleman may be aware that Devon, which is run by a four-party coalition, was led by the Conservatives last year when council tax was increased by 28 per cent., as proposed by the Conservative leader, Christine Channon. He may

also be aware that, in her speech, Christine outlined the injustice of the council tax; she said that it should be abolished and replaced by a fairer taxation system.

Mr. Waterson: I should like to hear Christine's views on the matter, but that does not alter the fact that many Liberal Democrat councils, and those in which they participate, are making sharp increases in council tax.

I endorse some of the comments that have been made about post office closures. All hon. Members should beware: the Post Office has embarked on a scheme to consider closures on a constituency basis. Eastbourne is privileged to be one of the first and the Post Office has come up with five closures in my constituency, so some time soon: "This is coming to a post office near you".

I feel strongly about age discrimination. The Government have reneged on their pre-1997 promise to legislate on age discrimination. The EU has finally forced them to do so by 2006.

We hear much from the Liberal Democrats about free personal care for the elderly, despite the fact that it seems to be bankrupting several local authorities in Scotland. Furthermore, some councils run by the Liberal Democrats charge substantial fees, up to £5,000 a year, for care services for the elderly.

As on so many things, the Liberals are the "Do as I say, not as I do" party. They voted for greater bureaucracy for care homes, causing many homes to close.

Mr. Burstow: So did you.

Mr. Waterson: No, we did not.

Liberal Democrat councils charge heavily for care services for older people. They jack up council tax mercilessly and, in the case of my council, sack older workers merely because they turn 65—turning their birth certificate into their P45. Outside this place, in Brent, and indeed in Eastbourne, Liberal Democrats extol the virtues of the pension credit, but in the House, they say that they want to scrap it. They certainly do not mention the means-testing that is at the heart of its approach to poorer pensioners.

I hope that the voters of Brent will have taken some of these points on board. Advice from the booklet for Liberal Democrat campaigners is that they should "act shamelessly, stir endlessly" and not "be afraid to exaggerate". That is how they operate throughout the country.

I urge the Liberals to make the difficult journey from piety to reality and not to mislead people, especially vulnerable pensioners. They should drop their empty rhetoric and their hypocrisy. I shall not urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to support the motion both for those reasons and because the motion makes the ritual attack on the Conservative record in government. I invite my right hon. and hon. Friends to abstain on the motion but to vote against the Government amendment, which is astounding in its complacency, even by the standards of this Government.

3.5 pm

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson). I congratulate him on his appointment. I am glad to see that some of his colleagues have joined him on the Opposition Benches; for a while he seemed to be offering not so much joined-up opposition as a one-man band, which did not say much for the Conservative Opposition's commitment to older people, or for their support for a colleague on his first appearance in his new position.

I agreed with the hon. Gentleman on one point. Although the Liberal Democrats did us a great service in bringing the issue to the House, some of the ways in which they presented their arguments did not help to tease out the important factors. They presented us with a catch-all set of grievances. There are real pressures and problems facing pensioners and they require long-term solutions, which must be agreed and maintained over time. What we put in place will, we hope, benefit pensioners for many years to come.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Turner) offered us an example. Giving everybody a flat-rate increase of £19 week sounds nice, but we would need to explain two things. First, it would mean taking money away from the poorest pensioners, who would receive only £96 instead £102; and, secondly, because the Liberal Democrats are talking about changing from council tax, which is property based, to a local income tax, it would increase the burden of taxation for pensioners. Rather than going for cheap slogans, we should carefully examine the problems for pensioners.

My constituency is in a "middle England" area and many pensioners do not fall into the poorest income ranges. However, there are specific historical reasons for pensioner poverty in the region. People worked for companies that have disappeared, such as those in the boot and shoe industry, which is in the process of change. A large number of women have broken employment records, because they took a break for family reasons. A phenomenally high percentage of women worked part-time and had no pension entitlement in their own right. In later life, they have been caught in poverty.

People think that middle England is extremely affluent, but it is not. Northampton has a high number of people on low incomes. Even if they contributed to an occupational or second pension scheme, those pensions and their savings are now extremely low. I asked a group of pensioners, who were here for the lobby this afternoon, about the rate of their second pensions. They told me what I had heard before—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) is nodding. I am sure that he knows the figures: about £15 a week, or £50 month. That is not much, yet people receiving those amounts will not qualify for some of the benefits designed to help extremely poor pensioners. We need to help pensioners who are in that poverty trap and do not have enough to live comfortably.

The Government have done wonders in systematically considering what has made pensioners' lives so uncomfortable. I am sure that everyone will say, "Well, she would say that", but the Government have put in place very good programmes to tackle the real causes and symptoms of pensioner poverty. First, they have introduced the minimum income guarantee, which deals with the terrible problem of absolute hardship and destitution that existed among an awful lot of pensioners when we first took office in 1997. I am sure

[Ms Sally Keeble]

that all hon. Members had pensioners coming to their advice surgeries in dire straits because they simply did not have enough money.

Targeted measures have dealt with some of the pressure points in pensioners' lives. The winter fuel allowance is absolutely wonderful. It has made a real difference and has tackled the problem of fuel poverty among pensioners, who used to get so cold during the winter. Pensioners now enjoy free television licences. Concessionary fares have worked better in some areas than in others. They have worked best in Labour areas, where Labour councils top them up and provide free transport for all pensioners, which is wonderful. Free eye tests are now available. One of the cruellest things that the Conservative Government did was to hit pensioners at a point when they were particularly susceptible.

Measures have also been taken to ease the burden of income tax on pensioners, such as increasing personal tax allowances and introducing the new starting rate of tax. Pensioners will say that everyone on low incomes will get that, but those measures are really important when we consider how many pensioners are on low incomes. I know that many pensioners do not like to pay tax, but they have special tax protection, which I very much welcome.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Turner) mentioned national health service measures, but I want to say a few words about the pension credit. The hon. Member for Eastbourne was quite wrong in his proposals, because the pension credit is an incredibly important benefit for those areas, such as mine, where a lot of pensioners are caught in the poverty trap: they have too much to be entitled to state benefits designed for the very poor, but they still do not have comfortable lives. It is important that those people at least feel that they will be comfortable if they claim the credit, and that if they do make a claim they do not feel intimidated; otherwise what the hon. Gentleman says about the numbers not claiming will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The hon. Gentleman's point about savings and the interest rate was wrong. I agree that there is an assumption about earnings on savings. Some people might think about such things and say, "If only", but people can get help with making claims. If they do not have statements of interest from their banks or building societies, assumed amounts may be included in the booklets. Of course, as they can use assumed interest, they do not have to dip into their capital. They can keep their capital, which is very important for pensioners because it means that they can keep their nest eggs to pay for their funerals and save for other expenses in their very old age.

It is quite wrong to frighten people by saying that they will be means-tested, because the system will be much more like filling in a tax form. People will not have to keep claiming, as they do with housing benefit and other benefits. I am sure that the Minister will correct me if I am wrong, but people will have to submit a claim only when their circumstances change—otherwise, there will be a reassessment in five years' time—so the pension credit is not like an ordinary benefit.

People can phone up, and someone on the end of the line can complete the form and send it to them for signing. I have been running a campaign about that in my constituency. Before doing so, I asked a couple of people to test the phone number, and it works; it is user-friendly service. I congratulate the Pension Service on doing some very good outreach work. People are going out to help those who do not have phones. The benefit has been designed in the light of pensioners' suggestions. Those of us who held meetings on the consultation document know that the policies emerging now are exactly those that pensioners said they wanted. I hope that the benefit will be a big step forward, certainly in areas, such as mine, where a lot of pensioners have some occupational or private pension or savings, but not very much.

I agree that a good number of things remain to be done to improve pensioners' lives, and I am sure that the Government will continue to take on some of those things. The first thing to do is to ensure that next month's introduction of the pension credit is as smooth as the arrangements have been so far for claiming and outreach work. I am sure that many others will want that to happen.

The development of home care packages is extremely important. That is mainly a job for local authorities, but such measures need to be in place if we are to provide pensioners with a decent standard of living in the years to come. We also still have to deal with pensioners who are asset rich and cash poor and find ways to secure their home ownership in their old age. That involves people who may have bought their council properties, as well as those in areas such as mine who have always owned their own homes, as it is often not cost-effective for them to move into smaller places.

The Government must consider ways of supporting equity release—either by making it safer, or by introducing some sort of CAT mark—so that people can afford to pay for repairs, major maintenance and adaptations by releasing some of the capital value. In that way, people could achieve what they often want: to stay on with dignity in their own homes, without their homes deteriorating and failing down around them.

I want to press a couple of final points. First, the procurement of residential care must be improved. The hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) should consider the incredibly imaginative work being done in Castle Vale in Birmingham, which has enabled more old people to leave hospital and return to their own homes. The work has involved very clever joint funding, and I commend that model.

Secondly, we should look at some of the anomalies in the benefits package, so that pensioners who are carers can receive benefits that they should receive, including important mobility benefits that are denied to them.

I recognise that some important and positive changes are taking place. Pensioners are living longer and enjoying better health, and they have higher aspirations. Female pensioners rightly aspire to be independent. As a society, we need to take on the challenges and to protect pensioners and their standard of living in their older years and give them dignity in their retirement. I believe that our Labour Government have made an incredibly good start, with some very thoughtful and well put together programmes, so I urge the House to support

the amendment and not to go for cheap slogans, but to go for things that will give people security and dignity in their old age.

3.19 pm

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): I welcome this debate on an important subject for older people in Wales, where 60 per cent. of pensioners live at the minimum income guarantee level—on or below the poverty line—and where the health of pensioners is worse than in the rest of the UK. It does not take an analyst of genius to link those two little facts.

My concern is the centralisation of the Pension Service at the pension centre in Swansea, the perceived lack of a local service from local officers and the problems that have been reported to me with the Welsh language service. I met officials from the Pension Service a few weeks ago to discuss these matters, and personally found them helpful and committed to delivering the best service that could be managed. I do not, of course, hold those individual officers responsible, but the centralisation of the Pension Service in Swansea is by its nature a bad idea for Wales, given the geography of our country and the difficulties of communicating between north and south. I fear and suspect that we will continue to see a complication of the service, which will make it much worse. I am not saying that the problems at Swansea are unique—I would not be surprised to learn that similar problems exist at other pension centres—but it is the only one in Wales and is our national pension centre. As a result, its problems are a national problem in Wales.

The problems with the pension centre are exemplified by a number of cases, and I hope that I am not being unnecessarily negative by examining the problems, which have been raised in my constituency surgeries. First, I want to mention the problems faced by Mrs. Williams of Porthmadog at the start of year. It took a one-woman campaign on her behalf to secure her pension. After five months of continual phoning, writing and calling the local office, she finally secured the pension. I hope that my intervention also helped her to some extent. It seemed to me that Swansea was unable to cope with the case, despite all the phone calls and the help of the local office. Mrs. Williams is a very determined person and someone who likes a certain degree of formality, as do many older people. She found it very difficult to deal with a different person each time, and she would have liked to call officials Mr. Jones or Miss Hughes—she found it difficult to cope with Dave referring to June, Jane, John or Joe. It is a small matter but an important one for some older people. As I said, she has managed to secure her pension and has received compensation from the special unit in Newcastle. She should not, however, have had to go all that way over five months to secure what should have been a straightforward matter—her own pension.

The second case is that of Mrs. Harding from the community of Aberdaron, a small village at the very tip of the Llyn peninsula—about as far away as one can get from Swansea. People in Aberdaron would say that they live centrally, however, and that it is Swansea that is far away. I suppose that it depends where one starts. Mrs. Harding's pension, which used to be paid directly into her bank, disappeared. After a good deal of phoning around and phoning Swansea she was told that it had disappeared because she was dead. She was not dead—she was phoning them up. It took a large number of phone calls from her and from me, and letters from me, to restore her pension. I was told—the Minister might like to respond to this matter later—that when someone is registered or entered as dead in the computer system, it is very difficult for the computer to reverse that categorisation. I wonder whether a Lazarus programme could be devised to rectify that.

Again, after a lot of trouble, Mrs. Harding has received a substantial compensation payment from Newcastle. I think that she would have preferred to have her pension paid directly into her bank properly—

Mr. Webb: And bereavement benefit.

Hywel Williams: Perhaps.

I want to refer briefly, given the pressure of time, to two other cases that were brought to my attention this week by a constituent who is an ex-Department of Social Security official, Mr. Ken Jones of Llanberis. The first was of a pensioner who had tried repeatedly to get through to the Welsh language line in Swansea. I should explain to hon. Members that there are two lines in Swansea—a Welsh language line and an English language line—both of which are very helpful at times. The person concerned found it very difficult to get through to the line in Swansea, however, and told Mr. Ken Jones that he suspected that the official eventually phoned from home rather than from the centre, as he apparently heard children playing in the background. Mr. Jones tells me that that would never have happened in his day at the DSS. Perhaps one might look back fondly on one's previous career, but he has a valid point.

Mr. Jones told me that he often contacts the Swansea centre himself, and he feels that the officials there have to refer to someone else for an opinion rather too often, instead of giving an opinion directly. He also refers to Swansea being at the further end of Wales, and to the fact that the centre workers speak Welsh with a pronounced Swansea accent. He stated that some elderly people have despaired and have turned to the English language. I should tell the House that I tried to get the number of the Swansea pension centre today from our wonderful new directory inquiries system, and I was unable to do so. I eventually got through to a local office in Swansea, which gave me the number. It was the number for the English language line, however, even though I had begun the conversation in Welsh. I suppose that those are the complexities of running a bilingual service, but I would have hoped that the Pension Service would have ironed them out.

The last case, which was again referred to me by Mr. Ken Jones, was of a widow who waited for payments for five weeks after her bereavement, and who then received a giro rather than an order book. Again, Mr. Jones referred me to earlier practice, whereby that person would have been paid very promptly rather than having to wait for five weeks.

I can appreciate that this centre, like other centres, has teething problems. The consequences for individual payments and individual pensioners, however, are serious. Even if the majority of claimants get a first-class service, some do not, which is a matter of concern to me and to other hon. Members, as the effects can be

[Hywel Williams]

disastrous. The point that my constituent, Mr. Jones, makes is that a system that was based locally would not have led to such problems. I know that there is a facility for local support and local visits. Is the Minister satisfied that that system is working? Will he tell us what provision exists for monitoring and reviewing the quality of the service from pension centres generally, and specifically from the telephone service in Welsh and English from Swansea? I fear that the complexity of the system will lead to problems, and that the complexity of the telephone system will lead to a disincentive to claim.

On that point, I refer, finally, to the question asked by the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing) about whether the Government will set specific take-up targets for pension credits for Wales, Scotland and the regions of England. I would be very interested to know that.

3.28 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): This has been an important debate. We have covered issues ranging from the closure of care homes and the pensions crisis to the burden of council tax. Those are matters of concern to all of our constituents, but of particular concern to many older people throughout Britain.

The debate was opened expertly and powerfully, as we would expect, by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow). I will not spare his blushes by mentioning that this morning *The Guardian* described him as one of the most knowledgeable and effective politicians on older people's issues. He demonstrated this afternoon why he has attained that reputation.

My hon. Friend highlighted the crisis of closure of care homes. He drew attention to the fact that when a care home closes, those who have lived there have less security of tenure than a council tenant or someone living in rented accommodation. Yet that elderly person can be at their most vulnerable point in life. In some tragic and extreme cases, that disruption can be fatal. My hon. Friend was right to say that in the past 15 months, 13,000 care home places have been lost. That is unacceptable. The Government's amendment to the motion is woefully complacent and inadequate in suggesting what might be done in the circumstances.

The Minister for Pensions, who spoke to the Government amendment, has a history on some of the issues that we have discussed to which I shall refer later, always assuming that he has wandered back into the Chamber by then.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) referred powerfully to the human cost of post office closures, which is another issue of particular concern to older pensioners. She referred to a number of her constituents who will struggle to an alternative post office when their local one is closed. She said that the exercise of walking to the local office is good for them and that the visit is sociable, but that when the local post office is closed, a lifeline will go with it.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris) was right to say in response to our concerns about the burden of council tax on pensioners that there is a council tax benefit, but he failed to say that that means-tested benefit has the lowest rate of take-up of any benefit. More than 1 million pensioners fail to claim their council tax benefit entitlement and, therefore, it is an inadequate safety net. Rather than have an unfair and regressive tax inadequately corrected by a failed, means-tested benefit, we would prefer a tax that relates fairly to ability to pay.

Richard Younger-Ross: My hon. Friend is aware that we have been lobbied today by pensioners, and among those lobbying me was Mr. Cayley. His family has a fairly good income of £17,000, but it is paying £1,900 in council tax. That represents 11 per cent. of the family's income. Even those on better incomes are being hurt by the high levels of council tax.

Mr. Webb: My hon. Friend raises an important point. Those who are hurt hardest by the council tax are not those who are on the lowest incomes, who may have their council tax met in full or in part, but those who have worked hard and saved hard, and have to face that tax burden in full. When one tax comes to represent 11 per cent. of someone's income, clearly something has gone very wrong.

The hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) suggested that replacing the council tax with some form of local income tax would in some way be unfair to pensioners because that would mean getting rid of a property-based tax. Given that two thirds of pensioners pay no income tax at all, they would be the principal group of beneficiaries in a switch away from council tax to local income tax.

Ms Keeble: I actually said that if we sloganise and, for example, talk about flat-rate increases, and then talk about changing from a property-based tax to an income-based tax, there will be unforeseen consequences. I think that the two measures have not been thought through properly by the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Webb: I recall from the hon. Lady's remarks that she said that, given that many pensioners are property owners, a move from a property-based tax might be to their detriment. Many parts of Europe and the United States run local income tax systems perfectly effectively. Given that two thirds of pensioners pay no main income tax, they would be the principal beneficiaries of such a move.

Rob Marris: I am not saying that the hon. Gentleman is wrong, but what is the provenance of his statistic? The Library tells me, using the Department for Work and Pensions pensioner income series, that it estimates that 60 per cent. of single pensioners have gross weekly incomes of more than £150, and that 60 per cent. of pensioner couples have gross weekly incomes of more than £250. I would expect that to mean that at least those 60 per cent. of pensioners would be paying income tax. That is a different figure from the one that the hon. Gentleman is giving.

Mr. Webb: The hon. Gentleman needs to bear in mind that not all sources of income included in his gross weekly income figures are taxable. It has been understood for many years that roughly one third of pensioners pay tax.

The hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) raised the important issue of care home closures specifically in Birmingham, and drew attention to the pensions crisis, a crisis that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West believes does not exist. Tell that to those who are in company schemes that have recently been wound up with inadequate funds. Tell that to people in their 40s and 50s who now fear that they do not have a secure retirement ahead of them.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), who now speaks for the Conservatives on older people's issues—I congratulate him on assuming that role—quite properly raised the issue of pension scheme closures, and highlighted the missing 1 million pensioners who, on the Government's figures, will not claim their entitlement to pension credit. He also criticised the Government for assuming that pensioners can get 10 per cent. income on their investments as part of the pension credit rules. That is clearly absurd. He glossed over the fact that in 1988 the Conservatives introduced similar rules that assumed that pensioners could get not 10 per cent. income on their savings but 20 per cent. The House and the electorate would do well not merely to look at the Government's performance but to remind themselves of the Conservatives' record of doing precisely nothing when they had the chance to do something.

The hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Turner) quite properly drew attention to his family circumstances, and said that his own experiences of the Pension Service had been positive. I welcome that. However, I intervened to highlight the fact that his elderly mother had found it preferable to ask her son to deal with the authorities. Surely, a system that worked well to maintain the security and dignity of pensioners would guarantee that all pensioners could deal with matters themselves without needing the assistance of family members.

Mr. Neil Turner: I also referred to the importance of access to the Pension Service; employees of the service can go to people's homes to help them fill out the forms. The Pension Service is a hugely important step forward in making sure that ordinary pensioners get the services that they deserve.

Mr. Webb: I am sure that everyone in the House would like the Pension Service to succeed and provide a higher standard of service than that which is currently provided. However, its employees would not have to make home visits to deal with applications for means-tested benefits if people got a decent pension in the first place—that would be a better way of operating the system.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) expressed concern about the centralisation of the Pension Service in Wales, and drew the attention of the House to the case of a constituent who had had her pension stopped because she had been told that she was dead. It is understandable that those who write the computer programmes do not normally allow them to reverse such transitions, but it illustrates a problem. When the IT systems of a Government Department are as ropey as those of the Department for Work and Pensions, such things will happen. We are concerned that when the pension credit is introduced next month many pensioners will have experiences similar to that constituent.

The Minister began with a social policy analysis of the issues affecting older people, which we all enjoyed and took us back to his days as an academic. I was intrigued that he attacked Sarah Teather, our excellent colleague who is fighting the Brent, East by-election and who we hope, next week, will be an even more excellent addition to the House of Commons, for encouraging people to claim the pension credit. A few moments before, he had exhorted us all to encourage people to claim the credit. Am I missing something? One minute, the Minister says that he hopes everybody will encourage people to claim the pension credit, but when the Liberal Democrat candidate for Brent, East does so, that is apparently outrageous behaviour.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Webb: If the hon. Gentleman had been here throughout, I would do so.

Malcolm Wicks: Given what the hon. Gentleman has just said, will the Lib Dems scrap the pension credit, yes or no?

Mr. Webb: No. We have made it clear that in government we would spend that £2 billion on the pension for the over-75s. That proposal was in an amendment that we tabled with the Conservatives to the Bill that introduced the pension credit. Once the credit is introduced, we will not scrap it. As the next party of government we will replace the dependence on means-testing with greater dependence on the universal state pension, particularly for older pensioners. In other words, as the economy grows and Governments have to decide whether to put money into means-tested benefits or a universal state pension, we will opt for the pensions route. That is the difference between the Liberal Democrats and the Government.

I suggested that the Minister has a history. He used to be a free thinker. Indeed, some people have unkindly suggested that the delay in his attaining ministerial office—his appointment was long overdue, I hasten to add—was partly attributable to the fact that he had a tendency to free-think rather too much.

I happen to have with me a copy of an article by the Minister that appeared in the *New Statesman* a year after the 1997 general election, entitled "Back to Beveridge's Basics." *[Interruption.]* It was a very good article and I commend it to the House. I am not sure whether I have the authority to place a copy in the Library, but I would like to do so. In the article, he asked himself this very important rhetorical question:

> "Should social security policy abandon notions of universality and focus all available resources on the poor? It is time to give a loud 'no' in answer to this question."

He went on to write:

> "the notion of citizenship is diminished if the welfare state deteriorates into a mere poverty relief programme. And the main sufferers would be the poor themselves, subject to more means tests."

That is the dreadful thing to which they would be subject, and they would be "marginalised and stigmatised." The article goes on to state:

> "And it would be a slippery slope: if pensions and child benefits are means-tested, why shouldn't we means-test access to doctors and hospitals and schools?"

[Mr. Webb]

Those are the Minister's words and perhaps that is his agenda—I do not know. I sometimes ask myself what happened to that idealist of a few years ago. Perhaps the House should reflect on his concluding comment:

"No one of sound mind could advocate wholesale means-testing".

How right he was.

To coin a new Labour phrase, I always believed that means-testing should be for the few and not the many, but what sort of policy do we have? It is one in which the majority of pensioners will be allowed to retire into poverty only for some of them to be rescued by a means test. Is that really a vision for 40 years down the line? Should it not be the Government's goal to ensure that the vast majority of pensioners reach pension age with decent pension entitlements in their own right, so that it is the few who have slipped through the net who need lifting out of poverty, not the many? How can a Government have so little ambition for Britain's older people that they allow this situation to persist?

The Minister did not refer to the council tax at all. I wonder why he did not do so and why he did not accept that, year after year, the council tax, which was created by the Conservatives and has been built on by the Labour Government, is becoming more of a burden, especially for Britain's older people. Those are the people who have modest incomes beyond the reach of the benefits system. They have worked, saved and budgeted hard and expect to have a particular standard of living, but find that, through inadequate central Government funding, the council tax is an increasing share of their income and more of a burden. Who is responsible? Year in, year out, central Government builds in an assumption that revenues from the council tax will rise far faster than inflation. Year after year, Governments and local authorities of all political parties and none ratcheted up the council tax, and what do the Government do about it? They have done nothing to address the burden of the council tax on Britain's older people.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle raised the important issue of post office closures. The Minister is to some extent responsible for that policy. He spoke about giving pensioners choice. He even said that about 60 per cent. of newly retired pensioners opt for payment into a bank account. That is fine, as it is their choice. However, 40 per cent. want an order book. Faced with a choice between payment into a bank account and an order book, they want the latter, but the Government are going to take that choice away from them. I am most concerned not about newly retired pensioners, but about the elderly and infirm pensioners to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle referred, who can just about make it to the local post office and enjoy the social contact, value the order book and have opted to have the book by not choosing payment to a bank account. Why do the Government not respect that choice? They are guilty of a lack of respect of older people.

We make no apology for the fact that our motion is wide ranging. Older people quite properly have a sense that Britain is an unfair place for them. They have worked and saved hard. They were told that the welfare state would be there from the cradle to the grave, not from the cradle to when they really needed it most, when the carpet would be pulled away from under them. That is what the Government are guilty of.

We have heard no response to the care homes crisis, the pensions crisis, the closure of post offices or the burden of the council tax. The Government's attitude has been complacent; I hope that the Minister will do rather better.

3.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Dr. Stephen Ladyman): The debate has been, as usual, good-humoured and enjoyable. It has also been informative, although I doubt whether it informed us in quite the way that the Liberal Democrats hoped. It tells us that they have not changed their ways—they would rather make a lot of noise and issue a lot of press releases than do any serious thinking about an issue. Although this is their Opposition day, and they started by saying that the issue is one of the most important of the day and absolutely key to their policies, at times they did not even have any Back Benchers in the Chamber and very few tried to contribute to the debate.

We have heard so many contradictions that it is difficult for me to figure out where to start, but I shall do so with a word that was mentioned by the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb)—choice. That represents the key dividing line between what the Liberal Democrats intend for older people and what this Government intend. When the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) opened the debate, he used the phrases, "People stuck in hospital when they are ready to go to a care home," and, "We want elderly people to go to a care home at the right time and the right place." The assumption that the Liberal Democrats make in all their planning is that the right place for older people is a care home. That is the inevitable consequence of everything that they try to do in local government and other places where they have positions of power, such as Scotland, and of what they are trying to do here in Westminster.

Mr. Martlew: To emphasise what my hon. Friend says, in Cumbria, where the Liberal Democrats are in control of the county council, the first thing that they did when they got power was to increase home care charges, despite having said during the election that they would not. We now have 250 pensioners who cannot afford home care any more because of the Liberal Democrats.

Dr. Ladyman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing that to the House's attention, because I bet that it is a story that is repeated all over the country wherever the Liberal Democrats are in a position of power.

Let me give an alternative view of what we should be offering to older people. Primarily, we should assume that older people know best what they want. We should bear it in mind that this is the generation that got us through a world war—in many cases, two world wars. We intend to respect their right to control and make choices about their own lives. We want them to have a spectrum of choices for their old age, ranging from being looked after in their own home to a variety of provision, including extra-care housing, residential care and nursing care. We want to enable them to make practical decisions.

Yesterday, I had the privilege of opening Alexandra house in Coventry—an extra-care facility that was created as a result of far-sighted thinking by the Anchor trust and Coventry social services. The council is Labour run, I might add. Every resident has their own flat—not a room, but a flat, with a living room, a bedroom, a bathroom, a kitchen and its own front door. Although the front door opens not on to a street, but on to a corridor, the corridors are named after streets, so people live in, say, 31 Primrose way instead of a numbered room in a house. It is therefore a private home where the individual can close the door on the rest of the world whenever they want. There, I met an elderly lady in a wheelchair who is no longer able to see or feed herself—she is fed through perentaneous endoscopic gastrostomy, or PEG, feeding—and needs total and constant nursing care. Yet she lives in her home with her own space and privacy. She is able to do that because she can plug into the services that she needs when they are required.

We should like to extend the model of extra-care housing to give additional choice to older people. Some people could choose to rent extra-care housing and others could choose to transfer the equity from their homes to buy it. There would be a range of provision, and people could make the choice when they approached retirement age. They would know that, as their care needs progressed, they could plug into different, more intensive care packages. We want to add such provision to the spectrum of choice. We are realising that by devising an £85 million competition to encourage people to propose ideas for creating such extra-care facilities. We shall not assume that people want to be in a care home. Our planning will be predicated on giving people genuine choice.

Before considering care home closures, I want to deal with some aspects of pension credit. I shall not do that in depth, because my hon. Friend the Minister for Pensions did so earlier, and I do not pretend to be an expert on it. However, the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) raised some local issues involving the centralisation of the Pension Service in Wales. He made some constructive points that deserve a constructive answer, and I shall ensure that my hon. Friend the Minister for Pensions reads his comments and takes them on board. I shall deal with two points.

First, the hon. Gentleman said that 60 per cent. of pensioners in Wales rely on the minimum income guarantee. That means that 60 per cent. of pensioners in Wales benefit from our targeting resources on the poorer pensioners—those who need them most—rather than spreading them too thinly.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman said that there are two language lines for people in Wales to ring when they claim minimum income guarantee and pension credit. Of course, there should be two language lines and their existence shows the detail into which the Department for Work and Pensions and the Pension Service go to ensure that everybody can easily claim the minimum income guarantee and the pension credit. The fact that people can do that by telephone and that Pension Service officials will go to people's homes to help them to apply for the benefits shows the lengths to which we go to boost the number of claimants and ensure that everyone can claim. The Department and the Pension Service should be congratulated on their work, and not encounter the sort of blocking that Liberal Democrats are attempting.

Events in Brent, East have constituted another sub-theme of the debate. Liberal Democrats in one place claim that they would scrap the pension credit, but in Brent, East they claim that it is wonderful. For the first time, I witnessed a political party changing its policy three times in one debate. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam began with an explicit statement that the pension credit should be scrapped and that we should give £19 extra a week to people over 75. *[Interruption.]* That is what he said—I am not going barmy and I did not imagine it. Anybody under 75 would not benefit from that Liberal Democrat policy. When he claimed that he would get rid of means-testing, he did not mean it because £19 is not as much as the total minimum income guarantee, which is closer to £26. Anybody who did not benefit from the £19 and remained worse off would have to be means-tested to reach the minimum income guarantee, and anyone under 75 would still have to be means-tested to get the minimum income guarantee.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam sits here trying to give the impression to the pensioners of this country and the voters in Brent, East that if his party were in power, it would scrap means-testing and give everyone an extra £19 a week, but he is going to do neither of those things. By the end of the debate, the hon. Member for Northavon had said, "Well, we did believe in scrapping the pension credit when it first came out, but we've changed our mind now. We're going to keep it." Yet, by the time he had reached the end of his speech, in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Minister for Pensions as to whether he would scrap it he said, "No, but if we were in power, we would shift to some other means of providing pensioner benefits." He had changed his policy within 15 seconds of making it, which has to be a record, even for the Liberal Democrats.

Let us move away from pensions, although that will not involve moving any closer to an issue that the Liberal Democrats have done any serious thinking about. Let us consider the so-called crisis in care homes that they keep talking about. I would be the first to admit that, in some parts of the country, there are some difficulties in respect of capacity in care homes. How are we dealing with that? We have given local authorities substantial extra funding, along with the responsibility to manage care home capacity in their own areas. We have given resources above the level of inflation since 1997. We have given local authorities nearly a quarter more funding for personal social services, and they can use that money in any way they want—to balance provision between domiciliary care and care homes, or to stabilise the care home market, for example. They can do whatever they want with it, because we believe in local government autonomy. That is something that the Liberal Democrats are always telling us that they believe in, yet as soon as local authorities make a decision that they do not like, they want us to intervene from Whitehall.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Where is it working?

Dr. Ladyman: It is working all round the country. My hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Turner) told us

[Dr. Ladyman]

how it is working in his constituency. He has a Labour council—that is why it is working there. Why is it that Conservative and Liberal Democrat Members raise the issue of problems in the care home market? It is because most of them have constituencies with Conservative and Liberal Democrat local councils. Labour councils balance these provisions in the way that they were intended to be balanced. Let me give the House one final figure on care home closures. There are 500,000 care home places available in this country, yet only 460,000 people want to use them. There is still excess care home capacity.

With regard to domiciliary care, we want to give a real choice to older people. No less than 80 per cent. of older people tell us that they want to stay in their own home for as long as possible. The suggestion by the hon. Members for Sutton and Cheam, for Northavon and for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) that there are now fewer domiciliary care packages in place is—dare I say it—a sophisticated use of spin. The reality is that the number of hours of domiciliary care provision is now 14 per cent. higher. The difference is that home care packages are now being properly targeted on the people who need them so that they can stay in their own home, rather than being spread among all elderly people. We are taking practical steps to keep people in their own home.

We believe in choice, respecting older people and giving them security in retirement. The Liberal Democrats believe in taking away that choice and security. They believe in introducing policies that might help a few pensioners, but at the expense of destroying the economy, slashing the value of pensions overall and taking choice away from everybody. That is not what the Government are about. We are about respecting and valuing old age, and ensuring that people have cash in their pockets when they become older. This Government ensure that people have choice of provision when they get older and we respect their right to choose. That is what the Government are about, and I advise the House to treat the Liberal Democrat motion with the contempt that it deserves.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 58, Noes 315.

Division No. 305] **[4:00 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brook, Mrs Annette L.
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hermon, Lady
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Moore, Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete

Tellers for the Ayes:
Richard Younger-Ross and Alan Reid

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell, *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*

Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Khabra, Piara S.
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Fraser Kemp and
Margaret Moran

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 307, Noes 182.

Division No. 306] **[4:14 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette

Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Khabra, Piara S.
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
[illegible]ougall, John
[illegible]ll, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and Margaret Moran

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William

Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alan Reid and Richard Younger-Ross

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes that from 2004–05 Government will be spending £9.2 billion extra per year in real terms on pensioners compared with the 1997 system; notes this is £5.7 billion more than if the basic state pension had been linked to earnings; recognises that the poorest third of pensioners will be £1,600 a year better off in real terms compared with the 1997 system; applauds Government action for older people on health and social care, fuel poverty, transport and lifelong learning; approves of action to stabilise the care home sector by increasing resources available to councils to increase care home fees where required; supports the Government's commitment to increase resources available for social services by on average six per cent. a year in real terms over the next three years, the expansion of intensive home care support, and the largest ever sustained increase in funding for the NHS; welcomes the real terms increase of 25 per cent. in grant to local authorities since 1997, and the review of the balance of funding between central and local government; further welcomes the successful introduction of universal banking services, giving Post Office access through a number of current accounts, basic bank accounts and the Post Office card account; congratulates Government on its intention to bring in Pension Credit from October; notes eligible households stand to gain on average £400 a year; and applauds the actions of the Government which result in over 1 million people being ready to receive Pension Credit who will gain more money than they had before.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am reliably informed that yesterday the official spokesman for No. 10, Downing street told the Lobby that the report from the Intelligence and Security Committee had been handed to the Prime Minister that day. However, when the Prime Minister was asked earlier today in the Chamber why he would not publish the report, he said—as far as I can remember hearing—that he could not possibly publish it today because he would not have it until tomorrow. There is a serious inconsistency between what No. 10 told everybody yesterday and, unsurprisingly, what the Prime Minister told the House today. Can you help the House to sort the matter out? It is a matter of the greatest importance and considerable controversy. It is not good enough for the Prime Minister to say something to the House that is in direct contradiction of what his spokesman told the Lobby yesterday. May we have this matter sorted out before much more time passes?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I understand the points that the right hon. Gentleman makes, but I am not in a position to help him because I am not aware of the detailed points he has made. No doubt the House will have heard his points and they are, of course, now on the record.

Role of the United Nations in Iraq

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I must inform the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

4.27 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): I beg to move,

That this House welcomes the publication of the recent draft resolution of the United Nations Security Council on Iraq; calls upon Her Majesty's Government to honour the Prime Minister's commitment to give the United Nations a vital role in the political and economic reconstruction of Iraq through a new Security Council Resolution which would expedite the restoration of sovereignty and democratic control to the Iraqi people, place the process of political transition under the auspices of the United Nations, transfer the whole responsibility for the economic reconstruction and rebuilding of Iraq to an Iraqi provisional government assisted as necessary by the United Nations and replace existing security arrangements with a multinational force under unified command obliged to report to the Security Council.

Those who have come here today hoping for a partisan debate, like yesterday's, will—I hope—be disappointed. We have chosen to ask the House to consider a serious matter and I begin by thanking the Foreign Secretary for being present. I know that he had other obligations for today that he has cancelled in order to attend the debate.

The scepticism of me and my party about the military action against Iraq is well documented, but nothing in the events of recent weeks—the Hutton inquiry, the fact that we still have not found weapons of mass destruction capable of deployment within 45 minutes, the Foreign Secretary's memorandum setting out, with admirable clarity, the risks and responsibilities of Government policy towards Iraq or today's allegation of a leak from the Intelligence and Security Committee—has persuaded me that my scepticism was other than well founded. However, we have a duty to deal with events as they are, not as we would like them to have been.

If I were to allow myself a brief moment of self-indulgence, it would be to point out that on the East river it will not be lost on those who work for the United Nations that the institution that was bypassed in March as part of the problem is being assiduously wooed in September as part of the solution.

When the force commander on the ground asks for more troops for an operation that the House of Commons authorised by democratic vote on 18 March, there would have to be a very good reason to refuse the request. In my view, no such reason exists. I understand the reluctance of some to acquiesce in the sending of more troops, but it is not realistic or fair to ask forces to fulfil tasks for which they have inadequate resources.

Some would argue that the logic of refusing more troops is that the forces already deployed should be withdrawn. However, one need only pause and ask what the consequence of withdrawal would be. Would Basra be made safer for its citizens? Would electricity and water flow more regularly? Would aid agencies find it easier to operate? The answer to those questions is self-evidently no.

The additional forces now being sought are necessary for two principal purposes—to help to achieve the humanitarian objectives to which I have referred, and to keep safe those already there, both military and civilian.

What would be the military consequences of withdrawal? It would create a vacuum in which disaffected members of the Ba'ath party, the sullen soldiers of the disbanded army and the suicidal jihadists would flourish. The current deterioration that all recognise would accelerate out of control

However, the deployment of the extra troops can be seen only as a stopgap that allows an opportunity to buy time. The deployment, to be added to in the way that has been suggested and indeed already implemented, cannot go on for an unlimited time, for military and economic reasons. A former leader of the Conservative party asked three questions last September to which no one has been able to provide answers. He asked what the exit strategy was, how many British troops would be required, and how long they would be required to be deployed. Those perceptive questions of 12 months ago remain unanswered.

Sooner or later, there will have to be an exit strategy. I suggest that it will be based either on a determination that the job has been done and the objectives achieved, or on a recognition that we can no longer do the job and that we should go. However, that is not a matter for today.

The House and the country are entitled to more detailed information about the financial costs to date. What are the daily and monthly costs? What are the projected costs? I was not satisfied with an answer that I received on 10 July from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, and I have written to the Chancellor again today to ask for further information, but it has become overwhelmingly clear that the burden in Iraq has to be shared. I have no doubt whatever that the best way to do that is through the UN, which now enjoys belated recognition among even the most neoconservative elements in Washington. Truly, rumours of the UN's death are shown to have been grossly exaggerated.

I turn now to the military position. We need a resolution that mandates a multinational force under unified command. In that respect, there is nothing between me and the Foreign Secretary. We must be realistic, and accept that that force will be under US command. The force, and the command that is established, should be modelled on the arrangements for what we might now call Gulf war one. The command should be obliged to report to the Security Council, as happened in Gulf war one.

I do not know how many hon. Members have had the opportunity to read the draft resolution now circulating in New York. Those who have read it may have noticed that it uses the phrase "all necessary means", in contradistinction to the earlier phrase "serious consequences". If "all necessary means" had been in people's contemplation last October and November, it is possible that some of the difficulties encountered by the UN might have been avoided.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Earlier, the right hon. and learned Gentleman made the interesting remark that we might have to withdraw from Iraq because of a recognition that we cannot achieve our objectives there. Is that possibility more likely to come to pass if we retain a command structure that is under the control of America and not the UN? If the UN were calling the shots in military terms in Iraq, would the

withdrawal under the conditions that he describes be less likely? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman say a little more about how there could be an American command structure that would, nevertheless, be recognised internationally as answerable to the UN?

Mr. Campbell: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman was a Member of the House in 1990 and 1991; the answer to the second part of his question is that precisely such a structure was established for the purpose of expelling Iraq from Kuwait. It was under the command of General Schwarzkopf, and General Sir Peter de la Billière was the senior British representative. The French were also represented in that command and the representation of other contributing nations related to some extent to the value and degree of their contribution. It is perfectly possible to create such a command. Our motion seeks to establish that the command is authorised by the UN and obliged to report back to the Security Council.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall answer the questions put by the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) before I take his intervention.

On whether we are more likely to succeed through the UN or through existing arrangements, I have no doubt whatever—indeed, it is implied in the motion—that we shall much more easily and effectively achieve the objectives that we regard as desirable through not only a multinational security arrangement, but also an arrangement for the reconstruction and rebuilding of Iraq conducted through the UN. That would enjoy far greater legitimacy than proposals and measures from a coalition about whose right to continue with such measures there must be, at least, some legal doubt as, to some extent, it is stretching its responsibilities under the Geneva convention.

Mr. Salmond: The right hon. and learned Gentleman examines such things extremely carefully, so he will have noticed that the Government amendment refers to the existing command structure, as did President Bush's "Come and join us" appeal earlier this week. Will he confirm that he is not in favour of the existing command structure being sanctioned by the UN, but rather that he is looking for one that is properly authorised by the UN?

Mr. Campbell: I thought that I had already said that, but if it is necessary to repeat it, I want a command structure based on that for Gulf war one, which was both legitimate in terms of the legal powers that it created and politically acceptable because it required the command to be answerable to the Security Council. That is why I responded to the hon. Member for Ceredigion by saying that we were much more likely to achieve those objectives through the UN than by following the existing arrangements outside the UN.

Such a force with such a mandate ought to be able to attract contributors from militarily capable nations such as France, Germany, India, Pakistan and even perhaps Turkey. I used the words "militarily capable" deliberately; it is one thing to have troops assigned from a member of the UN to a command of that kind, but we must have troops that are properly led, properly equipped and properly trained. Some hon. Members will remember the lessons of Bosnia where troops were assigned to a UN force—a blue-helmet force—with inadequate provision by all three of the criteria to which I referred. Troops were arriving without personal weapons and without boots. If we are to restructure the command as I have suggested, we must do so in a way that will attract troops from militarily capable nations.

That of itself will not be enough to attract such support, as some of the preliminary observations made by the representatives of those countries at the UN made clear. There will have to be parallel political development. Even with an expanded and more representative security force, there will be no shortcuts to stability in Iraq. Stability and security will depend on political progress and on the civil administration in Iraq being the responsibility not of the coalition—increasingly seen as occupiers— but of the UN, which would, in my view, enjoy a far greater legitimacy and acceptability.

For those who are students of such matters, I fancy that the next fortnight in New York would be a most interesting occasion if one could participate, even silently, in all the meetings that will take place, because they will essentially involve that peculiar UN operation of barter and exchange, negotiation, offer and counter-offer. However, any new resolution, as finally agreed, must provide the vital role for the UN promised by both President Bush and the Prime Minister, not just in words, but in substance as well. It must embrace the urgent objective of restoring sovereignty and democratic control to the Iraqi people. It must ensure that the process of transition from the present arrangements comes under the auspices of the UN. We should ensure that the responsibility for economic reconstruction and rebuilding in Iraq is as soon as possible placed with an Iraqi provisional Government, assisted by the UN.

The deployment of British forces can be justified against such clear objectives. I also want to make it clear that a desire to rescue the deteriorating situation in Iraq, which virtually everyone now recognises, is no endorsement of the action that has given rise to that position. I said at the outset that my scepticism remains undimmed. Analogies in these matters are always deeply dangerous, but let me suggest that the doctor who treats the victim of a serious assault neither endorses nor justifies that assault in so doing.

I cannot believe that it is in the interests of the people of the United Kingdom, whom we are sent here to represent, that Iraq should further deteriorate and that there should be instability in that country, which would inevitably have consequences for the stability of the whole region. We have a moral obligation, but there is also a deeply pragmatic obligation as well.

Firmly rooting remedial action in the UN is, in my judgment, an acknowledgement of the UN's pre-eminence, for which Liberal Democrat Members at least have consistently argued, and far from being an endorsement of military action, which I still believe was unjustified at the time that it was taken, it is in truth an implied rebuke to all those who sidelined the UN. I have said before—I am flattered that the Foreign Secretary has quoted it from time to time—that the UN is no more or less than the sum of its members. It is not a third party

[Mr. Campbell]

to whom we can contract out our security or, indeed, that of the Iraqi people. It requires our engagement, and if, as we do in the motion, we set out a series of steps that we regard as essential, we have an obligation to recognise that we have to continue to engage, and, if necessary, we have to engage with further resources in the form of troops and—who knows?—perhaps even in the form of financial support.

When Sergio Vieira de Mello and Fiona Watson, who was one of my former constituents—incidentally, her coffin was draped with the UN flag at her funeral—were both brutally murdered, they were acting for us and in our name, as much as were any of those in uniform who have been so tragically killed.

The UN is not and never will be a perfect instrument, but it is the best means available now by which to ameliorate the present condition of the Iraqi people and to improve it to the point at which they can resume full responsibility for themselves. That is why I commend the motion to the House.

4.44 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"supports the vital role played by the United Nations in Iraq as endorsed by UN Security Council Resolutions 1483 and 1500 (2003); pays tribute to the Secretary General's Special Representative, Sergio Vieira de Mello and his colleagues brutally murdered in the terrorist atrocity of 19th August; welcomes the determination of the United Nations Secretary General to remain engaged in Iraq; further welcomes the initiation of discussions on a new UN Security Council Resolution on Iraq, which aims to reaffirm the United Nations' support for the work of the governing council, calls on the governing council to submit a timetable and programme for the drafting of a new constitution for Iraq and for the holding of democratic elections, proposes a United Nations-mandated multinational force under existing unified command arrangements and encourages UN Member States and international organisations to help the Iraqi people by providing resources for rehabilitation and reconstruction at next month's conference in Madrid."

I welcome this debate and the tone in which the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) moved the motion. I welcome the spirit of the motion, too. I looked hard to see whether we could accept the motion as stated, and it was only what I described as a little infelicitous drafting here and there, on which I would have been happy to offer prior assistance, that led me to move the alternative. The tone of the debate reflects the fact that, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman said, whatever views people have had about the wisdom or otherwise of the military action, we all have a common interest in securing Iraq's peace and prosperity as quickly as possible.

The role of the UN has been at the heart of the issue with Iraq for more than a dozen years. During that time, Iraq achieved the unique distinction of having more mandatory Security Council resolutions against it than any other country in the United Nations' history. Its record of defiance in response to the Security Council's demands put Saddam Hussein's regime into a category of its own. That unenviable record led the House to make the decision on 18 March, by a majority of 263, that the only way to deal effectively with that defiance and the threat that the Security Council had already agreed that it posed to international peace and security was through military action.

This time last year, we were involved with our Security Council partners in an intensive dialogue as to how we could enforce the writ of United Nations resolutions in Iraq. That dialogue became a negotiation, which led on 8 November to the unanimous adoption of resolution 1441. It is worth reminding ourselves of the key elements of that resolution. It declared that Iraq represented a threat to international peace and security, which is a key trigger for the use of chapter VII powers. It gave Iraq a "final opportunity" to bring itself into compliance, and it spelled out how it was to do so in the clearest possible terms. If Iraq failed to meet the conditions, 1441 warned that "serious consequences" would follow. Diplomatic parlance is notoriously ambiguous, but that phrase was understood to have only one meaning—military action. I say to the right hon. and learned Gentleman that it was understood to be interchangeable with "necessary means" or "necessary measures".

I do not downplay the significance of the United Nations' subsequent failure to agree on the so-called second resolution in March. Indeed, it was a matter of great personal regret to me. I travelled to New York four times between January and March in an attempt to a secure a consensus on the need to enforce those terms of the resolution. We all worked hard to try to achieve that consensus, but we were unable to do so. Divisions were also apparent in this House in that momentous debate on 18 March. Some took the view that containment was working, or, alongside that, that more time should be granted to the United Nations inspectors. The Government's view was that that would simply play into the hands of a regime that wanted time without end. As I have already mentioned, the House therefore endorsed the Government's position and decided to enforce those "serious consequences".

In the aftermath of coalition military intervention, the immediate challenge facing the international community is to bring peace and the rule of law to a country that has been brutalised for almost a quarter of a century. Our task is to help the Iraqi people rapidly build a nation from the ashes of Saddam's dictatorship and to do so with the United Nations. In April, at the Hillsborough summit, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and President Bush called on the United Nations to play a vital role in the reconstruction of Iraq. It has been doing so ever since. The World Food Programme, with its Iraqi counterparts, got the public distribution system for food rations fully up and running in June. UNICEF and the World Health Organisation have made major contributions to the restoration of health services, which have included the successful containment of the cholera outbreak in the south of the country, maintaining supplies of essential medicines and resuming child vaccination programmes. The United Nations Development Programme has been helping to restore electricity services, and the Government, through the Department for International Development, have been providing very considerable support. DFID has committed £113 million to the United Nations' work in Iraq, alongside other funds in respect of other programmes.

In all this work, particularly in the south of the country, the work of the civilian agencies has been supported and in some instances made possible by the exceptional work of British troops. I cannot emphasis, often enough—I know that I have the approbation of the whole House—the admiration that we all have for the skill, expertise, courage and determination of our troops. It happens that by chance on Saturday I met a group of service personnel who were literally about to leave for Basra. Some were with their families. Tears were being shed. It was striking in the brief conversations that I had what stoicism our troops were showing, and what commitment to the cause and to the highest traditions of the British armed forces.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Endorsing what my right hon. Friend said about the British troops, where great commitment has been shown, is not there a problem that really should be addressed, which is the labelling of many technocrats who formerly were Ba'athists, in that they had to be to get anywhere in their profession? Could not some change be made in the guidelines as to who can help in reconstruction and who cannot? I think particularly of Saddam's Health Minister, Dr. Mubarrak from Sulammiya—a Kurd, incidentally—who was technically, in the view of many people, extremely efficient. All right, he paid lip service to the Ba'ath party, but he was interested in health. Should not such people be brought back in the reconstruction process?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend makes an important and constructive point. It is one that has been exercising us as well. The point is how sensitively the process of so-called de-Ba'athification can be undertaken in a way that identifies those people who on any analysis were completely committed Ba'athists, and therefore would represent a threat to any subsequent Government within the country, and those whom my hon. Friend correctly said were Ba'athists because they had to be Ba'athists, in the same way as in the Soviet bloc if someone wanted to be a teacher, an administrator or engineer at any level, they had to be a member of the Communist party.

Quite a lot of the people who are operating at a senior level were members of the Ba'ath party. When I was in Baghdad on 1 July, I met a woman who had been a senior official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I am quite sure—I am not absolutely certain, but almost certain—that she was involved in the Ba'ath party. People had identified her as someone who was not remotely committed to it. However, she had to be able to follow her career.

On the gravamen of what my hon. Friend says, he is right. We continue discussions in the coalition provisional authority to ensure that the de-Ba'athification process is handled sensitively and quickly, and that good people who pose no threat to security in Iraq are allowed to continue their work.

The Government have been committed all the way along to establishing a broad mandate for the UN in post-Saddam Iraq. Thus far, this has been affirmed in two Security Council resolutions. The first, UNSCR 1483, was passed on 22 May.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I am pleased to hear my right hon. Friend's remarks about the British commitment to a UN mandate. Does he agree with me that the American reluctance to bring in the UN at an early stage, and the seemingly reluctant acceptance that the UN has an important role to play now, after a period of violence, does not do their cause very much good?

Mr. Straw: I do not fully accept my hon. Friend's view. From the very start, the American Government wanted the United Nations to play a vital role. I was present at the discussions at Hillsborough at the beginning of April, when the issue of the vital role was discussed. It was not an issue of words. Everyone recognised, not least President Bush and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, that if the UN was to play a "vital role", those words had to be translated into action. In my judgment, they have been, and I was about to say how that has been done. However, I do not deny for a second that we now have to enhance the UN's mandate.

Resolution 1483, co-sponsored by the United States and the UK, talked about a vital role for the United Nations, and established a framework for the UN's involvement in all significant aspects of Iraq's reconstruction. It lifted most of the UN sanctions against Iraq. A second resolution—resolution 1500—passed on 14 August welcomed the first steps taken by Iraq towards representative government with the formation of the Iraqi Governing Council. It also created the United Nations assistance mission for Iraq, as recommended by the Secretary-General.

To pick up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), of course there was scepticism about the question of whether the "vital role" was simply warm words or would be followed by action. I have accepted both in the House and outside that mistakes were made, not only in respect of the role of the United Nations but, more significantly, in not fully anticipating the speed with which the Saddam regime would collapse and the security vacuum that would be left. There were also mistakes in the planning for the coalition provisional authority. That said, after the passage of resolution 1483, in late May, June and July, the role of the United Nations on the ground was accelerating and, on any analysis, becoming vital.

That was made clear in the Secretary-General's report to the Security Council on 17 July. He said that the

> "UN can begin to assist the Iraqi people...in making a difference ... and in helping to pave the way of the restoration of sovereignty to democratic Iraqi institutions."

Sergio Vieira de Mello referred to the formation of the Iraqi Governing Council on 13 July as a "defining moment" for Iraq,

> "moving it back where it rightfully belongs: at peace with itself and as a full participant in the community of nations."

As I told the House on Monday, the fact that the terrorists decided to target the Secretary-General's special representative and other United Nations staff at the UN's headquarters, the Canal hotel in Baghdad, speaks volumes about the positive impact that the United Nations was having through its involvement in the political process and its role in reconstruction. It had been helping to establish the conditions for an orderly transition in Iraq, and its personnel became the target of

[Mr. Straw]

those who sought to plunge the country into chaos. It was precisely because those terrorists could see the difference that the UN was making that they decided to target it.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: I do not demur from what the right hon. Gentleman has said in the last moment or two, but another consideration is the fact that the UN was a pretty soft target. The security arrangements for its headquarters were a long way below what was desirable.

Mr. Straw: I was just about to say that in the wake of the appalling events on 19 August, the United Nations obviously had to scale back its presence in Iraq considerably. I have since spoken to Secretary-General Kofi Annan on a number of occasions, and assured him that we are ready to offer further advice and assistance to help to guarantee the security of United Nations facilities and personnel. However, may I also tell the right hon. and learned Gentleman that the United Nations had to make its own decisions about security? There was security around the Canal hotel, but the UN—rightly, in my view—judged that it should be separate from the coalition forces and the secure area within Baghdad. It also judged that in the past it had never been a target, so it was fair for it to assume, even in the more difficult security climate, that it was not going to be a target in future. Obviously, that has to be reassessed, but I say to him from my knowledge that no culpability lies with the security services of either the United Nations or the coalition. The culpability for that terrorist attack lies solely with the terrorists.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): May I infer from the Foreign Secretary's last remark to the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) that the United Nations was offered security cover at the Canal hotel by the United States, but thought it proper to refuse it?

Mr. Straw: The situation is more complicated than that. The United Nations had security cover and the issue is the level of cover. If the hon. and learned Gentleman will excuse me, I am afraid that I shall not go into detail about the confidential discussions that took place between the UN and the coalition.

Mr. Salmond: The Foreign Secretary said that he thought that the United Nations wanted to be separate from the coalition forces. Might that be the case because it wanted to see a distinction between the United Nations operation and that of the coalition forces, which had been engaged in military action—a distinction between combatant forces and peacekeeping forces? If he acknowledges that distinction, would it not be unwise to blur it by trying to incorporate other countries into an existing command structure instead of setting up a new command structure that would not be regarded as partial and combatant?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman is correct that, of course, it was in the mind of the United Nations that it was distinct from coalition forces and wanted to reinforce that distinction by locating itself in a different place in Baghdad. Indeed, it had occupied the same headquarters since the Gulf war. I shall deal in a moment with the issue of unified command, but I say now that nobody in the Security Council is arguing for blue-helmeted troops under the command of a UN Secretary-General-appointed commander. Everyone accepts that there has to be a multinational force, but under a unified command, and that that unified commander has to be from the United States, for reasons that the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife readily acknowledged. That is also an element of the resolution.

The truth that we now know, but did not know before 19 August, is that everybody who is working for peace in Iraq—the United Nations, coalition forces, members of the governing council and ordinary Iraqis—can be targeted by such terrorists, who simply want, in a nihilistic way, to blow up processes that will lead to peace and security. We must take account of that and assist the Iraqis in getting on top of terrorism, just as, in a much more limited way, we have had to do ourselves.

Mr. Simon Thomas: Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, I need to make progress, as this is a very short debate and others wish to speak.

As I have said, the attack on the UN headquarters was a terrible reminder that all nations share a common interest in ensuring a successful transition in Iraq and have none in allowing the terrorists to succeed. For that reason, over the past few weeks, I have been working closely with United States Secretary of State Colin Powell and my colleagues in the European Union and the Security Council to strengthen the UN's mandate and the joint efforts of the international community in Iraq.

Let me set out the key elements in the draft that is now under discussion. It reaffirms the United Nations' support for the work of the Governing Council and calls on the council—this is a very important point—to submit a timetable and programme for the drafting of a new constitution for Iraq and the holding of democratic elections. The timetable would be provided in co-operation with both the CPA and the United Nations. It would reinforce to the Iraqi people our determination to move along the path towards democratic government run by Iraqis in a sovereign Iraq. Giving that sense of progress and hope about the fact that the coalition is in the country as an occupying power only temporarily is of profound psychological importance in Iraq. It will give the international community more certainty about the direction that is being pursued in Iraq. The fact of the discussions has already tended to assist the international climate in which the Iraqi Governing Council is operating. I was pleased to learn this morning that at a meeting in Cairo yesterday, the Arab League passed a resolution in which it invited the Iraqi Governing Council to take up its full seat at the league until a representative of a full Iraqi Government could take over. Given how standoffish the Arab League and neighbouring states had been before, that is a very important change.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): The Secretary of State says that he wants to give the Iraqi people the

impression that the occupying forces will be there only temporarily. Will he give an indication of how long they are going to be there? Will it be two years, three years, five years, or 10 years? If he cannot do that, will he give an indication of when he can give an indication?

Mr. Straw: The purpose of inviting the governing council to propose a timescale is to let the most representative body of the Iraqi people make those proposals, not to have them imposed by others, including the United Kingdom. We do not want to stay, nor will we stay, in Iraq for a moment longer than is necessary. We will ensure that a handover of sovereignty takes place as quickly as possible. Given the uncertainty of the situation, I cannot give my hon. Friend exact dates as to when that will happen, but I can promise him that we are committed to doing so as quickly as is safe.

The text highlights the UN's role in supporting the constitutional processes in Iraq, drawing on its extensive expertise in this area. The aim is for the UN to be heavily involved in preparing the electoral register and other electoral processes.

The draft proposes a UN-mandated international force under existing unified command arrangements; that should facilitate the provision of troops by other countries that have so far felt unable to make contributions.

Finally, the text refers to next month's donors conference in Madrid.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): In answer to some comments that have been made about the commitment of the United States to the involvement of the United Nations, can the Foreign Secretary confirm that the draft text to which he refers was in fact proposed and tabled by the United States?

Mr. Straw: Indeed. This is a United States proposal, which is constructive and will no doubt be improved during discussions.

In summary, if a resolution along the lines of the draft is accepted, that will send a strong signal to those forces in Iraq who would deny the Iraqi people a peaceful and prosperous future. It will tell them that the international community's commitment to the establishment of representative government in Iraq was irrevocable and that their efforts to block Iraq's return to the international community of nations were doomed to failure.

The build-up to military action in March was, sadly, characterised by serious divisions in the international community. By contrast, the period since the fall of Saddam has been characterised by growing consensus that whatever those previous disagreements, we all have a common interest in Iraq's future stability and prosperity and in the role of the United Nations in achieving that. Constructive discussions on the draft have been held over the past 10 days in New York and via direct contact between Foreign Ministers of Security Council members. This Saturday, at the invitation of United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, I shall travel to Geneva for a meeting with him and my four colleague Foreign Ministers from the permanent membership of the Security Council to discuss both the draft in more detail and the wider issues of United Nations involvement in Iraq. I look forward to that meeting, and I shall of course report the outcome to the House.

Since the inception of the United Nations, no country has been more committed to it than the United Kingdom. No country has made a greater effort than the United Kingdom to ensuring that the UN is a central means by which the international community deals with the threat from Saddam's regime and the country's rehabilitation. We were the co-sponsor of three UN resolutions in respect of Iraq that have been passed in the past 10 months, and in the coming days we shall strive to secure a fourth.

The draft resolution that is under discussion is aimed at cementing the UN's presence in Iraq, enhancing Iraq's security and bringing forward the day when the Iraqi people can take full control of their own destiny. I urge the House to accept the amendment.

DEFERRED DIVISIONS

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I now have to announce the results of the Divisions deferred from a previous day on the motions on Local Government Finance (England).

On the motion on the Preserved Rights grant, the Ayes were 389, the Noes were 1, so the motion was agreed to.

On the motion on the Delayed Discharges grant, the Ayes were 255, the Noes were 40, so the motion was agreed to.

On the motion on the Social Services (High Performers No. 2) grant, the Ayes were 387, the Noes were 1, so the motion was agreed to.

Role of the United Nations in Iraq

Question again proposed.

5.9 pm

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): The debate on Iraq and the United Nations takes place at a significant time. Unlike some of the discussions that we have held in past few days, there will be little difference between us. The fact that the subject of Iraq has been raised on the Floor of the House for the third consecutive day shows the concern about the current position that is shared by hon. Members of all parties.

The concern is not new to me; I encountered it among Iraqis when I visited Baghdad on 23 July. The other day, the Secretary of State criticised me for raising some concerns and criticisms. However, they do not originate with me but with people to whom I talked in Baghdad and other parts of Iraq. They mentioned them because they believed that it was important that we understood them.

What is happening—to be more accurate, what is not happening in Iraq—is unfair to the Iraqis, who are unsurprisingly growing resentful, and to our armed forces who, through no fault of theirs, sometimes have to face the backlash of the resentment. Our servicemen and women are doing a remarkable job in difficult circumstances and I wish to pay tribute to them. I wish the additional troops who are being deployed to Iraq today every success in their mission. However, we owe them not only moral support but a clear and active civil programme of restoring the basic amenities of water, power and working sewers to the provinces under our control. That will relieve pressure from not only the Iraqis but our armed forces. Government uncertainty about the reconstruction programme helps neither party.

Since our debate on 24 September last year, I have argued that the involvement of the international community through the United Nations is essential to rebuilding Iraq. A little more than a week ago, the United Kingdom took over the presidency of the United Nations Security Council; the United States takes on the role next month. We are therefore at a critical moment, when together we can promote a positive role for the United Nations. The United States is sometimes portrayed as the obstacle to United Nations involvement, yet President Bush has made it clear that deeper United Nations involvement and the further internationalisation of the coalition in Iraq is essential for the prosperity and security of the region. As I pointed out earlier, the United States tabled the text of the draft resolution. I urge all nations on the United Nations Security Council, especially the permanent members, who have sometimes been the problem rather than the solution, to work constructively towards passing the resolution.

However, the resolution must not be allowed to complicate the security situation in Iraq. It is clear that, in military terms, a single chain of command and control must operate in that country. The specific circumstances and the disparity in troop numbers between the participating nations mean that it must logically be American-led. To suggest otherwise defies reality and common sense and would be a recipe for confusion. That is why I support the Government amendment.

The draft resolution, which the Security Council is currently considering,

"authorizes a multinational force, under unified command".

There is currently a multinational force, under unified command, in Iraq; the resolution adds the authorisation of the United Nations. That is the right way to proceed and we support that.

Mr. Simon Thomas: What should be the deciding body on any withdrawal of military force from Iraq? Who should decide when the time is right—America, as head of the unified control that the right hon. Gentleman outlined, or the United Nations? The final arbiter of when military force withdraws is important for whether the Iraqis perceive the forces as occupying or bringing them peace and justice.

Mr. Ancram: We are talking about practical realities, and about the security of Iraq. Those who are best able to judge the security situation are those who are responsible for securing it in the first place—the armed forces, not the United Nations. It is therefore inevitable that the decision will be taken by the armed forces in consultation with the various participating nations, which is how the matter should be decided. I shall give another example shortly, which will show that that where we should direct our attention.

Mr. Salmond: The doctrine that decisions on withdrawal from—or, for that matter, entry into a theatre of combat are made by the armed forces is extraordinary. Such decisions are political decisions made by whoever is authorising the armed forces. The right hon. Gentleman was asked whether withdrawal would be authorised by the American command—presumably, the President of the United States—or by the United Nations. If the unified command is reporting to the United Nations, surely it should be the United Nations that makes the decision.

Mr. Ancram: I do not know how much knowledge the hon. Gentleman has of military matters, but I would say to him that those in charge of security are best placed to decide when changes can be made to security operations. Those who have been responsible for providing the security in the first place should properly take the final decisions on whether the situation in Iraq is secure enough for withdrawal to take place. I shall return to the issue later, but a good example of the principle in operation is to be found in Afghanistan, where decisions on security are taken by the armed forces and the decisions on humanitarian and political questions are taken by the United Nations. That relationship is working well, and it is one that we should look at closely in relation to Iraq.

The formal United Nations involvement should not be military. The passing of the current draft resolution will create a mandate for the further involvement of other nations in the security of Iraq, which would be welcome. In particular, it could open the door to India's military involvement. Furthermore, I understand from conversations that I have had that some of the Gulf states might be able to provide Arab forces to help in this endeavour, which would be an important extension of the multinational nature of the force that is in place.

The endeavour should not be a UN peacekeeping force in the sense that we understand it at present, however. Kofi Annan has ruled out a blue helmet – or, indeed, a blue beret – operation for good reasons, not least because it will not be a traditional peacekeeping operation of the kind in which the United Nations is involved elsewhere. At the moment, it is a counter-insurgency mission, which is not, and should not be, the role of the United Nations. For that reason, I believe that the definition set out in the draft resolution text is the correct one.

In Afghanistan, the United Nations has a significant role to play on the political and humanitarian front, in co-ordination with NATO and the American forces on the security front. It achieves its purpose without seeking to exert control over the military operation. The military, for its part, welcomes the work of the UN, which allows it to concentrate on its security responsibilities. I saw this in action when I visited Afghanistan in July. I talked to the United States and United Kingdom military commanders there, and to Lakhdar Brahimi of the United Nations. There was a clear and important demarcation of responsibilities, which worked well. That was before NATO took over the command of ISAF, which I believe will help still further by creating greater continuity on the security side.

In Afghanistan, as in Iraq, one of the priorities is to move as swiftly as possible to a democratically elected indigenous Administration. The military coalition accepts its role in training local security forces to provide security across the country, without which a successful election would be unlikely to be held. The United Nations has the vital responsibility of helping to carry out sensitive work on voter registration and other legal technicalities, and advising on constitutional options. Afghanistan provides an example of how that relationship is working successfully on the ground, and it is just such a relationship that is envisaged in the United Nations draft resolution. It is a model that could usefully be adapted and adopted for Iraq.

If, however, the United Nations is to play a significant role in delivering a bright future for Iraq, two things are needed immediately: first, as far as possible its security must be assured; and, secondly, civilian reconstruction must be stepped up and the contracts to do so must be in place. After the tragic death of Sergio Vieira de Mello and other United Nations personnel, not least our own Fiona Watson, in the bombing of the United Nations building, the question of United Nations security is paramount. I heard what the Secretary of State said, and I do not wish to know about the private and secret discussions that took place. However, when I was in Baghdad, the United Nations was beginning to be aware of a threat and was considering discontinuing its flights into Baghdad airport, because there had been several incidents of missile lock-ons. It was beginning to see that there was a threat, and I still regret that, for the reasons the Foreign Secretary stated, it had kept itself outside the secure area on the east side of the river where the security provided by the security forces was not available.

Mr. Garnier: My right hon. Friend may not want to know what discussions the Foreign Secretary had with his counterparts, which are necessarily confidential, but we are entitled to comment that the safety and overall security of United Nations' personnel can be achieved effectively and practically only with the assistance of United States' armed forces guarding its premises. That may be politically inconvenient and diplomatically uncomfortable, but if we are to avoid tragedies such as those that took place in August, as members of the United Nations we should swallow our pride and allow those who have the means to help to protect us.

Mr. Ancram: I agree in principle with my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), but there was another dimension: the United Nations was in its old building, which was on the east side of the river. That was not part of the secured area in Baghdad. That was its decision. It was not so much that it required American assistance in protecting its premises. I would have preferred it if its premises had been within the secure area, because that would have lessened the likelihood of what happened. It is easy to be wise after the event, but I drove past the United Nations building and, having in my time in Northern Ireland learned that terrorists look for soft, rather than hard, targets, I wondered whether the United Nations was not presenting itself as a soft target and therefore a temptation to terrorists.

Mr. Garnier: I do not want to labour the point, because it is not central to the debate, but surely there is not much difference between siting premises in an insecure area, and having them within a secure area but refusing to accept the protection of security forces.

Mr. Ancram: Ideally – I hope this will happen now – there should be a United Nations presence, but within the secured area, where it can take advantage of the fact that it will be a harder target than in the unsecured area. The United Nations must be brought to understand that if it is to succeed in Iraq, it must accept the security umbrella of what I hope will be reinforced coalition military protection.

United Nations security will also be enhanced by greater co-operation from the Iraqi people themselves. I say again that that is more likely to be forthcoming if the civilian programme of reconstruction, particularly of basic amenities, progresses apace. The question we must ask is, will it be forthcoming? After three days, I have not yet heard anything concrete from the Government to suggest that there is a clear, structured and timetabled plan for physical reconstruction. As it is five months since the war ended, that is simply not good enough.

I want to make it clear that I have nothing but praise for the performance of our troops, who have done much to improve the lives of people in Iraq, not least building a new hospital in Basra. However, our troops are not there to act as surrogate civilian contractors, and I was surprised to hear the Foreign Secretary on BBC radio yesterday apparently suggesting that they were. That would be a travesty of their role and of their responsibilities.

I repeat that the dearth of civilian contracts is not a complaint raised by me but one that was raised with me not only by Iraqis, but also by senior British military sources when I was there. It is difficult, in the absence of a clear and stated programme and schedule of work, to avoid the impression that the Government are confused

[Mr. Ancram]

about how that programme will develop. We have been left asking whether there was a post-war plan, let alone what has been described as an exit strategy, but which I like to think of as a completion strategy.

In June this year the erstwhile Secretary of State for International Development admitted that

"the preparations for post-conflict were poor and we have got the chaos and suffering that we have got now".

Those are the words of the person who had been responsible for producing a plan, and that began to fill me with suspicion that a plan might not have been made.

The present Secretary of State, Lady Amos, admitted

"we would all say there are things we did not get right with respect to the planning and administration"

of the post-war regime.

On Monday, I asked the Foreign Secretary about reconstruction contracts. I now ask him again: how many civilian construction contracts were in place when I visited Iraq on 24 July? How many contracts are now in place? How many are in preparation, and how long is the period between project identification and the start of the work? Those are questions that were put to me, and we have still not had answers to them. I hope that we may have answers today.

A strong civilian programme of reconstruction will make an enormous contribution to stability on the streets, and will create a stronger environment within which the UN can play the important role that is increasingly open to it in Iraq. The same would be achieved by a demonstration by the Government that there is a strategy for reconstruction, for returning power to the Iraqi people as soon as possible, and on completion of those tasks for getting out. That would have a powerful effect on sceptical people in Iraq, and would also enhance stability on the ground.

Of course the most urgent problem at the moment is the rising wave of terrorism and insurgency. The priority must be to root that out and eliminate it. The Conservatives welcome the deployment of additional troops, although the pressure of overstretch in our armed forces cannot be ignored. We also welcome the programme of retraining and recommissioning Iraqi military and police forces. I believe that their role in combating both terrorism and lawlessness will be crucial. Similar training carried out in Afghanistan has given us some indications of how that can work effectively

If reconstruction, political development and the satisfactory provision of humanitarian aid are to be achieved, a secure environment must be achieved and maintained. I have no doubt that the UN can play an effective and vital role in such an environment.

I believe that a new chapter is opening in Iraq. I believe that what we did in the war was right. What we must not do now is squander the peace for lack of political direction or will. There are positive signs, which must offer hope.

On Sunday President Bush demonstrated a clear determination to make reconstruction work, and I hope that the Government here will do the same. Through the work that he did in Baghdad, Sergio Vieira de Mello showed that the UN can perform a vital role. We owe it to him, and to all the others who have died in the service of securing and building a better future for the people of Iraq, to get the peace right and to give them back their country, free of tyranny and free of the reign of fear. To do that, the Government must show more direction than they have hitherto, and simply get on with the job.

5.28 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on this subject in the House, having had the opportunity to do so elsewhere.

Like the Foreign Secretary, I thought the speech of the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) reasonable and sensible, as most of his speeches are. I believe he genuinely accepts that the Government are taking on board most of his views. Others, however, do not seem to accept that. They do not seem to be listening to what the Foreign Secretary, the Defence Secretary and the Minister of State, Department for International Development are saying. I am reminded of the old phrase "none so deaf as those that will not hear". I think that some Members, and some people outside, do not want to hear of the progress that is being made.

The most remarkable progress being made, in the circumstances, is the development of political pluralism. We have a governing council, and we now have a Cabinet with, at last, a Foreign Minister who speaks on behalf of Iraq. I have heard him on the radio. He is not one of Saddam Hussein's puppets. That is tremendous. The governing council represents people who used to be exiles, and people who stayed in Iraq under Saddam Hussein in the face of great difficulties - people of all creeds and backgrounds. But of course, we have to make progress, and as the Foreign Secretary rightly said, the United Nations has a vital role in preparing for, supervising and supporting the elections. I was delighted to hear the Foreign Secretary say that the Iraqi governing council will work out the timetable for those elections and for the transition to democracy. That seems right, and it will of course need the support of the coalition, at least in terms of security. So progress is being made on democratic development as well.

The resolution gives rise to the question of the command structure, and in that regard I again agree with the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife. Yesterday, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) yet again made a fool of himself in his flat-footed way. He believes that everything is black and white. The shadow Foreign Secretary will remember the old days of cowboy and Indian films, in which the cowboys always appeared in white and the baddies always appeared in black, just so that people could identify them. That is the simple world of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan.

When it became clear yesterday that everyone but the hon. Gentleman agreed that the force will not be blue-helmeted - even Kofi Annan says that the force will be not a UN one but a multinational one - the rug was pulled from under his argument. When I asked him who, other than the Americans, could lead such a multi-national force I suggested that perhaps the Lithuanians or the Poles could - he had no answer. It is a pity that innate anti-Americanism suffuses the views of

certain Members, who are to be found not only on the Opposition Benches—there are one or two on the Labour Benches as well, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway) being one of them.

Mr. Salmond: Given the right hon. Gentleman's view of the world, I am sure that he always has a white hat on. Some 24 hours after yesterday's debate, even he should have stumbled across the fact that the question is not whether there is a unified command structure, but to whom it reports. If he can, will he tell us now whether he thinks that a unified command structure—whichever the lead country—will report to the White House or to the Security Council? If he can answer that question he will, at last, rise in my estimation.

Mr. Foulkes: Like many of the critics, when the hon. Gentleman is defeated on one matter, he changes the subject. He has moved the goalposts: yesterday, he was talking about the military command structure, and it is of course sensible that the US lead that. Remember that anything that the hon. Gentleman says must be put in the context of his comments on the liberation of Kosovo, when he described the Government's action as an unpardonable folly. What he said was an unpardonable folly, as he will live to realise.

Mr. Salmond: Whom will the unified command structure report to: the White House or the United Nations Security Council? That is the question—can we now have an answer?

Mr. Foulkes: The situation is much more complicated than that. It is a matter for the Government to answer, and I am sure that the able Minister, who is doing the job that I used to do a few years ago, will have a reply.

Mr. Menzies Campbell *rose*

Mr. Foulkes: I shall continue, as a lot of people want to get in. On reconstruction, again, there are none so deaf as those that do not want to hear. On Monday, the Foreign Secretary made a statement on reconstruction—about hospitals, schools and everything that is improving. The shadow Foreign Secretary wants a neat plan to be drawn up. That is the latest soundbite that he has come up with—it is the Conservatives who are the original spinners. I must disagree with his proposal because any plan needs to be flexible. It must take account of the security situation, and of the sabotage of the oil pipelines and water supply. Such incidents have set back some of the existing plans and the progress that needs to be made.

People criticise the security forces for being unable to deal with some of the atrocities that have taken place. They ask how such things can happen. Of course they can happen in a country with Iraq's history. They even happen—tragically, as we saw yesterday—in Israel, a country with the most sophisticated intelligence system and a strong security and defence system. Israel could not guard against suicide bombers. How can we expect the embryonic state of Iraq to do so?

Mr. Ancram: This is not an academic question, but one that is real for people in Iraq. Somebody put it to me in this way: how can countries that put men on the moon 30 years ago not turn the lights back on in Baghdad and Basra in four months? All people are asking is to be told whether there is a plan. I have asked about something even more fundamental, the contracts for reconstruction that will put the lights back on Baghdad and Basra. That is what people want to know and we in this House must answer.

Mr. Foulkes: The right hon. Gentleman will get an answer; I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will give it in his reply. Fortunately, when the Americans were putting men on the moon, they did not have terrorists and Saddam Hussein supporters sabotaging their efforts. I welcome the conversion of the shadow Foreign Secretary and the Tories to involving the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Food Programme and all the agencies that are doing a good job in the reconstruction of Iraq. It was the Tories who took Britain out of UNESCO—not an indication of co-operation—and it needed a Labour Government to bring Britain back into it. We need no lectures on supporting the UN from the Conservatives.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): Will my right hon. Friend comment on the fact that if a plan and timetable were made available, it would be an invitation to terrorists to derail that plan?

Mr. Foulkes: I do not need to add to that extremely good point.

We have been asked why the French, Germans and Russians should now help in reconstruction. I can understand that they do not want to support any kind of resolution that retrospectively approves the action taken by the coalition; that is logical. But if they are really concerned about the interests of the people of Iraq, they must want to help reconstruct that ravaged country following the decades of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. Surely any country with concern about poor, under-privileged and disadvantaged people will want to do that and I hope that they will take account of that.

Like many hon. Members, my attention has been diverted from some of the main issues by the Hutton inquiry. I wish to put on record here, as I have done elsewhere, that most of my colleagues and I voted for action in Iraq not on the basis of one paragraph in one dossier. The 45 minutes claim appeared in only two out of thousands of parliamentary questions. I invite the critics to go back to the debates on Iraq and see how many times that matter was mentioned; it was not put forward as the reason for action. There was a range of other things and not just intelligence information: the continual flouting of UN resolutions by Saddam Hussein, the invasions of Kuwait and Iran and the killings and torture. Regime change was not the legal justification for action, but it is a very desirable outcome of it.

Mr. Simon Thomas: The right hon. Gentleman is correct of course in what he says about the 45 minutes claim in its specifics, but surely even he—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I remind all hon. Members that the motion deals with the role of the UN in the reconstruction of Iraq rather than the question of the 45 minutes.

Mr. Thomas: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I shall bear that in mind. I wanted to remind the right hon. Gentleman of a wider point, which I hoped would be in order—that the resignation speech of the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), the previous Foreign Secretary, absolutely demolished the case for war. Surely the right hon. Gentleman took that into account and we should—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I really must bring hon. Members back to the wording of the motion before the House.

Mr. Foulkes: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and may I say that the resignation speeches would have been treated with greater respect if they had been made a little earlier?

As to the decision to get rid of the dictator, I would like to quote an e-mail. E-mails are suddenly becoming dangerous things, but I shall quote one of many that I received in support of what I have said. It says as a postscript at the end:

"I notice that the media is not talking about Dr. Kelly's view that regime change was the only answer in Iraq."

That appeared in his sister's testimony to the Hutton inquiry, but as you said, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are now talking about the future.

Some of the critics ask where the weapons of mass destruction are—*[Interruption.]* They are doing it again. That implies that Saddam Hussein never had any weapons of mass destruction. That is the logic of what they say. Well, what did he use to invade Kuwait and Iran? With what did he kill the hundreds of thousands of people, many at Halabja? Why did he turn out the weapons inspectors in 1998 and refuse to let them back in? What did he have to hide? Saddam Hussein was very good at hiding weapons, particularly chemical and biological weapons, which are not difficult to hide.

In conclusion, today's debate is welcome and has been constructive, but I was not sure about the purpose of yesterday's debate. It seemed to me a desperate attempt by the official Opposition to show that they were indeed the official Opposition and would not be upstaged by the Liberal Democrats.

I finish by dealing with another criticism of those who supported the Government's action—that Saddam Hussein was only one dictator and that there were others around the world. I am just as concerned about Mugabe and about the regime in Burma. I have not heard much from Opposition Members about Burma or much support for Aung San Suu Kyi—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that we will not hear anything about Burma, because the motion before the House is about the reconstruction of Iraq.

Mr. Foulkes: You are quite right, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the reconstruction of Iraq would not have been possible unless we had got rid of Saddam Hussein. I am proud to be one of those who voted in favour of the action that did get rid of him.

5.43 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I was amused to hear the speech of the right hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes). I have heard a lot of him on the radio and seen him on television throughout much of the summer, and he has loyally advanced the Government's cause. I rather suspect, however, that he picked up the wrong notes when he came to today's debate. He picked up the "Let's support Alastair Campbell, Tony Blair and others in the frame under the Hutton inquiry" notes, rather than the notes that he should have made and thought about for today's debate on the Liberal Democrat motion and the Government's amendment. But there we are: he is an enjoyable Member of the House and we all listen to him with some amusement.

I have the greatest respect for the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) for the manner in which he advanced his case this afternoon and for the clever way in which he said that this afternoon's debate should not descend into party-political argument. That makes it hugely impolite to be rude about the Liberal Democrat motion. I shall not be impolite, but I will have one or two things to say about it.

The motion seeks to portray the Liberal Democrats as concerned about Iraq and its future. I have no doubt that they are, but they leave reality behind when it comes to the implementation of those concerns on the ground. It is unreal to expect that the process of political transition, including the restoration of sovereignty and democratic control to the Iraqi people, can be achieved under the auspices of the UN. It is unreal to demand that the entire responsibility for the economic reconstruction and rebuilding of Iraq should be under an Iraqi provisional Government, with or without the assistance of the United Nations, and it is unreal to replace existing security arrangements with a multinational force under a unified command obliged—I stress the word "obliged", which appears in the motion—to report to the Security Council.

I accept that the Liberal Democrats—at least, most of them—did not vote for the US-UK military operation earlier this year that led to the toppling of Saddam Hussein—

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): None of us did.

Mr. Garnier: Well at least they were consistent. I voted for the Government on that occasion, but I shall not now rehearse the arguments for and against the proposal to take military action, both because it has taken place and cannot be undone and because the facts that we now have to deal with—as those responsible for holding the Government to account—are somewhat different and demand different answers.

It is true to say that the UK's influence in the Security Council and the General Assembly has always been high, even if not always acceptable to every member of it. We are now in a position to exert even greater influence than before, because we are to assume the

presidency of the Security Council this month. We are helped by that and by having high calibre professional public servants posted to our delegation in New York. I am reminded that earlier this year, just before the war started, I was part of an all-party Anglo-American parliamentary group delegation to the UN, where I met Sir Jeremy Greenstock, the then UN ambassador, who is now—I am happy to say—posted to our delegation in Baghdad as the Government's special representative. He represents exactly the high level of professional assistance that Governments of all colours have been able to rely on. It was on that occasion also that I was fortunate enough to meet again Fiona Watson, whom I knew from when she worked in the Library. It was clear when I met her in February that she was full of enthusiasm for the work that she was doing as a public servant for the United Nations. It is all the more regrettable that such a star was snuffed out in August this year. It is therefore with some sadness that I take part in this debate, as well as with some happy memories, because it reminds me of that valuable and wonderful person.

It is also fair to say that our influence in the United Nations has been high historically because we have had the political and diplomatic will to ensure that our national interests are advanced and protected on the world stage, either by ourselves, as for example in the Falkland Islands, or with allies, as in the two Gulf wars. In this Gulf war, we were of course in a much smaller alliance, but that does not mean that our participation in a military operation was entirely selfish. Indeed, there is a powerful argument for saying that what we did with the US this year is what the United Nations should have done—no doubt through the agency of countries such as our own with the military capacity to perform the task—four, five or six years ago.

It has been said that we have no business becoming involved in Iraq, certainly without the sanction of a Security Council resolution specifically mandating military intervention. Some also argue that everything should be done under the auspices of the United Nations. I disagree. It is not the duty of this Government, or any Government of the United Kingdom, to export the diplomatic or military implementation of our foreign policy to other bodies, no matter how much those other bodies deserve our respect. The United Nations cannot achieve post-conflict success in Iraq, as the Liberal Democrats want, because it does not have the resources, the administration or the civilian and military personnel to do what the motion requires of it.

It is a truism that the UN works best—that it perhaps can only work at all—when the Security Council is united. In areas where the national interests of its membership do not coincide—as has been the case with Iraq before, during and after the military operation—it is foolish to expect anything much of value to flow from demands that the UN behave as though matters have been agreed when, in fact, they have not.

I agree with view of Edward Mortimer, the UN Secretary General's director of communications, as expressed in the July issue of "*World Today*". He said that the UN was

> "a mechanism for mobilising joint action by states and peoples towards agreed goals."

Merely adding the initials "UN" to any resolution, idea or early-day motion solves nothing.

Having got that off my chest, I must say that I do not believe that the success of the UN in Iraq—or anywhere else—should be measured only in terms of its relationship with the US, and in particular with the present Administration of President George Bush. Clearly, the UN's effectiveness will be governed to a large extent by its relationship with its most powerful member. However, I deprecate the ritualistic denigration of the US Government and their officials as though that were a well argued and well thought-out position that advanced the cause of peace and prosperity in Iraq.

The US is not beyond criticism, of course, but its overall record in this matter is worthy of more than begrudging recognition. Praise is due to a country, and a people, that has done and prevented what the UN should have done and prevented some time ago. I for one am happy that the Government recognise that our strategic interests are well served by a close alliance with the US. It is worth remembering that the US has spent more in treasure and human lives on trying to achieve a satisfactory resolution of the problems in Iraq than any other UN member. I say that even though from time to time we have had fundamental disagreements with the US on matters not just of detail but of wider policy.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): The hon. and learned Gentleman and I, among others, spent some time in Basra earlier this year, and have seen the Iraqi people's response to our forces. Does he agree that a ritualistic hatred of the US is stirred up in some Arab nations? Does he also agree that one way to undermine that ritualistic dislike is to give the UN a broader role, so that other Muslim and Arab countries can play a part in the peace-making process in Iraq?

Mr. Garnier: I am not sure that being rude about the US encourages Arab nations to assist in the current problems that we seek to solve. The hon. Gentleman is right: he and I did go to the British sector in southern Iraq, but I did not conclude from what I learned there that it was sensible to denigrate—ritualistically or otherwise—the activities of the US in Baghdad and northern Iraq. The US is doing a tremendously difficult job in tremendously difficult circumstances. Some will say that that serves them right for going there, but I do not think that that is a very helpful attitude. I am sure that that is not what the hon. Gentleman meant by his intervention, but I fear that many outside the House, if not within it, fall into the trap of believing that being rude about the US is enough to salve their consciences when it comes to the problems faced by the Iraqi people.

I am not against what the UN is doing; or what it seeks to achieve, but we must recognise its practical limitations. By all means let us try to achieve a sensible Security Council resolution, especially if that sets out a timetable for drafting a new constitution and for elections, and if it recognises that the armed forces present in Iraq must be under the overall military command of the US, even though troops and civilian assistance from other interested countries would be welcome. However, all our efforts will be severely inhibited, and might even come to nought, if we cannot

[Mr. Garnier]

rebuild the civilian economy quickly. Only when the economy starts working will we see an end to political unrest.

5.54 pm

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I was last in Iraq in June and I hope to return in a few days' time.

Yesterday, I held an interesting meeting with someone whom some hon. Members may have read—the internet diarist, the Baghdad blogger. He began his diary in the middle of last year, before the war started, and continued throughout the war, apart from one point when he was disrupted. He is an ordinary Iraqi who has lived there for quite a long time. Anyone who wants to know what everyday life in Iraq is like at present should look him up on the internet. I cannot believe some of the things that I read in the papers compared with what I saw when I was there in June; nor can I believe the general gloom that pervades many of the reports or that the whole of Iraq is in chaos—it is not. Many honourable colleagues have made that point strongly today.

I agree with those who have said that we need a publicly stated, long-term commitment to the rebuilding of Iraq. The success of such a project will be seen in security, infrastructure and civil society. One of the mistakes that we, or others, made in places such as Afghanistan was to raise expectations and walk away. We must never do that again and certainly not in Iraq, where, on so many occasions, the Kurds, the Shi'a and other groups were left dangling at the end of a string—literally—because of the repercussions taken by the regime against people who rose up after encouragement from the Americans and others.

I want to talk about Sergio Vieira de Mello for a moment. He was the epitome of the UN. I saw him working in East Timor where he made a magnificent job of restoring that country to democracy. It is tragic that his hand will not be seen in the evolving future of Iraq. I worked with him on the protection of graves in Afghanistan and, at my invitation, he came to the House to speak just after his appointment as head of the human rights division.

I also mention Ayatollah Hakim. After so many years of exile, it is tragic that a moderate Shi'a leader should come back to his country and be killed. His was a voice of moderation. I met him once, and I am sorry about what happened to him and to the many others who have died in similar attacks.

There is an urgent need for the Coalition Provisional Authority to improve security in the country. Failure to do so will create problems for all the authority's other policy goals and objectives. The lack of order can be seen in targeted assassinations, the destruction of the infrastructure and the loss of civilian and military life. If the CPA is to regain control of security in Iraq, it must work with the Iraqi population, the vast majority of whom welcomed the end of the dictatorship. Laudable though the policy of de-Ba'athification is, it should be applied with greater flexibility. No one can be better at sorting out the most prominent Ba'athists than the Iraqis themselves.

One of the first CPA meetings that I attended in June was between some of the women of Iraq and Ambassador Bremer. As I was waiting to go into the room I could hear people inside shouting at one another. Afterwards, I found out that they were denouncing the Ba'athists who were present, which is why the people of Iraq are best equipped to decide who should be in and who should be out.

As I said on Monday, the disbanding of the former Iraqi army before new structures were in place shows how rigid cleansing could create problems in the future. By discarding all members of the former armed forces, the CPA is losing local knowledge that could help in security matters and is creating potential recruits for those who want to destabilise the new Iraq. That CPA policy should be reconsidered immediately.

On Monday, I mentioned a general who is the brother of an Iraqi friend of mine who lives in Wales. The general told his brother that he could get between 50 and 100 senior officers to act as liaison between the coalition and the Iraqi people. He had sent a message to Ambassador Bremer, but had not received a reply. He also said that, every morning at 5 o'clock, he joins a queue of ex-army people of all ranks waiting to be paid. There are sometimes thousands of them standing out on the streets in the heat, waiting to get their money. Day after day, most of them come away with no money in their hands. There is no sense at all in getting rid of the army and not paying them the money that they are owed and not ensuring that they understand what is happening to their pensions. The general said that the queue was extremely demeaning because those involved are not even allowed to have refreshments, as the vendors are not allowed to walk down the queue. People of all ranks are standing there, which is, again, a considerable recipe for disaster.

An army has been disbanded with all its skills and weaponry, but there is surprise when people are shot. At one time, $500 a head was being offered in Baghdad for shooting at American soldiers. If people have no money in their pockets and do not know how they will feed their families, not many of them would turn down that offer, I am afraid. That is the reality, and it is ridiculous that that situation has been allowed to continue.

Last night, coalition forces—the Americans—burst into the house of the very general whom I mentioned on Monday, and all his family and his house were searched. I found it a curious coincidence that I mentioned that man on Monday and that his house was attacked last night. He is not the only one.

I do not know what the level of intelligence is, but I am sometimes quite suspicious of it when I hear some of these stories. During the holidays, I was contacted by a person in London who is the daughter-in-law of a woman in Baghdad. Her husband had gone back to Baghdad to find out what had happened to his mother. Exactly the same thing had happened, but she had been arrested. She was aged 73. She was in a house on her own, with no other family around. People burst in at night, took all her money, jewellery and papers, and then took her away. She was kept in custody for more than three and a half weeks, which is illegal.

That woman has now been released, but only because I spent considerable time during the holidays sending e-mails—I have them here—to someone on Ambassador

Bremer's staff in Baghdad to try to find out where the woman was. She was held in Camp Cropper, where the major criminals are being held. People such as Tariq Aziz were taken to Camp Cropper. What was that woman doing there? What was the intelligence that put her there? Why has she now been released—I am very glad that she has been—without any of her papers, her money or her jewellery being returned? I understand from her daughter-in-law that she is quite frail, that she needs help and that her family wants to bring her to this country for a month or so.

Mr. Dalyell: My hon. Friend and I have had many deep differences of opinion on this issue, but I am deeply sympathetic to what she has been saying. Will she use her influence with the Ministry of Oil and the people whom she meets, because there is an idea that much of the destruction of pipelines that has taken place has been facilitated by disgruntled former members of the Ministry of Oil who are desperate for employment and doing it out of revenge? Will she also pursue an issue that she has often pursued in the past: bringing people to trial? In particular, whatever anyone thinks about Tariq Aziz, he ought to be brought to trial.

Ann Clwyd: I shall answer some of the points that my hon. Friend makes. Obviously of equal importance to the things that I have been mentioning is the delivery of basic services to the Iraqi people. The supply of water and electricity should be a priority. Of course, it is true to say that there have been many attacks on pipelines, pylons and the things that bring those services to people. It is incredible that, during the hot weather, people have not been able to get fuel for their air conditioning, fridges or the things that they need to make life more bearable, and something needs to be done about that very quickly.

On my hon. Friend's second point, I was going to mention that Human Rights Watch has in the last few days called for the draft resolution being discussed by the United Nations Security Council to advance the cause of justice for Saddam Hussein's victims and for those charged with certain crimes. The resolution, which will of course be critical for mobilising international support and assistance for the stabilisation and reconstruction of Iraq, currently makes no mention of justice for serious past human rights crimes. That is a mistake, and I do not know what the argument for that is. The investigation and prosecution of crimes is essential.

Indict has now been asked to provide victim statements to the CPA, because, over a six-year period, we collected enough such statements to incriminate the 10 leading members of the regime, some of whom are in custody, some of whom are dead, and one of whom is yet to be captured. Those are people on whom we hold evidence. I do not, however, intend to hand that over to the CPA until I know what system of justice will be put in place. We have promised the victims from whom we have taken statements that those will be handed over only to a responsible authority. I do not know who that will be at the CPA. I would be happy to hand that over if an international tribunal were to be set up, of which the UN and several others are in favour, but it has been pushed to one side as being too expensive—that is one reason that I have heard for saying that an international tribunal is not necessary for Iraq.

Such an international investigation is still important, however. Apparently, there is an idea to pass the matter over to the judiciary in Iraq. Cases of the kind that we envisage would test even the most established judicial system, however, let alone one corrupted by years of international isolation and abuse of power. The existing Iraqi judiciary has little or no experience advocating criminal cases that last more than a few days, which is a far cry from the complexity of trials involving charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. I would be glad to hear whether the Government have any idea what is to be done to set up a proper system of justice, because the victims of the regime and their families are owed that for what has happened to them.

One of the things that I saw working in Iraq, for which I have been able to get help, was the free prisoners association in Baghdad for former prisoners of the regime. Immediately after the war was over, it collected documents from private houses, schools and prisons, and the files and documents in their thousands have been piled up to the ceilings in the house of a former head of the security service—the Mukhabarat—in Iraq. The names, prisons, date of execution and method of execution of all those victims are meticulously being entered into computers. Long lines of people can be seen trying to get into that building to find out whether the person of whom they have not heard for many years is on that list. It is a harrowing scene and I am glad that the coalition, with a lot of push from here, has managed to get that process operating. We must ensure that it continues to operate not only in Baghdad but in other major cities in Iraq where it is hoped that similar free prisoners' associations will be set up. They should be supported in their work of cataloguing the disappeared of Saddam's rule.

I agree with those who have said that there are many positive signs in Iraq, particularly the Iraq governing council, the naming of Ministers and the first steps in the writing of a new Iraqi constitution. I mention Latif Rasheed, who is now Minister with responsibilities for water. He is a board member of Indict and is well known to us. Hoshyar Zebari is an old friend and he is now the Foreign Minister. There are many others who are now playing their part in the future of their country.

Latif Rasheed called on the international community only a week or so ago to stop treating Iraqis like children. Let the Iraqis help their own country. Give them the opportunity to do so, and I am certain that we shall see an Iraq that we will be proud to say that we had some part in bringing about.

6.11 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): It is a genuine pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), for whom I have a great deal of respect on these matters. The hon. Lady paints a balanced picture of what is happening in Iraq. As the Secretary-General of the United Nations said recently, it is an extraordinary situation when two founder members of the UN—indeed, two Security Council members—find themselves in occupation of another founder member without an express mandate from the UN. In the long term, that situation is clearly not sustainable.

[Mr. David Heath]

I opposed military action at the time it was taken. I have not resiled from that view. I still believe that what we saw at that time was a failure of diplomacy. Indeed, it was a failure of diplomacy through the UN. When the Foreign Secretary talks about his genuine efforts to find a consensus on the second resolution, he omits to say that he was seeking a consensus on the way to engage in military conflict rather than a consensus on how effectively to disarm and deal with Iraq with the agreement of other members of the Security Council. That was the basic failure from which so much else has flowed.

I am delighted to say that some of the consequences that I most feared from the start of the military conflict have not come to pass. I was concerned that there would be a general and rapid destabilisation of the region. That has not happened, and I hope that it will not. I was concerned that we would see the advent of serious inter-ethnic and inter-denominational conflict in Iraq. That may be on its way, but it is not happening at the moment.

I was worried about the increasing disjunction in international relationships and its effect on international bodies such as the UN and other treaty organisations of which the UK is a member. I think that I am more justified in saying that that did happen and that there is lasting damage—not irremediable damage—to those relationships.

I thought that there would be an increased likelihood of terrorism. Sadly, I believe that to be the case. I find it an odd and specious argument that somehow it is encouraging that there should be a greater number of terrorists now operating within Iraq than there was because that gives us the opportunity to eliminate them. I believe that the conflict itself has spawned an increase in terrorism, and that we shall regret that in future.

I was concerned that the international community would be diverted from its fight against international terrorism, particularly the al-Qaeda network. I believe that not only has there been a diversion not only of resources but of attention from an enemy that is a real and present threat. It may indeed strike in 45 minutes, either now or at any other time, and it requires a great deal more attention.

I believed that there would be difficulties creating and maintaining peace in Iraq. Those difficulties were not only foreseeable but foreseen, not perhaps by those whose supine posture required them to accept anything that came from the White House or the Prime Minister but by people with a more intelligent view, who were asking what the exit strategy was, what the programme for reconstruction was, and how we should regard the transition after the conflict to a democratic Iraq. I am worried that many of those questions have still not been answered.

We must, however, deal with the position as it is now. Some people argue, both outside and, indeed, inside the House, that we should say no to the military reinforcements requested by our commanders in the field. Indeed, they say that we should remove our forces altogether from the Iraq theatre. I find that position incomprehensible. Even those of us who were desperately against the war because we feared its consequences and believed that it was unjustified owe it not only to our forces who are stationed in Iraq in dangerous circumstances and people providing humanitarian support there but to the Iraqi people themselves to provide the greatest possible level of security. The pacification of Iraq is just as important, albeit of a different order, as the initial conflict to remove Saddam Hussein's regime. It takes different skills and different troops—it does not require the elite assault troops who were so successful in the initial stages. It requires different techniques, but it is desperately important that it now takes place.

Inevitably, some people will engage in a certain amount of schadenfreude at the fact that the United States has had to go to the United Nations to ask for help and support in Iraq, which it earlier spurned. Some people say that the American and British Governments should sort out the problems to which they were party in the conflict. I think that that position is wrong and inappropriate, and is not espoused by nations and people in this country who want a peaceful and democratic Iraq with a reasonable degree of reconstruction. It is essential that that is based on UN participation.

There have been problems, as the American Administration have periodically changed their position, both before and since the conflict. There seems to be a tug-of-war between the Department of Defence and the State Department, which has not yet been resolved. On some occasions, one Department is in the ascendancy, but on others it is the other. Occasionally, there seems to be a lack of communication within the US Administration and between the United States and the United Kingdom. I was deeply shocked by the Defence Secretary's revelation on Monday that he last spoke to Donald Rumsfeld on 29 July, which is a dereliction of duty of a high order. I am surprised that that has not been alluded to more often in our debates this week.

Nevertheless, if the American Government are now in the position of needing to take a more multilateral approach, I applaud and encourage that. I want them to be supported by the United Kingdom and other countries, especially on the Security Council.

That means that we need a new resolution. It should not be imposed by ultimatum, but negotiated in the way in which United Nations resolutions should always be negotiated—by seeking the support of other members and finding common positions. Such a resolution needs to be based on a guarantee of the financial and logistic support that, in many cases, only the United States of America can provide, and that guarantee must be secured for the long and not the short term. As the hon. Member for Cynon Valley said, disruption of a country's civil arrangements has too often been followed by a disregard of the consequences.

We need the resolution and the engagement of the United Nations because we need a better mix of military forces. We must strongly encourage the involvement of Muslim-based forces in Iraq. It is important that we have an exit strategy and some blueprint for future development in Iraq. That must be based not on opportunities for American, European Union or other business people to make a quick buck at the expense of the Iraqi people, but on a genuine programme for reconstruction that encourages everyone who can

participate to do so. I believe that we need a new commitment from this Government and from the American Government to genuine co-operation in future.

I happen to have picked a United Nations tie to wear today. The decision was purely subliminal; I do not think that I consciously intended to choose it. I think that I purchased it the last time I visited the United Nations. I made the visit at the request of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office at the time of the negotiations and met Dr. Blix, which I found extremely useful. I believe in the United Nations. I do not believe that it is a perfect organisation, but I believe that it is probably the least bad organisation to do the job that we want it to do in a very far from perfect world.

6.22 pm

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): I thank the Liberal Democrats for allowing some of their parliamentary time for this important debate. They bravely and rightly opposed our going to war in Iraq, but some of my colleagues would say that were wrong so quickly to support the war once it had been declared. They have not proposed any timetable for the end of the occupation and still favour US leadership of the occupation. I think that that is misguided, as is their faith in the puppet, hand-chosen provisional Government involving Mr. Bremer, which has very little legitimacy. That is why I shall not support their motion.

I think that the war was wrong, and I voted against it whenever the occasion arose. It was started without the clear second UN resolution that we were promised and Iraq was not a threat in any realistic understanding of the term. There was no evidence of a clear connection with al-Qaeda—a diversion from the real war on terror that has to be fought. There were no weapons of mass destruction. If there were any, they would have been discovered long before now. The UN inspectors were doing a good job and should have been given the extra time they asked for. The action was not a liberation, as we were told, but an occupation, as is acknowledged in the latest UN resolution.

The war has not impacted favourably in terms of finding a solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, although it was claimed that it would do so. The dossiers were flawed and inaccurate for all those reasons, and were not a proper justification for war. In fact, I think that the war was long planned by the United States and had probably long been committed to in private by our Prime Minister. The outcome has been the killing of about 30,000 people, the overwhelming majority of whom were Iraqis. The war turned a police state into a collapsed state; it was a victory for crime and anarchy and a boost to terrorism. It has made westerners more of a target today than they were previously.

The security situation is dire, with as many US and British troops being killed as during the war itself. Civilians are being killed—we do not know in what numbers, because very little information is available. Civil liberties and the state of the nation's economy are at the same level, or lower, as they were under Saddam Hussein. Huge costs are being incurred—billions of pounds—and we are getting precious little information about how much it is costing us. There is a political cost, too, because it blows the Government, whom I want to succeed, off course.

Huge resentment is building up in Iraq, as was summarised by the demonstrators who said, "Thanks—now leave." That is the approach that should be adopted. As the cost rises—in terms of lives, as well—the call is for other countries to engage in a significant way, but making that decision would mean risking the lives of their soldiers, and they will not do so unless the operation is under UN auspices and they have a full say in how to deal with the situation. The United States should, therefore, cede control to the United Nations, but President Bush is not prepared to do that, as he said in his speech only a couple of days ago. Those countries will find that many of their people say, "The US and the United Kingdom created the mess—let them get out of it themselves." The neo-cons who are close to the US Administration engaged in a lot of hissing and hurling of abuse at those nations, as well as at the United Nations. US troops are being killed as a result. There is a powerful case for the US ceding overall control to the UN; otherwise, it remains an occupation. That situation is damaging to the UN as well, because it is tied into it and is seen as being synchronised with the US. That puts it at risk.

I am not in favour of more troops going to Iraq. As I said on Monday, they not only add to the cost, but become additional targets. They act as a crutch by discouraging Iraqis from coming forward to govern and administer themselves. Sending more troops effectively subsidises the United States, particularly its huge defence budget. What is in it for the countries that are being asked to do so? They are liable to be to be abused, dominated or treated as a competitor rather than as a proper partner. Last Friday, I heard a news item about the poor people of Oregon, who suffer from high unemployment, very low family incomes and welfare cuts: they have effectively been abandoned as a result of the policies of the Bush Administration. If we are going to subsidise the United States, let us do it through international aid support to those poor people of Oregon; at least that would not mean loss of life among our troops in Iraq.

I favour a proper and swift handover to the Iraqis, which means having elections at an early date. If that results in Shi'as being elected, so be it. I cannot see how that would be worse than having puppets such as those in the provisional Government. I admit that some of them are good people, but they are hand-picked by the United States and lack legitimacy. One, Mr. Chalabi, was a proven fraudster in activities involving millions of pounds in Jordan, yet he is the United States' chosen one—the Pentagon's man.

The Prime Minister talked about a prosperous and stable Iraq. I share that objective, but I am worried about even that, because if it remains a US puppet it could become a threat to its neighbours. I want a prosperous and stable Iraq, but not with such an agenda. Aid must flow into the infrastructure, and the US and the UK must be the principal donors. The electricity and water supplies must be restored. I agree with the shadow Foreign Secretary's comments that there must be work for the Iraqis. It is deplorable that more than 50 per cent. are currently unemployed. Proper rebuilding, which is truly internationalised and not a greed-fest for US corporations, must take place.

I do not understand why the Liberian model—the solution, not the events of the recent past—should not apply. Liberia requested 15,000 troops to stabilise the

[Harry Cohen]

situation, which was ignored across the globe. However, the troops were African, with the US in the background. Why cannot there be an Arab-led UN force in Iraq, albeit financed by the UK and the US, but with troops from those countries in the background? The solution must be truly internationalised, through the UN, until it is truly "Iraqi-ised". That should happen as swiftly as possible.

6.31 pm

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): The debate has been interesting and useful. I shall begin by commenting on some of the contributions.

I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) is not in his place because I should like to ask, "What is he on?" He accused some of us of not listening to the good news from Iraq—perhaps that is because there is so little to hear. However, when Armageddon has come and the world is in tatters, one could imagine him proclaiming, like a latter-day Dr. Pangloss:

"All is for the best in the best of all possible worlds."

He never perceives the downside of anything. That makes for a wonderful personality but not always for an honest contribution.

The hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) made a thoughtful speech, which made me think a lot, but he appears to be having a love affair with the USA. As my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross) pointed out, the rest of the world is not having a love affair with the USA, and that creates problems when it is in Iraq and running things.

I welcomed the speech of the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) and was interested in her comments. It was a thoughtful contribution from someone who knows Iraq well. She emphasised the terrible lack of security and the disorganisation in the country and rightly stressed the terrible humanitarian position.

My hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) said that he was relieved that the position had not affected the stability of the region. However, recent events in respect of the middle east road map lead me to believe that stability has been affected. I shall comment on that in more detail later. The position in Iraq has increased terrorism and the risk of it, not decreased it.

It is no accident that we have held two debates in two days on Iraq. It reflects the fact that the Opposition and the British people no longer trust the Government, mainly because of their conduct since 11 September 2001 and their perceived—I emphasise that word—adherence to the policies of George Bush and his Administration. That adherence necessitated at least exaggerating—I am being kind today—the need for a war with Iraq. I shall not go into that because many hon. Members have done so.

Another factor is the Government's failure to understand the need to find a way to peace in the middle east, or to realise that if failing to obey UN resolutions over many years means war on Iraq, the same must apply to Israel. That is how the issue is seen in much of the Arab world, whether we like it or not. The middle east problem should have been our first priority, not Iraq. I spent a memorable week in the middle east with the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) earlier in the summer, when the troubles were beginning to escalate again. This is not the time for a debate on the middle east, but I trust that the Government will allow us to have one soon.

Today, the Prime Minister referred to a "magnificent" victory in Iraq. Yesterday, the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the hon. Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin), was very upbeat about the situation. He certainly over-egged it—or should I say "sexed it up" a bit? He told us that reconstruction was taking place all over Iraq and that hospitals were open—never mind what is going on inside them. He said that children were going to school, and that electricity and water were on tap; the lion was truly lying down with the lamb. Whom was he kidding? Why, if everything is so good over there, has the Norwegian Refugee Council withdrawn all international staff from Iraq owing to the difficult security situation and the weak position of the United Nations? Why has the Red Cross announced a reduction of staff in Baghdad? Why has Oxfam withdrawn all its international staff from Iraq and requested that the UN be given a greater role? Why have the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund put their work there on hold, and the World Food Programme transferred its functions from Iraq to Jordan and Kuwait, leaving only core staff in Baghdad? Even Balfour Beatty has said that it is backing off from its construction contracts in Iraq. That does not suggest a very peaceful situation.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dr. Tonge: Certainly. I am so glad to see the right hon. Gentleman back in his place.

Mr. Foulkes: May I interrupt the hon. Lady's catalogue of woe, which is very depressing, if not absolutely accurate? I gather that, before I was able to get back into the Chamber, she was expressing concern for my health. I can tell her that the only thing that is inspiring me is naturally produced adrenalin.

Dr. Tonge: I am glad that we have the answer to that question, but I should warn the right hon. Gentleman that adrenalin causes a rapid rise in blood pressure and can be very dangerous. If he would like to see me afterwards, I will give him a full consultation.

The situation in Iraq is the result of little planning for the aftermath of the war, despite all the questions asked of the Department for International Development and the Foreign Office in recent months. I want to pay tribute, however, to the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman), who led the charge on these issues as long ago as last autumn, despite the enthusiasm of her Front Benchers for the rush to war with Iraq. She was there asking question after question, and holding meetings to discuss what was to happen after the war. She got no answers; I got no answers. There has been a failure to recognise that we had to win the peace. It should have been understood that establishing the rule of law was essential in any post-war situation: security, security, security. That has not happened.

A recent Channel 4 survey found that 47 per cent. of Iraqis believe that life is worse now than before the war, and that gossip abounds. We might think that gossip is a trivial thing, but it is very important in a country where communications are not good and there is not a great deal of good radio and television. The stories go round. The old one, of course, is that the USA did it for the oil, or that they did it for Israel. A Channel 4 journalist told me last night, up in one of the Committee rooms, that an Iraqi had told her that Saddam Hussein was in league with George Bush and was currently at his ranch in Texas. It is all nonsense; it is all very funny.

Mr. Foulkes: It sounds like my right hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West and Royton (Mr. Meacher).

Dr. Tonge: People could be killed any time, accidentally or on purpose, so when all these stories are passed around they make the situation seem even more fragile and dangerous. Perceptions and gossip are all-important. That is why the United Nations must be given more authority. If the whole episode had been conducted under the auspices of the United Nations, the British people might still trust their Government.

Whether or not the conspiracy theories of the film director Michael Moore in his brilliant book "Stupid White Men", which hon. Members will have read, or of the right hon. Member for Oldham, West and Royton (Mr. Meacher) are true, the way to reassure the Iraqis is to return control of the oilfields to them via the United Nations, and to ensure that aid programmes, reconstruction and contracts that are being handed out are handled by the United Nations, not the United States of America. That was promised to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Clare Short) while the war was being pursued, and was one of the reasons for her resignation.

The governance of Iraq must be by Iraqis; it is a secular state. I had some sympathy with what the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) said. The Iraqi people do not trust the ethnically balanced governing council of Iraq, because it was handpicked by the Americans. The United Nations should take political control in Iraq as soon as possible in the transition to the election of a proper Iraqi Government.

It is absolutely essential that the United Nations be given a high profile. I accept that that will probably not lessen guerrilla activity in the short term as it is too late, but it will surely get the support of the Iraqi people and the Arab world, which is what is needed now.

In a knee-jerk way, I would love to say, like several hon. Members, "UK troops out. The Bush Administration have made their bed in Iraq and now they must lie in it." That was a favourite expression of my mother's – leave them to it, serve them right, teach them a lesson, walk away. However, deep down I know that cannot happen; it is the coward's way out, as was eloquently stated by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell).

The Government, supported by many Labour and Conservative Members, went into Iraq in our name. They had the majority and we have to live with that, but because of that decision the Iraqi people have had more suffering inflicted on them, to add to that in the 20-odd years under Saddam Hussein. I am persuaded that we must allow longer, and try harder, to make life better for the Iraqi people. We cannot abandon them now.

It is time, however, to teach the George Bush Administration a lesson in world co-operation. They have withdrawn from so many international agreements and treaties. Sadly, the USA is seen as the most selfish nation on earth, and that is not fair on all the good Americans. It is now pay-back time. The Bush Administration must work with the United Nations and the European Union or face the consequences.

6.44 pm

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Hilary Benn): This has been an important and an extremely thoughtful debate about an issue that is of great concern to those on both sides of the House. I welcome the spirit and the tone of all the contributions, including that of the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram)—I shall respond to one or two points that he raised—because they reflect the scale of the challenge that we face. As several hon. Members said, whichever Lobby we went into on 18 March, whichever view we took, all hon. Members recognise what needs to be done now to help the Iraqi people.

The second feature of the debate has been the number of contributions reflecting Members' personal experience and commitment over, in some cases, many years, and the visits they have made to Iraq since the end of the conflict. Let me particularly acknowledge the part played by my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), who has been tireless in her advocacy of the rights of the people of Iraq. In the context of dealing with past human rights abuses, let me say that she has played a particular role in supporting those who, day after day, are trying to catalogue, uncover, report and bear witness to the reality of the 25 years or so of Saddam's regime. As she knows, it is important for there to be a process enabling the people responsible for those atrocities to be brought to justice. Ultimately, of course, it is for the Iraqi people to determine how that should be done, but as the UN Secretary-General said in July in a report to the Security Council, part of the role of the UN assistance mission is

"engaging and supporting national dialogue and institutions to address accountability for past human rights violations".

My hon. Friend's speech also gave us a sense of balance in terms of what is happening in Iraq today. We must not understate the scale of the challenge that we face—no one seeks to do that—but we should acknowledge that, while what is shown on our television screens and described in our newspapers gives part of the picture, the most newsworthy part, other things are going on in Iraq.

Two constituents with family in Iraq visited my surgery on Saturday. When I asked "What is it like?", I was told "It is not quite as it is reported in the newspapers". The House should recognise that many things are happening at present—that aspects of normal life are being restored, but that there are real difficulties that we must address.

Reconstruction was mentioned by the right hon. Member for Devizes and others. Of course we all recognise the problems of, in particular, restoring electricity and water supplies speedily. The Iraqi

[Hilary Benn]

people's expectations are understandably high. The infrastructure is old and prone to breaking down—in some cases it has not worked for years—and pylons and pipes are being sabotaged and looted. My right hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) was right to make that point. He asked, legitimately, why the restoration was taking so much longer than it did after what happened in 1991. Part of the answer is that Saddam used very different measures to deal with those who transgressed the rule of his country. That is not a route that we intend to take.

Let me say to my right hon. Friend in all honesty that the charge that nothing is being done is simply not justified. The Department has supported an extensive programme of practical help and reconstruction, much of which—as my right hon. Friend knows—has been implemented by the UN and other agencies. Why have we provided funds? Because having the UN agencies on the ground is the most effective way of ensuring that the work is done, and done quickly. I shall return to that point later.

Today I placed in the Library a note giving updated details of our support, including the £20 million programme of investment in the restoration of power and infrastructure in the multinational division south-east area for which we have a particular responsibility—a responsibility that we accept.

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to the Minister for his answer, which takes us forward a little, but what I am trying to ascertain is how many civilian engineering contracts have been issued. We are not talking about work that can be done by soldiers or aid agencies; we are talking about major engineering work. How many contracts have actually been signed?

Hilary Benn: The right hon. Gentleman anticipates my very next point, on the question of contracts. So that we get a sense of the scale of support, it might help the House if I point out that DFID has made funding agreements with 11 United Nations agencies, which are worth more than £76 million; provided support for the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, to the tune of £32 million; provided support for 14 non-governmental organisations, which is worth more than £5 million; and established 10 contracts with commercial companies, which are worth more £32 million. Many of those funding agreements and contracts themselves involve multiple subcontracts for work on the ground in Iraq.

I shall make available further details of the programme that we are embarking on in the multinational division south-east, which is directed at improving the infrastructure. I acknowledge, given today's contributions, the strength of feeling and concern that exists throughout the House that we should be seen to be making progress, particularly in that part of the country in which we have direct responsibility, and in which the people look to us for progress.

My second point on reconstruction is that a lot more help is going to be needed, as hon. Members recognise. That is why the donors conference, which is scheduled to take place in Madrid at the end of October, will be so important. In particular, it will draw on the work of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, in terms of their assessment of Iraq's reconstruction and financial support needs.

To get a greater sense of balance, it might help if I tell the House what the executive director of the World Food Programme, Mr. James Morris, had to say about DFID's role in a letter to us of 5 September:

"Since early March 2003, DFID has been an integral partner for WFP in providing specialists in customs and air movement. This ensured that the UN could fully resume its work in Iraq in the shortest time possible.

On behalf of WFP, I would like again to express our gratitude for the magnificent assistance provided by DFID to our work".

I put that on the record simply to show that the WFP, a UN agency, has played a really important part—with our support and that of other donors—in ensuring the provision of food to the people of Iraq, a country in which, we should remember, 60 per cent. of the people have been dependent on food aid.

Finally on reconstruction, in a plea for perspective, balance and understanding I should point out that it is very unfortunate if the charge be laid that somehow nothing is being done. Above all, that is a slur on the hard work and dedication of many DFID and Government staff. They have been working very long hours in difficult conditions in Baghdad and Basra to make things happen, and, as we know since the UN bombing, at some personal risk. They deserve our thanks and support for the work that they are doing and will do, and I want to place on the record my thanks, and that of Baroness Amos, particularly to the staff in our Department.

When we discuss, rightly, the vital role that we want the UN to play in the reconstruction of Iraq, we need to recognise the vital role that it has already been playing in helping Iraq and the Iraqi people to build a new future. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary emphasised that point in his speech, particularly when he referred to Security Council resolution 1483. The resolution made it very clear how wide-ranging the UN mandate in Iraq should be: including the political process, human rights, humanitarian assistance, economic reconstruction, and reform of the police, judiciary and civil administration. All of those elements need to be in place, alongside the restoration of water and power supplies, if a country is to function effectively.

The UN agencies were active even while military action was taking place, ensuring the continuity of humanitarian supplies. Since then, the UN and its agencies, particularly the special representative, about whom I shall say more a little later, have done a great deal to fulfil that vital role—until the terrorist attack on the Canal hotel on 19 August that killed so many people.

The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) talked about the consequence of the current security situation and the impact of the bombing on the UN and other NGOs working in the country. Inevitably, and quite rightly, the UN has had to review its own arrangements for security and its presence on the ground. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made clear the offer of support that we have given to the UN in that process. I made the same point in a conversation with Ramiro Lopez da Silva, who is in charge of the operation, when I spoke to him in Baghdad three days after the bomb went off.

Once the UN has been able to deal with those concerns about security and to make appropriate provision for its staff, we need to support those members of staff in their return and to support the many NGOs that have been playing an important role in helping the Iraqi people in practical ways.

The third and, without doubt, the most important thing that has come out of the debate is the recognition that progress on security and on the political process need to go hand in hand; a point made forcefully by the hon. Member for Richmond Park. Progress on the handover of political power to the Iraqis and on the restoration of basic services depends on improving security, which is why the Government have taken the steps announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on Monday.

We have to welcome and support the resolve of the international community in the face of the terrorist attacks to contribute further to guaranteeing security in Iraq. That is precisely what the draft resolution—which Members on both sides have welcomed—does in calling for a new mandate with a multinational force coming under a single chain of command with existing coalition forces. Almost all Members recognise the need for that structure. In answer to the specific question about the reporting arrangements, the draft resolution makes it clear that the command structure would report to the Security Council on a regular basis.

We need to make progress quickly on the political process, and the single most significant event since the end of the war was the establishment of the governing council. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen)—who referred to the council members as puppets—that I have met four members of the governing council. I did not have a conversation with puppets; I had a conversation with men and women who now see, at last, an opportunity for Iraq to have the future that they want for themselves, their families and the people whom they represent at the moment.

There is no political or democratic process that we can pull off the shelf and put in place instantly. We have to take it a stage at a time. The establishment of the governing council was the single most important step so far because it demonstrates that when we say that we do not want to run the country and that we want the people of Iraq to do so, we mean it. The council members are getting on with the job and have appointed the Ministers to work with them in that process. Increasingly, I hope that we will see more of the decisions being made by them because it is to them that we look to get working the process of getting the country back on its feet. They have now appointed members to take forward the constitutional process, and we look to them to answer the legitimate question about the next steps in the timetable.

The Iraqi people must have a clear sense of when they will be in a position to take control of their own affairs, and that will help the international community to focus its support on helping the governing council and to hold the latter to its commitments. Again, this is an area in which the UN has an important role to play.

Everybody—whether it is the Iraqi governing council, the new Ministers, the coalition, the UN, other donors or Members in this House—recognises that our task is to give help, and help now.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove) *rose in his place and claimed to move*, That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question.

The House divided: Ayes 53, Noes 285.

Division No. 307] **[6:59 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Opik, Lembit
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete

Tellers for the Ayes:
Richard Younger-Ross and Mrs. Annette L. Brooke

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blair, rh Tony
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Byers, rh Stephen
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*

Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Trimble, rh David
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Charlotte Atkins and
Mr. John Heppell

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. SPEAKER forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House supports the vital role played by the United Nations in Iraq as endorsed by UN Security Council Resolutions 1483 and 1500 (2003); pays tribute to the Secretary General's Special Representative, Sergio Vieira de Mello and his colleagues brutally murdered in the terrorist atrocity of 19th August; welcomes the determination of the United Nations Secretary General to remain engaged in Iraq; further welcomes the initiation of discussions on a new UN Security Council Resolution on Iraq, which aims to reaffirm the United Nations' support for the work of the Governing Council, calls on the Governing Council to submit a timetable and programme for the drafting of a new constitution for Iraq and for the holding of democratic elections.

proposes a United Nations-mandated multinational force under existing unified command arrangements and encourages UN Member States and international organisations to help the Iraqi people by providing resources for rehabilitation and reconstruction at next month's conference in Madrid.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE INTER-GOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE

Motion made,

That—

(1) There shall be a standing committee, called the Standing Committee on the Inter-Governmental Conference on the Future of Europe.

(2) At any sitting of the standing committee, the chairman may permit a Minister or Ministers to make statements on the Inter-Governmental Conference, and questions may then be put thereon by Members:

Provided that no proceedings under this paragraph may continue after the expiry of a period of one and a half hours from their commencement, except with the leave of the chairman.

(3) At the conclusion of proceedings under paragraph (2), the committee may consider either of the following—

(a) when a written report has been laid before Parliament by a Minister or Ministers, a Motion proposed from the chair 'That the committee has considered the report of [date] on the Inter-Governmental Conference'; or

(b) a Motion for the adjournment of the committee, provided that a Minister of the Crown has given notice of a subject relating to the Inter-Governmental Conference for the debate on the adjournment not later than five days before the sitting.

(4)(a) The chairman shall put any Questions necessary to dispose of the proceedings on any Motion under paragraph (3)(a), if not previously concluded, when the committee shall have sat for two and a half hours; and the chairman shall thereupon report that the committee has considered the report of [date] on the Inter-Governmental Conference, without putting any further Question;

(b) in case of a Motion under paragraph (3)(b), the chairman shall adjourn the committee without putting any question, not later than two and a half hours after the committee has begun sitting.

(5)(a) Notwithstanding Standing Order No. 86, the standing committee shall consist of those Members of the House nominated for the time being to the European Scrutiny Committee (appointed under Standing Order No. 143) and to the Foreign Affairs Committee (appointed under Standing Order No. 152); and

(b) any Member of the House, not being a member of the committee, may take part in the proceedings of the committee and be counted in the quorum, but shall not vote or make any motion, except that any member of the government may move a Motion under paragraph (3)(b).

(6) Members of the House of Lords may participate in the committee's proceedings, but no member of that House may vote or make any motion or be counted in the quorum.

That this Order be a Standing Order of the House until the end of the next Session of Parliament.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT CHANGES: AMENDMENTS TO STANDING ORDERS

Motion made,

That—

(1) Standing Order No. 94 (Scottish Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)) be amended in line 2 by leaving out the second 'Scottish' and inserting 'Scotland';

(2) Standing Order No. 103 (Welsh Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)) be amended in line 2 by leaving out the second 'Welsh' and inserting 'Wales';

(3) Standing Order No. 119 (European Standing Committees) be amended in the table in paragraph (6), as follows:

(a) in line 5, by leaving out 'Transport, Local Government and the Regions' and inserting 'Transport; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister';

(b) in line 12, by leaving out 'Lord Chancellor's Department' and inserting 'Department for Constitutional Affairs (excluding those responsibilities of the Scotland and Wales Offices which fall to European Standing Committee A)';

(4) Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments) be amended in the Table in paragraph (2), as follows:

(a) before item 1 insert

'1 Constitutional Affairs	Department for Constitutional Affairs (including the work of staff provided for the administrative work of courts and tribunals, but excluding consideration of individual cases and appointments, and excluding the work of the Scotland and Wales Offices and of the Advocate General for Scotland) 11';

(b) leave out the item relating to the Lord Chancellor's Department inserted on 27th January;

(c) in item 16, leave out 'Welsh Office (Office of the Secretary of State for Wales (including relations with the National Assembly for Wales))' and insert 'Wales Office (including relations with the National Assembly for Wales)'; and

(5) the Order of 5th November 2001 relating to Liaison Committee (Membership) be amended, in paragraph (2), by leaving out 'Lord Chancellor's Department' and inserting 'Constitutional Affairs'.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT

Motion made,

That Mr Michael Meacher be discharged from the Environmental Audit Committee and Mr Elliot Morley be added.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Ordered,

That Geraint Davies and Mr George Howarth be discharged from the Committee of Public Accounts and Jon Cruddas and Jim Sheridan be added.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

Asperger's Syndrome

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

7.15 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): On 23 October 2001, I introduced an Adjournment debate on Asperger's syndrome and autistic spectrum disorder. I am delighted that the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman), is on the Treasury Bench, as he also attended that debate. At the time, he was chairman of the all-party group on autism and I cannot think of a better person, one with as much experience and knowledge of the subject, to respond to the debate.

I want to move on from that debate in 2001 and focus especially on Asperger's syndrome and mental health services. Although many symptoms of autism are present in people diagnosed with Asperger's, there is a difference, as such people generally have good language skills and may be of average or high intelligence. However, they demonstrate many of the traits associated with autism, which results in communication problems and, sometimes, ritualistic behaviour. They can experience difficulty in social relationships, causing a sense of isolation, especially in adolescents and adults.

Too few appropriate packages of support are available and they can often be obtained only when there is a crisis. However, where health and social services work together, especially with agencies that specialise in the management of autism, the results can be good, not least because stress and anxiety are reduced, thus reducing the patient's mental health needs and an unacceptably high suicide rate among that group.

Although the causes of Asperger's syndrome and autism have yet to be positively identified, research to date shows that they are related to a physical dysfunction of the brain that may have more than one cause, including a genetic base. What Asperger's is not is an illness, nor are the behavioural symptoms exhibited by people with the syndrome caused by psychosis.

Management of the condition is best addressed by individually tailored packages of support. They will not cure the condition—it is lifelong—but they will vastly improve the quality of life for the sufferer and maximise their opportunities for living independently. We are talking about a vulnerable group of people, who have a strange mix of abilities, which can mask characteristics that may include obsessive behaviour and lack of imagination, resulting in their not being streetwise, yet can be coupled with a range of educational abilities, up to degree level and beyond.

Behaviour may be challenging, especially if routines are interrupted or the individual is faced with unexpected changes, such as a break with a familiar environment or people. People with the condition can be quirky at best and, at worst, threatening to those who are not familiar with their behaviour. Such behaviour is almost always triggered by events rather than an emotional response. It is in that context that I shall focus on adults and adolescents who, under stress and perhaps presenting strange or challenging behaviour, find themselves in contact with mental health services, especially in-patient treatment.

It is true, of course, that people with Asperger's can become mentally ill, as with any other person. Indeed, depression is particularly common in that group. As I pointed out in my debate in 2001, apart from any physiological reason, such as low serotonin levels in the body, it is not rocket science to understand why, by adulthood, people with Asperger's syndrome—desperate for the social and employment opportunities in which they see their peer group participating, but finding themselves friendless, locked out and socially isolated because of their inability to relate to other people—start to become depressed and demonstrate behaviour that, frankly, is quite obvious to those who study the condition and understand it. Who among us would not become depressed if we had tried so hard, as many with Asperger's do, to normalise—for want of a better word—our behaviour only to find that we cannot break through the glass wall that divides us from the rest of society?

Given my work with autism charities and in assisting those who seek to improve the lives of those in the Asperger's group, I feel prompted to raise the issue again in the House because of the pattern of treatment that has clearly developed throughout this country, particularly in provincial mental health hospitals. Very few provincial psychiatrists have been trained in either the diagnosis or management of Asperger's syndrome and even fewer have gained the experience, as part of their working lives, to be able to distinguish between a mental health condition and what many of us regard as normal autistic behaviour, which even professional psychiatrists may well interpret as something quite different.

A level of expertise is required. For example, if someone with Asperger's develops symptoms of schizophrenia, very few psychiatrists in this country have the expertise to differentiate between autistic symptoms and a genuine case of schizophrenia. Yet, day after day, people with Asperger's syndrome are admitted to mental health hospitals and find themselves being diagnosed and treated by people with that lack of experience. So they fall foul—I use that phrase quite deliberately—of the mental health services, as in-patients. They are often sectioned under existing mental health legislation.

All too frequently around the country, we find that those in that group are being treated in a way that would not be tolerated in any other part of health care. It is all too common for psychiatrists even to ignore an existing diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome. That is astonishing. One professional has made a diagnosis, yet all too often another professional, who is responsible for caring for the person with Asperger's, refuses to accept the diagnosis. Behavioural symptoms are not recognised as normal autistic behaviour. They are often treated with strong drugs that have little or no effect on the symptoms, but in themselves cause yet another problem for those with Asperger's. When a drug does not work, psychiatrists work their way through the prescribing lists, building a cocktail of medication that fails to address the symptoms. Why should it address the symptoms if the underlying cause is physiological?

It is common for people with Asperger's to be misdiagnosed as schizophrenic and given medication on that basis. Many of those cases result in long hospital stays, with all the damage of long-term neuroleptic

drugs, the effect of which needs to be addressed. I know that I need not emphasise this to the Minister, but those are not isolated cases. The problem is becoming increasingly common, even in the casework that Members of Parliament have to take up on behalf of our constituents. The Minister will be aware that we have held meetings in the House with the carers of people who have been treated in that way, so we know of the absolute distress and pressure on those carers.

Liz Blackman (Erewash): Does not what the hon. Lady is saying point to the fundamental requirement for multi-disciplinary teams to be set up early for autistic young people, including those with Asperger's syndrome?

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Lady has a great deal of knowledge and experience of this subject, and I agree with her. It is necessary for the professionals—the multidisciplinary teams that she talks about—to become actively involved at an early stage in the management of the case. If that worked everywhere—it works in some places—we would not see so many of these people coming under the auspices of the mental health services in the first place.

When those carers try to make representations and to be advocates on behalf of their adult children or—if they are not relatives—on behalf of the in-patient, the health professionals all too often simply will not listen to them. The House will be aware of a high-profile case that has gone to court and is still pending—R *v.* Bournewood Community and Mental Health NHS trust. I have the carers' permission to quote their experience. They told me personally that when they tried to become involved, they were described by the psychiatrist as "uncooperative". When they pressed further, the term "abusive" was applied to describe them as carers. Finally, when, at their wits' end, they tried to explain to these so-called professionals how this person actually behaved because of his autism, it was suggested that they had mental health problems themselves. That is outrageous. Their knowledge of the individual concerned and the way that he behaved was key to his management and treatment, yet it was not wanted by the psychiatrist. That is an example of arrogance—not of all psychiatrists, as we could all name some who are doing a jolly good job in this area—that should not be tolerated.

Most of the damage done to in-patients will occur in the first four to six weeks, through a combination of inappropriate medication, finding themselves in an environment that exacerbates their difficulties in managing their behaviour, and through carers and parents being resisted by professionals and given the minimum amount of access. That cannot be tolerated. I therefore urge the Minister to introduce the following measures as a matter of urgency.

First, unless a psychiatrist has received an accredited training course and has a recognised working knowledge of the treatment of Asperger's syndrome and autism, a second opinion on the treatment and management of that individual patient must be sought from another professional who has that expertise as an input to the case. Secondly, the Department of Health should set up an immediate investigation into the number of adolescents and adults with an Asperger's syndrome diagnosis who have also been treated for schizophrenia, as we should know how many of these people are being misdiagnosed and mismedicated. When an undiagnosed adult is suspected of having Asperger's syndrome, a referral must be made to a professional who has experience of autism. Diagnosis of adults cannot be learned from a textbook. It takes years of work. It is much more complex than the diagnosis of children, and there are people who have reached their 20s, 30s, 40s and even 50s before being diagnosed, as other factors must be looked for. That requires a huge level of expertise.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate on an important subject. The doubts that she has raised about the effects of neuroleptic drugs have been experienced by a large number of people in residential homes for the elderly and by many women in prison. Will a call for such an investigation include a general investigation of the effects of neuroleptic drugs among many other people?

Mrs. Browning: I would not disagree with that at all. We all have concern about this area, and we would like to know much more about it. I know that the hon. Gentleman has knowledge of this area, and I would certainly like to know more.

On my list of what I would like the Minister urgently to consider is the requirement for all primary care trusts to identify their autism and Asperger's professionals for in-patient care and community care—from community psychiatric nurse level to consultants in hospitals—and to implement a structured training and accreditation programme. They should also draw up a referral list, even if it is out of area, so that those people who do not have the expertise know of a professional on whom they can call for case-by-case referral.

If I need an operation for a broken leg, I would expect an orthopaedic surgeon to deal with it. If I were admitted to hospital with a heart condition, I would not expect to be medicated for some other condition. It seems that psychiatrists are laws unto themselves. There is an ignorance and an arrogance that permeates their approach to Asperger's syndrome that is all too common.

In the advice to carers, many of us who are involved in dealing with individual casework, including Members, are not prepared to accept the status quo. It is becoming more common for cases to be tested in the courts. I believe that many more cases will be so tested if the situation is allowed to continue. It is criminal.

I have many files of heart-rending casework. I will not quote from them because I know that those Members who are in their places will have had to deal with such casework in their constituencies. I know that they will understand the heartbreak for the individual and their carers when they come up against a system that treats them in this way. It is leading to family breakdown, where increasingly ageing parents and carers bear the strain of lack of provision, of failure to diagnose or even a failure to recognise diagnosis on the part of other professionals. In some cases, this has led to permanent damage caused by inappropriate medication.

[Mrs. Browning]

I can think of no other area of health care where this situation would be permitted. These patients are the least able to self-advocate, yet the people who could advocate for them—their immediate carers—are sidelined. It is cruel and it is unjust, and it must stop.

7.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Dr. Stephen Ladyman): It is a great pleasure for me—I know that Ministers always say that when they come to the Dispatch Box to respond to Adjournment debates, but on this occasion it is truer than usual—to respond and to congratulate the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) on raising the issue again. I know that we are not allowed to refer to Opposition Members as right hon. or hon. Friends, but on this subject I would like to think of the hon. Lady in that way. She has made many constructive suggestions, while speaking with much feeling and compassion.

Becoming a Minister was a joy for me. The one thing that I regretted, however, was that I had to give up chairing the all-party group on autism. The only consolation is that my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Liz Blackman) has agreed to take over. I look forward to working with her and the rest of the group in my new capacity.

In one fell swoop, I moved from being Chairman of the all-party group on autism to Minister with responsibilities for autism. Although I hope to move the agenda forward as aggressively as possible, I have been a Minister for slightly fewer than 100 days, so I am not yet in a position to make all the decisions that I would like to make, nor to understand all the ramifications of the things that I would like to do in this context. I know that the hon. Lady will accept that I shall reflect deeply on her comments and shall do my best to implement some of her constructive ideas, and that she will not expect me to commit myself this evening.

As we all know, autism is a complex and distressing condition, not only for those affected by it, but for their families and carers. The hon. Lady was right to emphasise the role of carers, in terms not only of what they contribute to the person with autism, but of their responsibility and their opportunity to help advocate on behalf of autistic people. That is something that we forget when reflecting on the contribution of carers. I wanted to acknowledge that now before I move on any further. I shall certainly look at opportunities to help carers. My portfolio includes all long-term conditions, and I am well aware of the role of carers in all such conditions. I shall take on board the hon. Lady's comments—I am well aware that autistic people often need their carers to be advocates on their behalf.

Asperger's syndrome, as the hon. Lady said, is a developmental disorder on the autistic spectrum, and is a social disability rather than an illness. In the context of tonight's debate, we need to emphasise the fact that people on the autistic spectrum are more likely than the rest of the population to have a mental health problem that needs to be addressed. The hon. Lady highlighted two issues. First, problems arise when a condition on the autistic spectrum is confused with a mental illness, leading to someone being treated for mental illness. However, because they are autistic, the treatment will have no effect and will be entirely inappropriate. Indeed, it may be distressing and damaging, and will not help the autistic person because the things that need to be done to help them are not being done.

Secondly, when an autistic person has a separate mental condition, we need to make sure that that is recognised and treated. Let me make something clear for the record: if someone in the primary care system or social services believes that an autistic person may have a mental illness, they can be referred to mental health services, and must be assessed and treated for it in the same way as anybody else. People should not sit in their office thinking, "This person is autistic—I cannot refer them to mental health services." If there is any reason to believe that someone has a mental health condition, they should be referred to mental health services because they are entitled to treatment for that condition, as long as the assessment is made, as the hon. Lady pointed out, by people who are skilled in recognising autism as well as the mental health condition.

The hon. Lady asked how I shall ensure that that is done, and I have to reflect on that. If I were to introduce regulations—my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash pointed this out eloquently in her intervention—that may affect the multidisciplinary teams that need to be set up. I might regulate in a way that hampered the setting-up of those multidisciplinary teams. We may not want to make it mandatory for an autistic person to be seen by someone who is skilled in the treatment of autistic conditions. We may want them to be seen by a multidisciplinary team that includes expertise in autism, rather than by a psychiatrist who has training in autism and mental health issues. I shall reflect on the way in which we can best achieve that, and whether or not regulation is appropriate. I shall reflect on how we make sure that we distinguish between autism and the mental health issue, and how we make sure that we are going the right way about identifying mental health issues.

The appropriateness of medication is a related issue, and my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) is right that if people are treated with drugs—I am not a clinical professional, so I am not in a position to judge whether drugs are appropriate or not—we must remember that they have side effects. We must make sure that the right drugs are used at the right time. If the autistic spectrum disorder has been confused with a mental health issue, the autistic person may well be getting drugs that are entirely inappropriate, with distressing results for both them and their carers.

An important time for interventions that may prevent serious mental health issues from developing in adulthood is childhood and adolescence. The standards and targets that we are setting in the forthcoming children's national service framework are intended to help improve services for disabled children, including those with autism. The hon. Lady will be aware that the national service framework for children will include an autism exemplar. We will be developing national standards across the national health service, social care and the interface with education. That will relate to the way in which we handle autistic people and how they are referred for services.

The NSF will include pathways and exemplar diagrams illustrating the optimum approaches to delivering services in a number of different areas. The all-party parliamentary group on autism sponsored the national initiative on autism screening and assessment report, which is now called the national autism plan for children. That will form an important part of the package of care that we shall build to address issues relating to children with autism.

We must recognise that children with autism, whether or not they have a learning disability, are more vulnerable to a full range of mental health disorders, both as a result of their underlying neurological dysfunction and the additional social, family and emotional stresses of everyday life. The child and adolescent mental health services see children and young people with autism who also have mental health problems. As the hon. Lady said, however, specialist care from CAMHS professionals with expertise in learning disability, autism and child and adolescent mental health problems are in very short supply.

As we are aware of the shortcomings of existing provision, the Department published an outline of a comprehensive CAMHS in the "Emerging Findings" document for the children's national service framework. The requirement to develop a comprehensive service was also set out in the CAMHS 2003 circular to health services and local authorities, which was published on 17 January this year. "Emerging Findings" requires a comprehensive service to take account of the full range of needs locally, including those arising from a learning disability or from autistic spectrum disorders. Each local CAMHS development strategy should outline progress towards the establishment of a comprehensive service and refer to children with an autistic spectrum disorder.

The Department's public service agreement targets set an agenda to improve significantly the services for children and young people with mental health problems. The specific target is to:

"Improve life outcomes of adults and children with mental health problems through year on year improvements in access to crisis and CAMHS services; and reduce the mortality rate from suicide and undetermined injury by at least 20 per cent. by 2010."

The priorities and planning framework capacity assumptions underpinning that target are that all CAMHS are to provide a comprehensive service, including mental health promotion and early intervention, by 2006; and that all CAMHS will be increased by at least 10 per cent. a year across the service in accordance with agreed local priorities. To support those challenges, the Government will invest an additional £250 million in CAMHS provided by local authorities and the national health service.

On adult mental health services, it would be naïve to believe that success in improving CAMHS will remove the need for services for adults with Asperger's syndrome and mental health problems. It is also important that we deliver improvements in adult mental health services. When we came to office, we set mental health as a priority for reform, alongside cancer and coronary heart disease. We did so because we believed that the service when we came to power was demoralised and under-supported, and desperately needed to move forward. We had no national standards at that time. Mental health law had been overtaken by developments in services and society. Financial constraints were crippling those with responsibility for providing care, and local services did not have the freedom to make choices that were right for their populations.

The significance of that situation is difficult to overstate. As many as one in six of the population is affected by a mental health problem, and many more families and children are indirectly affected each year. More than 600,000 people with serious mental ill health receive care from specialist mental health and social care services, and suicide is now the commonest cause of death among young men. I am well aware of the suicidal thoughts to which many people with Asperger's syndrome refer in their conversations, letters and writings.

Those are some of the reasons why the Government prioritised mental health service reform. Our national service framework for mental health was the first NSF to be published. It set out seven standards for modern health and social care, covering health promotion, primary care, mental health, specialised services for people with severe mental illness—

The motion having been made after Seven o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at fifteen minutes to Eight o'clock.

Deferred Divisions

Local Government Finance (England)

That the Special Grant Report (No. 123) (HC 778) on the Social Services (High Performers No. 2) Grant for 2003–04, dated 16th June 2003, a copy of which was laid before this House on 16th June, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 389, Noes 1.

Division No. 302]

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Ancram, rh Michael
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Bercow, John
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, rh Tony
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cooper, Yvette
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curry, rh David
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flook, Adrian
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, rh George
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hague, rh William
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jack, rh Michael
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Khabra, Piara S.
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackay, rh Andrew
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malins, Humfrey
Mallaber, Judy
Maples, John
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Merron, Gillian
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norman, Archie
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*

O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Ottaway, Richard
Owen, Albert
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Randall, John
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Selous, Andrew
Shaw, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Streeter, Gary
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Trimble, rh David
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Walter, Robert
Ward, Claire
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wyatt, Derek
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

NOES

Burnside, David

Question accordingly agreed to.

Local Government Finance (England)

That the Special Grant Report (No. 124) (HC 777) on the Delayed Discharges Grant for 2003–04, dated 16th June 2003, a copy of which was laid before this House on 16th June, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 255, Noes 40.

Division No. 303]

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, rh Tony
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*

Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Soley, Clive
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Trimble, rh David
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wyatt, Derek

NOES

Allan, Richard
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Heath, David
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Shepherd, Richard
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Question accordingly agreed to.

Local Government Finance (England)

That the Special Grant Report (No. 123) (HC 778) on the Social Services (High Performers No.2) Grant for 2003–04, dated 16th June 2003, a copy of which was laid before this House on 16th June, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 387, Noes 1.

Division No. 304]

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Ancram, rh Michael
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Bercow, John
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, rh Tony
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cooper, Yvette
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curry, rh David
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Donohoe, Brian H.

Doran, Frank
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flook, Adrian
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hague, rh William
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jack, rh Michael
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Khabra, Piara S.
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackay, rh Andrew
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malins, Humfrey
Mallaber, Judy
Maples, John
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Merron, Gillian
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norman, Archie
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Ottaway, Richard
Owen, Albert
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Randall, John
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Selous, Andrew
Shaw, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Streeter, Gary
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Trimble, rh David
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Walter, Robert
Ward, Claire
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wyatt, Derek
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

NOES

Burnside, David

Question accordingly agreed to.

House of Commons

Thursday 11 September 2003

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Teacher Recruitment

1. **Mr. Piara S. Khabra** (Ealing, Southall): How many teachers have been recruited by schools as a result of teach first. [128968]

4. **Dr. Doug Naysmith** (Bristol, North-West): What assessment he has made of the number of teachers recruited by schools as a result of teach first. [128971]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Stephen Twigg): One hundred and seventy-eight trainees on the teach first scheme began working in London secondary schools last week. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House will join me in wishing them well.

Mr. Khabra: My constituency encompasses people from a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. May I ask the Minister how successful the scheme has been in attracting teachers from minority groups? Will he tell me how he intends to utilise the national skills strategy to address the imbalance between the skills offered by unemployed Londoners and those that are needed by employers?

Mr. Twigg: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. As we heard in the education debate earlier this week, we face a challenge in ensuring that our classrooms truly reflect the communities that they serve. I am delighted to be able to inform my hon. Friend that 22 per cent. of teach first students entering classrooms in London over the past fortnight were from ethnic minorities. That sets a very positive example.

Dr. Naysmith: Teach first is an interesting initiative that has potential in many respects. Does the Minister plan to roll it out in other parts of the country after the monitoring that must, of course, take place?

Mr. Twigg: I thank my hon. Friend for those remarks. This is a brand new scheme, which started in London because of the particular challenges that it faces with recruitment and retention. We will evaluate the scheme closely, as will those who organised it and the Teacher Training Agency. I certainly would not rule out its extension to other parts of the country.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): May I echo the Minister's delight that teach first is recruiting high-calibre teachers? We have supported the scheme since its launch and will continue to do so. Will the hon. Gentleman reciprocally acknowledge that the numbers recruited through teach first are just a palliative, given that this week the Department issued figures showing that the number of qualified regular full-time teachers is down by 1,400 this year? Will he acknowledge that his Government's constant boasting about rising teacher numbers is bogus?

Mr. Twigg: I welcome the support for teach first from Opposition Members, including the Liberal Democrats.

The hon. Gentleman refers only to part of the figures that were published this week. He is correct to say that the figure for full-time qualified teachers fell by 1,300 over the past year. However, that was more than offset by the increase in full-time-equivalent part-time qualified teachers. The overall statistic was a net gain of 200 full-time-equivalent teachers over the past year. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will join us in welcoming those extra teachers in schools across the country.

Mr. Green: I note that it is significant that the Minister does not repeat the bogus number of 25,000 that his colleague, the Minister for School Standards, is fond of repeating. Can he tell the House how many of those teachers are unqualified and how many are short-term appointments from other countries, many of which are poorer than this country, whose schools we are raiding to fill the gaps in our own schools? Does he recognise that the problems have been made much worse by the funding crisis that has led to the loss of 2,500 teaching posts purely because the Department has been staggeringly incompetent in spending its money?

Mr. Twigg: We are not going to take lectures from Conservative Members on this subject, given that they presided over the loss of 50,000 teaching posts between 1979 and 1997. He is right to say that we have significant numbers of teachers from overseas, but they are not unqualified – they are qualified in their own countries. Some 4,200 teachers are on employment-based training routes. In fact, the majority of teachers in schools today are now qualified; many have qualified since January. Part of the reason why so many teachers are on schemes such as the graduate teacher programme is that we are dealing with teacher shortages by providing other routes for people to get into teaching. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would want to welcome that.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): I, too, congratulate the Government on teach first as part of their success in recruiting more teachers. May I ask the Minister, when

considering the roll-out and extension of teach first, not to forget our rural areas, including the south-west region?

Mr. Twigg: I heard my hon. Friend's comments and I am sure that South Dorset would benefit from such an extension.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): What success is my hon. Friend having in recruiting ESOL—English as a second language—teachers? Given the changes in the requirements for citizenship, we shall need many more good quality ESOL teachers. The subject should not continue to be the poor relation in education; it is important for our northern cities.

Mr. Twigg: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, who has been assiduous in pursuing the matter. She knows that, last academic year, we published our document "Aiming High—Raising the Achievement of Ethnic Minority Pupils", part of which addressed the precise topic to which she referred. We shall shortly publish our response to the consultation and methods of taking forward our strategy to ensure that every child in this country gets the best possible start in life, regardless of ethnic background.

Children's Centres

3. **Mr. Barry Gardiner** (Brent, North): If he will make a statement on the progress made in establishing children's centres. [128970]

9. **Mr. Win Griffiths** (Bridgend): What the latest developments are in the establishment of children's centres. [128977]

The Minister for Children (Margaret Hodge): We designated the first 32 children's centres in June. We intend to designate a further similar number later this month. Local authorities are currently preparing their plans for developing children's centres and will submit them to us by 15 October. We are confident that the children's centre model, which provides care and education for young children alongside community health and family support services, is excellent for ensuring the best start for our children.

Mr. Gardiner: I am grateful to the Minister not only for her reply but for the £2.3 million indicative figure for capital programmes that Brent has received for children's centres.

When my hon. Friend examines the submissions, will she ensure that emphasis is placed on the model of multi-agency working? In particular, will she ensure that the incredibly valuable role of health visitors is incorporated in the model so that in the progress from zero to five years the education and health aspects of children's lives are genuinely integrated?

Margaret Hodge: I agree with the thrust of my hon. Friend's contribution. I draw to his intention the fact that, as well as capital, Brent is getting £1 million revenue to support the development of children's centres.

The multi-agency approach is crucial and an essential part of our policy to put children at the centre and develop services around their needs rather than around the traditional professional silos. I also accept the importance of the role of health visitors and therefore welcome our announcement on Monday in the Green Paper that my colleagues in the Department of Health will undertake a review of the role of health visitors to ensure that they can contribute to giving our young children a good start.

Mr. Griffiths: I thank my hon. Friend for the work that is already being done. Can she tell me, on the basis of the centres that have been approved, the extent to which local authorities and other agencies have gone beyond simply integrating existing services and are taking the opportunity to improve the total service for young children and families?

Margaret Hodge: Many exciting experiments are taking place in the emerging children's centres, as well as much innovation. I could give endless examples of the practices that are being introduced. Much work is being done with families to ensure that parents are supported in the early years with their children. I draw the voluntary organisation Home-Start to my hon. Friend's attention. It is doing a good job in providing peer group support, involving mums visiting other mums in their homes to help them through the difficult early days when they bring their child home.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: I call Phil Willis.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): I wanted to come in on the next question, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I must tell the hon. Gentleman that Question 4 has gone, but perhaps he wants to come in on Question 5.

Mr. Willis: Yes, I wanted to come in on Question 5.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): Unusually, I welcome what the Minister for Children has said. I also welcome the work that has been done on children's centres, because of the help that it will bring to parents of very young children and to families in need of support. But what exactly is the Minister going to do to protect the minority of children who are specifically at risk from criminals who have the intention of harming them? I use the word "criminal" rather than "paedophile" because we must understand that there are criminals who are deliberately targeting young children. While children's centres will help families and children at risk from neglect, they will not help the children at risk from such criminals, and I would like the Minister to give us guidance on that problem.

Margaret Hodge: In the Green Paper that we published on Monday, we said that the way in which we can best protect children from risk of abuse or harm is to ensure that the universal services provided for children are of a particular quality and that the protection of children is central and integral to them.

The protection of children must run like a thread through all the services, so that ensuring that children are protected is part of the role of every GP, teacher, nursery assistant and child care worker. Another issue in the Green Paper was that the emphasis must be on prevention. We must try to intervene and to put in place all sorts of levers to ensure that children are prevented from falling into risk of abuse. For example, the sharing of information and the training of the work force—both of which we highlighted in the Green Paper—are two aspects of the policies that we are pursuing to ensure that children are not at risk of abuse or harm.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Can my hon. Friend tell me whether the children's centres could be the base on which to build a universal provision of child care? Has she seen this week's PricewaterhouseCoopers study which states that investment in a universal child care system would be an enormous boon to our economy?

Margaret Hodge: My hon. Friend and I have worked together for many years, and he will know that I have long been a campaigner for the universality of early-years services for children, in terms of child care and early-years education. Children's centres have great potential for being a universal model to meet the needs of children and their families, and I look forward to working with colleagues across government to translate that ambition into a reality.

Specialist Schools

5. **Andrew Selous** (South-West Bedfordshire): What his policy is on middle schools applying for specialist school status. [128972]

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): I know that the hon. Gentleman has been assiduous in pursuing this issue, and I am pleased to be able to give him further information on the review that we were undertaking when he last asked about it. Middle deemed secondary schools are now eligible to apply for specialist school status as part of a joint application. One or more middle deemed secondary schools can apply jointly to the programme with upper schools.

Andrew Selous: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. Is he aware that there are nearly 130,000 children in middle schools in England alone who are unable to be in specialist schools at the moment because of the current guidelines? Is he also aware that two of the three years' work for key stage 3—the crucial foundation for GCSEs—takes place in middle schools? In my constituency, the upper schools already have specialist college status, so the excellent Priory middle school which wants to apply, cannot do so. Will the Minister make a specific pledge on solo applications for middle schools, so that schools such as Priory can acquire specialist status?

Mr. Miliband: I do not know about the 130,000, but I do know about the 40 middle schools in Bedfordshire. I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that solo applications would be allowed from middle schools, because they have primary school pupils as well as secondary school pupils, and the specialist school programme is designed to raise achievement at GCSE and beyond. I can assure him, however, that the middle schools that he is concerned about can apply jointly, either for designation or redesignation, with a secondary school or in a group. That is a big step forward.

Mr. Speaker: Mr Wills.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): Thank you for calling me, Mr. Speaker.

Does the Minister accept that the principal reason for schools wishing to acquire specialist status is the extra £500,000 that that status brings, and that, had it not been for specialist status, the crisis in schools funding this year would be significantly less serious? Will the Minister guarantee to those schools whose budgets are now in deficit as a result of the funding crisis that their applications for specialist status will not be turned down because of the Government's criterion which states that they have to show prudent financial management?

Mr. Miliband: I am afraid that there are two pieces of nonsense in what the hon. Gentleman has just said. First, he is running down the efforts of teachers and head teachers who want to make their schools better. That is why they apply to attain specialist school status and to have a centre of excellence in their school. Secondly, while on the one hand the hon. Gentleman says that the schools are getting too much money, on the other he says that the money is what is causing the funding crisis. He is standing on his head.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): What measures is the Minister taking to ensure that the range of specialisms offered by specialist schools correlates with the demands of pupils and parents? Given that the choice of specialism rests with the school itself, is not the approach producer led rather than consumer led?

Mr. Miliband: I know that the hon. Gentleman speaks with seriousness on these issues, but when a school applies for specialist status it does so with the aim not just of raising its own standards but of providing a real resource for the whole community. That involves schools' working with parents and the community to choose a specialism that is appropriate for the area. I have not observed a problem on my visits to schools, although if the hon. Gentleman has any evidence of problems, I shall be happy to look at it.

School Nurseries (Leeds)

6. **Mr. Harold Best** (Leeds, North-West): How many school nursery places in Leeds, North-West were available for under-fives in each year since 1997. [128974]

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Charles Clarke): We do not have detailed information on the availability of places, but I can tell the House that the number of pupils attending nursery classes in maintained schools in the hon. Gentleman's constituency was as follows: in 1997, 551; in 1998, 588;

in 1999, 548; in 2000, 538; in 2001, 514; and in 2002, 499. The provisional figure for 2003 is 475. Other publicly funded places for under-fives are available in the private, voluntary and independent sectors.

Mr. Best: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, although that trend is worthy of note, there may be some room for improvement? Can he say something about further funds that might improve the position?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend that the trend is worthy of note. Leeds currently reports an overall participation rate of 90 per cent. among three-year-olds in free early education, which is slightly higher than the national average. We should, however, consider the type of participation involved. The starting point must be to ensure that overall provision is flexible, and meets parental needs. The right approach is that described a moment ago by my hon. Friend the Minister for Children—the securing of a range of forms of provision to meet the needs of children and their families.

Tomlinson Proposals

7. **Mrs. Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham): What representations he has received on the Tomlinson proposals for changes in the examination system for 14 to 19-year-olds. [128975]

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): The working group will report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in July 2004. At this stage, all representations are being made to Mike Tomlinson and the working group, not to my right hon. Friend. I welcome the open and serious way in which the group is addressing the problems involved in 14-to-19 education and training, and we look forward to its next interim report in January.

Mrs. Gillan: What does the Minister intend to do about the NVQs and GNVQs examination system? While the Government have been obsessed with targets for so-called university education, they have presided over a rapidly declining vocational system, in which fewer people have been obtaining qualifications and standards of work-based learning have been falling. When will Education Ministers stop meddling with our education system, and support practical education that will lead to good jobs for our young people?

Mr. Miliband: I am very disappointed by the hon. Lady's question. I thought she would know that 28 per cent. of young people are now pursuing modern apprenticeships. That is precisely the sort of education route that she claims is being derided. As for GNVQs and NVQs, I should have thought that the development of a wider range of vocational as well as academic subjects would command support across the House. I am sorry that the hon. Lady decries efforts to deliver that in schools, colleges and workplaces.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): As the Minister will know, test and examination results show that when black children enter the school system at the age of five they are doing as well as white and Asian children, but when they are aged between 14 and 19 their exam results collapse. That applies particularly to black boys. It is of great concern both to the black community and to anyone who cares about education in the inner city. The aims and values consultation has been widely welcomed, but what practical steps do Ministers intend to take to narrow the frightening achievement gap between black boys and the rest of the school population?

Mr. Miliband: I genuinely admire the work that the hon. Lady has been doing across London to raise issues such as this, and the way in which she has raised them with my colleagues. She will correct me if I am wrong, but I think it is fair to say that the different minority ethnic groups perform differentially at the 14-to-19 stage. The highest performers are from the Chinese and Indian communities. The collapse in achievement is occurring partly in the Afro-Caribbean community, but also in sections of the white community. Later this term, the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg), will publish the response to the aims and values consultation that my hon. Friend mentioned. I hope that that will provide a chance for the whole House to engage with these issues in a serious way.

Mr. Charles Hendry (Wealden): Has the Minister seen the recent research by Hounslow community health council, which shows that by far the greatest health concern for teenagers is stress, one of the main causes of which is constant exam pressure? Does he also understand that one reason why too many students who are not particularly academic simply lose interest at school at the ages of 13 and 14 is that all they can see ahead is a constant stream of exams, to which they know they are not suited? Is not the solution to reduce the number of exams that students face, and to ensure that more is done to support those who need vocational, rather than academic, education?

Mr. Miliband: I am very sorry to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but the publications of Hounslow community health council have yet to find their way on to my desk.

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Charles Clarke): Shameful!

Mr. Miliband: Yes—as my colleague says, it is shameful, but I shall ask my office to look into the matter. I hope that, in calling for a reduction in exams, the hon. Gentleman is not joining the Liberal Democrats in calling for the abolition of GCSEs. As for AS-levels, teachers throughout the country and Ofsted—it has also reported on this issue—say that the wider range of subjects now available and being pursued by young people has actually strengthened the system, rather than weakened it. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman does not support that.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): Is it not a mistake to polarise the debate as being between either supporting vocational education, or supporting academic education? In the City of York we have some of the best-performing comprehensive schools in the country, of

which we are very proud, but a pilot study is also looking at reform of the 14-to-19 system, so that we can meet the needs of the whole population, and not just of those in the academic stream.

Mr. Miliband: That is a very good point. On my visit to York, I saw the work being done by my hon. Friend, and by teachers in schools and colleges in York. Of course it is right that students are able to combine academic and vocational studies. That is precisely the remit that we have given to the Tomlinson group in its attempt to overcome the two great English problems: an academic track that is too narrow, and a vocational track that is too weak. We want to go beyond those two problems.

Grammar Schools

8. **Mr. Paul Goodman** (Wycombe): What recent representations he has received about the future of grammar schools. [128976]

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Charles Clarke): My Department has received various representations, both written and oral, about the future of grammar schools. These representations have reflected all sides of this debate.

Mr. Goodman: It is reported that the future of grammar schools will soon be debated at the Labour party conference. If there is a vote on selection, will the Secretary of State vote for or against?

Mr. Clarke: Actually, I do not want to illuminate the House too much as to Labour party policy making. Labour's policy on education will be determined at next year's party conference—in 2004—not at this year's. There will be a debate, as the hon. Gentleman says, about education, but no decisions will be taken, because decisions on our policy making are subject to long debate. I am glad to shed a little light on how a democratic political party works.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Our grammar schools and other post-primary schools in Northern Ireland provide an excellent educational opportunity for our children; in fact, the results are the envy of many other United Kingdom regions. Can the Secretary of State give me an assurance today that the Government will not impose an education system in Northern Ireland that would conflict with the clearly expressed wishes of the majority of parents and teachers who were surveyed, who wish to retain grammar schools but want an alternative selection procedure?

Mr. Clarke: As luck would have it, I was in Belfast last week, speaking to the Association of Commonwealth Universities. I took the chance to meet the Minister with responsibility for education in Northern Ireland, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Jane Kennedy), to discuss several of these questions. My hon. Friend will reach a decision following lengthy debate—the hon. Gentleman will know about the recommendations of the commissions that have considered the issues—and I am not in a position today to give any assurances on her behalf.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): When the Secretary of State is determining Labour party policy at next year's conference, will he invite me to speak at it, so that I can convince the Labour party and its dinosaurs that education in my constituency is a seamless robe of comprehensive schools, specialist schools, grammar schools and the college, and that the benefits of that proper mixture far outweigh any dogma that involves reduction to the lowest common denominator?

Mr. Clarke: I am very sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's dilemma, as I know that many Conservative Back Benchers are trying to flee their party's Front-Bench policies. We have a rigorous membership process in our party, so I cannot guarantee that if the hon. Gentleman wants to come over and join us he will be accepted. If he decides to go down that course and participate in our debates, it would be a positive political development, which would reflect the reality of Conservative party weakness at the moment.

School Redundancies

10. **Mr. Adrian Flook** (Taunton): What estimates he has made of the number of (a) teacher redundancies and (b) classroom assistant redundancies as a result of 2003–04 school funding. [128978]

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): Every year the Department collects statistics on teacher and support staff numbers in January with publication of the first results in April. This has been a difficult year for some schools, as we debated in the House on Tuesday, and we are working with local education authorities and representatives of head teachers to deliver continued growth in the school work force.

Mr. Flook: I am grateful for the Minister's answer, but it may conceal more than it reveals. According to *The Times Educational Supplement* survey published three months after the beginning of the financial year, three quarters of the posts lost in this country have been from schools with rising or static rolls. All hon. Members have received representations about redundancies and I want to ensure that the money gets through to Somerset schools. Does the Minister agree that part of the solution may lie with a top-heavy local education authority in Somerset?

Mr. Miliband: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman wants to see the cash getting through to schools, and he will be relieved to know that £1,060 is allotted for every pupil in Somerset—more in this academic year than in 1997–98. Additionally, he should know that there are 3,400 more teachers in Somerset than there were six years ago. The hon. Gentleman mentioned *The Times Educational Supplement* survey. If he had read to paragraph 9 rather than stopping at paragraph 6, he

would have found out that there was a net increase in the number of teachers. He should have read the survey more carefully.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): My hon. Friend rightly points out that there are many more teachers. Will he confirm that it remains the Government's priority to improve the teacher-pupil ratio in our schools, which is the main way of achieving a better education for our children?

Mr. Miliband: We in the Labour party fought the last election on a pledge to recruit at least 10,000 extra teachers into our education service and I am pleased to report to the House that, two years on from that election, there are now 13,000 more teachers in our schools.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): Is the Minister concerned that one of the strategies that schools follow in order to avoid redundancies in tight budgetary conditions is cutting spending in other areas? According to the Department's own figures, spending on information technology for schools in 2002–03 has fallen. Will the Minister seriously examine the impact on other areas of spend such as IT as well as the headline redundancy figures?

Mr. Miliband: Of course I recognise that it has been a seriously difficult year for some schools. I think there may be some confusion in the recording of figures on IT spending. Of course priorities have to be set at school level, but the hon. Gentleman would want to know that there are 1,600 more teachers in his own region than there were six years ago.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Will the Minister give sympathetic consideration to the all-party delegation that he will receive from Hertfordshire next month, which wants to draw to his attention the fact that the budget shortfall in the county this year, stemming from the Government's funding arrangements, will result in the loss of funding equivalent to 70 teachers' posts? Next year, as the cushioning from those funding arrangements begins to disappear, Hertfordshire faces the loss of the equivalent of 600 teacher posts. Will the Minister give sympathetic consideration to that all-party group?

Mr. Miliband: I always give sympathetic consideration to people who come to meet me, so I look forward to that meeting. I do not recognise the figures that the hon. Gentleman quoted on threats of teacher redundancies. However, we are committed to working with Hertfordshire and every other local education authority to ensure that we use the money as well as possible to deliver the highest possible standards in Hertfordshire schools and those across the country.

Tuition Fees

12. **Mr. Andrew Mackay** (Bracknell): What recent representations he has received on tuition fees. [128980]

The Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education (Alan Johnson): My Department has continued to receive correspondence on issues relating to tuition fees from a range of organisations and individuals. In addition, I have had meetings with a number of MPs, vice-chancellors and representatives of interested groups in order to discuss and clarify the proposals set out in our White Paper "The Future of Higher Education".

Mr. Mackay: Will the Minister accept a little friendly advice from a former Government Deputy Chief Whip? The tuition fee legislation will end in tears. It is deeply unpopular in the House as well as among students and parents throughout the country. It would be wise to withdraw the legislation, so will the Minister guarantee that that will happen?

Alan Johnson: Would the right hon. Gentleman—whose attributes as a former Deputy Chief Whip I very much admire—take some advice from me? The Conservative party ought to be wearing sackcloth and ashes over their approach to the future of higher education funding. I cannot for the life of me understand how a serious political party can argue that the answer to the knowledge-driven economy of the 21st century is to contract and to disinvest in university education. I am amazed that the right hon. Gentleman, who marched through the Lobby in support of the Dearing report and the principle that graduates should make a contribution—an important principle—should now argue against that principle. We need take no advice from the right hon. Gentleman, but I hope that he will take some from me.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Is my hon. Friend concerned, as I am, that top-up fees at some institutions and for some courses will deter the brighter students from those institutions and courses? What action will he take to prevent that?

Alan Johnson: I do not accept that philosophy. I would accept it in isolation from the rest of our proposals, which are the ending of up-front fees, the reintroduction of a maintenance grant, an income-contingent repayment basis, the threshold for the repayment of student loans going up to £15,000—which halves the amount that students will pay—and various other policies to help poorer students. For the first time, our policy will crowbar open higher education for poorer working-class students.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Given that the 2001 Labour election manifesto stated:

"We will not introduce 'top-up' fees and have legislated to prevent them",

will the Minister now tell the House in the light of the Government's about-turn, and irrespective of the merits of the arguments, what he thinks that about-turn does for the reputation among the public of politicians for honesty?

Alan Johnson: Were we to ignore the situation in higher education and the fact that our major competitors—whether in America, China, India or elsewhere—are actively engaged in expanding their

higher education and concentrating more on their research, it would be total cowardice by the Government. We will not introduce those proposals until after the next election, and I relish the argument on the doorstep—this is the red meat of politics—against the proposals of Her Majesty's official Opposition for retraction and decline, and for our proposals for expansion and investment.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): The Minister may be aware of my letter in *The Guardian* yesterday, setting out my calculations as to what might happen with top-up fees. How much do the Government estimate will be spent in the financial year 2007–08 on the new £1,000 bursaries? I estimated that one third of students would receive those, costing about £250 million. I should like clarification from the Minister regarding those figures.

Alan Johnson: I have not read my hon. Friend's letter in *The Guardian*. [HON. MEMBERS: " Why not?"] Indeed; I plead guilty to many failings and that is one of them. My hon. Friend's letters are always worth reading. We expect that at least one third of the extra money coming from fees will go to bursaries. We have calculated that around £300 million extra will go to bursaries, along with the other proposals to help poorer students to get to university.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): Much of the argument in favour of the Government's proposals has been couched in terms of the need to reinvest in the research base of UK universities. In that context, has the Minister seen the comments this week of Professor Andrew Cubie, the author of the Cubie report, who stated that the proposals would have the opposite effect, creating a gilded circle of universities in the south-east and denuding universities in the rest of the country of the staff, students and resources necessary to compete?

Alan Johnson: I read those comments from Andrew Cubie, who, incidentally, chaired the Scottish inquiry and rejected all Opposition arguments that graduates should not make a contribution. On the specific issue of research, we believe that with an additional investment of £1.25 billion in research and with the actions of our international competitors, we cannot just carry on with business as usual. We have shifted some £25 million, which is 2 per cent. of the research budget, but I accept the fears and concerns about the return to a binary situation because of those proposals. I am keen to debate the issue and to find a shared analysis, because we all want the same thing. We want excellent research and to ensure that we keep the best academics in this country.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Is my hon. Friend aware that within the past few days several of our senior scientists, including Nobel prize winners, have made representations to the Government about the rapidly declining numbers of students in universities studying science, engineering and technology subjects? Will he consider my feelings and those of many others, who fear that if differentially higher fees for studying those subjects are introduced, it will make matters much worse?

Alan Johnson: I do not accept that final point, but I accept that we have a problem—and a job to do—with encouraging more youngsters to study science. An important element of that will be the new GCSE, 21st century science, on which we are working. Several initiatives are being followed across the board to ensure that we get more students interested in science. The Roberts report said that one of the main problems was that science was perceived as being dull, and we need to work on that as well as the other initiatives to address the important problem that my hon. Friend raises.

Post-16 Education

14. **Vera Baird** (Redcar): How many education authorities provide only (a) a sixth-form college and (b) school sixth-form provision for post-16 education; and what plans he has for diversity of supply in post-16 education. [128982]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): There are eight local education authorities in England where 16 to 19 education is provided solely in a mixture of sixth-form colleges and general further education colleges. There are no local education authorities where post-16 provision is delivered only through sixth forms. There will be no national blueprint for the pattern of learning. However, popular and successful sixth-form provision, whether in schools, sixth-form colleges or new, distinct sixth-form centres in FE colleges, will be encouraged, especially where there is little or inadequate provision.

Vera Baird: I am grateful for that answer. Will my hon. Friend consider the position in Redcar, which is one of the authorities with only college provision for post-16 education? The take-up rates are very low. A beacon school has now proposed a sixth form with specific outreach into the areas with the lowest take-up rates. Does my hon. Friend agree that that represents progress that we should encourage?

Mr. Lewis: Our objective in every community is to increase significantly the number of young people staying on in education and training post-16 to achieve qualifications that lead either to higher education or to skilled employment. We have asked local learning and skills councils to conduct strategic reviews in the next two years, to consider post-16 provision in both those areas and to make recommendations for improvement. Alongside that, local education authorities have the right to publish proposals for consultation on the creation of new school sixth forms. I would expect my hon. Friend's local learning and skills council and local education authority to engage fully with her views, in the best interests of her constituents. If she felt that that was not happening appropriately, I would be more than happy to meet her to discuss the matter.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): In drawing up his plans for post-16 education, will the Minister be guided by the views of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who seems to think that training to be a plumber is less valid than doing an academic degree?

Mr. Lewis: My right hon. Friend did not make that point. The tragedy of this debate is that the Conservatives are repeating the reason why vocational education and training has never worked before in this country. They want a system of sheep and goats, in which able young people receive academic education and young people from different social backgrounds receive vocational education. We want a system that supports every individual young person in fulfilling their potential. We want a society that has adequate numbers of plumbers and of scientists and lawyers.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Will the Minister explain why the No. 10 policy unit—and in particular Mr. Andrew Adonis, who I know is loved by Labour Members—is so keen on delivering sixth-form education through sixth-form colleges, rather than on the more varied approach about which the Minister has just spoken?

Mr. Lewis: We have made it absolutely clear that there is no national blueprint for appropriate 16-to-19 education. We want the local organisations in every community to look at the best interests of those young people to ensure that far more of them stay on in education and training and progress into higher education or skilled employment. We recognise that between the ages of 16 and 19 young people have distinct needs and are vulnerable. We need a system that can respond to those specific needs. It is for local agencies, such as the learning and skills councils and LEAs, and professionals and parents in each community, to determine the provision that will deliver improved participation and higher attainment.

Local Education Authority Funding

15. **Mr. Mark Simmonds** (Boston and Skegness): If he will make a statement on the working of the new funding allocation system for local education authorities.

[128983]

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): The new LEA funding system consists of a basic amount per pupil that is the same everywhere, plus top-ups for deprived pupils and for areas with higher recruitment and retention costs. We are working on the detailed proposals to restore stability to school funding for 2004–05 and 2005–06, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced to the House on 17 July.

Mr. Simmonds: What response would the Minister give to schools in my constituency and across Lincolnshire, which the LEA predicts are facing an estimated budget cut in this financial year of £2.133 million, based on the new funding formula? Further cuts are predicted in the 2004–05 financial year, affecting 29 out of 63 secondary schools in Lincolnshire. Will the Minister take this opportunity to assure my constituents, and teachers and students in Lincolnshire, that those funds will be returned and that school budgets will be increased next year? That would honour the commitments by the Secretary of State, and by the Minister for School Standards himself, that there will be no repetition of this year's funding problems?

Mr. Miliband: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows that this year schools in his constituency are funded to the tune of £1,130 more per pupil than was the case six years ago. If individual schools face particular problems, I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would write to me to explain how those problems have arisen. The hon. Gentleman will be reassured to know that every LEA in the country has been contacted by the Department to help model the options for 2004–05 and 2005–06, to ensure that we have the continued growth in the teacher and support staff work force of which we are so proud.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Will my hon. Friend say what has happened to the funding formula in the past six months? When it was first announced, the Conservative leadership of Cheshire county council praised the Government for the changes that they had made. Now, however, the council seems to be fundamentally critical of the changes. What has happened in the past six months?

Mr. Miliband: I can reassure my hon. Friend that the Government have not changed the funding formula in the past six months. The formula for this financial year is the one announced in the House in December.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Will the Minister agree to investigate the impact on the funding formula of the Greenwich judgment, which is resulting in higher cross-border pupil movements? The needs of those schools in my constituency that are largely populated by out-of-borough pupils are in no way reflected in the formula allocated to the borough.

Mr. Miliband: The hon. Gentleman raises a serious matter often raised with me by people representing constituencies in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, where there are also cross-border pupil movements. I should be interested to hear any particular evidence from his constituency and from London that the hon. Gentleman may have. I have not seen evidence before that this has been a particular problem in London. The hon. Gentleman will know that the funding formula and the recommendations for teachers pay from the School Teachers Review Body treat different parts of London in different ways. I had not heard that the Greenwich judgment was having adverse consequences, but I should be very happy to look into the matter.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Before the Minister repeats the figures that he gave to the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook) about Somerset funding, may I say that I accept that, empirically, we are doing better now than in the dark days of the previous Conservative Government? However, a differential does exist. Counties such as Somerset and other rural shires in the west country, as well as parts of the midlands, are doing extremely badly in comparison with other parts of the country. The difference in per-pupil funding is

greater than what might reasonably be caused by differences in costs. Will the Minister look at the formula again to ensure that all children in all parts of the country have a basic entitlement to the money needed for their education?

Mr. Miliband: We are always pleased by the generous even-handedness of the Liberal Democrats. Our commitment is that similar pupils in different parts of the country should have similar amounts of money attached to them by central Government. That is the fair way to act. There is a basic entitlement for every pupil in the country. Every pupil who comes from a family living in poverty gets extra, and those in high-cost areas receive extra too. That funding formula is the right basis for the future, and the funds that go out are based on the nature of local populations around the country, which is the fairest way of distributing them.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

The Solicitor-General was asked

Serious Fraud Office

18. **Mrs. Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham): How many secondees are working in the Serious Fraud Office; and if she will make a statement. [128961]

The Solicitor-General (Ms Harriet Harman): Two secondees from the private sector are working in the Serious Fraud Office, and two staff are on loan from other Government Departments. It helps the effective investigation and prosecution of serious and complex fraud if there is a good understanding between the SFO and the private sector and between the SFO and other Departments and agencies.

Mrs. Gillan: Does the Solicitor-General think that that is enough? Given the recent high-profile collapse of Customs and Excise cases, particularly the London City Bond prosecution, the Butterfield review recommended that there should be more systematic dialogue between Customs and other Departments. Does the Solicitor-General believe that that could be facilitated by more secondments between the SFO and Customs and Excise? If so, what can she do about it?

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Lady makes an interesting point. Obviously, the SFO must achieve the right balance between permanent staff, those seconded and those employed on contract to increase capacity or bring in specialist knowledge during a particular case. She raises the question of Customs, particularly in the LCB case. A statement was made to the House in July by the Economic Secretary to the Treasury following the report of Mr. Justice Butterfield, who made a number of recommendations for building on progress already made in Customs and Excise investigations and prosecutions. There will be a report later in the autumn on how we intend to take things forward.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Every year fraudsters and so-called white-collar criminals rob thousands of victims, causing untold damage. In spite of the presence of secondees, there are continuing reports of low levels of prosecution by the SFO. What percentage of cases referred to the SFO resulted in prosecutions in the most recent year for which statistics are available? Is the Solicitor-General satisfied that all cases that deserve prosecution are prosecuted by the SFO?

The Solicitor-General: Of the cases referred to the SFO, something like 40 per cent. of those that the SFO decides to take on for vetting result in prosecution. Obviously, many cases are referred to the SFO in which people have not realised what the SFO's remit is, and those cases are more appropriate to another prosecutions agency. So, something like 40 per cent. of those taken on for vetting end up being prosecuted. That is quite a high figure.

On whether all serious fraud that ought to be prosecuted by the SFO is being prosecuted, I think we must all agree—including the SFO—that the answer is no. Something like £14 billion worth of fraud occurs annually in our economy. The Attorney-General and I, like the SFO, are in no doubt that we must take white-collar crime very seriously. The law must be even handed in ensuring that those who are money laundering in the City are dealt with effectively and fairly.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): The Solicitor-General will recognise that there is great concern among the Opposition and outside the House about the collapse of the Customs and Excise cases to which my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) referred. Does the Solicitor-General recognise the need for all-party discussions on the implications of the Butterfield report? Will she meet me, and colleagues such as my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) who expressed concerns to the Economic Secretary when he made his statement, so that we can ensure that fraud prosecutions are much better conducted in future, whether by Customs and Excise, the SFO or any other body?

The Solicitor-General: Of course, I will arrange for those meetings to take place. We would want to discuss these important issues of prosecuting Customs cases and serious fraud cases with the hon. Gentleman and any other hon. Members who take an interest in them. I will get back to him with a response. With more focus on the issue, with the right framework and procedures and with the right amount of resources allocated to serious fraud, I think that we can take matters forward.

Public Prosecutions

19. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What discussions she has had with her European counterparts on common practice relating to public prosecutions. [128962]

The Solicitor-General (Miss Harriet Harman): Crime is international now and we need to work with our European counterparts and more widely internationally to combat it. To that end, I met other European Justice Ministers in The Hague in April to discuss and support the work of Eurojust, the European network of

prosecutors. The Attorney-General constantly meets and discusses a wide range of issues with other Justice Ministers—particularly EU Ministers. Both the Attorney-General and I work closely with the Crown Prosecution Service's European and international division, whose work I commend to the House.

Miss McIntosh: I thank the Solicitor-General for that reply. Does she realise that the criminal justice system goes to the heart of the system in each member state? Scotland prides itself on having its own legal system, as she is only too well aware. It would be entirely inappropriate for the Government to subscribe to common EU standards of evidence and procedure. Will the right hon. and learned Lady resist any attempt to impose on this country a uniform EU standard of criminal procedures?

The Solicitor-General: We want close co-operation. Crime does not recognise national borders and we have to ensure that if a crime is committed in one country, and the evidence is in a second, it can be prosecuted in a third. That is important for human trafficking, drug smuggling and dealing with money laundering and terrorism, as the hon. Lady will accept. That is one question. The other is accountability. It is certainly the case that while prosecution decisions that are taken in this country are taken independently, I am accountable to the House for them. That is important and it is the way it will remain. Of course, it is important that the House makes the decisions—the substantive criminal law—and decides the procedures. The Convention material reflects the differences between legal systems throughout Europe. We definitely want to keep our own accountability and autonomy, but we must have more co-operation and we must work more closely together. We must work in a harmonised way to get to grips with international criminals.

Serious Fraud Office

20. **Hugh Bayley** (City of York): What additional resources have been made available to enable the Serious Fraud Office (a) to investigate and (b) to prosecute cases of bribery by UK citizens and companies abroad. [128963]

The Solicitor-General: In this financial year, the SFO budget has risen to £23.41 million and it is due to increase further to £35.34 million by the end of 2005–06. The SFO plans to use some of those resources to expand its permanent staff numbers to approximately 300 by the end of that financial year. Each case referred to the SFO is assessed on its individual merits, including allegations of bribery by United Kingdom citizens or companies overseas.

Hugh Bayley: One of the consequences of the dreadful attacks two years ago on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon was that the House decided to enact legislation to make international bribery and other international financial crimes offences in British law. Naturally, I want to know that the SFO is investigating cases and that prosecutions will follow. I am not asking my right hon. and learned Friend to make a statement in detail to the House but I wonder whether she would be willing for me and a representative from the Transparency International UK branch to talk to her about that matter so that we can be reassured that the legislation is not just gathering dust on the statute book but is actively being used to clamp down on international bribery.

The Solicitor-General: I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend to talk about those issues, which he has done so much to bring before the House. Indeed, I acknowledge his role in raising the issues covered by the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. I would be happy to discuss with him the enforcement of that important Act.

Sentencing (Rape)

23. **Vera Baird** (Redcar): What plans the Attorney-General has to refer unduly lenient sentences in rape cases to the Court of Appeal to seek general guidance on sentencing. [128966]

The Solicitor-General (Ms Harriet Harman): The Attorney-General and I have the power to refer a sentence imposed for a limited number of serious offences, including rape, to the Court of Appeal if the sentence is, in our view, unduly lenient. In 2003, the Attorney-General and I referred sentences in 12 cases involving rape. The Court of Appeal increased the sentences in four, and seven cases of rape that we referred to the Court of Appeal as unduly lenient sentences have yet to be heard.

Vera Baird: I am grateful for that answer. Is my right hon. and learned Friend satisfied that the courts are implementing the sentencing advisory panel's recommendation that they should sentence as harshly for rape by an acquaintance as they must for rape by a stranger? If she is not entirely satisfied of that, are not unduly lenient sentence applications, appropriately brought, a way forward?

The Solicitor-General: My hon. and learned Friend reminds the House that a key part of the sentencing advisory panel's recommendations was that rape that is supposedly acquaintance rape should not of itself be regarded as less serious than rape by a complete stranger. That recommendation was accepted by the Court of Appeal in their guideline judgment in the case of Milberry in December and that is what all courts should be following. However, if my memory serves me right, none of the cases that we have had to refer to the Court of Appeal as unduly lenient sentences has involved a stranger rape, so we are looking particularly at how the Court responds to the importance of recognising all the circumstances of an individual case, and that rape by a husband, a partner or a friend can be every bit as violent and traumatising as rape by a stranger.

Speaker's Statement

12.32 pm

Mr. Speaker: I wish to make a statement about identity passes. Members will appreciate that security issues are a source of deep concern and the provision of these passes is a basic security measure, which helps to protect us all.

Our security staff cannot be expected to identify all those who have access to the parliamentary estate. Although I recognise that it is impractical for Members to wear their passes at all times, it is essential for them to carry their passes and to co-operate with the security staff if they are asked to produce them.

Members are personally responsible for the consistent wearing of passes by their staff. Members of the parliamentary Press Gallery and staff of all other organisations attached to the House must wear their passes at all times.

I ask Members to set an example and to give their full support to the Serjeant at Arms and to all our security staff who carry out their admirable work to make the parliamentary estate a safe place in which to work for Members, Members' staff and all the staff of the House.

Business of the House

12.33 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): May I ask the Leader of the House to give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Peter Hain): The business of the House for next week is as follows:

MONDAY 15 SEPTEMBER—Commons consideration of Lords Amendments to the Local Government Bill.

TUESDAY 16 SEPTEMBER—Opposition Day [17th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced, followed, if necessary, by Commons consideration of Lords Amendments.

WEDNESDAY 17 SEPTEMBER—Consideration of an allocation of time motion followed by all stages of the Northern Ireland (Monitoring Commission etc.) Bill *[Lords]* followed, if necessary, by Commons consideration of Lords Amendments.

THURSDAY 18 SEPTEMBER—Second Reading of the Arms Control and Disarmament (Inspections) Bill *[Lords]*. Followed, if necessary, by Commons consideration of Lords Amendments.

FRIDAY 19 SEPTEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week after the conference recess will include:

TUESDAY 14 OCTOBER—Remaining stages of the Crime (International Co-operation) Bill *[Lords]*.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for October will be:

THURSDAY 16 OCTOBER—Debate on the report from the Committee on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on reducing regional disparities in prosperity.

THURSDAY 23 OCTOBER—Debate on the report from the Lord Chancellor's Department Select Committee on the Children and Family Court Advisory Service.

THURSDAY 30 OCTOBER—Debate on the report from the International Development Committee on Trade and Development at the WTO: Issues for Cancun.

With permission, Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the whole House will wish to endorse what my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said in expressing our shock and horror at the murder of Sweden's Foreign Minister Anna Lindh and in offering our condolences to her family, her friends and the Swedish people. As the Foreign Secretary said, she represented everything that is wonderful about Sweden and about Europe. As Europe Minister, I saw what an inspirational and internationally respected Foreign Minister she was. She was a delightful and warm person, a joy to work with and widely seen as a future Swedish Prime Minister. She will be sorely missed.

Mr. Forth: May I thank the Leader of the House and echo on behalf of the official Opposition his remarks on the ghastly events in Sweden and the loss of the Swedish Foreign Minister? On this day, 11 September, and at this hour, may I also say that our thoughts must surely be with our friends and allies in the United States, bearing in mind how many people tragically lost their lives on

[Mr. Forth]

this day two years ago—people of many nationalities and many different beliefs? They will surely never be forgotten.

May I ask the Leader of the House to elaborate on the Government's reasoning for insisting that all stages of the Northern Ireland (Monitoring Commission etc.) Bill are to be forced through this House in one day? He has announced that as if it were a fait accompli, yet legislating at that speed is surely one of the things about which we should always be most reluctant. We all know that we legislate in haste and repent at leisure—at least, we do not repent; the citizens usually repent. Will the Leader of the House therefore do us the courtesy of telling us why legislation of this importance, complexity and controversiality needs to be put through the House as quickly as he is suggesting?

I attended this morning's Intelligence and Security Committee press conference, and I am hoping that the Leader of the House will tell us when we will have an opportunity properly to discuss that matter in its own right. I suspect that he will probably say that there is a defence debate this afternoon, as indeed there is, and I would hope that it will not be necessarily pre-empted by a discussion about the Intelligence and Security Committee, which deserves time of its own in this House, not least because, for example, the report includes such phrases as:

"We are disturbed that after the first evidence session . . . the Defence Secretary decided against giving instructions for a letter to be written".

At paragraph 110, the report continues:

"We believe that this uncertainty should have been highlighted to give a balanced view of Saddam's chemical and biological capacity."

The following paragraph states:

"This should have been highlighted in the dossier."

Paragraph 112 states:

"The omission of the context and assessment allowed speculation as to its exact meaning"—

referring to the famous 45 minutes.

I mention those few extracts almost at random to illustrate the amount of important and controversial material in the Intelligence and Security Committee report that is damning of the Government, their whole approach to the matter and the Secretary of State for Defence in particular. Will the Leader of the House therefore tell us when we will have the opportunity for a proper, measured debate on this document—not just minutes after it has been released, or first thoughts, as I have expressed briefly today—and a measured response by the House and the Government to the absolute dynamite, if I may put it that way, that it contains?

Talking of that, I was somewhat puzzled that in PMEs yesterday—

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): PMEs?

Mr. Forth: Prime Minister's evasions. At column 320 of *Hansard* yesterday, the Prime Minister said:

"I think it quite wrong that we make any assumptions until we see the Intelligence and Security Committee report, which is to be presented to me tomorrow. It would be wrong to comment on it before that is done."—[*Official Report*, 10 September 2003; Vol. 410, c. 320.]

That is what he said yesterday. However, funnily enough, the Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee wrote to the Prime Minister on 9 September—the day before yesterday—to say, very familiarly:

"Dear Tony,

Enclosed with this letter is the Intelligence and Security Committee's Report".

How is it that the Chairman may write to "Dear Tony" on Tuesday only for "Dear Tony" to say on Wednesday that he would not see the report until today? There is surely some mistake and I hope that the Leader of the House will ask the Prime Minister to come to us this afternoon to explain how he got it so wrong. Perhaps this is another piece of evidence showing that we cannot believe a word that the Prime Minister says any more.

Smuggled in through the written ministerial statements today—it is hidden down the Order Paper at statement No. 8—is:

"Prime Minister: Publication of the Government's response to the Ninth Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life."

That is an important matter and an important report and, given its significance, will the Leader of the House guarantee that we will be given the opportunity of a full debate on it and all the material it covers, and that it will not be swept under any carpets or rushed through in any way? I am not asking for his guarantee of an immediate debate, but for time in the House of Commons to deal with the matter.

Finally, I ask the Leader of the House to think again about the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill. He will recall that way back in January the Bill emerged from its Standing Committee—those proceedings were truncated and guillotined as, regrettably, they all are these days—after only 30 of its 90 clauses had been debated and only one of its schedules discussed. After a gap of about six months, the Government eventually came back to the House and said that they wanted to carry over this large and controversial Bill and recommit it to Standing Committee. They admitted then that a lot of new material would be imported subsequently to the Bill.

We now learn—the Leader of the House is telling us with his usual insouciance—that the Bill will have only eight further Committee sittings despite the fact that we already know that there will be about 35 new amendments and apparently a lot more material on which to vote. Will he please think again and not follow his predecessors' regrettable habit of being party to the poor and inadequate consideration of such Bills in Committee because of lack of time? We have already been round the track once on this and the scrutiny has been shown to be completely inadequate. Please may we have a lot more time to consider the Bill in the future?

Mr. Hain: First, I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's endorsement of the whole House's horror at what happened to Anna Lindh. I am also grateful to him for reminding us of the terrible terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre on 11 September two years ago. I agree with all the points that he made, and that we should never forget those who died or ever let up on the fight against terrorism.

On the Northern Ireland (Monitoring Commission etc.) Bill, to which the right hon. Gentleman referred, the truth is that it is urgently needed before the end of the Session. I hope that the Conservative Opposition will start giving us exactly the kind of bipartisan support for bringing peace and stability to Northern Ireland that we gave them when we were in opposition. I am afraid that such support is unfortunately often lacking from Conservative Front-Bench spokesmen.

On the Intelligence and Security Committee report, may I first congratulate the Committee on a thorough piece of work? Many senior Members of the House from all parties sit on it and it demonstrates the value of parliamentary scrutiny. The fact that the Prime Minister asked it to report on the matter is a further example of the importance that we as a Government and I as the Leader of the House attach to parliamentary accountability on such important issues.

May I also attack and deprecate the right hon. Gentleman's criticism of the Defence Secretary? We had a mendacious and misleading leak yesterday from the Committee. *[Interruption.]* Yes, indeed we did. It was an attempt to pre-empt the Committee's full report. As a member of the Committee said at the press conference this morning, facts have a habit of getting in the way of conspiracy theories. The Leader of the Opposition joined the conspiracy theory in the most disreputable fashion yesterday and he has endorsed that stance again today, to his discredit.

The truth is that we have an outstanding Defence Secretary who provided brilliant leadership in a difficult war against Iraq. I am sure that he has the full support of the House in continuing to combat terrorism and the remnants of the Saddam regime in Iraq. I just want to say this to the shadow Leader of the House: it is wrong to try to pre-empt an independent judicial inquiry as the Opposition are seeking to do. There will, of course, be an opportunity to put questions to my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary this afternoon.

On the Wicks report, the Government have made it clear that we endorse virtually everything in it. *[Interruption.]* Well, we have said that we cannot accept two things, and I am sure that everyone would agree that it is sensible for the Government to have reservations about them. One is the number of special advisers. It is not sensible to put an arbitrary limit on that. The other is the right of the Prime Minister to appoint key staff to ensure that directions can be given so that the Government's business is conducted in a sensible and orderly fashion. *[Interruption.]* The shadow Leader of the House is muttering. His colleague, the deputy shadow Leader of the House, was a special adviser—as it happens, to Norman Lamont, although I am not sure that that is a good advertisement for special advisers. The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) was also a special adviser, in addition to jumping up and down in his usual enthusiastic way. We should concentrate on the facts and not let the Opposition's allegations get in the way.

On the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill, the truth is that it has been given full parliamentary scrutiny, and that will continue to be the case. It has received no more and no less parliamentary scrutiny than Bills received over the years under the old procedure. If any matters need to be considered in that regard, I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and his Ministers will do so.

As for the rest of the Session, we will consider the workings of the September sitting. I notice that the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) did not criticise it. I take his silence as an endorsement of the policies that we have adopted in the House.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): We obviously associate ourselves with comments on the assassination of the Swedish Foreign Minister and the anniversary of the 11 September terrorism attacks.

There is a precedent for handling Intelligence and Security Committee reports, set by the report on the Bali terrorist bombing. In that case, the Foreign Secretary made an immediate statement in the House, followed by an hour's questioning. In denying the need for an early statement on the latest report, is the Leader of the House saying that it is less important, or is no one prepared to make that statement? Surely at the very least, the Prime Minister should come to the House to be accountable in the way described by the Leader of the House a moment ago. The report is about not just one personality—the Secretary of State for Defence—but the whole rot at the centre of the Government.

For example, paragraph 83 raises an important issue. It is apparent that part of the Prime Minister's statement that was intended for his foreword was subsequently excluded. The exclusion of

"The case I make is not that Saddam could launch a nuclear attack on London or another part of the UK (He could not)"

from the eventual introduction to the dossier is very misleading. Paragraph 86 states that there was a tendency for the document to be

"unhelpful to an understanding of this issue."

There is also the extraordinary issue of paragraph 103, which has been removed from the report. The introduction says that if anything has been blocked out by No. 10, it will be marked by an asterisk, but there is no asterisk where paragraph 103 should be. What has happened to it? As it pre-empts what is said in paragraph 104, it is extremely important that we are given an explanation of what was intended, because the Committee concludes:

"We regard the initial failure by the MoD to disclose that some staff had put their concerns in writing to their line managers as unhelpful and potentially misleading."

What was going to be put in paragraph 103? Finally, in paragraph 135, the February dossier and the surrounding publicity are described by the Committee as "counter-productive".

The question still remains whether the House was conned by the two dossiers. Were the public conned by the two dossiers? We know that those on the Conservative Front Bench were not conned, because the leader of the Conservative party wanted to attack Iraq and to follow President Bush come what may, even if the Government did not. The House deserves a full statement now on the issues that have been raised by this important report.

Mr. Hain: The House has had statement after statement from the Government—from my right hon.

[Mr. Hain]

Friends the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary—on Iraq and all the matters around it. An independent judicial inquiry is under way. Lord Hutton will report, and that report will be fully debated in the House. That is where we should leave it. On issues to do with detail and paragraph 103 and all the rest of it, the hon. Gentleman is obviously able to ask his colleague the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) about that detail. The truth is that many distinguished Members of this place are sitting on the Committee. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is not making a criticism of them as to the report that they produced.

It would not have been known from what the shadow Leader of the House and from the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) said that the report exonerated the Government from all the main charges that have been made against us and endorsed the thrust and the content of the dossier. That is the central result of the report, although it would never be guessed from the attempt to generate froth and excitement over the past few minutes.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): May I take my right hon. Friend back to the monitoring commission Bill? It is unacceptable and an abuse that it will be railroaded through the House in one sitting. I remind my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) that the House of Lords will have two days on the Bill. That underlines the fact that this place has become a charade in terms of law making. I hope that my right hon. Friend will reflect on that.

The Bill is a major piece of legislation affecting the future of the United Kingdom and the problems of Northern Ireland. If it is right for the House of Lords to have two full days to consider it and an opportunity to digest and reflect over the weekend, how is it right that this place will have the Bill bounced through in one day, bearing in mind the row and the notes left on my right hon. Friend's file by his predecessor, who said that this would not happen again when we had a similar abuse a few months ago involving the Northern Ireland Assembly?

Mr. Hain: I pay tribute to the vigilance with which my hon. Friend always holds Governments and everybody to account. I am sure that he is not using the procedures of the House of Lords as a model for this House. The monitoring commission Bill is a much-needed measure. It is very important, as I know my hon. Friend accepts, in taking forward the Northern Ireland peace process. There will be a late sitting on the day that the Bill is considered—proceedings will run on well beyond the moment of interruption—because it is so important to take the measure through at this stage.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): Will the Leader of the House redeem the promise that was made as long ago as January by one of his predecessors that we would have a full-day debate in Government time on pensions? Is he aware that it is two years since we have had a debate on this subject in Government time? Practically everyone apart from the Government recognises the fact that there is a pensions crisis. We want a full-day debate so that we can hear what the Government intend to do about it.

Mr. Hain: I will certainly draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. Given the Green Paper that the Government have published and the other opportunities that the House has had to raise the issue of pensions, I do not accept that pensions have been ignored by the House in recent times. The issue has been fully debated. The Government are seized of the worldwide collapse in stock markets, which has had a big effect on pensions worldwide and created many difficulties for pensioners in this country. The Government are giving close and urgent attention to the matter.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Will my right hon. Friend take the opportunity in the near future to allow the House to consider the mechanisms that it uses for holding to account bodies to which Parliament has devolved powers, which have misused those powers? I have in mind specifically, in the area that I represent, the local Conservative-controlled Dacorum borough council, which has taken no notice at any stage of the new regulations and advice introduced by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister concerning development. As a result, it continues to try to build on the green belt in my area in Apsley. Instead, it should be paying proper heed to what Parliament decided councils should do.

Mr. Hain: My hon. Friend raises an important matter. I understand his concerns. I am sure that the Ministers who have responsibilities in this area will want to note his concerns and perhaps discuss the matter with him.

For the information of the House, I understand from information that has just been given to me that paragraph 103, to which the hon. Member for North Cornwall referred, does not exist in the ISC report.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will the Leader of the House prevail on the Secretary of State for Health to explain to the House why there is such a notorious scandal over the proposed hospital development at Paddington basin? Is he aware that Harefield hospital in my constituency could be modernised at a cost of about £18 million whereas the new project at Paddington basin is now estimated to cost no less than £800 million, and is already several years late? Is this how the national health service will carry out the NHS plan?

Mr. Hain: I am aware that the hon. Gentleman has been raising this matter consistently, including, if I am right, in an Adjournment debate. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is seized of the issue. I remind the hon. Gentleman that there are more nurses being recruited in his constituency and that more investment is going into hospitals throughout the country compared with massive hospital closures, cuts in health spending and cuts in nurses, doctors and consultants, which was the Conservative record.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): I obviously associate myself with all the comments made about the sad death

of Anna Lindh. I note that many pro-euro and pro-European campaigners will be particularly saddened because they feel that they have lost an eloquent, persuasive and attractive colleague.

May I point out to my right hon. Friend the fact that today is another anniversary, namely the 30th anniversary of the coup in Chile, when Salvador Allende's legitimately elected socialist Government were thrown out by Pinochet with the support of the CIA of the United States of America? Chile is now rebuilding itself as a democratic country and is trying to find means of bringing together an understanding of its past. Is it not time that we had some debate in the Chamber, or in Westminster Hall, about the changes in Chile and other countries that have suffered dictatorship over the past 30 years?

Mr. Hain: I very much agree with my hon. Friend's views on Chile and its transformation since the fascist coup, the anniversary of which we are noting today. He is right to draw the attention of the House to it. We are seeing Chile moving forward under a social democratic Government towards a new future and a new hope for the future. We shall certainly consider whether there will be time for a debate, and my hon. Friend has opportunities to raise the matter in other ways.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): May I ask the Leader of the House to think again about his reply to my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House, on the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill? As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the Government have elected to return the Bill for consideration in Committee with some extra clauses, but only those extra clauses can be discussed, quite apart from the fact that they will have an influence on the 90 clauses of the first Bill. Fewer than 30 of those 90 clauses were discussed in Committee, and there was no prevarication or filibustering by the Opposition parties. In the name of not only democracy but good government, will the right hon. Gentleman please ask the appropriate colleagues to reconsider this important matter?

Mr. Hain: I take serious note of those concerns, coming as they do from the hon. Gentleman. I will look into the matter. As he knows, the Bill has been considered in Committee. The normal procedures have been followed by the Government in general and by Ministers in particular. Nevertheless, we shall have another look, given the points that he has made.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate about the growing trend whereby British companies put some of their jobs overseas? Is he aware of Tesco's plan to relocate 350 jobs from the UK to Bangalore, 230 of them from Tesco house in my constituency? The main reason seems to be the low wages that are paid in Bangalore; as a result, jobs are being lost among my constituents and those from other constituencies.

Mr. Hain: I very much understand my hon. Friend's concerns and appreciate the diligence with which she reflects the interests of her constituents, including the Tesco staff. We are part of a global economy in which such movements are a fact of life: the relocation of call centres and similar activities to India and elsewhere is a challenge that we all face. I am sure that Tesco will want to bear my hon. Friend's remarks in mind. She reinforces the Government's determination to create new high-quality jobs for the future. As she knows, 72,000 new jobs have been created in Wales over the past year, even as globalising pressures reduce the number of jobs in certain sectors.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): In view of the imminence of the intergovernmental conference, may we have a further debate on the draft European constitution? Given that the Prime Minister told this House on 18 June 1997 that the Amsterdam subsidiarity protocol would have "real teeth"; given that the Foreign Secretary told me on 21 May this year that in practice subsidiarity had proved unsatisfactory; and given that the latest draft proposal imposes no obligation whatsoever on the European Commission to withdraw inappropriate legislative proposals, why does not the right hon. Gentleman now concede that subsidiarity in the future will be what it has been in the past—not a protection of the rights of nation states, but thin cover for the legislative imperialism of the European Union?

Mr. Hain: On the procedural matter of whether we should have another debate, of course there will be opportunities to debate the intergovernmental conference negotiations. Indeed, the Foreign Secretary has been more forthcoming than any of his predecessors in ensuring that this House has every opportunity to debate the progress of such conferences. May I ask the hon. Gentleman why he and his colleagues blocked a motion that was going through the House the other night that would for the first time have set up, as the Government intend, a proper Standing Committee to monitor on the House's behalf the progress of the European treaty negotiations? I should have thought that they would welcome that and nod it through so that we can get on with it.

Subsidiarity was a very important achievement for Britain: it was a British proposal that, for the first time, allowed national Parliaments across Europe to vet any new proposal from the Commission. If more than a third of national Parliaments object, the Commission is obliged to reconsider and withdraw. *[Interruption.]* Indeed—to reconsider. It is inconceivable that Brussels would seek to railroad through a proposal in the face of such national parliamentary opposition, which is likely to reflect the Government's position. *[Interruption.]* Instead of nodding his head in the kneejerk fashion to which we have all become accustomed, the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) should welcome that democratic advance and celebrate it—but of course that does not fit the script of Tory anti-Europeans.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the monopoly that has been established by the Parliamentary Communications Directorate, the parliamentary computer provider, on the supply of computing equipment within the House, and of the sub-standard service that it has been providing to those who do not have what it calls standard equipment—by which it simply means equipment that it has provided. I raised the matter with my right hon. Friend's illustrious predecessor in

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business questions in May, and the then Leader of the House referred it to the Information Committee on 2 June. I do not know whether my right hon. Friend has received a reply, but I certainly have not. Will he investigate why, three months and one week after receiving a letter from the then Leader of the House, the Committee has made no response to a matter that concerns many Members? Indeed, I know that one of his Cabinet colleagues has mentioned it.

Mr. Hain: You will be aware, Mr. Speaker, as am I, that there is great concern about the matter among right hon. and hon. Members across the House. I have not yet had a response from the Information Committee, but the situation is being investigated and progress is due to be made soon. I am worried about the fact that Members with non-standard equipment are barred from accessing the parliamentary video and data network. It is vital that Members and their staff have full access to the PDVN, and a sufficient quantity of standard equipment must be issued to ensure that that is the case. The House authorities need to take the matter forward urgently.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): Can this House follow the example of the Scottish Parliament in having an urgent debate about the Dungavel detention centre and the policy of locking up the children of asylum seekers, especially given that we are told that this House is responsible for that policy? Although we welcome the concessions forced out of the Government by the Scottish people and the SNP, many people will have seen how unsatisfactory the devolution settlement has been in this respect, especially in terms of the shameful silence that has emanated from Scottish Ministers. Does the Leader of the House agree that there can be no grey areas in devolution when it comes to locking up the children of asylum seekers?

Mr. Hain: I cannot accept the hon. Gentleman's accusation of shameful silence on the part of Scottish Ministers, who are well aware of the situation and are addressing it. As for the substance of the issue, I shall make sure that the Secretary of State is aware of it.

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I join my right hon. Friend in paying tribute to the life of Anna Lindh, whom he and I met on numerous occasions—as did my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson)—when I held a Europe post in the Government. It is a terrible blow, not only for Sweden, but for Europe, because she was a great internationalist. My right hon. Friend will know that the Prime Minister of Sweden has made it clear that the referendum will go ahead on Sunday despite her tragic death. Whatever the result, it will have enormous implications for Britain's euro campaign. Will my right hon. Friend make time for a debate immediately after the referendum so that we can discuss the implications of the result on our strategy?

Mr. Hain: I very much echo my hon. Friend's sentiments. Anna Lindh was a doughty campaigner for human rights, going right back to her early days in the struggle against apartheid. As well as being a lovely person and a great internationalist, she reflected with great integrity a range of commitments to social justice, civil liberties and international justice worldwide.

As for the Swedish euro referendum, I am not aware of any statement by the Swedish Prime Minister, but I hope that fanatics, whether politically inspired or not, realise that murder will not derail the democratic process.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): Further to the point raised by my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House, the Government published today their response to the ninth report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, in which they explicitly reject two of its central recommendations on the number and role of special advisers. As that matter has caused the Government considerable difficulty, would it not be advantageous to have an early debate to allow the House to assist the Government in avoiding further embarrassment?

Mr. Hain: I understand the right hon. Gentleman's interest in and concern about such matters. The truth is that despite the fact that many Conservative Governments over the years employed special advisers, this Government are the first ever to publish a model contract and code of conduct for special advisers. We accepted the report's recommendations, including the setting up of an ethics adviser, in their entirety but for two specific points, which I do not accept as being central—namely, that the number of special advisers should be subject to a statutory limit and that the Prime Minister should not have the ability, through an Order in Council, to appoint certain members of staff who are able to give directions and thereby to run his office properly. Notwithstanding the right hon. Gentleman's views, that does not detract from the Government's central commitment to accept the report and proceed in a way that enjoys full public confidence.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): My colleagues and I wish to be associated with the tributes paid to the Swedish Foreign Minister. We also remember the horror of the terrorist attacks in the United States two years ago.

The Leader of the House may know that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in Northern Ireland is sponsoring a conference on broadband in Belfast early next month. However, does he know that no local broadband companies will be represented? A local company, KBL-Online, was refused both a platform and space at the conference, yet at one of the main sessions, NTR-Broadband, a Republic of Ireland-based company with no operational capacity in Northern Ireland, is being afforded participation. Will the Leader of the House therefore find time for a statement on the broadband conference so that assurances can be given that no local companies have been unfairly disadvantaged or disregarded during the Government-sponsored event?

Mr. Hain: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks about Anna Lindh and 11 September.

I must confess that I am not aware of the representation at the conference, but given the points that the hon. Gentleman raised, I am sure that the organisers will take note of them.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on enforcing civil judgments? I want to draw his attention especially to the conduct of Preston Beaumont Interiors, which operates in and around Cheshire. There are civil judgments against it but it is ducking and diving and avoiding them. That is an unacceptable effect of the court process, and such appalling business practices leave legitimate customers high and dry.

Mr. Hain: Obviously, I am concerned about my hon. Friend's remarks, especially since, with his long service in the House, he does not raise such matters lightly. I shall ensure that appropriate Ministers deal with those issues.

Points of Order

1.12 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will have heard the Leader of the House say in response to my question that it would be inappropriate for a Minister to make a statement at this stage on the report from the Intelligence and Security Committee, despite the fact that Ministers are accountable to the House. I have the lobby briefing from No. 10, which states:

"Downing Street said the Defence Secretary Geoffrey Hoon would make a statement to the House of Commons today on the Intelligence and Security Committee report on the lead-up to the Iraq war."

That directly contradicts the Leader of House's response of a few moments ago. Have you received any indication from Downing street or the Secretary of State for Defence that a statement will be made? Why were we not forewarned?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. For clarification, are you saying that you have received no requests from the Secretary of State for Defence for the opportunity to make a statement specifically on the Intelligence and Security Committee report? Otherwise, it would imply that the Secretary of State would try to do what he attempted the other day, when you correctly stopped him, and subsume a statement in a debate. Such matters should be kept properly separate. We must not allow them to be merged for the convenience of the Secretary of State or anyone else, must we? Can you clarify the exact position?

Mr. Speaker: Let me clarify the position as far as I know it. I am not responsible for ministerial statements; they are a matter for Ministers. I have received no notification of any statement from the Secretary of State for Defence. However, we are about to hold a debate on the Adjournment of the House. If the Secretary of State is in order, he will be able to say what he wants. When he was not in order the other day, I stopped him. If other hon. Members are out of order, I shall not be long in telling them so.

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Peter Hain): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Let me make it clear what I said. In recent months, the Defence Secretary has made more statements to the House and been more accountable for the war in Iraq than any Defence Secretary in similar circumstances in parliamentary history. He will appear immediately after points of order, as the Opposition know. I do not know how the Defence Secretary could be more accountable to the House.

Mr. Forth: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Apart from the fact that the Foreign Secretary has already made a statement to television cameras and not to the House, were the Secretary of State for Defence to make a statement, it would enable hon. Members to question him properly under your guidance. However, if he decides to attempt to make a

[Mr. Forth]

statement in the guise of a speech in a debate, it is up to him whether he accepts interventions. That undermines one of the important processes of the House whereby we hold Ministers to account. They cannot duck a statement because it takes place under your guidance, but if they are making a speech, they can refuse interventions.

Mr. Speaker: These are the rules of the House, which the right hon. Gentleman knows. I think that he is clear about what I am saying—any hon. Member who is in order when speaking during the debate, whether the Secretary of State or a Back-Bench Member, even the newest Back Bencher, will be allowed to continue.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned interventions. It is up to individual Members' discretion to decide whether to take interventions. Although that may be a problem, provided that all hon. Members who are called are in order during the business before us, they will be able to speak. Those are the rules that the House has given me.

I do not wish to prolong the matter because hon. Members know that there is a 12-minute limit on speeches for Back-Bench Members. We are in danger of squeezing out a Back Bencher.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you confirm that today's debate is about homeland defence? It has been much sought because we have not held a ring-fenced debate on the subject. If we trespass into international affairs, it will be open season and we shall have another general foreign affairs and defence debate.

Mr. Speaker: It is a debate on the Adjournment, entitled "Defence in the United Kingdom". Hon. Members can read the Order Paper. It is a while since I have looked at it because I have been so busy taking points of order.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. We look to you to protect not only our interests but the good processes of the House. Is it not normal practice that when a ministerial statement is anticipated—we have been led to believe that one is forthcoming from the Secretary of State for Defence—hon. Members should receive proper prior notification so that they can attend? Cannot the Secretary of State make clear now from the Dispatch Box the time when he will make a statement—

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order. Clearly, the Speaker has not led anyone to believe that there will be a statement. That is the important thing.

Standards and Privileges

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That this House—

(i) approves the Fifth Report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges (House of Commons Paper No. 947); and

(ii) accordingly suspends Mr Clive Betts, Member for Sheffield Attercliffe, from the service of the House for seven days.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

1.18 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): I commend the motion to approve the Committee's fifth report, which it agreed unanimously on 15 July, and the related recommendation to suspend the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) from the service of the House for seven days. I shall speak briefly.

The report, which found that the hon. Gentleman's conduct had fallen well below the expected standard, was published on 17 July. The hon. Gentleman made a personal statement to the House on that day in which he acknowledged and accepted the Committee's conclusion that he had made two errors of judgment. He had already apologised unreservedly to the Committee in respect of those matters.

Hon. Members will recognise the readiness with which the hon. Gentleman came to the House to accept the report's conclusions and to apologise for his conduct, and the terms in which he did so. His prompt statement to the House was particularly welcome as the Committee's inquiry was completed on the eve of a recess, and there was consequently no opportunity for an early debate.

The background to this case is unusual. Following the appearance in the press of a series of allegations about the circumstances in which the hon. Gentleman had employed a personal friend, Mr. José Gasparo, a Brazilian national, to work for him temporarily at the House of Commons, and the circumstances of Mr. Gasparo's return to the UK after the two of them had travelled abroad together, the hon. Gentleman wrote to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards seeking an investigation of the propriety of his actions. This is the first occasion on which a Member has sought to initiate the investigative process, rather than wait to see whether a complaint materialised. That was no soft option. The Commissioner has investigated the matter in precisely the same way as he would have investigated a complaint from a third party.

I pay tribute to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the sensitive way in which he conducted this investigation. Both he and my Committee were solely concerned with whether any aspects of the hon. Gentleman's conduct in relation to the events in question were in breach of the code. We were not concerned with matters relating to his personal life.

The Commissioner's report highlighted three areas of concern: first, whether Mr. Gasparo had the skills and experience to do the job for which he was recruited, and whether his employment represented a proper use of public funds; secondly, whether the hon. Gentleman should have taken account of any factors besides Mr. Gasparo's skills and experience before employing him; and, thirdly, the events surrounding Mr. Gasparo's re-entry into the UK following his holiday with the hon. Gentleman.

My Committee concluded that, on the evidence available, the hon. Gentleman had not contravened any rules of the House relating to the staffing allowance in employing Mr. Gasparo. We did, however, conclude that the hon. Gentleman had been unwise to employ him, given Mr. Gasparo's history of work as a male escort and that he did not have leave to remain in the UK for the full period envisaged for his employment. However, the most serious of the allegations was that the hon. Gentleman had been party, while on holiday abroad with Mr. Gasparo, to copying an altered letter of enrolment for Mr. Gasparo's proposed further course of study. That alteration had removed words which Mr. Gasparo considered might be prejudicial to his securing readmission to the UK, his previous leave to remain having expired during the course of the holiday.

While my Committee recognised the psychological pressure under which the hon. Gentleman acted, it concluded that he should not have agreed to be party to a course of action which might have led to the immigration officer being deceived as to the facts on which to decide on Mr. Gasparo's re-entry to the UK. We concluded that, in doing so, the hon. Gentleman's conduct fell well below the standard expected in terms of maintaining and strengthening the public's trust and confidence in the integrity of Parliament.

Having been furnished with a full copy of the report, the hon. Gentleman made a written submission to the Committee, to which we gave careful consideration. We welcomed his recognition of the fairness of the Commissioner's report, and his willingness to apologise, should the Committee agree that he had made the errors of judgment identified by the Commissioner in his report. We none the less took the view that Mr. Gasparo's intentions were clear in relation to why he wanted an altered copy of the letter of enrolment for his proposed new course, and that the hon. Gentleman should not have been party to them, given the risk of immigration offences being committed as a result.

This was, in many respects, a difficult case. The Committee none the less reached a unanimous conclusion. I commend our report to the House.

1.23 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I would simply like to say that, every time we have one of these cases before us, it highlights the difficulty and sensitivity that often arises. It also puts us to the test in terms of our ability to regulate ourselves. I believe that, on this occasion as on all others, our Committee has performed its task and considered the matter properly, and come to what is always in these cases a rather painful conclusion. I certainly support the Committee and would want my colleagues to do so as well. I do so in the knowledge that this is yet another example of how we are capable of regulating ourselves, and are prepared to do so. I hope that it will reassure those outside that we are doing so, and that we are constantly capable of doing so.

1.24 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I wish to associate myself and my colleagues not only with the comments of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) but with those of the Chairman of the Committee.

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Phil Woolas): It is generally accepted that the House should move quickly to resolve recommendations from the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges. The Committee reported on 17 July, and the Government have provided time today for debate at the earliest possible opportunity. I thank the Committee for its careful examination of this matter, and for its considered and balanced report. I also thank the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards for his thorough investigation, and for the clarity of his report.

It is important to note that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) referred the allegations made against him to the Parliamentary Commissioner and co-operated fully with the investigation, as has been accepted. He has apologised unreservedly to the Committee and to the House, and has acknowledged and accepted the Committee's recommendations. Many of us will have sympathy with the personal situation that the hon. Gentleman has had to face. It is important that we make it clear, as the Committee and the Commissioner have done, that these related personal matters are not the concern of the House.

I hope that the House will endorse the Committee's report and accept its recommendation unanimously. In thanking the distinguished Chairman of the Committee for its report, I can say that matters of this kind reflect on the integrity of the House as a whole and on each of us individually. It is, therefore, important that we should show unity in responding to such matters fairly but robustly. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Defence in the United Kingdom

[Relevant documents: The Seventh Report from the Defence Committee of Session 2002–03, Draft Civil Contingencies Bill (HC557), the Sixth Report from the Defence Committee of Session 2002–03, A New Chapter to the Strategic Defence Review (HC93 I-II), and the Third Special Report of Session 2002–03, A New Chapter to the Strategic Defence Review: Government Response to the Committee's Sixth Report of Session 20 –03 (HC975).

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

1.26 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): Before moving to the specific subject matter of this debate, I would be grateful for the opportunity to respond directly to the criticisms of the Intelligence and Security Committee's report which was published earlier today. I ask the House to allow me the opportunity to set out in full what I have to say on this issue, but I will certainly take interventions at the end.

The ISC report is measured and detailed. First, it clearly finds that there was no attempt by anyone in Government—whether in Downing street, the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign Office or elsewhere—to sex up the dossier published on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction in September last year. Secondly, it finds that the dossier was a fair and accurate summary of the intelligence. Thirdly, it finds that, in respect of the so-called 45-minute claim, no one in Government interfered with the intelligence assessment, though the Committee finds that the Joint Intelligence Committee could have put the wording of that particular piece of intelligence in a different and more detailed way. I appreciate that the ISC was concerned about the initial approach of the Ministry of Defence, and I want to make it quite clear that I had no intention whatever of being other than open and straightforward with the Committee. I regret any misunderstanding that may have arisen.

So far as my own position is concerned, the Committee states fairly that I did inform it of the dispute within the defence intelligence staff about the way in which the 45-minute claim was described in the dossier. In fact, I volunteered the information in my first evidence session on 22 July that there were people in defence intelligence who had made proposals for amendments and who indicated that they thought that the language in places could be tightened up. I outlined the substance of the dispute as to whether the intelligence showed or indicated particular conclusions, and how this was resolved before it ever reached the Joint Intelligence Committee, let alone any Minister.

The essence of this debate was set out by two DIS staff, who took the view that the wording on three points in the dossier—including on the 45-minute claim—should have been expressed differently. The disagreement was resolved by the then Chief of Defence Intelligence and his deputy, who concluded that the dossier wording was sound. It cannot be stressed too strongly that even the two DIS members who took the view that they did were not against the inclusion of the 45-minute claim in the dossier. They simply proposed different wording, reflecting the intelligence that they had seen.

The Committee, however, believed that the failure to disclose specifically that the views of the two DIS staff had been recorded in writing was unhelpful, and that it could potentially have misled it as to the seriousness of the dispute. Given the focus on these issues, I recognise that it would have been helpful to the Committee if I had mentioned specifically that the dispute was recorded in writing. I did not say specifically that points made by the two staff members had been put in writing, since these were detailed drafting points on the language of the dossier which were seen at the time as contributions to the normal healthy debate in the DIS about assessments. It did not seem so unusual for such suggestions or amendments to be made in writing.

The Committee also comments on my decision not to have a letter written to it outlining the concerns. The Committee has had the advantage in this case of seeing a briefing note prepared for me by officials before my appearance. It suggested that a letter should be sent to the Committee if the matter did not arise during the session on 22 July. As I had raised the dispute in the DIS voluntarily at that session with the Committee, I judged that there was no need to write subsequently.

I hope that the Committee accepts that I did not, in fact, mislead it. I note that the Committee finds in the final words of its report that it agrees with the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Committee report that

"Ministers did not mislead Parliament".

I believe that this is a fair assessment of the issues, and I thank the Committee for what its Chairman said this morning.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): It would be churlish of the House not to recognise the contrite way in which the Secretary of State has approached it this afternoon, but it should be noted that a Committee of this stature has written that, in giving evidence to the Committee—evidence of which he personally took charge—his Department was unhelpful and potentially misleading. Does he regard that as a ringing endorsement of his reputation for departmental competence, or should he not do the honourable thing—accept responsibility and resign?

Mr. Hoon: I have accepted that the Ministry of Defence—and I am not in any way avoiding my personal responsibility—could have been more helpful. I have made that clear. The essence of the criticism, however, is this. The Committee is saying that, having indicated or volunteered to the Committee the information that there was a dispute, that amendments had been tabled and that the process had been followed through in the DIS in the assessments made about the intelligence, I should have indicated to the Committee that that had been recorded in writing. That seems to me to be the difference between us.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): The Secretary of State is a football fan, so he will understand what I mean when I say that I intend to play the ball, not the man. In the context of the other important aspects of today's report, however, may I ask him some questions?

Does the Secretary of State believe that if the Prime Minister's original foreword had not been taken out of the dossier, if the intelligence showing that there was no connection between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein had remained in the dossier, if the dossier had contained intelligence that war with Iraq would increase the threat to the United Kingdom because of the dispersal of weapons of mass destruction, and if it had been made clear in the dossier that the claim about 45 minutes related to battlefield rather than strategic weapons, the Government would still have won the vote on 18 March?

Mr. Hoon: I do. The hon. Gentleman has asked a series of hypothetical questions which I believe the ISC dealt with properly in what I have described as a fair and balanced report. I do not intend to take up more of the House's time by discussing the matter in detail, as I am sure there will be further opportunities for us to do so in the future.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to tell us why he thinks Dr. Kelly died, given that Dr. Kelly was a member of his staff? I think it would help the Secretary of State to give Parliament his view clearly today, as he has been the subject of so much adverse briefing and comment — often, probably, from his own friends and colleagues — which has done a lot of damage to his reputation in the press.

Mr. Hoon: I hope that I do not appear unhelpful to the right hon. Gentleman, but I am sure he understands why, as Lord Hutton's inquiry is continuing, it would not be right or proper for me to respond to that question in any way at all.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does the Secretary of State agree that the picture would be fuller and clearer if he indicated that he did of course volunteer the information he has described properly in response to a question, but that the report records that after he had left the room his staff were pressed further on the matter, and we still did not discover the names or the nature of the two people involved?

Has the Secretary of State noted the recommendation in the report that the DIS needs an arrangement whereby people who have minuted dissent know what procedure to follow, and the fact that they have done so is recognised and communicated to the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee?

Mr. Hoon: During the further discussions we had when I attended the Committee on a second occasion to consider these matters, the right hon. Gentleman made a number of telling points about procedures that needed to be adopted in the DIS. I assure him, as I assured the Committee, that those points will be taken fully on board.

Mr. Michael Portillo (Kensington and Chelsea): I am trying to put myself quite sympathetically in the position of the Secretary of State, because it is a position that I held. I am trying to understand. Perhaps the Secretary of State can help.

Given the allegation that some dissenting elements in the intelligence services had objected to the 45-minutes claim being in the dossier, and given that that was central to the Andrew Gilligan accusations that have been given such tremendous publicity, I cannot quite understand how the Secretary of State reached the judgment that he would not make a full disclosure that there had been written correspondence from intelligence officials which, on the face of it, clearly matched the accusation that Andrew Gilligan had made.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for the fair way in which he put his question, but I invite him to look again at its premise. As I said a few moments ago, the suggestions from the two individuals in the DIS were not that the material should not be included in the dossier. They constituted, essentially, a linguistic analysis of what the intelligence either showed or indicated. In each of their proposed amendments they wanted, in effect, to draw a distinction between the intelligence showing that Saddam Hussein's regime had the ability to deploy chemical or biological weapons within 45 minutes and the intelligence indicating that.

As I suggested earlier, there was no suggestion from those individuals that the material should not be included. It was simply a case of the placing of the emphasis in the assessment. Given an indication of that kind, I judged that it was not necessary to provide the ISC with the specific amendments in writing; but I did give a very full account of the fact that there had been amendments and discussion, and that these particular linguistic discussions were resolved by the Chief of Defence Intelligence.

Several hon. Members *rose*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State must indicate to whom he is giving way.

Mr. Hoon: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes).

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): I have had a look at the report, and I watched the Committee's press conference. I see nothing in the report that is either a resigning issue or a sacking issue, and I believe that that view was confirmed by the Committee's members at the press conference. Unfortunately for my right hon. Friend, that does not fit in with what the Opposition wanted to be in the report, or what the media, in their feeding frenzy, wanted to be in it. The media will continue with that feeding frenzy, baying for my right hon. Friend's resignation or sacking. And may I say—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The intervention is too long. I think the Secretary of State has got the drift of the support that he is being given.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support.

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire) *rose*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope the hon. Gentleman is not going to criticise the Chair. He had better not do that, or he will be in trouble.

Mr. Mates: The Secretary of State has given way to me, Mr. Speaker.

[Mr. Mates]

Is it not the case that when anyone comes to the House and says that a mistake has been made which he regrets, and that he will see that it does not happen again, the House is generous? The real answer to all this is that, ultimately, the Committee was not misled. There will be plenty of opportunities to debate this matter, because the Government are required to respond to our report, and there will then be a debate about it. I suggest that that is the time when we shall be able to go over this ground again.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I have always felt that I have an extremely good relationship with the Committee. I have sought at all times to be open and straightforward with it. I intend to learn whatever lessons are necessary from this period.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Hoon: If I may, I shall turn to the subject of today's debate: defence in the United Kingdom. It is timely that this debate should take place today, 11 September, since it was the tragic events of that day in 2001 that caused us to re-examine, together with other issues, the United Kingdom's ability to respond to a mass-effect terrorist attack. Our thoughts today are with the families and friends of those who died on that tragic occasion. The re-examination was set out just over a year ago with the publication of the new chapter to the strategic defence review, which dealt with the defence contribution to the Government's wider consideration of their strategies and their preparedness to deal with disaster, in the light of the events of two years ago.

Our conclusions in the light of the 11 September attacks have been the subject of rigorous scrutiny by the Defence Committee. Its reports on defence and security in the United Kingdom and the SDR new chapter, together with the Government's responses, provide a sound backdrop to today's discussion. It is entirely right that the House should take a keen interest in defence activity in the United Kingdom, but in doing so our debates must avoid perpetuating an outdated understanding of the role of the armed forces. By that I mean that the armed forces alone do not ensure the security and defence of the country; nor can we secure and defend ourselves independently of events in the wider world.

Our interdependence with the rest of the world is self-evident. We do business with the rest of the world, we go on holiday all over the world, and the rest of the world comes here for the same reasons. Fifty-one British citizens died in the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre, 26 died in Bali and two died in Saudi Arabia. Our national security and prosperity is dependent on international trade and the flow of materials and services, which in turn rely on international stability.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): My right hon. Friend is giving a timely reminder of the British victims of the 11 September tragedy and of other tragedies. Will he join me in condemning the conference being held today by al-Mujaharoon, known as "the magnificent 19", which purports to praise the "heroism" of those who committed those despicable crimes? Is it not about time that firm action was taken against these people, who have nothing whatsoever to do with the British way of life, and who should be rightly condemned throughout this House and throughout the country?

Mr. Hoon: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, and I could not put the criticism more strongly than he has. He is quite right.

We have responsibility for our overseas territories, including the Falkland Islands, South Georgia, the South Sandwich Islands and Gibraltar. Some 10 million Britons live as expatriates across the globe. Millions more are vulnerable as they travel overseas for business or pleasure. Our diplomats and armed forces, and a range of United Kingdom non-governmental organisations and charities, operate around the world, often in tough environments. In short, wherever terrorists strike, the effects are likely to impact on UK citizens or on their interests. It is right, therefore, that we play a leading role in the international community through the United Nations Security Council, the Commonwealth, the European Union, NATO and coalitions of the willing. The defence of the United Kingdom must involve operations overseas as much as at home. There is no isolationist option for the United Kingdom.

The 1998 strategic defence review set out that analysis in detail. Its conclusions helped us to deliver armed forces to meet the challenges of recent years: the Balkans, Iraq, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan. Last year, the new chapter focused on the consequences of the 11 September attacks for us and our friends and allies, and, indeed, for our adversaries. The scale and nature of terrorism shocked the world that day, and the world certainly seemed to change.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): Two years on from the dreadful events of 11 September 2001, can the Secretary of State tell the House which Minister is in charge of defending the UK?

Mr. Hoon: I shall explain that in some detail in a moment, but it has always been the case that, essentially, responsibility for security in the United Kingdom falls to the Home Office and therefore to the Home Secretary. However, I shall point out the way in which the armed forces, especially in light of the challenges raised by 11 September, can make a particular and distinctive contribution.

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup): The Secretary of State has set out the scale of operations that the forces under his control are involved in, which everyone accepts and respects, but he will be equally concerned about overstretch of the armed forces. Will he tell the House what he plans to do about the 6,000 shortfall in manning levels and its effect not only on morale but on overstretch and training, as I gather that recruitment is currently frozen?

Mr. Hoon: I am delighted to be able to repeat to the House that there is significant progress in recruitment, and I shall deal with the general issue of the impact on our armed forces towards the end of my speech.

Fundamentally, our security priorities remain as set out in the strategic defence review, although the balance of the armed threats has shifted. The new chapter

concluded that the primary capability required of the armed forces to respond to armed threats remains expeditionary operations overseas. The United Kingdom needs strong defence to help protect our own interests, to support the promotion of human rights and democracy the world over, to be a reliable and powerful ally, and to be a leader in Europe and the international community. We are preparing a White Paper, which I hope to publish towards the end of the autumn, setting out in more detail how we see continuing change and the consequent continuing adaptation of the armed forces' and Ministry of Defence's contribution.

Mr. Beith: On a completely different matter from the one I raised earlier, in the context of the review of priorities, does the Secretary of State note that the correspondence sent to Members and local authorities about four RAF stations has caused considerable anxiety, probably in all four locations? At RAF Boulmer, in Northumberland, there is certainly huge appreciation among personnel of that station's strategic value and various functions. There is also enormous support in the local community for its remaining there.

Mr. Hoon: I appreciate that, and it is vital that I reassure those people that no such decisions have been taken. I certainly do not want those people to be disturbed, particularly when their loved ones are serving in often difficult and dangerous circumstances.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): As the Secretary of State says, the cornerstone of our defence policy is the expeditionary capability—I have spoken to him before on this matter—so it is surely time that we send another helicopter carrier to join Ocean. She is overstretched and cannot always be on station because she frequently has to go into refit.

Mr. Hoon: I do not accept that Ocean frequently goes into refit; indeed, it is a remarkable ship that I have had the privilege of visiting on several occasions, most recently last week. If I may, I shall take the hon. Gentleman's observation as a direct submission to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

I turn to the specific theme of today's debate: home defence or home security? The old military paradigm of home defence addressed the threat of a sustained attack by conventional military forces on the United Kingdom itself. It is fair to say that the threat of military invasion by a hostile nation has probably gone. The focus is now on a different sort of threat: that of the terrorist. The focus is on home security, rather than on the old concept of home defence. The armed forces cannot and do not provide that security for the people of this country on their own. They contribute widely and in a number of important ways, many of which are unique, but they do not do that job on their own.

That is especially true of responding to terrorism. There is no simple military solution to terrorism—no simple application of armed force that will achieve the Government's goal of removing international terrorism as a force in world affairs. It is essential that in considering defence in the UK today, the House take account of this fact. The Government's strategy is wide ranging, but it recognises the importance of tackling the causes of terrorism, as well as of seeking to bring terrorists to justice, denying them the capability to operate freely in the UK and overseas. It recognises that the international community must tackle this problem collectively and co-operatively.

We acknowledge the difficulty of ever achieving absolute security, but the core of the strategy is to make the United Kingdom a harder target through better protective security at home, and through measures to enhance our resilience, should we fail to deter or otherwise prevent attacks from taking place. In doing this, the Government remain committed to the principle that the United Kingdom's civil authorities are responsible for crisis and consequence management, under the ministerial direction of the Home Secretary. The police and the intelligence services are the front line against terrorism at home. Terrorism is a crime, and it is entirely right that we treat it as such.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I have pointed out before in this House, to the Home Secretary, the total absence of a police profile in the vast majority of our sea ports. Can the Secretary of State tell us what discussions he has had with the Home Secretary, who undertook to reconsider this issue? Can I urge him, together with his ministerial colleagues, to recognise that there is a compelling need for a dedicated police force along the lines of the British Transport police—or comprising the British Transport police—in our sea ports? Currently there are no immigration officials, no police, no Customs and Excise in our ports. We really need a front-line, high-profile presence in order to combat crime and, above all, combat terrorism.

Mr. Hoon: I shall certainly refer in a few moments to the contribution of the armed forces to the problem that my hon. Friend identifies. I shall ensure that my hon. Friend's words are passed on to the responsible Ministers. As he suggested, more than one Minister is involved in the matters that he raised.

It is a matter of regrettable necessity that we in the UK have had to develop considerable expertise in fighting terrorism. While the events of 11 September 2001 and more recent attacks have focused minds on international terrorism, it is vital to remember that we still face a threat from domestic terrorists. Even with the ceasefire in Northern Ireland, there remains a threat from dissident terrorist groups. Consequently, for as long as the Chief Constable there requires it, we will provide support to the police in Northern Ireland. However, as I have already acknowledged, we must respond to the changing nature of the threat from elsewhere. Our arrangements are constantly reviewed to ensure that they take account of that change. Those reviews include the contribution that is made by defence assets in support of the police.

More widely, the Government attach a high priority to being prepared to deal with a major terrorist attack. We have re-examined and refined the machinery for managing the central elements of a crisis response and have put in place a wide range of practical civil protection measures to build capabilities.

The Government issued for public consultation a draft civil contingencies Bill on 19 June. In line with Government practice, the consultation period was 12

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weeks. Coincidentally, that ends today, on 11 September. The draft Bill proposes the way forward for civil protection in the UK, by providing a single statutory and regulatory framework, designed to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

A Joint Committee of both Houses has been established to examine the draft Bill. It is due to report at the end of November, having taken into consideration the results of the public consultation and evidence from its own witness sessions. The Select Committee on Defence has already published its observations on the draft. The Bill has been largely and generally welcomed by the wide range of organisations that will be affected by its provisions.

The draft civil contingencies Bill will, in particular, improve the UK's ability to deal with the consequences of incidents by improving the planning process at local level, by improving the linkages between local areas and the centre, and by building up a regional civil protection tier. That new regional tier will draw together activity already organised on a regional basis as well as providing a strong bridge between the centre and local levels. It will be a key point of contact for the armed forces in the future.

Against that background, the armed forces are shaped to make their distinctive contribution. At home that means that they provide the capability to detect, deter and ultimately destroy a determined attack by a renegade aircraft. We have made no secret of the fact that we have that air defence capability and will use it if necessary.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): The House has been informed and many Members are delighted to hear about the order for 20 new Hawk aircraft to train interceptor and other fast jet pilots for the future. However, does the small size of the order mean that the number of aircraft in the front line, particularly interceptor squadrons, is to decrease in future?

Mr. Hoon: No, it does not. The hon. Gentleman anticipates a point that I shall make in a few minutes. If he has further questions after I have made my remarks, I will certainly give way to him again.

Typhoon, our next generation high-performance fast jet, will serve as the cornerstone of the Royal Air Force's air defence capability in the future, replacing our current Tornado F3 aircraft, which will be phased out between 2006 and 2009. The project achieved a major milestone this June with delivery of the first of these highly capable aircraft to the UK.

It is in part to meet the new demands of training pilots for front-line service for Typhoon that I have selected the BAE Systems Hawk 128 as the next advanced jet trainer for our armed forces. Subject to the successful completion of contractual negotiations, we intend to make an initial purchase of 20 of the new training aircraft, with options to buy up to another 24. The value of a full order for 44 aircraft is expected to be worth some £800 million. It will enter service from 2008. It is the right choice for training pilots for our future advanced fighter jets. It is also the right decision for our defence industrial capability; for BAE Systems and its employees at the Brough factory on Humberside, where Hawk 128 will be designed and built; and for the several hundred people involved in the UK supply chain for the aircraft.

Hawk 128 is an excellent aircraft. More than 800 are currently in service with some 17 customers. In a highly competitive global market, Hawk variants have won the last three advanced jet trainer competitions and have demonstrated their status as one of the UK's finest exports. The future sales prospects for Hawk are extremely bright, as demonstrated by the recent news that the Indian Government have selected Hawk as their new advanced jet trainer.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): The Secretary of State alluded a moment ago to the supply side, which also poses repair issues. Given that he appears to have faced a summer of uncertainty about his own job security, he will no doubt sympathise with the uncertainty faced by the loyal and skilled work force at the Defence Aviation Repair Agency, Almondbank. In the light of the impact of the interim review, will the Secretary of State give an assurance today that the Ministry of Defence will not pull the rug from under DARA?

Mr. Hoon: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State with responsibility for the armed forces visited the facility only two weeks ago to open a £5 million facility. I hope that that demonstrates our commitment. I understand that the hon. Lady was present, so she could see that for herself.

The armed forces are also ready to play a key role, should the need arise, in countering terrorism at sea. The Royal Navy can act in several ways to support the police and Customs and Excise, the most visible of which will be intercepting a renegade ship or ships suspected of carrying terrorist-related materials, as we demonstrated with the MV Nisha in 2001. We remain prepared to undertake similar operations, should it become necessary, both within UK territorial waters and elsewhere. The reach of the RAF's Nimrod patrol aircraft and the capability of the Royal Navy's surface fleet are undoubtedly a significant deterrent to terrorism.

The armed forces also represent a hugely flexible resource for the Government in times of emergency. They provide a pool of trained, disciplined, organised and highly capable personnel who can and will assist the civil authorities when necessary. The overt presence of service personnel at Heathrow in February this year represented an excellent example of that. Such a visible presence, in response to credible intelligence about a specific threat, demonstrates not only the ample deterrent effect that military assistance can have, but that we are able to respond quickly and very effectively when circumstances require it.

It is wrong, however, to underestimate the capacity and capability of the civil agencies. As they so ably demonstrated in last weekend's exercise, the civil agencies have a significant and well practised capability to respond to a wider range of disruptive elements. The emergency services will be at the front line of responding to emergencies. The police will take the lead in

responding to a terrorist incident, drawing on the expertise of other agencies as demanded by the precise details of the event.

As part of the new chapter assessment we considered both the nature and quantity of military assistance. We did not do so in isolation, but in consultation with other Departments and in parallel with their own work on improving the mechanisms that deliver security and resilience. The conclusions drew on the lessons of previous emergencies, particularly foot and mouth and the fuel crisis.

We decided to invest in three main areas: command and control arrangements, specifically to allow the armed forces to engage fully in local contingency planning and undertake 24/7 operations; communications equipment, which will be compatible with that used by the police; and giving existing members of the volunteer reserves an opportunity to volunteer to serve in civil contingency reaction forces.

The enhanced regionally based planning and command capability will make it easier for the authorities dealing with civil contingencies to get rapid support from the armed forces, both regular and reserve. That reinforces what exists already: it does not create a new or separate civil contingency chain of command.

Patrick Mercer (Newark) *rose—*

Mr. Hoon: Before I give way to the hon. Gentleman, I am about to talk about civil contingency reaction forces, which I anticipate might be the subject of his intervention. There will be 14 CCRFs, each comprising some 500 volunteers drawn from among existing reservists. Each will be based on a Territorial Army infantry battalion, and new posts have been added to each battalion to support the CCRF role directly. Their establishment increases the likelihood that we will be able to meet requests for support, but we are not creating a separate or self-contained force for this purpose. The volunteers will retain their existing military roles and CCRFs are not intended to be the first or only source of assistance we can provide locally.

Patrick Mercer: The resource that has been created for the CCRFs is slender; only 7,000 from all ranks are to be drawn together for it. Why has it taken so long to draw together the force? Why are the CCRFs not yet operationally effective? How hard hit have they been by crucial members being called up to help the overstretched regular Army in places such as Afghanistan and Iraq?

Mr. Hoon: I agreed with most of what the hon. Gentleman said until he reached his conclusion. I do not believe that any assessment of the role of reserves in recent times suggests that they are there to relieve so-called "overstretched" regular forces. At the time of the strategic defence review, we developed a concept that built on work previously done in the MOD to ensure that our reservists were usable and trained for a specific contribution in the time of conflicts of the kind that we have seen in Iraq. They were being used for that purpose.

I recognise and accept the first part—or, at least, the implication—of the hon. Gentleman's observations; inevitably, during a period in which we are calling on reservists to the extent we have seen in Iraq, there must be implications for the kind of reorganisation that I have just set out. I am not pretending that Iraq has not had an impact on that change. It must have and it has.

Patrick Mercer: Unfortunately, the Secretary of State misses my point. When we need forces here to defend this county—people who are dedicated to this task—no provision seems to have been made among the reserve forces to prevent them from being called to operational theatres such as Afghanistan and Iraq. Surely that is a contradiction?

Mr. Hoon: I am tempted to describe this as a new role for reservists, but many with longer memories than mine will say that it is a return to a more traditional role. The role recognises the new kind of threat that we face, which was my theme at the start of my remarks. I accept that with the challenges of Iraq and the mobilisation of large numbers of reservists, it has been harder to carry out the reorganisation than it would have been but for that commitment. That is an inevitable consequence of the times in which we live.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman must forgive me; I must make progress. I have given way on a number of occasions.

The principle of military assistance remains that regional commanders will advise Defence Ministers of the best means available to meet a particular request. This may involve the use of regular or reserve personnel or it may require deployment of some more specialised capability. Nor is it the case that CCRFs will only be used when regular manpower is not available.

The CCRFs are an important strand of the assistance that we are able to provide in an emergency and have the potential to bring very useful qualities to a deployment, such as local knowledge. They will also boost our ability to sustain a longer-term operation by adding to the pool of resources available to regional commanders. Recruiting and training for the CCRFs is proceeding well and we are on track to achieve our target of full operating capability by the end of this year.

Although I have addressed defence in the UK in the context of the armed threat from terrorism, the principles that I have set out apply across the whole spectrum of resilience. If an aircraft crashes into an oil refinery—whether that is caused by a terrorist bomb or by mechanical failure—the consequences are the same and the mechanisms for providing support from the armed forces are the same.

Mr. Prisk: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Hoon: I have given way a great number of times and I recognise that a considerable number of right hon. and hon. Members wish to speak in the debate.

We can draw on the armed forces in response to any emergency, national or regional, that goes beyond the normal capacity of the emergency services. We did so in

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the foot and mouth outbreak, and we did so during the firefighters dispute. But there was a penalty. The personnel involved—some 19,000 at the peak—had to be withdrawn from their primary military duties. Training and preparations for Iraq were disrupted. Some ships were unable to go to sea.

An extra burden was placed on the individuals concerned. Even though the strikes themselves were not continuous, personnel involved in providing the cover remained on standby to deploy. That meant that they could not take planned leave and, in some cases, post-operational tour leave had to be cancelled. Because we could not predict how long the dispute would continue, training and other normal military activities could not be planned while the possibility of further strikes remained. Nor could the commitment have been maintained indefinitely. At the outset, we recognised that the effort necessary to provide emergency cover would impact upon other military operations and training activity. But the increasing level of military commitments during the early part of this year meant that in order to meet the demands of other operations—most notably Iraq—we had to progressively reduce the number of personnel engaged in the operation. Ultimately, it would have become impossible to maintain the same level of cover as had been provided during the early strikes.

The success of the operation is an excellent example of the flexibility and commitment that our armed forces bring to any operation they undertake, but it also serves to remind us of the limitations of working within what is essentially a finite resource.

We recognise explicitly in our planning that earmarking units for more than one contingency imposes limitations. When a contingency unfolds—whether it is an operation in Sierra Leone or a fire strike in the United Kingdom—any forces committed to that contingency become unavailable for other operations. This applies to the CCRFs and reserve units as it does to regular units. Simply put, no one can be in two places at the same time. It is not possible to act and still be able to meet every possible contingency. That is the core challenge of managing our commitments. It applies at home and overseas and is ultimately a matter of a decision on the priorities of particular circumstances of the moment. It cannot be any other way, principally because our human resources are not unlimited.

This works because of the hard-earned flexibility and commitment of our armed forces. That flexibility and commitment flow from the time and effort spent in the training of the highest quality of the men and women who make up our regular and reserve forces.

I am confident that we have put in place the capabilities and structures that will allow our armed forces to make an effective contribution to maintaining the defence and security of the United Kingdom, whether that is through responding to a terrorist incident here or conducting expeditionary operations overseas to prevent a threat materialising as an attack on our home territory.

2.7 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): This is not a good day for the House of Commons. The Secretary of State may have observed the letter of the procedures of the House, but he has abused the spirit of the House by effectively making a statement about a Committee report that was published this morning without advertising it in advance and without giving Members an opportunity to learn in advance that he would be making a statement. To debate a Committee report so soon after its publication is a most unusual procedure for the Government to pursue. It was also discourteous for the Foreign Secretary to make a statement about the contents of the report outside Downing street, instead of to this House.

At the outset, the Government have shown little respect to this House, certainly to those who might disagree with them on this question. This situation underlines how elaborately the spin operation has worked in relation to the publication of the report. It is now clear that there has been briefing from Whitehall officials on the contents of the Intelligence and Security Committee report in advance of its publication, precisely to enable the Secretary of State to manage this occasion. It remains to be seen whether the effect he feels he has created in this House is sustained in the media tomorrow and in the commentary that will undoubtedly follow. I believe that the right hon. Gentleman's attempt to brush aside the question of his conduct will in the end serve him ill.

What it would be most appropriate to concentrate on today, the second anniversary of the terrible attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on 11 September, are those terrible attacks, those who died on that terrible day and those who displayed such heroism. Here in this House of Commons, it would be appropriate to concentrate on the Government's defence policies and the responses to 11 September 2001 in the context of the title of today's debate, "Defence in the United Kingdom." The Government should remove anything that distracts us from that vital task.

We take this opportunity to pay tribute to the UK's overstretched armed forces and intelligence services for all that they have achieved since that terrible day. They have worked harder than ever. They have performed superbly, despite shortages of manpower and equipment, despite cancelled leave and unduly long separation from families and loved ones, and despite the risks and dangers that they face. Indeed, we have seen conspicuous acts of gallantry and bravery that are the hallmark of all three armed services. And there have been sacrifices. I join the Secretary of State in paying tribute to our armed forces on this occasion.

This should be an occasion on which to concentrate on the Secretary of State's policy failures: I would wish to explore the failure to provide a more coherent policy for the security of our homeland; the failure to appoint a single Minister responsible for homeland security—as we have appointed an Opposition spokesman to shadow that task; the failure to deal with the erosion in the numbers of the Territorial Army and the reserves; and the failure to create an effective and operational civil contingencies reaction force, which my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) has just pointed out.

The Secretary of State has also failed to recruit effectively for all three of our armed services. How can he tell us that all is well, when the armed forces are more challenged and more overstretched than ever before and when he has cut the target size of the armed forces by 3,500 from April 2001 to 1 July 2003 so that he can claim that we are less under-recruited than before? Not only has the right hon. Gentleman failed to meet his recruitment targets: he has cut the target size of the Army. He has signally failed to fulfil the promise in the strategic defence review to increase the size of the Army to 108,500. The spending crisis in the Department is an open secret in Whitehall and among defence contractors. Other problems include the state of the accommodation. I visited Blandford camp last Friday and saw accommodation not fit for a student, with mould on the walls—*[Interruption.]* I saw bedsits not fit for students, where we expect 40-year-old senior NCOs to live for two years while on a training scheme at the Royal College of Signals.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Disgraceful.

Mr. Jenkin: It is an absolute disgrace. There should be nothing distracting us from that and other issues, yet we are being distracted. What is the point of conducting such a debate with a Secretary of State who is now so widely expected not to be in office for very much longer? How can the Secretary of State be capable of conducting his Department with regard to defence in the UK if he is so obviously being hung out to dry by his own Prime Minister? How is he meant to command the confidence and respect of the armed servicemen and women in his care, whose whole command philosophy is about taking control of and accepting responsibility for those answerable to them, when he never accepts responsibility for anything?

How can the British people or the armed forces have trust in the conduct of the Secretary of State's Department after he told the Hutton inquiry that he was not aware of key events taking place in his own Department? He was apparently not even aware of the discussions taking place at meetings at which his special adviser said he was present. That compounds his record in the Ministry of Defence.

The Secretary of State never takes responsibility for the shortcomings in kit and equipment for the armed forces. Whenever things go wrong in his Department, like the sudden need to send reinforcements to Iraq, he hides behind his military advice, as though he is simply a messenger for the chiefs of staff, yet he was ready to overrule his permanent secretary when his political reputation was on the line.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Is not the hon. Gentleman being inconsistent in criticising the Secretary of State for referring to the report published today but now doing the same thing himself?

Mr. Jenkin: It was the Secretary of State who raised the issue of the report. I shall not debate the 45-minute issue or discuss the breadth of the report, but the Secretary of State has brought his personal reputation to the fore in this debate and I simply point out what is at stake.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Will my hon. Friend deal with this issue? The Prime Minister told the House on 4 June that he would produce all the evidence for the ISC, yet paragraphs 96 and 97 of the report make it clear that the Secretary of State deliberately and wilfully suppressed vital evidence that the Committee wanted.

Mr. Jenkin: I shall come to the question of whether the ISC can really fulfil the function the Prime Minister promised it would.

Now the Secretary of State disclaims any responsibility for the ISC's finding that he and his Department were "unhelpful and potentially misleading" in the evidence given in the recent inquiry. The report continues:

"We are disturbed that after the first evidence session, which did not cover all the concerns raised by the DIS staff"—

the defence intelligence staff—

"the Defence Secretary decided against giving instructions for a letter to be written to us outlining the concerns."

The Secretary of State says that he does accept responsibility, but he thinks that he can carry on regardless. However, that severe criticism is yet another nail in the coffin of his personal reputation. Would the Committee have recalled him to give evidence for a second time to set the record straight unless the Hutton inquiry process had exposed the initial failure to give a full and frank account of his evidence? Even if we were to give the Secretary of State the benefit of the doubt, it would be to conclude that he may not be malign but he was at least incompetent. In any case, he has lost the trust of those who need to trust him most.

The Secretary of State knows the real reason why he is being sustained in office on a life support machine. He knows that he will not survive beyond a few more weeks. He knows that he is to be the scapegoat, tethered to the stake until all the sins of this Government have been heaped upon him, before he is cast into the wilderness in a symbolic but insincere act of contrition. Is it really in the national interest for the Secretary of State to allow himself to be used in that way? Is it in the interests of the men and women of the armed services? Would it not help the right hon. Gentleman's reputation and integrity if he accepted ministerial responsibility for all the problems and mistakes for which he is ultimately responsible? Would it not be better for his own integrity, for the Government and for the general reputation of public life? Paradoxically, there is an example that he could follow: Alastair Campbell has resigned and so should the Secretary of State.

The Intelligence and Security Committee has had an extremely difficult task, but I fear that its report will only fuel the debate about the handling and presentation of intelligence material in the run-up to the war in Iraq. I could elaborate on the contradictions between the Committee's report and the earlier report by the Foreign Affairs Committee. Then there are the far more detailed and public testimonies given to the Hutton inquiry, which expose the weakness of the processes of both the Committees that have reported. That is not to cast any aspersion on the Committees' work or integrity, but no Committee of this House can carry out the kind of impartial and forensic cross-examination that we have seen in Lord Hutton's inquiry. No Committee of this House can reach impartial conclusions that are properly

[Mr. Jenkin]

insulated from the party political battle, in order to command the public confidence that is so necessary in this case.

Mr. Keetch *rose—*

Alan Howarth (Newport, East) *rose—*

Mr. Jenkin: I shall not give way.

The fundamental truth remains that the only way to establish the truth about these matters in a manner that will command public confidence, which is so necessary for the defence and security of our country, is for Lord Hutton to be given the wider remit for which we have always argued, or for a new independent judicial inquiry to be established for that purpose. In the meantime, the Secretary of State should insist that the Prime Minister accept his resignation, so that his Department can get back to the business that it should really be about—the defence of the UK.

The Secretary of State is discredited and, with all respect, he should go.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I remind the House that Mr. Speaker has imposed a 12-minute limit on speeches from the Back Benches. I call Mr. Bruce George.

2.21 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): Madam Deputy Speaker—

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Opposition defence spokesman to open the debate for his party without making any reference to the subject on the Order Paper?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The content of the shadow Secretary of State's speech is his responsibility, not mine.

Mr. George: Madam Deputy Speaker, I hope that the clock began ticking off my 12 minutes 10 seconds ago, not when you actually called me.

I applaud the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State came to the House and made, if not a statement, at least remarks about the Intelligence and Security Committee report. Had he not done so, the Opposition spokesman would have used plan B, turned over a page of his second-rate speech, which was like an impersonation of Sir John Gielgud—

Mr. Smith: That is too flattering. It was third rate.

Mr. George: The hon. Gentleman's speech was indeed third rate. Under plan B, he would have attacked my right hon. Friend for making no comments on the presentation by the ISC.

Secondly, the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) spoke about overstretch. I am sorry to go on about this again, but the Opposition Front-Bench defence team is so overstretched that half of them have to double-hat as members of the Defence Committee. I find that appalling, and I shall be writing to the Liaison Committee and to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House on the matter. It is very important for Opposition Front-Bench Members to decide whether they are able to function as a politically motivated group in one environment while adopting a more consensual approach in another. That dichotomy is something of which I am very critical.

Having used two of my 12 minutes on those matters, I turn to the subject of the debate. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has commented on what his Department has done by way of homeland security. My Committee has mirrored that process, and in our reports we have criticised the Government for doing the wrong things. We have produced four reports: "The Threat from Terrorism" in December 2001, "Defence and Security in the UK" in July 2002, and "A New Chapter to the Strategic Defence Review" in May 2003; our most recent report concerned the draft civil contingencies Bill, and it appeared in July 2003.

I am very proud to be Chairman of the Defence Committee. Our work goes beyond the terms of reference set for us. From what my right hon. Friend said, I took him to mean that this country's departmental structures are not reflected in reality. The Defence Committee has broken away from its terms of reference—with no complaints from anyone so far—to look at the roles of the Ministry of Defence, the Home Office, the civil contingencies secretariat, and a whole range of Departments. We have looked at how decisions are made, both horizontally and vertically. We have looked at regional and local government and civil contingency planning, as well as the roles of the NHS, the ambulance service and the private sector.

What is happening is patently obvious to everyone. As my right hon. Friend said, the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces are only part of the process of deterrence. The nation must realise that we must be engaged in what is called total defence. The term may not be exact, and indeed it is almost a contradiction in terms in a free society, but it involves the private sector and ordinary citizens as much as the armed forces. The armed forces' role is a narrow one, and the structure of the Select Committee system and of Government in general should reflect the changing world in which we live.

Terrorism does not fit neatly into any departmental structure. We must overcome departmentalism in the Committee system of the House of Commons as well as in central Government. If we do not, I fear that we will not be responding as effectively as we should.

In our report "Defence and Security in the UK"—the product of six months' work—we made a number of recommendations that did not go down a bundle with the Ministry of Defence or the Home Office. We touched on the question of whether there should be a director of homeland security for this country. We were not attacking the Home Secretary, but we thought that it might be better to have a senior Cabinet member who could devote all his time to the matter. At present, the

Home Secretary has to cover a vast range of subjects. I believe that the Committee remains of the opinion expressed in the report.

My right hon. Friend commented on the report entitled "A New Chapter to the Strategic Defence Review" and the establishment of a civil contingency reaction force, which I very much welcome. That force may not necessarily be the first available in a crisis, as that responsibility might well go to our full-time armed forces, assuming that they are available for deployment. I have a few concerns about the new reaction force, one of them being that five days' training may not be sufficient, even though it may not be doing everything if a major crisis happens. I hope that that matter will be addressed properly, and that we can be reassured in that regard.

Some matters need to be explained more fully. It is disappointing that the Ministry of Defence has not thought more innovatively about home defence. Is that because of a potential turf war with the Home Office? I was a little irritated—

Patrick Mercer: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. George: I am sorry, but I shall give the hon. Gentleman a full response when next he attends a meeting of the Defence Committee. I am not sure who I am talking to today—an Opposition spokesman, or a Committee member. I shall be more prepared when that has been sorted out.

Patrick Mercer *rose—*

Mr. George: Of course I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Patrick Mercer: I am most grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. He doubted whether the Home Secretary could devote all his energies to leading emergency planning. Is not that the central point in the demand that the Government appoint a Minister with sole responsibility for security? That would overcome not only the Home Secretary's difficulties but the turf-war problems that the right hon. Gentleman has just identified.

Mr. George: I shall work for that. Perhaps the Opposition spokesman on these matters will reciprocate by concentrating on one task, not two. There may be a parallel there.

There have been improvements in the way in which we deal with homeland security. I very much welcome the appointment of Sir David Omand. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Regional Governance and Fire and his staff do a truly excellent job. My concern about the draft civil contingencies Bill was not that a Joint Committee was set up but that the Defence Committee—the only one that had taken a serious interest in the subject—was bypassed. Only two members of my Committee were appointed to the Joint Committee.

I am a little concerned about how long it took to produce the draft Bill, and I have serious reservations about some of what it contains. The Defence Committee has also expressed similar reservations, which include the fact that the draft Bill does not include provisions covering central Government's responsibilities for civil protection—nor does it place a duty on local agencies, including the emergency services, to work together. We are also concerned by the proposal to create regionally nominated co-ordinators. If legislative measures were to be taken, those co-ordinators would, in essence, mirror the concept behind having lead Government Departments. That would risk confusion about who to contact in an emergency.

The role of the private security industry—a point that might seem out of place in this debate—was not given much treatment in the draft Bill. I have no financial interest whatever in that body of men, but when one is searching desperately for people to be involved with the emergency service in the event of a major crisis, members of that industry, who are about to be properly regulated, trained and led, are potentially available in their hundreds and thousands. I hope that the Government will find a way to incorporate those individuals in the process of protecting society should there be a crisis.

I appeal to the Government to define the role of companies, heads of security and risk and consequence managers. As the State Department's recent report "Patterns of Global Terrorism" notes, business provides the overwhelming majority of targets for terrorist organisations. Far more than US embassies or military targets, business is being targeted. It would therefore be prudent to develop better relationships with the private sector to try to achieve better co-ordination and greater involvement. Businesses will not be able to rely on the police, emergency services and military if they are directly or indirectly targeted. Far more attention should be given to my suggestion.

In conclusion—*[Interruption.]* I must switch off my mobile phone, Madam Deputy Speaker, and apologise for that ringing endorsement of the Secretary of State; it was not quite delivered in the manner that he would expect.

On the powers of parliamentary oversight, the Bill contains sweeping powers for the Ministry of Defence to declare a state of emergency and introduce emergency legislation. I believe that there should be a greater role for the House in dealing with such circumstances. There is a question whether the Government need the powers that they are giving themselves in some respects. The definition of emergency is widely drawn in the draft Bill, and goes considerably wider, my Committee believes, than the existing definition in emergency powers legislation. I hope to hear some reassurance on that point.

Today is an opportune time to discuss the draft Bill and the role of the military because it is the anniversary of 9/11. It is unbelievable that people in this country believe that the United States deliberately sought an attack in order to justify its actions. Perhaps they are the descendants of those who said that the Americans deliberately ignored warnings of the Japanese attack at Pearl harbour. Let them provide some evidence. Perhaps some of those people argue that there is no real threat of terrorism and that the Government are playing it up for their purposes of their own agenda. No wonder the public are cynical if politicians can display such massive ignorance of the reality that we face.

[Mr. George]

I hope that we can create a structure giving our armed forces, police and intelligence services the right powers with the support of the people. The people are not simply observers of the competence of our official figures and military personnel, but are directly involved. The public must realise that there is a massive threat to our society and the role that they will have to play. Unless there is better liaison between the private sectors of our society, who control and own most of our critical national infrastructure, we shall fail—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman's time is up.

2.34 pm

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): This is an important debate, and it is always a pleasure to follow the Chairman of the Select Committee. Other members of that Committee, including my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), will hope to speak.

The title of the debate—"Defence in the United Kingdom"—perhaps goes broader now than it has ever done. We no longer live in a country in which defending our nation means stationing the Royal Navy in the channel or keeping the Royal Air Force flying over Kent. Defence of the UK today means many different groups of people, from our armed forces to our diplomats, intelligence services and others, working all across the globe. We should all join the Secretary of State in paying tribute to those who do that job for us. In particular, the debate is relevant today, the anniversary of the events of 11 September. Our thoughts should go to the British victims and those from all other countries who died on that terrible day two years ago.

I join the Secretary of State in congratulating those members of the civil forces and armed forces who took part in last week's exercise in London. I pay tribute, too, to those members of our armed forces who undertake other roles in civil support, particularly those involved during the firefighters' strike. Like many other MPs, I have visited armed forces based in my constituency—from the RAF in my case—who provided essential cover during those weeks. They did a superb job with equipment that was not the most modern. Their role was vital.

Today, UK defence policy faces in several directions at once. The Ministry of Defence, not for the first time, is trying to play many roles at many levels, and it sometimes struggles to meet the responsibilities that it has set itself. On one hand, the Government would rightly like to play a role at the high end of combat operations with the United States. On the other, we have responsibilities to the European Union, NATO and the United Nations in peacekeeping and peace-building operations in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Bosnia and Congo, among others. Finally, we have the role of defending our nation against terrorism at home.

All those are appropriate tasks for the Ministry of Defence. In order, however, to do each of them well, we must strike the right balance. If the Ministry of Defence fails to strike that balance, the planning gap will fall on those so frequently asked to implement policy—the men and women of our armed forces. When that observation is made in the other place by as experienced and informed a commentator as the former Chief of the Defence Staff, Lord Bramall, the Government must take note. He said:

> "When will the Government—which of course means the Treasury—match resources in manpower, material and money to commitments? Alternatively, when will the Government deal with our far-flung commitments more circumspectly?"—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 8 September 2003; Vol. 652, c. 53.]

Lord Bramall has identified the key problem with defence in the UK—imbalance and overstretch. Operations in Iraq have made that overstretch worse. In spite of that, I saw, when I accompanied the Minister for the armed forces and the shadow Defence Secretary to Iraq, the great work that our forces are doing there in difficult situations. As well as direct combat operations, British forces have worked hard at peacekeeping and civil reconstruction. They have been helping to deliver aid and even opening schools. I did not support the war. Nor did my party. But we must make sure that a difficult situation improves, and British forces in Iraq and elsewhere across the globe are doing a wonderful job.

If we ask more and more from fewer and fewer members of our armed services, some of them will be reluctant to continue to serve. The Minister will have heard the rumours spreading throughout the summer about increasing outflows of men and women returning from Iraq—not just in the regular forces, but among the Territorial Army. Will he confirm whether that is so? If it is, how can the Government deal with it? If it is not, we must stop the rumour because it is spreading fast.

That rumour must be set against the forthcoming White Paper, which may again involve cuts in infantry numbers—cuts among the very people we need in Iraq and here to defend our homeland. Network-centric capabilities and maintaining interoperability with high-tech US equipment are important, but they cannot come at the expense of cuts in manpower, pensions or accommodation. The Ministry of Defence must strike a balance. I have said time and again that the best bits of kit in our armed forces are the men and women who serve.

I shall say a quick word about procurement, particularly carriers. Again, there have been rumours throughout the summer about the future carrier programme. I believe that the future carriers will be an essential part of the defence of the UK. They are an absolutely essential part of our expeditionary strategy. The Government were right to procure them, but recent reports on the progress of the project are deeply concerning. We have heard about possible cost increases and delays in the in-service date, and even that the carriers may be made smaller.

The Government cannot cut corners on a project of such importance to the United Kingdom. To do so would be to compromise the success of the whole endeavour. When they announced the last-minute coalition of BAE Systems and Thales to produce the carriers, I and others warned that this shotgun marriage might mean an increase in costs and could lead to the carriers not being delivered on time. That approach should be given a chance to work, but the early signs are not good. I hope that that decision has not jeopardised the future of the programme, and that the Navy will get the carriers that it richly deserves.

Many other hon. Members wish to speak, so I shall be brief. If defence expenditure is to remain at present levels, a careful balance must be struck between capabilities that address the needs of the United States at the high end of the spectrum—our ability to work with the US—and those needed to promote peace in troubled areas in the aftermath of major conflicts. That is the lesson of the second phase of operations in Iraq. It is likely that we will fight in combat operations alongside the US in the future. It is equally likely that we will conduct peacekeeping operations with our Commonwealth and NATO allies. The pursuit of one role should not undermine the other. Britain cannot afford to have a defence policy that tries to face all ways but ends up facing none.

2.41pm

Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): As today is the second anniversary of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, may I too express my deep sympathy for all those who so tragically lost their lives and for those who have suffered as a consequence? This is very much a time for reflection—on the actions that we have taken since that fateful day in September 2001 and on what action is still required to prevent further atrocities.

Sadly, there have recently been terrorist attacks in Iraq, Indonesia, Morocco and elsewhere. They demonstrate in the most visceral way the devastation that terrorists continue to inflict. The recent black-outs here and in the United States, although they were not terrorist related, demonstrate how strikes against vital infrastructure can bring cities to their knees not only for hours but for days, and possibly months. Cancelled flights, factories at a standstill and grid-locked streets would cause chaos and large-scale economic losses.

Clearly, al-Qaeda and transnational terrorism continue to be active and I pay tribute to the timely and brave actions of our police and security forces and those of our allies, which have at least prevented some further outrages from occurring. As has been said, the need for vigilance backed by action has never been more apparent throughout all levels of society and involving every citizen. I too welcomed the introduction of a draft civil contingencies Bill earlier this year, in spite of the reservations expressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George). We all hope to continue to work on that legislation.

Like the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch), I welcome the exercise that took place in the London underground last weekend and I hope that there will be more such exercises. There is an urgent need to increase the protection of businesses and key infrastructure from attack. We can never provide a 100 per cent. guarantee of safety or anticipate every eventuality, but defence and security cannot be hemmed in or separated from all other aspects of society.

Furthermore, 11 September also starkly illustrated that homeland security cannot be provided by the "Englishman is safe in his castle" approach—or indeed, the Scotsman, the Welshman or the Northern Irishman. We live in a global world and we need to act globally. The arguments that we should not take military action in Iraq and elsewhere unless there is about to be a blitz-style bombing raid on London or Glasgow do not hold up in the 21st century given the type of asymmetric warfare with which we now recognise we are dealing.

The contribution of the United Kingdom's armed forces to fighting wars and peacekeeping on a global basis is second to none. They can and have—in particular in the past 12 months—paid a heavy price, both in time away from their homes and families and, tragically, in injuries and death. I also express my deepest sympathy to all families who have lost a loved one in the past year.

Iraq teaches us some important lessons about the United Kingdom's defence needs. In July, I had the opportunity to visit Iraq with other members of the Defence Committee, where I was able to see at first hand our forces operating in that setting. I was very impressed by their professionalism and expertise—both the regulars and the reserves—and by how they had conducted the war-fighting phase and managed so well the difficult and demanding change to peacekeeping. One thing that stood out was their personal commitment to working with the Iraqi people to build a better future—their determination, in particular, to give Iraqi children a way out of poverty and fear.

After four days in Iraq, my regret was not that we had engaged in military action but that we had not done so 12 years ago to end Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. The desperate state of a people and a country potentially so rich in both oil and water was due to decades of under-investment and a dictator whose sole interest was his power base.

To all those in this country and elsewhere who seem to concentrate on political point scoring when dealing with the operations in which our forces have recently been engaged, whether in Iraq, Afghanistan or elsewhere in the world, or on philosophising and what they see as the moral high ground, I say that I believe that our priority in the crucial months ahead should be the same as that of our troops—to help put in place the foundation stones for a peaceful and prosperous future for Iraq. In his interview in the *Financial Times* last weekend, Kofi Annan said,

> "The stability of Iraq should be everyone's concern. Regardless of one's position before the war, whether one supported it or not, we have a problem we should all focus on."

I hope that all countries, non-governmental organisations and support services will do just that in the crucial months ahead.

When the media are reporting on UK defence matters here or elsewhere, I hope that they will spend more time praising our armed forces rather than constantly criticising them and will consider the message that that sends to our troops and their families back in the homeland.

I must also mention the importance to the defence of the UK of the contribution of all those involved in support services, whether in the Ministry of Defence, the private sector or civilians. The challenges of defence and security in the world today are complex and multi-faceted and there are many lessons to be learned.

I welcome the initial report on Iraq. Obviously, the Defence Committee is looking into the lessons to be learned. Clearly, some of those lessons are already universal and comprehensive. I especially welcomed the review of logistic support for the armed services that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State published earlier this week. Asset tracking is extremely important for homeland security and operations elsewhere; it was

[Rachel Squire]

clear to the Committee that we need to know where the logistic support is—whether it is a pair of boots or extra forces to deal with a homeland incident.

Reference has been made to the pressures on our armed forces. I hope that we shall continue to make every effort to ensure that our European allies deliver an effective European defence capability, operating both within NATO and in peacekeeping areas. Some progress has been made: the EU has taken over peacekeeping in Macedonia and NATO is going into Afghanistan and Iraq. However, too much time seems to be spent on words rather than action. We must realise that to ensure homeland security we must work in partnership to provide stability elsewhere. We are all greatly concerned that we might lose some of our most experienced and professional personnel if we continue to do what we have done to many of them during the past 12 months. They have gone from an operation in Afghanistan to an exercise, to covering for firefighters, to being called out to Iraq. That adds to my determination that part of our defence strategy must be to tell our allies, especially in Europe, to deliver action rather than words. They must share those operational tasks with us.

I have already mentioned the importance of support services in the defence of the UK and, as someone who represents Rosyth dockyard, I am especially aware of the security problems that can arise, for example in respect of nuclear waste and decommissioned submarines. The House would be surprised if I let a defence debate take place without saying something about Rosyth, Crombie and HMS Caledonia. I pay tribute to the contribution that they have made to our recent operations. People will be aware that Rosyth did an outstanding job of refitting our aircraft carriers, Ark Royal, Illustrious and Invincible, which were engaged in those operations. Crombie provides ammunition and other important support for our ships.

I want to say something about the contribution of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am afraid that the hon. Lady's time is up.

2.53 pm

Mr. Michael Portillo (Kensington and Chelsea): First, it is a great pleasure to follow such a lucid and interesting speech from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire). Secondly, I must declare an interest, with both a defence contractor and the BBC, as that might be considered relevant.

As the debate is about defence in the UK, I should like to begin by considering the way in which the Ministry of Defence operates, which has come under unprecedented scrutiny in the Hutton inquiry. One point that may not have been considered is the basis on which people in the MOD work together. The Secretary of State and Ministers will know what an extraordinary privilege it is to work in the Ministry. In my experience, the degree of camaraderie is unusual. It is unique among Departments, partly because many key positions are filled by serving military officers who bring with them their military ethos and because there is the constant prospect that everyone in the MOD will be involved in a war situation, so there must be complete mutual trust between all the people who work there. To an uncommon extent, therefore, it is important both that the Secretary of State should give loyalty to his officials and that he should have the right to receive loyalty from those officials.

As far as I am aware, the MOD has always operated on the basis of that mutual trust and I have no reason to believe that things are any different at present. That means that officials are given the opportunity to express their views on policy matters where they have expertise; there is a free exchange of opinion and dialogue. Provided that that situation still exists, everyone must also accept that the Secretary of State must eventually come to a decision. When he has made his decision, he expects that everyone in the Department will subscribe to it, given that they previously had the opportunity to make their point of view known.

Provided all that happened, if I were Secretary of State I should be extremely disappointed and even angry if I found that an official, who may have held a minority opinion, continued that debate outside the Department and took it to the press. No official has any business doing that. I should have been even more dismayed if that official had compounded that action by indulging in political gossip. On the one occasion when I was aware that that had happened to me, I demanded and received an apology from the official and the official's senior officer.

Furthermore, although I understand, not least because I work for the BBC from time to time, that journalists value the protection of their sources—indeed, that they regard it as a vital matter of principle—I do not accept that it is a vital matter of principle that Ministers should protect the identity of people who have taken outside a Department a debate that should have held within that Department. It might be gracious to protect that person's identity; it might be a kindness to do so; but I would not necessarily regard it as a requirement.

I mention such things not merely in the spirit of saying the unexpected but because I fear that some of these points might be missed when Hutton comes to an end. It is possible that the inquiry might end up by undermining rather than endorsing those mutual bonds of loyalty that are absolutely necessary for the operation of the MOD.

I shall move on to other topics that are mainly to do with terrorism. First, where is the front line in the defence of the UK? President Bush, obviously speaking not for the UK but of the west in general, has argued that the front line against terrorism is in Iraq and Afghanistan. I agree. The House has debated at great length whether Saddam Hussein presented a clear and present danger to the UK. I believe that he did. The Prime Minister has got himself into great difficulty because he tried to make the case in terms of weapons of mass destruction, and that was extremely hard to sustain.

Saddam Hussein was a clear and present danger to the UK after the development of a subtler case. Two years ago today, when we looked back from the perspective of the horror of 11 September 2001 over a decade of the

foreign policy of the United States and its allies, especially in respect of the growing threat of terrorism—there had been many incidents during that decade—we could see that our responses to those escalating terrorist incidents had been puny. Our responses to escalating terrorism had given the terrorists the impression that we were unwilling to defend our countries, our peoples and our values. In parallel, we looked back and saw that Saddam Hussein's defiance of the international order and our failure to respond to that defiance over a decade gave people who wished us ill the impression that we were puny—that we lacked willpower and were unwilling to defend our values.

What followed in Afghanistan and in Iraq was a demonstration of willpower and—I am not afraid to use the word—strength. It was to prove to those who wished us ill that we were willing to take effective action to defend ourselves against threats. Whether hon. Members agree or disagree with that, we now find ourselves in a position in which, paradoxically, because we are in occupation in Afghanistan and in Iraq, our forces, the United States forces and, for that matter, United Nations personnel offer themselves as an easier target to terrorists than targets on the home front. To some extent, that is welcome to the terrorist, who sees the possibility of engaging in a struggle of attrition with us in an attempt to make us weary both at the political level and at the level of public opinion. I want to emphasise that our response to that, if we are to be secure in the United Kingdom, must be one of absolute determination to see through the task.

In that respect, I have two criticisms. One is that I am dismayed to see the US Administration in a volte face, now calling urgently for other countries to get involved in Iraq. I do not disagree with other countries getting involved, but the US is in danger of sending a signal of lack of commitment when it makes that appeal, which represents a change in its policy. The other, as I have alluded to previously, is that it was disappointing that the Prime Minister, following the successful conclusion of the war in Iraq—as opposed to the campaign in Iraq, which goes on—mocked those of his critics, who were mainly on his side of the House, who had predicted that Iraq might turn into his Vietnam. That was a bad example of prime ministerial hubris, because we simply cannot predict the future. We do not know how long we will be in Iraq—the terrorists will certainly want to make Iraq into our Vietnam, but we must ensure that it has a different result from Vietnam, which is that we are not driven out by a long war of attrition against us.

My third point is that we have had reviews of defence under the previous Government and under this Government, and the extent to which we end up with armed forces that are clearly too small is dismaying. The situation has moved on since this Government conducted their review—not only have we heard today how much our armed forces are needed on the home front, but we have moved into a situation in which forces of occupation, partly supplied by the United Kingdom, are becoming more and more common and almost routine. One region after another is requiring our forces to be in occupation. That seems to call for a substantial rethink. A point that Members might not expect to hear from me is that, of course, Governments are always tempted by new toys and new kit that are extremely expensive, and it is much less sexy to talk about the need for larger armed forces. We have an aspiration to be alongside the Americans on the digital battlefield, but I ask myself whether our strength does not lie in our ability to provide security over broad areas of territory.

My next point is about the united front against terrorism. Any terrorist success anywhere in the world in my view impinges on the security of the United Kingdom. Any terrorist success means that the terrorist is encouraged to be more outrageous and more audacious in the future. Again, I have a couple of criticisms. One is that, as a country, we did not show nearly enough sympathy, in this united front against terrorism, with India. India had its 11 September on 11 December 2001, when its Parliament was attacked. Our Prime Minister went to India shortly after that, and his message to the Indians following this appalling outrage seemed to be that they should engage in reconciliation with their neighbours, which was not the message that we issued after 11 September, when we immediately marshalled our forces to invade Afghanistan and deal with the terrorist threat.

My second criticism is that the Government were extremely misguided to continue to engage in public dialogue with Yasser Arafat during the premiership of Abu Mazen. It is perfectly clear that Israel and the United States will not deal with Arafat and that they suspect him of complicity in terrorism, and it was extremely bad of the Government to undermine the effectiveness of what was going on. We bear responsibility for the demise of Abu Mazen, and we may bear responsibility for the state in which the road map now finds itself. If that is any indication of the future shape of a common security policy in Europe, I would be very sorry.

Lastly, I entirely agree with what the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) said about the importance of having the engagement and the confidence of the public in dealing with terrorism in the United Kingdom. If we misuse the legislation that Parliament has put forward for dealing with terrorism, we will undermine that confidence. In my view, the use of section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000 to deal with demonstrators against the exhibition in east London was an abuse of that Act.

3.5 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): I want to begin by paying tribute to the work, the commitment, the loyalty and the professionalism of our armed forces, whether they are based in this country or overseas. Those forces put their lives on the line for us, and they serve wherever they are asked to serve for us, which is why it is vital for this Parliament, let alone the Government, to let it be known what our views on world policies are and why we are asking them to undertake certain tasks. That is crucial, which is why I welcome today's debate.

This debate raises the issue of how we defend ourselves—do we do so in our own shores, or over the fields of Kent, as was mentioned earlier, or do we need to defend ourselves in a different way? Do we need to examine where the potential threats are around the world and take action against them? All of us recognise that we cannot defend ourselves in the traditional way

[Mr. Doug Henderson]

that we thought about in 1939. We must now look much more to international links and to taking action against any potential threat wherever we see it in the world. We must explain that better to the British people because, after recent events, there is less clarity in their minds about how we defend ourselves, which will have serious implications in the longer term for the formulation of our defence policy, what is politically acceptable and what can be resourced. We must therefore make the case more firmly than we have done.

The British people understood why we went to war in 1939 and why we had to go to the Falklands in 1982, and they understood a more difficult argument about humanitarianism and preventing unnecessary migration and instability throughout Europe in relation to the Kosovo campaign. The British people understood why there was a need to do something about Afghanistan. I did not support the way in which we tackled that issue, and I thought that there should have been much more concentration on smaller specialised forces combating terrorism, terrorist cells and terrorist resources in a much more specific way. The British people understood, however, that that was what the Government were setting out to do, which was why Parliament supported them. The test of time will demonstrate who was right: whether it was the Government or those who, like me, were saying that it was not straightforward and asking how we would deal with the warlords, the Taliban and their influence on terrorism in the medium term. Those issues are unresolved, but at least the British people understood why we had to go to Afghanistan.

The pillars of justification for going to Iraq, however, are gradually being removed one by one. We were told that the argument was that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction that could cause great threat to our friends and to ourselves. As someone who was opposed to the war, six weeks after it began I was prepared to say that we should not assess whether there were weapons of mass destruction for perhaps nine or 12 months because it would take that time to try to identify them in a country of the size of Iraq. I had to change my original thinking when Donald Rumsfeld, the American Secretary of Defence, said in his press conference last March or April—that is where Hutton and everything else stems from—that he did not expect to find weapons of mass destruction. One could believe that that was a code for saying that there were no weapons of mass destruction that America could identify.

It is interesting to read today's report by the Intelligence and Security Committee. Paragraph G on page 41 says:

"The JIC did not know precisely which munitions could be deployed from where to where and the context of the intelligence was not included in the JIC Assessment."

If that is accurate, it means that the British Government said, "We are going to war because of weapons of mass destruction but we do not know what the weapons are, where they are or where they will be offensive." They said that they were not publicly prepared to give the context of the information—in other words, the security and intelligence information that led them to believe that that was the case.

The only way in which the Government can put paid to all that is to tell us the answer. I do not understand why there would be security problems now if they told us the evidence that led them to take action, although there would have been problems if they had told us nine months ago. The Government would be extremely wise to make that evidence known now because I rather suspect that the American congressional committees, spurred on by the contenders for the Democrat nomination, will force along the pace of inquiring why the Americans went to war. The American public are becoming more wary of the reasons why they went to war. It is now less acceptable to say in America, "We went because we wanted to get rid of the guy." That might have played well in Manitoba and Idaho some months ago, but it is playing less well every day in the United States. The congressional committees will tackle the motives of the Defence Secretary and his assistant, Mr. Wolfowitz, and examine the information that they had, and what happens there will have serious implications here. It is understandable for the Americans not to share intelligence with the British, but it is not credible for the British to say that they did not share intelligence with Americans on a joint operation. If the Americans say that they went to war to get rid of the guy rather than because of weapons of mass destruction, serious questions will be raised about our background.

The right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) made a thoughtful contribution in which he said that he was not convinced by the question of weapons of mass destruction—I am paraphrasing him—but that he was worried about the general threat from Saddam. I do not agree with that and neither do many military commanders, including Field Marshall Bramwell. Of course, I did not have full information, but they did not believe that Saddam was a threat in the way we made out. They knew that he knew that the Americans had such overwhelming force in south-east Turkey, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia that if he did anything stupid and aggressive, internally or externally, Baghdad, Saddam and his security people would be wiped out almost immediately, even if there was a civilian cost. That is why I do not believe that he was such a threat at the time.

Of course, the military commanders also raised the important question of what would happen afterwards with regard to combating terrorism internationally. Were we dampening or fuelling terrorism by being in Iraq? Many who were in favour of the war against Iraq said that it was the way to counter terrorism. However, many commanders in the British armed forces believed the opposite to be the case. They believed that the war would fuel terrorism and that we must be careful about the motives that we gave to every unemployed and poor young Muslim throughout the world.

Mr. Portillo: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this goes to the heart of the problem? Following 11 September, a demonstration of strength and achieving regime change were sufficient reasons for the United States to go into Iraq. However, it was necessary for the British Government to speak in a different language and prove a different threat that would commend itself to the United Nations. That is why our Prime Minister has got

into difficulty about the grounds on which he based the war, although that difficulty does not apply to the President of the United States.

Mr. Henderson: The House will judge the British Prime Minister's position, but I agree with the right hon. Gentleman about what was acceptable in the United States and Britain. That was politically different at the time when we became involved in decision making. It is important to get that right now.

There are other points that I would like to make although I am running out of time. If we cannot convey to the British people why we went into Iraq, will they support us next time, when that really matters? I am, and have always been, a strong supporter of NATO. What happens to NATO after all this and how does it pick up the pieces?

To achieve something positive we must get the United Nations into Iraq—I know that there was a debate on that yesterday. There must be a command structure that is acceptable to the French, Germans, Chinese and Russians so that a truly international force can be present to bring back stability and help to reconstruct the nation.

3.17 pm

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup): Hon. Members who have been in the Chamber throughout the debate will share my conclusion that it has been broad ranging and stimulating. The Secretary of State's opening statement—we thought that it was a speech to open the debate but it was half a parliamentary statement—took some of us a little by surprise, but it was dignified. I am one of those who believe that the Secretary of State is an able man but most people who have watched the past few days' performances get the impression that he is sadly a dead man walking. His political fate will ultimately be curtailed as he is made the Prime Minister's fall guy, although he deserves better. I say that after witnessing half a dozen Tory Ministers being driven from office over a protracted time during my years in government—it is not a pretty sight. The fact that not one member of the Cabinet sat alongside the Secretary of State for Defence on Monday or today demonstrates what is going on.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), the shadow Secretary of State, covered the scene broadly and with his usual competent manner. He set the scene for the wider concerns about the way in which the armed forces are currently supported that are felt by hon. Members and, clearly, by the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence, the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), who made a distinguished contribution. I am disappointed by one thing this afternoon. Although I usually favour time-limited speeches—especially my own—I would have appreciated more time for the former Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo). He made an extremely thoughtful contribution of which the House would have preferred to hear more.

I shall concentrate especially on the problem of overstretch to which several hon. Members referred. The Royal Navy is 1,040 people under strength, the RAF is 860 people under strength and the Army is 4,230 people under strength. Some of us think it incredible that full manning for the Army is not forecast to happen until 2008, although few people believe that the target will be hit.

There is no doubt that training and leave are having a considerable effect on morale. The Secretary of State announced on Monday—sadly, by way of a written statement—that a further 1,200 troops would be committed to the Iraqi force. That has an impact on arrangements for training and leave for the rest of the armed forces, both of which affect the morale with which they have to cope. Although there have been many industrial relations changes for the civilian population, our armed forces are increasingly put upon, under both Conservative and Labour Governments, and that may affect recruitment.

Of equal concern is the fact that the percentage of untrained personnel is growing relentlessly. The Minister must be greatly worried that more than 11 per cent. of the armed forces are not trained for role. That is not because the armed forces do not have the ability to train those people or because those waiting for training are too incompetent to get it; it is simply one of the consequences of overstretch. Several of my colleagues referred to the level of manning. Those who took part in Defence questions on Monday heard hon. Members, including Labour Members, express concern about the rumours over the summer on the future of some our more historical regiments.

When it comes to conflict, senior politicians without experience of the armed forces and the media inevitably consider whether the Special Air Service will be deployed or where the Royal Marines and the Parachute Regiment are going. They concentrate on the high-profile activists. The truth is that the line regiments are the workhorses of the British Army. Some of them are experiencing great difficulty in recruiting, partly because of the uncertainty about their future. Those of us who support the regimental structure in the Army understand the importance that county links bring to recruitment and retention. It is not an ancient system that is carrying on in a mad, obscure, conservative way; rather, the arrangement is important for recruitment and the cohesion of a regiment. Anyone who has witnessed that will bear testimony to it.

The reservists have been reduced from 293,000 in 2000 to 254,000 this year. Yet that reduction of 40,000 comes at a time when more and more reservists and Territorial Army personnel are being committed to active theatres. I understand that more than 3,000 reservists are involved in Iraq. Reservists, in particular the Territorial Army, are becoming fewer in number, yet the demands being made on them are growing all the time. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea explained, we need to address the problem of numbers. Although Committees and debates in House will inevitably focus on the bigger strategic issues—the sexy side of armaments perhaps—when it comes to controlling an area, we need men and women on the ground. The fact that 1,000 more reservists are being called up by Christmas shows that those who serve the Secretary of State for Defence and those Ministers who make the policy are not addressing manpower issues properly.

[Derek Conway]

Territorial Army regiments are being amalgamated into quasi-European regional regiments, like the Tyne Tees regiment of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), which combines my regiment, the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, and the West Midlands Regiment, which combines several former regiments and battalions. Although they keep the historical badge at company level, the arrangement does not work on a regional basis. They expect and need the ancient county identity to keep the ethos that has been so important to our regiments. The time will soon come when the Government, with the support of my party, accept that they have to expand the numbers.

I want to pay tribute to the adult trainers who help our combined cadet force, in particular the Army Cadets, the Navy Cadets, the Air Training Corps and those who run school corps. Some people think that young people should not wear military uniforms or be involved in military training. Even some hon. Members campaign for such schemes to be wound up and abandoned. That is entirely misconceived. Anyone who has the slightest connection with those units knows what a good experience exposure to a form of military training can be for young people. It teaches them a degree of self-discipline and the inter-reliance that comes from military training. I suspect that our young people today are no better or worse than their grandparents who were required to fight in such serious wars. The quality is still there, but the opportunity for training is diminishing by the week. However, the House should pay tribute to those who give up their time as adult trainers to ensure that those who want to experience the armed forces can do so.

We are lucky that even at a time when so many people are losing their lives on our behalf, people are still prepared to enlist in our regular forces. They are undoubtedly very special people. The training that the regimental system in particular provides makes them other than just special; it makes them superb. That does not happen by accident. It behoves the House and the major parties to support the expansion of the number of people in the armed forces and the resources that we need to commit to them so that they can do their job.

3.25 pm

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): As the Defence Secretary said, defence in the UK is interlinked with our international situation. As other hon. Members have said, it is appropriate that the debate is being held on the anniversary of 11 September. I identify myself with the sympathies extended to all those who are grieving at this time. It is appropriate for us to consider the perspective since 11 September.

Britain rightly said after 11 September that we were standing shoulder to shoulder with the United States. We believed that the attack was not just on the United States, but on civilisation itself. Although I believe that taking part in the war on terror was correct, we should also recognise the price that could be paid by increasing the risk of terrorism against the UK. Whether we believe that the war on Iraq was right or wrong, we should recognise that it has also probably increased the risk of terrorism against British citizens.

Immediately after the start of the war, influential people in the Bush Administration started arguing for further pre-emptive wars. Again, we should be under no illusions that if the United States engages in more military adventures, that will increase fear and hatred of it. From a time when the world was so closely behind the United States after 11 September, it is disturbing to see the extent to which the Pew survey and other surveys of international opinion have shown a sharp increase in hostility to the United States. There should be no doubt on our part that if the UK were to support further military adventures, that would massively increase the risks of terrorism against our people, whether from Islamic or other groups, whether from abroad or possibly even indigenous sources. The blood price of that military special relationship would be paid not just by our armed forces, but by our civilians at home or abroad. One thinks of the example of Bali, which was clearly an attack on Australian citizens.

I believed that over and above the work of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the report from the Intelligence and Security Committee and the work of Lord Hutton, it was in the national interest to have a wider independent inquiry. One reason is that it is important that we should analyse the basis on which we went to war to ascertain whether or not that should set precedents for the future. Should a pre-emptive war on the basis of intelligence, which in terms of the ISC report can be uncertain, or as Paul Wolfowitz said can be murky, set a precedent for the future, or should we decide that we should be far more cautious in future?

Since the war there has tended to be a change of emphasis. In Britain there has been an emphasis on human rights aspects. I give the highest credit to my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) for the work that she has done over the years in emphasising the appalling atrocities of the Saddam regime over the decades.

War is a terribly dangerous precedent and we did not get the agreement of the international community, which was the way in which we should have been dealing with the matter. I fear that human rights was not the priority of the United States, and that there was far too much arbitrariness. We must work primarily to build up the International Criminal Court and in strengthening diplomatic and other pressures, with war being regarded only as a last resort, if we are to preserve a stable world under the rule of law.

I find the US neo-conservative concept of America as a self-appointed sheriff with a posse of the willing frighteningly near the idea of vigilantism and lynch law. To me that leads not only to arbitrariness but, as Nelson Mandela said, to the potential for international anarchy.

It is appropriate on 11 September for us to ask whether we are winning or losing the war on terror. I am glad that we have the report of the Oxford research group by Professor Paul Rogers, which was launched at the all-party parliamentary group on global security in this place last Tuesday. I shall briefly summarise some of his conclusions. First, while we have had significant successes militarily and in stopping the economic power of some of the terrorist organisations, and in thwarting some attempted attacks by means of intelligence, there have been significant failures such as Bali, Casablanca, Riyadh, Karachi and elsewhere, mostly in Asia and

Africa. Professor Rogers estimates that al-Qaeda or al-Qaeda-linked groups have probably killed about 350 people and injured perhaps 1,000. He points out that during the two years since 11 September they have achieved more than they were achieving in, say, the two years before it.

Professor Rogers says that in Afghanistan, where we achieved military victory, we must recognise that it is only an area around Kabul that is under control. The area outside that is dangerously out of control. While the positive support that was being given by the Taliban to al-Qaeda is no longer there, it still creates a sort of anarchy where there are grave risks that terrorist groups can still thrive.

Professor Rogers says that there is a grave danger that the troops in Iraq may be a magnet for terrorism and that contrary to what President Bush said—that this is the centre of the war against terrorism—it may be a focus for terror and terrorists.

I shall add two personal observations. It is undeniable that Iraq has fractured the unity of the international coalition against terrorism. Perhaps more controversially, I believe that it has been a distraction from the campaign against terrorism. On the basis that stability at home is based on stability abroad, I shall summarise Professor Rogers's recommendations. He suggested that the UK and the international community should put far more effort into aiding and providing stability in Afghanistan. Secondly, he suggested that we should persuade our US allies to give far more control of the situation in Iraq to the UN. Thirdly, on the basis that we need to be tough on terrorism and tough on the causes of terrorism, we need to do much more about the global economic divide. We need to try to improve our efforts to introduce development to the poorest countries. In a sense, the Department for International Development has a role along with the Ministry of Defence in increasing the security of the United Kingdom. I pay tribute to the work that I believe the Government have done in taking a lead in some of these areas. All three of Professor Rogers's recommendations deserve serious consideration.

It has been suggested—I think correctly—that a particular threat on which we should concentrate is the risk of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction coming together. There is a real danger, obviously, of al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups that might be described as being of an unconditional, apocalyptic or absolutist nature seeing some value in killing vast numbers of people. In that context, I am concerned having read paragraphs 125 to 128 of the ISC report. That passage indicates that the JIC made the same judgment as the CIA—namely, that there was not a large probability of Iraq transferring WMD to terrorist organisations, but that such a risk would exist in the event of invasion. Personally, I always suspected that the US, the United Kingdom and Australia had overestimated Iraq's WMD capacity. I now think it possible, given present evidence, that its WMD capacity was either wholly or substantially destroyed, perhaps long before the war started. If the coalition Governments seriously believe that there are large stocks of WMD in Iraq, they are being grossly negligent in not seeking to ensure that such material could not fall into terrorist hands or on to the black market.

We should never forget that weapons of mass destruction give rise to more threats than terrorism alone. India and Pakistan have reminded us of the appalling threat of regional nuclear war, and we should never forget that if there were ever to be wider-scale international conflict or world war involving weapons of mass destruction, we would face a human catastrophe of unthinkable proportions. That is why it is crucial that we hold to the concept that war must be a last resort; and why the United Nations, for all its weaknesses, is our only hope of survival and must be strengthened and supported. It is why it is vital that the emphasis should be on non-proliferation and on international treaties and arms control agreements, not on the concept that is usually described as counter-proliferation—that is, pre-emptive war, military interdiction and so on. I am not suggesting that the two concepts are mutually exclusive, but non-proliferation must remain the absolute priority.

I am concerned that in UK Government circles counter-proliferation is being mentioned more often. I hope that that does not indicate a gradual change in policy comparable to the shift that I fear is taking place towards missile defence, which is part of the agenda of thinking that one can resolve problems primarily by military power and military technology. It is vital that we continue to believe in the importance of multilateral diplomacy as the basis of our human security. The influential neo-cons in the Bush Administration have been demanding further pre-emptive wars, although they have become slightly less vocal as problems in Iraq have increased. Given their relentless determination in pursuing their obsessions—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman has had his time allocation.

3.37 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): In his opening speech, the Secretary of State made it clear that departmental responsibility for defence in the United Kingdom rests with the Home Office. I therefore very much regret that no Home Office Minister has visited the Chamber during the debate, especially as contributions have been thoughtful and in some cases authoritative. It would have been right for the Home Office to be represented.

Against what or whom are we defending ourselves? It is no longer the Soviet Union or the Warsaw pact. I have seen the Warsaw pact tanks in Russia and elsewhere—they are going nowhere. Russia and the other former members of the Soviet Union are under-resourced and pose no threat to us. The only threat lies in their stocks of nuclear weapons. I am delighted that the United States, in particular, has been taking action with the Russians to eliminate those stocks. I also observe that the United Kingdom has been active in supporting the Russian armed forces in demobilising their over-large units. There is a great deal of co-operation between Russia and the NATO countries, especially between Russia and the United States and the United Kingdom—that is extremely impressive.

[Mr. Peter Viggers]

In shaping up to defence in the United Kingdom, our major alliance is NATO. The political, parliamentary underpinning of NATO is provided by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, some of whose members are colleagues who sit in the House of Commons.

The Assembly has five committees. The Political Committee, which is the senior committee, has been dealing with the expansion of NATO, relations with Russia and Ukraine and transatlantic relations. I am proud to chair that committee. The second committee is the Defence and Security Committee, which deals with military strategy and procurement. The third is the Economic Committee, which covers economic co-operation and issues such as money laundering—especially relevant now because of terrorism. The fourth is the Science and Technology Committee, which deals, for example, with weapons of mass destruction, and specialist issues such as small arms and the threat that they pose around the world. The fifth is the Civilian Affairs Committee, which has recently been dealing with the exclave of Kaliningrad from Russia and reconstruction in Afghanistan and Iraq. There are ad hoc groups dealing with Russian relations, Ukrainian relations and Mediterranean relations.

My only regret about the NATO Parliamentary Assembly is that its work is not well known. Its debates and reports are seriously authoritative. Four former Prime Ministers, numerous Foreign Ministers, Defence Ministers and ambassadors sit on the Political Committee. I am sorry that that work is not better known and I hope to do more to promote awareness of the Assembly and the reading of its reports and debates.

We must consider the future of NATO. It was created to make sure that the United States, which came late into the first and second world wars, would be totally committed to Europe. The United States currently spends approximately twice as much as the rest of NATO put together on defence, but its military capacity is around 10 times more effective than that of the rest of the NATO forces put together. That massive power is in the hands of an insular country, where only 7 per cent. of the population have passports. Indeed, many Senators and Congressmen boast of having no passport because they do not feel the need or the wish to travel overseas and see any part of the world other than United States. That insularity means that it is crucial to stay close to the United States.

I worry about European Union defence planning. Yesterday, I was at a meeting of the European Parliament with Javier Solana, the high representative of the European Union. He stressed that the EU has and must have autonomous powers. Yes, provided that European powers are focused within NATO. However, the fact that four NATO nations wish to set up a planning cell or unit outside supreme headquarters allied powers Europe is symbolic of the divorce between NATO and the European Union. It shows the drift away from NATO of some EU members. Despite their friendly language, we must remember that some continental NATO members believe that perhaps it has run its course, that the European Union needs to flex its muscles now and that we can say goodbye to NATO. For the reasons that I outlined, that would be an enormous mistake.

We are considering defence against what? The answer is "the unexpected." How does one prepare against the unexpected? It is rather like the conundrum, "How do hedgehogs make love?" The answer should be the same—"very carefully." How careful are our preparations for the unexpected? I examined American preparations and discovered that America has a homeland security advisory system, by which it sets great store. It determines the security risk, from low, categorised as green, through guarded, categorised as blue, elevated, categorised as yellow, high, designated orange, to severe, which is red. Those security states are widely advertised throughout the United States and all citizens are encouraged to learn what the states mean and what they should do. The lowest state involves:

"Ensuring personnel receive proper training on the Homeland Security Advisory System and specific preplanned department or agency Protective Measures".

In this country, we have advisory notices, which are published in Ministry of Defence and Government establishments. I know from my time in the services and as a Minister that there are different systems in the civilian part of government and the military part.

I thought that it would be a good idea for us to have a homeland security warning system comparable to that of the United States, so I telephoned the Ministry of Defence and the Home Office to ask whether they could please let me have the official guidance on security alert systems. I can scarcely believe their response. I was told that the information was classified and that I could not be given it. Indeed, I was told in a rather sheepish way, "We do not want to alarm people unnecessarily." That was the reason given for not publicising the systems. So we have not even started. I urge Ministers to look again at the public advisory systems relating to security.

I suspect that the unexpected will happen, and we should plan accordingly. The section of the strategic defence review called "A New Chapter" looks at asymmetrical threats, and a well-considered section entitled "Network-centric capability" urges that we should have precision in intelligence command and control, and strike capability. I agree that our forces should be trained and equipped to a high level of technology and efficiency, because the unexpected will occur.

High technology brings its own problems. The Secretary of State pointed out quite correctly that, if an aircraft hits a power station, it does not matter whether it is a result of terrorist action or not; the response must be the same, and it must involve a considerable amount of structured, organised planning. Nowadays, however, the higher level of technology has brought its own problems. Air traffic control is so sophisticated that if one aircraft is delayed, it will delay others and cause congestion. If we lose our electricity supply, we lose traffic lights, water pumps, air conditioning, refrigeration, lifts, computers and trains. Aircraft and cars have become more reliable, but that means that road planning has now become so clever that it takes only a minor irritation on a road to cause massive congestion. Instead of having 1,000 snarl-ups from 1,000 broken-down cars, we are now more likely to have one great big snarl-up involving 1,000 efficient cars.

I welcome the introduction of reaction forces in the "New Chapter", and the 6,000 to 7,000 structured, trained and disciplined reserves, but I would urge that we go further in encouraging our reserves. The Labour Government cut the Territorial Army from 59,000 to 41,200. With the number of regulars pushing 100,000, that gives a ratio of about four reserves to 10 regulars. In the United States, the numbers of regulars and reservists are roughly equal. In Australia, there are two and a half regular brigades and five and a half reserve brigades. In France, there are roughly the same number of reservists as regulars, and Germany, Russia and China all have the capacity to expand their forces with reserves.

In preparing for the unexpected, we therefore need access to trained personnel who need not necessarily be regulars. I would urge that we should have the scope to have among our reserves specialists in linguistics, computers and signals, as well as engineers and, in particular, specialists in chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defence. Those are all areas in which it would be helpful to have larger forces, and they could well be provided by reserve forces. The reaction forces will be a good start, but there is much more that the reserves should be tasked to do, and I hope that future Government policy will take account of that.

3.48 pm

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): It is a privilege to be able to make a small contribution to today's debate, which has been extremely interesting. It was my intention to raise three issues that had not already been covered, but that was before the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) spoke. At least two of the issues that I shall raise will be new ones, however.

I would like to make one or two general points first. There was a lot of talk earlier in the debate about the competence and leadership of the Ministry of Defence. Unlike any other public service provided by this or any other Government—be it health, education or whatever—the military service provided to this country is unique. There can be no doubt or dispute about the delivery of this service: it will be either a success or a failure.

Under their present leadership, and with their current Secretary of State and his predecessor, the Government have established an outstanding record when it comes to the performance of the British military—especially given the insecure environment throughout the world, in Sierra Leone, East Timor, Afghanistan, the Balkans and, currently, Iraq. I pay tribute to the tremendous, magnificent operation carried out by British troops in the war in Iraq, in extremely adverse circumstances. I believe that there was a clear case for military action. Today is the second anniversary of 11 September 2001. Since that fateful day, the security environment in the world has changed, and as a result the security threat to this country—UK plc—has changed as well.

During the cold war, our enemy was obvious. The security threats to this country were obvious, and pretty predictable. They were not very far away, they were all lined up, and we knew where they were coming from. That was followed by a period of dreadful uncertainty and unpredictability—a decade during which we were not sure what we were going to do. Conservative Governments' policies reflected that: their disastrous defence cuts had left massive capability gaps by 1997. It has been difficult for us. The strategic defence review has not delivered all that is necessary, but we have recognised the changed security environment and produced military forces that are mobile, agile, flexible and able to respond to unexpected threats in hotspots throughout the world.

Since 11 September, that challenge has been magnified 100 times. A threshold was crossed then: we are now experiencing a different type of threat. There are people on this planet who are prepared to kill hundreds and thousands of innocent people without warning, on the basis of no direct complaint, conflict or state of war. We have never experienced that before.

We all mourn the deaths of the 3,000 people who died on 11 September, but we should bear in mind that 50,000 people were targeted. It was a miracle that only 3,000 died. The scale of what happened is not always appreciated. That is why the Americans have reacted differently from us to a threat to homeland security. That is why they have set up a homeland security bureau; they have done it as much to reassure their public, who have gone through a horrendous experience, as to protect their country from threats. Our approach has been to strengthen our homeland defence through the ministry of the interior—the Home Office—and the Ministry of Defence, and I think it has proved better and more effective. We have not needed to reassure our public in the same way. The initiatives we have adopted as and when necessary have proved extremely effective, especially at Heathrow airport, although there is a lot more to be done.

We must not confuse crisis management, or consequence management—something that we have to address—with homeland security. The biggest threat to us now lies outside, and it is our nation's ability to respond outside that will keep our people secure. That is why we should congratulate the men and women who went out to Iraq and performed so superbly to meet a real threat that was posed by that country because of the changed environment.

We took military action against Iraq because it was in breach of resolution 1441. That may not have mattered so much before 11 September, but it made all the difference in the world afterwards—whether or not Iraq has weapons of mass destruction, which I happen to think it has. We went into Iraq without a second front, and we managed to defeat it in 21 days. British troops played a fantastic role in that operation: 45,000 troops of the British battle group were deployed in half the time it took to deploy troops in the first Gulf war.

Tremendous advances were made. Saddam Hussein watched the British and NATO forces in Kosovo and thought, "I know—it'll be a long air bombardment, followed by a land attack." He waited for that and buried his heavy armour, including his fast jets; we are still looking for it. People complain that we have yet to find some of these WMD canisters, but we have been in what is a very hostile environment for only a few months. I am afraid that that view reflects a naïve understanding of the technology of military concealment.

Our troops did a tremendous job. My overriding memory is of welcoming Welsh troops back from Iraq with a celebration held for them at Dow Corning social

[Mr. John Smith]

club in my constituency. Some of these brave young men had just come back from the front line. One or two went up to buy a drink, and the girls behind the bar turned to me and said, "Mr. Smith, are they old enough to drink?" I said, "These men have just come back from fighting for our homeland security!"

I want to raise a couple of issues that are particularly relevant to today's debate, and which were partially covered by the hon. Member for Gosport: the role of NATO, and the need to defend the British homeland through coalitions and military alliances. We are talking about one of the most successful military alliances in history, certainly in post-war history. I agree with the Government's current policy of supporting the European security and defence policy, which should enhance our European allies' military capabilities and ability to project power. I also support the European rapid reaction force, but the committee concerned with the military capability of NATO members tells us how right we, and one or two others, have got it. It would be a big mistake to dilute this advantage, and our reputation in the world and among our coalition partners, by ceding control over our national defence in any way. I know that it is not Government policy to do so, but for military reasons and for the defence of this country, let us make sure that we do not. Let us ensure that the deployment of British troops will always be a British decision, not a European one.

On recruitment, retention and overstretch, the recruitment of ethnic minorities has been a Government success story since 1997. This Government have achieved a fivefold increase in the number of ethnic minority recruits to the British forces. The current figure is approximately 5 per cent., which is a tremendous achievement in a very short time. However, it is not enough: the figure should be at least double that. We should look to our American allies, who have adopted a much more progressive policy on the recruitment of ethnic minorities, which has assisted them in their entire recruitment and retention policy. They recruit three times the proportion of ethnic minorities reflected in their communities, yet we recruit not even half the proportion reflected in ours. We should address that issue.

General Colin Powell was born in virtual poverty in the Bronx. He rose through the ranks to become the United States military's Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. That could not happen in this country. It is a tragedy that no black recruit from the east end of London, Tiger Bay or Toxteth who joins our forces now could ever expect to become the Chief of the Defence Staff in Britain in 25 years. Discrimination still exists in recruiting from ethnic minorities and we have to deal with that problem.

Finally, I want to speak about end-to-end logistics. We have to consider the recommendations presented by McKinsey and Co. We have to streamline our logistics. We have to reduce the lines of logistical support from four to two. I agree with saving as much money as possible by not duplicating, but not with a U-turn on Government policy. Deep repair and maintenance and depth air support should not be pushed away from the centres of excellence out to military operational bases. Otherwise, we will go right back to the bad old days when we did not know how much things cost, and the military ran rings round us when they wanted extra resources. At that time we did not get the efficiency and, most importantly, we did not free our military personnel to do what they do best.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

4.1 pm

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): In common with other hon. Members, I would like to associate myself with sending thoughts out to the families of the victims of 11 September. We should also be mindful of others who have either died or been seriously injured in the various attacks since that date. I also associate myself with the thoughtful contribution of the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge). He spoke for many people both in the House and in the country when expressing his reservations about why we went to war and what has happened subsequently.

At the start of the debate, the Secretary of State made it clear that he was going to present a mini-statement. He invited interventions and said that he would take them, but when they came, he chose to cut them short when it suited him. I was disappointed that I did not get in because I wanted to ask him two questions. I am also disappointed that he is not in his place to answer them now. Perhaps he will give at least some thought to them.

Page 44 of the Intelligence and Security Committee report, published today, contains a telling paragraph. It refers to

"the initial failure by the MoD to disclose that some staff had put their concerns in writing to line managers",

which the Committee describes as "unhelpful and potentially misleading". Having exposed that problem, the report continues by saying that

"the Defence Secretary decided against giving instructions for a letter to be written to us outlining those concerns."

Despite the fact that the Defence Secretary knew about the "potentially misleading" failure to disclose, he still chose not to write to the Intelligence and Security Committee. It is important to ask why he took that line.

I also wanted to ask the Secretary of State whether he shared the thoughts of his permanent secretary who, giving evidence to the judicial inquiry into the death of Dr. Kelly, said that the Ministry of Defence "leaked like a sieve". Does the Defence Secretary agree and feel that the Ministry—and thereby Parliament and the country— has been let down by the security services in respect of how the dossier was put together and how the evidence was collated? If the permanent secretary suggests that he leads a Department that "leaks like a sieve" and if the Secretary of State is not prepared, when something is drawn to his attention, to write to the governing body of the security services in this country, one wonders who is letting the nation down the most—the security services or the actions of the Secretary of State in running the Department.

I was fascinated by the comments of many hon. Members about Iraq and how the situation has developed. Should we really be surprised by our current position? It was such a short battle to win the victory against the regime in Iraq, but it is sad that winning the peace will be such a long one. The Americans told their

congressional committees that it took more than 500 people working for six months to produce the peace plan for Iraq, but they failed to grasp some of the key issues that were fundamental to making the peace work.

During the original debate on the decision to go to war, the former leader of the Conservative party said that he had recently returned from a visit to some of Iraq's neighbouring states and that he was convinced that they would rush to help support the peace in Iraq once the fighting was over. He said that they were convinced that getting rid of Saddam's regime would lead to greater stability and peace in the region. Yet those same countries are now allowing terrorists to haemorrhage across the borders into Iraq to attack our soldiers and the coalition forces generally and to disrupt the rebuilding of Iraq.

I want to devote some time to the issue of homeland defence. As a member of the Defence Committee, I am convinced that we got it right in our proposal that homeland defence needed to be co-ordinated by a Cabinet Minister with direct responsibility for the matter above all other Departments and Ministers. The paramount failure, in our estimation, was in communications and leadership in terms of the co-ordination of contingency planning in this country. It does not matter whether it was at a Government or local government level, or within the health service, the civil service or the police, fire and ambulance services; there was a lack of overall leadership and co-ordination. That process can be managed only if there is one Minister sitting in Cabinet who has enough clout and resources to have a positive influence.

I was saddened by the Government's response and the neglectful way in which they disregarded the Defence Committee's useful and constructive work on civil contingency planning. It was obvious to any member of that Committee during our many evidence sessions that also lacking was the capacity for the Government to resource not just the capital's civil contingency developments, but those developments across the country. In the Government's response to our report on "A New Chapter", they said that they did not recognise the lack of resources, which, from our evidence sessions, was obvious. Nearly every person who gave evidence—either from the police, local government or wherever—made the point that they had no resources to do the job properly. They could not even fund a communication system that allowed them to speak to each other. The mobile phone was still the preferred means of communication for many of those services. That is simply not good enough. The Government should not be allowed to walk away from the commitment to provide properly funded civil contingency systems.

Hon. Members who take the time to read the Government's response will be struck by the mind-boggling complacency. Despite efforts from Members in all parts in this House to try to bring home to the Government the need to resource civil defence and contingency planning, no effort has been made to recognise that.

The Secretary of State failed once again to take an intervention about the CCRFs, the contingency reservists. The Committee said that if this were to be a meaningful body, three ingredients were critical: first, that people were properly trained and had properly honed skills; secondly, that they should be available in a fairly short time; and thirdly, that they should be properly resourced to enable them to respond to a situation. Once again, the Government's response was complacent. They said that the intention was always to provide a "general duties" response, so the requirement for specialist skills would be minimised. All the evidence demanded the opposite, yet that was the Government's response. They did not really want such skills to be available in that critical area, yet again displaying mind-boggling complacency.

In an earlier intervention, the issue of the protection of our sea-ports was raised with the Secretary of State. I represent the home of the Royal Navy—Portsmouth—which is close to one of our major ports, Southampton, so security at sea-ports has been a critical issue for me and my constituents for a long time. It has been proposed that we should have a police force to patrol our sea-ports properly. That is a much needed service, because in my own city the continental ferry port has no proper police protection. Indeed, the port has no regular customs service, despite being the second busiest port for passengers and dealing with millions of people every year. I received a letter just this morning about the security fence around the port and how many times it is breached.

We do not take seriously enough the threat to our maritime trade and the protection of our ports. I have seen how easy it is to get close to British naval ships in Portsmouth harbour. I am glad to say that the Navy has improved surveillance of its ships in port, and I am delighted that more resources have been made available for that purpose. However, is it right that our major container ports are not policed either by the military or a sea-borne unit of the regular police force? In some instances, such as Southampton, such work is even in the hands of private operators. The Government have been neglectful of their obligation to protect our sea-ports.

I was privileged to attend the evidence session at which we were told how easy it would be for terrorists to cause a problem in a maritime environment. I shall not divulge what was disclosed to us about the difficulties of trying to track such terrorists down or how cheap are the craft that could inflict considerable damage on a supertanker, a large container ship or—more importantly—a ship with a nuclear capacity. It would be easy to get close enough to cause enough damage to have horrendous consequences, so we must take all those points seriously.

I hope that one of the lessons that we have learned from 11 September is that we will not know where the next terrorist attack will come from, and we will not be allowed to excuse ourselves just because we cannot cover every eventuality. We know that several threats exist, but we are not properly resourcing our capacity to deal with them, and we never will.

4.13 pm

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate, and I wish to address two key issues that affect future defence capabilities in this country. First, I wish to I associate myself with the comments of other right hon. and hon. Members about the tragic events of 11 September 2001.

[Mark Tami]

which have made us all reassess how we approach the defence of this country, what we understand terrorism to be and how we can protect our people from it.

The recent conflict in Iraq has once again shown the need for Britain to have mobile and flexible armed forces to meet the needs of the ever changing international situation. That flexibility is needed not only on the ground, at sea and in the air, at the scene of conflict and for peacekeeping activities, but in this country, to ensure that our armed forces receive the necessary back-up and support. That is vital. Without that support, our forces, however well equipped, cannot operate effectively at the front line.

The Defence Aviation Repair Agency at RAF Sealand fulfils just such a vital role. Sealand is the agency's centre of excellence for all electronic and avionic work, employing more than 80 personnel, as well as a small number of service personnel, at the site. It is a well established facility and has a highly skilled and motivated work force.

DARA employs more than 4,000 staff in total throughout the UK; there are other sites at St. Athan, Fleetland and Almondbank. It was created in April 1999 and subsequently granted with trading agency status in April 2001. Since then, DARA as an organisation and business has made great strides in improving its levels of efficiency and delivery of service. From my own experience, I have seen the ongoing changes that have transformed the site out of all recognition from what it was when first established.

Mr. John Smith: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The transformation that has taken place within DARA on all its sites—including Sealand in his constituency and St. Athan in mine—has been terrific. Does he agree that if the recommendations of the end-to-end review were implemented, it would prove the death knell of DARA? Does he agree that the Minister must consider alternatives to streamline defence logistics?

Mark Tami: I agree with my hon. Friend. I shall move on to that issue, and will urge the Minister to take it up. The key point is that we could lose all the good work that has been done and all the changes that have been made. The old image that many of us may have of Nissen huts and everyone in brown overalls is behind us. Sealand and St. Athan now have modern, competitive facilities.

The original site at Sealand covered an area of more than 330 acres. Thanks to improved working practices, infantry reduction and process acceleration, it now operates out of a site of around 40 acres. The employees, represented by the trade unions, have been a key driving force in that culture of change, which has meant that they can compete effectively. There are now 30 per cent. fewer staff, providing much greater results. Productivity improvements have been staggering and there have been dramatic reductions in operating costs. All those factors have enabled Sealand to deliver better value and improved service to both the military and the growing number of commercial customers.

The commercial side of the business is growing, which demonstrates that, given a fair chance, DARA can compete and win orders outside its traditional field. However, we should never forget that DARA's main strength and value is to our armed forces. Sealand has shown its worth during the recent conflicts—throughout the Kosovo campaign and, more recently, in Iraq. DARA personnel responded to the increased demands placed upon them. They often worked around the clock to turn out kit that was urgently required at the front. We owe a great deal to them, and should praise them for their efforts. Often, they are not at the front line, but they provide a vital service and are perhaps forgotten. We do not appreciate how hard those people have worked.

DARA has continued to show the merit of a one-stop shop that can deliver what is required quickly, effectively and to a high standard. It is clear that such support can be delivered effectively only by this means; it cannot merely be pushed up to the front line through the use of contractors.

In spite of all the great strides forward, the long-term future of DARA has always felt less than secure. Every few months or so, a rumour surfaces regarding its future. Some of those rumours have some truth behind them, and others do not. Either way, they all have the same destabilising effect on staff, affecting their confidence about the future. We all hope the red dragon announcement will end that sort of speculation. The £77 million investment in building a superhanger at St. Athan will enable DARA to retain and secure UK military business and gain new business from military and commercial markets. We all welcome that, and the personnel at DARA are sure that they can build for the future. The Minister has led the fight on the red dragon programme, and the announcement was warmly welcomed.

There is always a however, however. This summer we have had a set-back in the form of further speculation over the end-to-end review. I recognise that that was not a statement of Government or MOD policy, and I welcome the assurances that I have received about the future of red dragon and the ongoing commitment to DARA. It cannot be denied, however, that the statement has put something of a shadow over the project. I appeal to the Minister to put an end once and for all to damaging speculation. Failure to do so would only further undermine morale at all DARA sites.

DARA has demonstrated that it is the most efficient and cost effective option open to us. The alternative of placing such work with the RAF or contracting it out would be more expensive and less efficient and would almost certainly lead to duplication. It would not provide the level of service that our air force needs.

Mr. John Smith: Does my hon. Friend agree that as well as providing the best value for money, the DARA solution introduced by the Government a couple of years ago provided cost transparency and a system of benchmarking prices for military deep aviation work that the military operational bases in partnership with the private sector would not provide, just as they did not in the old days?

Mark Tami: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We are aware how much some kit costs and how it can be repaired. In the past we did not know that, and a lot of expense was gone to because we did not know where parts were. With a central system, lots of costs can be drawn out of the system.

If direct front-line support is required, DARA can supply it and has shown that it has mobility and an ability to meet requirements. I welcome the reassurances, but we should move forward to secure DARA's future. It is the best option for our defence forces.

Another important subject for our defence forces is the future strategic tanker aircraft, one of the most important orders that the Ministry of Defence will consider for many years to come. It is that order that will decide whether we can compete with the United States or whether we are content for it to maintain an effective world monopoly in that area of defence supply. The Airbus 330 air tanker offers the best option for our armed forces and, unlike its rival, it is a new aircraft and requires little modification. It will retain full passenger and cargo capabilities, which is a considerable benefit. It will have a much greater range than the Boeing 767—the alternative bid—which is essential if our armed forces are to meet the challenges that will be placed on them. In recent conflicts, we have seen the importance of air space. The greater range will give our armed forces that extra flexibility.

The Airbus would have great export potential. We have the intellectual property in this country. I am confident that if we choose the Airbus option, other countries will follow. There have already been signs that the French and Australians are likely customers for the aircraft. By choosing that option, we would not only be safeguarding British jobs now and giving our armed forces the best aircraft, but would be creating more jobs for Britain in the future. Airbus is a great success story for this country and Europe. We should build on that success and choose the Airbus option, which is the best for our armed forces.

4.25 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Defence in the United Kingdom is not only a matter of academic interest for me; about 12,000 of my constituents are employed directly by the Ministry of Defence and many more thousands are employed indirectly.

I strongly endorse the speech of the Chairman of the Defence Committee, the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George). I agreed with everything that he said, but I want to go a little further. When he said that defence in the United Kingdom was not only the responsibility of the Home Office, which is the lead Department, or the Ministry of Defence with its military capability, but of a wide range of Government Departments, local authorities, regional agencies and others he was absolutely right. I am convinced that defence in the UK will be improved, that we will all feel safer and that we will all feel part of it if we change the culture of secrecy that has been part of the defence culture here since at least 1939. Compared with the safety of citizens in the United States, and how they feel about it, we are light years behind.

I have recently been to the United States and discussed that matter with a wide range of people, from the military to the scientists. I am sure that the Americans' culture of openness makes them safer. It is not a question of frightening the British public by keeping secrets from them: the reverse is true in this day and age. When we can look on the internet and find so much information in the United States about what they are doing, how they are doing it and what their threat assessment is, or walk into a bookshop in Washington or Detroit and buy books that are illegal in this country because of the material that they contain, which we would classify, we realise what a farce secrecy has become because we are not keeping the right things secret.

That is my first plea and the major point that I want to add to the debate. In this country we need not only to take on board the wider community of interest, including the expertise of the private sector, the pharmaceutical industry, the biotechnology industries and the academics—that is true and we must do it—but to change the culture of secrecy.

I want to tell the Minister a little secret. I would like him to look into the problem at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down. It is a wonderful scientific research organisation, but it is losing £4 million out of its research budget because it has to repair the Winterslow road—a public road—which is ridiculous. The county council is also strapped for cash. That is something that needs a little ministerial intervention.

On the disposal of assets by the Ministry of Defence, although it is right that Ministers should look forward and meet new challenges, will they please not forget that the legacy of assets that they leave behind is important to local communities? RAF Chilmark, for example, was closed in April 1995. The Ministry has spent £1.8 million to date on clearing ordnance to make it saleable. The work has now become stuck and we also face the closure of Dean Hill. Defence Estates is really stretched in trying to dispose of those assets.

I am sure that Ministers are aware that Boscombe Down military airfield presents an unusual problem and I hope that their officials will read the debate so that they, too, can see the problem. There is a proposal—mad—to build 700 private sector houses just off the end of the main runway of an aircraft testing and evaluation station. That is crazy. The site is also close to the munitions safety zone around the airfield, and objectors to the proposal are legitimately concerned that it will be unsafe to build schools and houses there.

I am delighted that the NAAFI headquarters are in my constituency. The organisation played an important role for our servicemen and women in the Iraq conflict and I wanted to say "Thank you", so I tabled a couple of parliamentary questions on NAAFI on 17 June. I thought that, perhaps in an absent-minded senior moment I had overlooked the answers, but when I checked in the Library I found that those questions of 17 June had not been answered. I should be grateful to the Minister for an answer; it is most unlike the MOD not to have replied.

I have an answer for the Minister on what to do about recruitment and retention. The Army's whole training programme for skills is the wrong way round. It is extraordinary that members of the armed forces should have to wait until they are within a couple of years of retirement before they are put through a retirement training programme. That is very good, but it should be provided at the beginning of their service, as it is in the American forces.

[Mr. Robert Key]

When the forces are out in Kosovo or Afghanistan, they cannot ring up for an engineer to mend their computers. There are not enough people in the services who have acquired such skills. They are multi-skilled in the sense that they learn some trades on the way through; they do some painting, decorating or building work and they learn mechanics, car maintenance and so on. However, they learn nothing in depth and we do not have many skilled resources to draw on. Even in America they can get it wrong; they have privatised parts of their logistics chain and discovered that the private sector was not frightfully keen to go out to Baghdad with the spares. We must look at training.

I have two final points. First, if we are to have that increased purple operation—all three services increasingly working together and with the civilian communities—we must get the legal basis right. I refer to the tri-service legislation proposed as part of the next Armed Forces Bill. I served on the Standing Committees for the past two quinquennial Armed Forces Acts. On the first occasion, we were told that during the passage of the previous Act, in 1991, the MOD had promised consolidation of the three Acts. In 1995, we were told: "We're terribly sorry, it's all got a bit stuck because there aren't enough draftsmen". In 2001, we were told that the Government had changed their mind; they were abandoning consolidation and going for a tri-service Act.

I tabled some questions about the matter and was delighted to find that the MOD is fully on the ball. On 9 June, I received a very good answer from the Minister of State, who confirmed that the Government are on course for a Bill in the 2005–06 Session. However, although the MOD drafts the Bill, it then has to go down the road to parliamentary counsel—an independent body. Interestingly, no one knows who it is answerable to. I checked with parliamentary counsel this morning and even they did not quite know. I was thus not too pleased when I saw the answer to a question that I had tabled to the Department for Constitutional Affairs about how many officials were working on the draft of the new tri-service Bill: it was "None." We should check on that and I hope that the Defence Committee will get on to the case—it needs chasing up.

My second point is really a plea to all hon. Members. The Secretary of State is in denial about shortage of equipment in Iraq. He says that it is all an exaggeration and a load of nonsense. Yesterday, I spoke to a constituent who had returned from Iraq this week. He told me that for the first month that he was out there his unit was fed by the Americans because no British food was in place. They had no desert kit; it turned up a week before they were due to come back, so they took a photograph of themselves in their new kit, took it off and came home. We are short of soldiers, airmen and sailors. The Army is short of kit, communications equipment and vehicles. The Navy is short of ships. We were told only last week that the Navy does not have enough ships to protect our shipping lanes: let us remember that 90 per cent. of our overseas trade still goes by sea. The Air Force is short of aircrew, and budget cuts are forecast for that service.

Shortages are a real problem, but it is worse than that. We can work alongside the United States military, we can work behind them and we can work in front of them. The problem is that we cannot work with them. In particular, we do not have sufficient systems integration. We are so far behind with our electronics compared with the United States that we are years away from operating in a digital battlefield. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) said in a very thoughtful speech, perhaps we should abandon the whole idea and just do peacekeeping. I think not. In this country, our military should be prepared for full warfare.

It is always difficult, particularly for an Opposition party, to chide the Government of the day for not spending enough. That is the point at which a helpful Labour Member is supposed to stand up and say, "How are you going to pay for it?" Unfortunately, none of them is doing that, so I shall have to answer the question myself. I have checked my party's position on resources for defence, which is that we will fully fund whatever defence capabilities are necessary to maintain our national security and to fulfil our national obligations. That is fine as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. If we are to be serious about defence in this country, my party, the Labour party and other parties must make those difficult choices and be prepared to spend more of our budget on defence. That is an unequivocal message, and I know that my constituents and Conservative voters would agree.

I am not talking about catching up with the odd billion that the Labour Government have put in, and that my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea put in before the 1997 election. I believe that Conservative supporters expect the Conservative party to commit to a serious increase in the defence budget before the next election. I will continue to say that. For those who ask how we will pay for it, I have a little list that I will be happy to share with the shadow Cabinet and with anyone else who wants to hear it. It is a serious issue, and I very much hope that my hon. Friends on the Front Bench will take my contribution in the spirit in which it is intended. It is not a criticism. I am trying to encourage them and to encourage a debate in this country about how seriously we take our defence in the United Kingdom and our defence posture in the world.

4.38 pm

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): Two years ago, the threat against which our defence forces had to safeguard the United Kingdom changed in an afternoon. The assumed impregnability of the United States, Britain and north-west Europe after the Berlin wall fell vanished instantaneously. The psychology of Governments, and people, too, changed that afternoon. They had believed that the effects of war on them and their countries had been banished for ever. Suddenly, they and their loved ones were vulnerable to the random malice of fanatics who were beyond the influence of reason and without any moral abhorrence for the killing of innocent people.

As is normal, many people, as a means of psychological protection, will not accept the true nature of the horrifying prospect. After the initial shock, life has to go on. Everything is normal, and distant and

uncertain prospects of terrorist attack are therefore discounted and pushed to the back of the mind. Any Government who did that, however, would betray the trust of the people who put trust in them and would fail in their primary duty to defend the country. To their great credit, this Government did not evade the changed world that they faced after 11 September 2001.

The vulnerability of people in modern cities to the effects of chemical, biological or radiological weapons is an issue that cannot be avoided. Speaking in terms of chemical, biological or radiological weapons or using the shorthand phrase "weapons of mass destruction" is too dispassionate and academic to convey any understanding of what might be threatened. We are talking about anthrax spores and radiation dust being spread through a major area of London such as Westminster or the City, meaning that they would have to be closed down for several decades. Alternatively, water supplies could be contaminated with poison, or nerve gas could insidiously permeate the London underground. Overnight, such areas could become ghost towns that would progressively fall into dereliction.

The economic impact would be incalculable because Government, business and financial institutions would have to move and start again from scratch because their records would be contaminated. However, before that, mothers, fathers, sons and daughters who went to work normally, like the people in the World Trade Centre two years ago, would either not return in the evening or return to die of contamination.

To those who ask what terrorists would do that, I say that al-Qaeda is among several, but Hamas, Hizbollah and Islamic Jihad could not be excluded if they had access to such weapons. That is the situation today, but once an example is given, there is the same possibility that non-Muslim organisations could do such a thing if they wanted to draw attention to any injustice that they feel. That is why the United Nations Security Council was right to demand that Saddam Hussein give up his biological, chemical and radiological weapons throughout the 1990s and why it was right to give him a last chance to co-operate last November. That is why I believe that Britain and the United States were right not to allow the situation to drift.

We should not allow controversy over Iraq to obscure the wider issue of a defence policy that is directed at the terrorist attacks that the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State and the Metropolitan Police Commissioner have warned about. The 1998 defence review touched on the threat from terrorism and rogue states but suggested that it would emerge in several years' time. The threat is with us now and gives rise to questions about several of the principles on which our defence is based.

The first principle is that the only legitimate use of military force is in defence against an attack. However, that presumes that there is no disadvantage to the defender in waiting. That cannot mean that we have to wait for parts of any western city to be contaminated or poisoned by a gas attack before action against the perpetrators or any state that harbours them is legitimate. As with Iraq, there are circumstances in which pre-emptive attack should be legitimate. There is a question of who should legitimise that. The answer must lie with the United Nations, but with a reformed United Nations so that a country's vital defence is not left hostage to the capricious or perverse attitudes of other Governments who wish to gain from the situation.

Sovereignty, in its traditional form, is another concept that is questionable in today's world. It has come to mean that no despotic tyrant who is responsible for abusing, torturing and killing a country's citizens may be replaced by a foreign country if he has some legitimate or de facto claim to power. I do not accept that any such tyrant should be immune to challenge and able to continue in such an inhuman way. Pragmatically, that has now been established in the case of Slobodan Milosevic, the former ruler of Serbia, and the courts have generally recognised it in the case of General Pinochet. Indeed, it was a factor that legitimised the removal of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. The concept of sovereignty needs amending to cover the removal of tyrants. The relevance of that to UK defence is that Britain is not likely to be threatened by democratic countries. The threats and promotion of fanatical terrorism come from tyrannical regimes that are far from democratic.

A further defence interest is in maintaining concerted co-operation between north America, Commonwealth countries and the European democracies to defend the principles on which they are founded. That transcends immediate political differences. Questions have been raised about the closeness of the Prime Minister's relationship with President Bush given their diametrically opposed views on domestic politics. The opposed political positions are far less than those between Churchill and Stalin, who successfully co-operated against Nazism to win the second world war alongside Roosevelt, who likewise sank political differences in pursuit of overriding strategic interests.

The greatest institutionalised defence co-operation between democracies is NATO. It has proved itself in the cold war and, though different, still has a role to play in defending democracy in today's world, as it has done in the Balkans. NATO's greatest strength is to institutionalise defence co-operation between north America and Europe, which today is essentially the European Union and Russia. It is overwhelmingly in Britain's interest that Europe and north America should stay intimately involved in combating terrorism and sustaining democracy against subversion or coup d'état. It is vital to Britain that those states that have taken to democracy recently in Europe and elsewhere should have a source of defence when threatened, whether the threat is external or internal.

America is the overwhelming superpower in the world and can chose between pulling up the drawbridge to become fortress America or co-operating internationally to sustain the democratic principles on which it is founded. The Prime Minister is right in stressing how vital for Britain's strategic interest it is that America remains engaged with western Europe in securing human rights and democracy. That must be the keystone of Britain's defence policy, as it has been for the past 60 years.

[Mr. Nigel Beard]

It is worth stressing the importance to Britain of the north Atlantic alliance when President Chirac is attempting to establish an alternative policy of polarisation. He is attempting to rally the countries of the European Union in opposition to America on defence and foreign policy issues and, no doubt, a range of other issues. No one could gain from such a schism except countries that are thereby provided with an opportunity to play one bloc off against the other. Let us hope, as appears to be the case, that no other countries rally to that Napoleonic illusion.

Having said that, there is a strong case for the European defence initiative. It would allow European Union forces to address issues arising within and close to the area of the European Union. The prime condition must be that the force will operate only where NATO as a whole has decided not to operate. Given that condition, it is a response to the US political pressure that asks why young men and women from Michigan, Minnesota and California should operate in Europe while European countries watch them. Because a European defence initiative answers that question, it strengthens NATO rather than weakening it.

I have attempted to outline some of the issues that United Kingdom defence policy needs to address or take into account in dealing with the threat of international terrorism. There are also questions of equipment, training and force structure, but they are being addressed in the changes that followed the 1998 defence review.

Sections of the media, for reasons that have nothing to do with defence, have become obsessed with the "He said, she said" tittle-tattle of the Ministry of Defence. It was sad to hear the shadow Defence spokesman following that line in marked contrast to the statesmanlike contribution by the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo). That is not the basis on which the House should judge the record of the Secretary of State. He is accountable for the readiness of our armed forces to deal with the changed circumstances and new threats that this country faces. The valour, performance and success of British forces in Iraq show them to be among the best in the world. That is testimony to the successful conduct of defence policy by the Government. Let us give due credit then to the man who is responsible for our armed forces. He has served this country well and will continue to do so.

4.50 pm

Bob Russell (Colchester): I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and also Mr. Speaker for allowing my name to appear on the list of speakers. I apologise for not being present for the whole of the debate. I was in my place for the opening speech, but the Home Affairs Committee had a rearranged sitting this afternoon to put questions to the Home Secretary, and I am a member of that Committee. However, I felt that in representing the garrison town of Colchester I should like the opportunity to contribute to the debate and to highlight what I think is a serious problem in retaining experienced soldiers. I shall come on later to recruitment.

I am advised that in the early 1980s there was a record level of junior entrants to the Army. As a consequence, during the next two or three years there will be record numbers of soldiers leaving the Army after completing their 22 years of adult service. The Army is already 4 per cent. under strength. That was made clear in an answer during Defence questions on Monday. Clearly, the defence of the United Kingdom is dependent on our having sufficient members of the armed forces to defend the country.

With a shortfall of 4 per cent. and with additional commitments overseas, I suggest that the overstretch is becoming worse by the month. More must be done to retain the recruits that we have while at the same time recruiting sufficient numbers to bring the Army up to full strength.

In my constituency—I suspect that the situation is the same in many other military centres—family housing is an important matter for those members of our armed forces who wish the Army, the Navy or the Air Force as a career. More needs to be done urgently to improve the housing stock for our military families. The modernisation programme is not proceeding as it should. The idiotic privatisation of the Army housing estates by the previous Government has not helped the situation. It is this Government's job to ensure that all our Army families are living in accommodation of the sort that we would wish for our own constituents.

A second area where the Ministry of Defence could and should be doing more is in supporting schools that have a large intake of children from military families. I initiated a debate on this issue during the previous Parliament and was led to believe that matters would be improved. I have to say that they have not improved. The Secretary of State for Education and Skills recently visited Colchester and spoke to some of the heads and chairmen of governors of schools where up to 95 per cent. of the pupils come from Army families. He left them with the view that something would be done. In my follow-up questions, the sidekick Minister has knocked that one back. There is no help whatsoever. I hope that in the spirit of joined-up Government, Defence Ministers will have words with their chums in the Department for Education and Skills to ensure that additional resources are provided. It is a vital part of the retention agenda.

About 3,000 troops from the Colchester garrison served in the Iraqi war. Sadly, not all returned. I know that the House will wish to join me in paying tribute to those who fell and assuring their families that our thoughts are with them. I witnessed early on when the war had commenced the marvellous way in which the Army's welfare and support services kicked in. It was a joy to see that in operation. Full-time members of the Army, former Army personnel who are now supporting the Army, civilians, local firms and members of the local community all rallied round and joined up to provide a fantastic support service for the families of those left back on base.

I want to pay tribute to the Secretary of State for Defence for his personal commitment in coming to Colchester to meet, speak to and reassure many of the families. His visit was greatly appreciated, and I ought to put my thanks to him on public record.

I ask the Ministry of Defence to take on board for the future one small area of disappointment with the welfare and support service—the feeling of isolation that was drawn to my attention by the families of Territorial

Army reservists who were called up. They felt that they were not part of the wider network of support and welfare services. I am sure that that can be addressed, and I hope that it will be.

The Army needs to do more to recruit, as well as to retain. We should bear in mind the different footprints of the parts of the United Kingdom where regiments have their historical and traditional recruitment. The part of the UK that recruits troops to the Royal Anglian regiment supports its regiment through full recruitment, whereas in other regions regiments do not recruit their full complement. I suggest to Ministers that one way of making up the shortfall of 4,200 soldiers would be to say to the Royal Anglian regiment: "You are very successful with your recruitment; you have a large footprint from which you can recruit your troops; we are prepared to give you the opportunity to reform the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Anglian regiment." What objection could there possibly be to that? Surely the object of the exercise is to have sufficient troops to bring the Army up to its complement of just over 102,000. If one regiment can recruit fully, while others cannot, why not allow a successful regiment to increase its recruitment through the restoration of its 3rd Battalion? That would be the successor to the old Essex regiment.

Many parts of the Ministry of Defence have been privatised in recent years, but it is not so enthusiastic about recruitment initiatives. Given that the Army is under strength by around 4 per cent., initiatives to boost recruitment should be welcomed. The British Army has a proud tradition of welcoming those from other countries of the Commonwealth into its ranks. One way of bridging the gap is by allowing the Royal Anglian regiment to recruit more; another is to recruit from the Commonwealth. It is therefore regrettable that someone somewhere in the Ministry of Defence has taken it upon himself or herself to block certain initiatives involved in the recruitment process.

If that sounds familiar to the Minister of State, he may recall that I wrote to him about it on 29 July and 1 August this year. I want to put on the record the questions that I asked, to which I hope that answers will be forthcoming:

"Is the British Army short of soldiers? Yes.

Does the Army recruit from the Commonwealth? Yes.

Where in the regulations does it state that recruits cannot be presented to the Army by a recruitment company?

Where in the regulations does it state that recruits are barred from being funded by a third party (or company) prior to them joining the Army?

Where in the regulations does it state that recruits are barred from entering into a legal agreement to reimburse loans provided by a third party (or company) whilst they are serving soldiers?

I would have thought that the Ministry of Defence would have welcomed an initiative"—

I assume it likes initiatives—

"in developing a means ... to help recruit soldiers from Commonwealth countries to fill the gaps in so many of our regiments."

The recruits would have to satisfy the Army's enlistment criteria and they would therefore have to be fit and capable of becoming members of Her Majesty's armed forces. If Defence Ministers are serious about wanting a full complement of soldiers so that the armed forces do not remain as overstretched as they currently clearly are, I ask them to consider my suggestion of greater home recruitment from the Royal Anglian Regiment recruitment area and to accept that initiatives for recruiting soldiers from Commonwealth countries should be welcomed, not blocked.

5 pm

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): It has become clear during the debate that replacing the former single-service debates with separate debates about defence in the world and defence in the United Kingdom has not worked. It was a brave, worthwhile try—I am not trying to score a party political point—but it is time to acknowledge that it has been a failure. If one compares the content of today's debate with that of our periodic debates on defence in the world, it would be impossible to tell the difference without looking at the titles. One could not tell from the speeches. It would be far more sensible to admit that holding separate debates on the Army, the Navy and the Royal Air Force and considering what each arm must do for defence of the United Kingdom, defence in the world, and with regard to procurement policy and personnel policy would be a better way of going about our business.

When the Secretary of State was able to tear himself away from responding to the Intelligence and Security Committee's report, his speech was largely about procurement policy. It was about structure rather than strategy—unless one includes the strategy of personal survival. My hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State understandably felt it necessary to concentrate primarily on the news topic of the day rather on the nuts and bolts of defence issues for the UK, strictly and narrowly defined. Yet if peace is indivisible, so is defence. I therefore welcomed the comment of the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence that the armed forces are only part of solution to the problem of terrorism that faces the UK, and that a policy of total defence is required. I hope that my own comments later will be perceived as endorsing that.

The Liberal Democrat spokesman acknowledged that his party did not support the war. That was frank of him. It is encouraging to those Labour and Opposition Members who supported the war that the latest polls show that a majority of the British people still believe that it was right to remove Saddam Hussein, despite the thundering mess that the Government have subsequently made of their presentation and policies.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) made a very general speech on defence, but she was typically supportive of our forces. My right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) brought the intriguing light of his perception as a former Defence Secretary to bear on current problems. He made a point that people have been reluctant to make in the light of what subsequently happened to Dr. Kelly. My right hon. Friend said that it was strange to have an official leaking stories off the record to the press. However, while I agree with him that the MOD was under no obligation to keep Dr. Kelly's name secret in those circumstances, I believe that the Ministry was under an obligation to let him know if it was not going to keep it secret, rather than telling him that they were going to do so and then engaging in a devious guessing game of disclosure with the press.

[Dr. Julian Lewis]

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) has been a consistent opponent of the campaign against Iraq. The Conservatives do not agree with him, but we respect his sincerity and the position that he takes, as we did when he was an assiduous Foreign Office and Defence Minister. My hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Derek Conway) pointed out that we need armed forces to be recruited to greater levels. We believe that it would at least be a promising start if they could be recruited to the target levels that the Government themselves set, but that is not happening.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge) always speaks with sincerity. He is a passionate opponent of military action, and he quoted at some length the views of Professor Paul Rogers, whom I remember with affection as a leading member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the 1980s and as a prophet of doom in the first Gulf war a decade later. I would only say to the hon. Gentleman—who has made his personal apologies to me that he cannot be here for the winding-up speeches—that he should be wary of over-reliance on a single source. My hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) showed once again his great knowledge of and commitment to NATO. He has been in the House for almost 30 years, and he has unparalleled experience on the opposite side of the arguments generally put forward by Professor Rogers.

The hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) took a typically robust stance, and I totally agree with him that the aim of the terrorists two years ago today was not to kill 3,000 people but to kill 50,000 if they could have done so. I take issue with him, however, when he compares unfavourably the efforts being made by our armed forces in terms of ethnic recruitment and promotion with what has been happening in the United States. It must be remembered that the coloured community—the black community—of the United States has been struggling for much longer to reach the heights that it has reached. I commend to the hon. Gentleman—as I have done to the House on a previous occasion—the memoirs of General Benjamin O. Davis, which are appropriately entitled "Benjamin O. Davis: American". He spells out the struggle that he and other black fighter pilots had during the second world war to be allowed the opportunity to put their lives on the line and to fight for what was then an imperfect democracy, so far as the black community was concerned. When we compare the different starting points, we shall find that it will only be a matter of time—and not too much time—before we are proud to see black people in the highest positions in our armed forces. They are making good progress already.

The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) had a gloomy outlook on the prospects in Iraq, but I was pleased to see that, wearing his Defence Select Committee hat, he agreed with us on the importance of having a co-ordinating Minister for homeland security. As the House will know, we have taken the step of setting the Government an example by appointing my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) as our spokesman on homeland security. He has great experience of the armed forces and is increasingly gathering expertise in his new field. We heard quite a bit from him today, and I can assure the House that we shall hear a great deal more from him in the future.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) expressed concern about the future of DARA and the Airbus, and my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) made the intriguing point that we were keeping things secret, but that they were not the right things. Speaking personally, I trust that the Minister will have heard my hon. Friend's plea, and that the road to Porton Down will soon be blessed with the tarmac that he so urgently wishes it to acquire.

Not for the first time, the hon. Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Beard) made a very thoughtful speech. I know that he had a professional career in the Ministry of Defence for many years, and that shows in the thoughtfulness that always informs his contributions. I want to take one of his many important points a little further.

International law has not yet caught up with the changed strategic situation that has followed 11 September. I shall say more about that later, but let me say this now. The idea that we must wait to be struck first is not to be countenanced in the 21st century, in the age of weapons of mass destruction and suicidal potential users of them. The sooner the international lawyers recognise that, the less likely it will be that people will be tempted to distort intelligence to make threats appear more imminent than they might otherwise seem.

The hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell), as well as focusing on retention and recruitment, paid a worthy tribute to the members of his Colchester garrison who fell in the recent conflict, and to the support shown to them by the Army and personally by the Secretary of State, who went to Colchester to offer his condolences. The hon. Gentleman said how much that had been appreciated.

It must be said that before 11 September the defence of the United Kingdom homeland against terrorism, let alone suicidal terrorism, was given a low priority. Conventional threats to the UK seemed to be at a lower level than they had been since the end of the 19th century. The strategic threat from a former superpower, the Soviet Union, had all but dissipated—although one can never be sure what may happen to Russian democracy over a long period.

Perhaps the most prominent threat that we were debating here before 11 September was the possibility of a missile threat from rogue states. Indeed, it is important for that not to disappear entirely from the agenda now. As has been pointed out today, terrorism from Northern Ireland has not disappeared completely and may not have disappeared permanently, but at least it is at a lower level than it has been since the troubles began.

The idea that religious doomsday threats would be our top priority in the defence of the United Kingdom would, before 11 September, have been considered utterly fanciful. Most defence discussions concerned expeditions, humanitarian operations, conflict resolution and, sometimes, direct military intervention in foreign wars overseas. How that changed after 11 September! Al-Qaeda is now at the top of the agenda, for five main reasons. First, its agents are prepared to

die. Secondly, unlike our previous opponents, they are largely impervious to deterrence. Thirdly, they have good organisation and a unifying creed. Fourthly, they batten on failed societies and rogue regimes. Fifthly, and above all, they apply the principles of military ju-jitsu, using their opponents' greater weight and technology to bring them crashing down. In short, they encapsulate the maxim "maximum impact for minimum effort".

Yet they are not as clever as they think they are. They have cunning tactics underpinned by a foolish strategy. They had one chance to take the civilised world by surprise; they blew it on 11 September. What they did then could be compared with what the Japanese did at Pearl Harbor. After the war was over, some of the Japanese leaders were interrogated. They were asked, "Why did you do what you did on 7 December 1941? You must have known that it would bring the full weight of the United States crashing down on you". They said, "Sometimes you just have to kick up your heels and leap into the gorge".

What these terrorists did was comparable with what Saddam Hussein did in not waiting until he had nuclear weapons—which he was on the way to getting—before invading Kuwait in 1990. In other words, al-Qaeda did not wait long enough.

Why do I say that timing is so essential in these circumstances? It is because of what we were discussing before: the problems that always arise when one is tempted to take pre-emptive action. In defending one's homeland, one can take steps after a blow has been struck that people would find very difficult to accept in advance of such a blow being struck. For example, overthrowing the Taliban would probably not have been acceptable before 11 September. It would not have been acceptable to fight Saddam Hussein before Kuwait was invaded; and it certainly was not regarded as acceptable for Israel to bomb his nuclear reactor before he made his first atomic weapons. Yet how right we now think the Israelis were—at least, I hope we do—to have taken that action.

In short, al-Qaeda's strategic mistake was to mobilise America and the free world against it before acquiring weapons of mass destruction of its own. I make no bones about paying tribute to the Government for recognising that any prospect of al-Qaeda and similar groups acquiring such weapons must be prevented. I pay tribute to the Prime Minister for instantly stating that he would stand shoulder to shoulder with the Americans, and for showing personal courage in taking that stance. He must know that he and those closest to him will be marked men and women—targets for any disgruntled terrorist—for the rest of their natural lives.

I pay tribute to the Opposition—to my own party—for putting party advantage aside by supporting the Prime Minister in his hour of need. I am only sorry that I cannot pay a similar tribute the Liberal Democrats and the nationalists, who would have left Saddam Hussein in power if they had had their way.

Mr. Keetch: How does the hon. Gentleman judge paragraph 127 of today's report? It states:

"The JIC assessed that any collapse of the Iraqi regime would increase the risk of chemical and biological warfare technology or agents finding their way into the hands of terrorists, not necessarily al-Qaida."

Is it not acceptable for the JIC to believe that invading Iraq could possibly spread terrorist weapons? Admittedly, the Prime Minister took a view, but in disregarding ours the hon. Gentleman should note that some members, at least, of the JIC accept it.

Dr. Lewis: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point, which would be convincing if he were saying that the question is clear cut and there is never a countervailing argument. But according to his view, because we are afraid that there is a risk that something may get worse if we try to deal with it, we must not do so. I particularly resent the way in which the JIC, an intelligence organisation, has been made into a political football in the context of this military campaign. In my view—I speak now not as a politician, but as someone who studied JIC and joint planning staff documents professionally, during the academic phase of my life—the old system was better. The intelligence people would make their assessments and submit them to their political masters, and the political masters would sign off their own assessments and not seek to shelter behind their professional advisers. I am not going to get into the game of second-guessing the JIC. Its role is to give the Government information, and the Government must take responsibility for the policies developed on the basis of it.

Bob Russell: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman does not want to mislead everybody. Does he accept that the view taken by the Liberal Democrats—many members of his own party and of the Labour party also took it—was that action against Iraq should take place only with the full support of the United Nations?

Dr. Lewis: The view of the Opposition and of the Government was that this country faced a serious threat. I, for one, never took the view that the United Nations was some sort of world Government, without whose imprimatur we could not act to defend ourselves if we judged it necessary. The Prime Minister did not take that view and he was right not to do so. We have not delegated the defence of this country to the United Nations, and heaven help us if ever we do. When the Prime Minister said that he might have lost his job and tearfully informed his family of the great risk that he was taking, I have to say that I began to lose a little sympathy with him, because, with the support that he knew he had from the official Opposition—doing what loyal Oppositions always do in such circumstances in times of national crisis—he knew that he could count on us. His job was not really in danger.

How wretched it is that, by unnecessarily exaggerating and manipulating intelligence, the Prime Minister has discredited himself, his Government and, most important of all, the prospect of taking similar action in similar circumstances in future. Suppose that Iran reliably proves to be in an advanced state of development of nuclear weapons. Suppose that Korea goes from bad to worse in respect of the threatening noises that it is making about the nuclear weapons that it already possesses. Who now will believe the Government when they say that we have to act?

I am going to touch briefly on the Intelligence and Security Committee report. I have only two things to say about it. The ISC has done itself, in my opinion, no

[Dr. Lewis]

favours with the report—and that will be seen to be the case when people look back on it in the fullness of time. I am most interested in the two annexes to the report, which I will briefly mention. The second annexe is interesting because it contradicts the report of the Foreign Affairs Committee at each and every turn. It is interesting to see what happens when two bunches of senior politicians try to cover the same ground and each pretends to be authoritative.

What interested me most throughout the post-Iraq campaign post mortem has been less the first than the second dossier. That was the one that was plagiarised and was, depending on whether one counts the cover sheet, 18 or 19 pages long. It is briefly referred to in the ISC report. That report quotes the Prime Minister as having stated on 3 February 2003:

"We issued further intelligence over the weekend about the infrastructure of concealment. It is obviously difficult when we publish intelligence reports, but I hope that people have some sense of the integrity of our security services. They are not publishing this, or giving us this information, and making it up."—[*Official Report*, 3 February 2003; Vol. 399, c. 25.]

Curiously, paragraph 133 of the report states:

"We conclude that the Prime Minister was correct to describe the document as containing 'further intelligence . . . about the infrastructure of concealment'".

Furthermore, paragraph 22 of the second annexe states:

"We believe that the Prime Minister was correct when he described the February document as"—

and the next word is in italics

—"*containing* further intelligence."

The trouble is that, having checked *Hansard* for that day, I can say that the Prime Minister did not describe it as "containing" further intelligence. Had he done so, it would not have misled the House. He described it as further intelligence.

We can see from the first annexe that the intelligence document that the Secret Intelligence Service supplied, on which part of the report was based, was only five pages long, whereas the final report was 18 or 19 pages long. It has to be said that, as far as the second dodgy dossier was concerned, the ISC has engaged in a whitewash of what was actually presented to the House in a misleading way by the Prime Minister.

On the brighter side, it is extraordinary that so little has happened by way of terrorism in the UK so far. There are several reasons for that. The first is that there has been no significant support for al-Qaeda among the UK's 1.5 million Muslims. The second is the unsung successes of the security and intelligence services when they are allowed by politicians to get on with their jobs. Let us not forget the special branch officer, Stephen Oake, who was stabbed to death in January in the aftermath of the discovery of the ricin terror cell. Thirdly, there is the determination of the US and the UK to take the fight to the enemy in Afghanistan and to remove regimes with the potential to produce weapons of mass destruction, whether that threat is imminent or not.

Defence is indivisible; the country that adopts a purely reactive strategy will suffer. The front line in the defence of the United Kingdom is not at the gates of Downing street, nor is it on the concrete blocks in Grosvenor square and Parliament square. The front line is with our forces in the failed states and the rogue states. It is in the shadows with the secret intelligence services and our security services, in which our Muslim citizens have an important part to play. It is in the spirit of the British people—especially those who live and work near prestige targets—who will never give in to the threat of terrorism in the UK.

5.25 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): In opening the debate, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence highlighted the key areas of what is an undoubtedly broad subject, and we have had a good, intensive and wide-ranging debate. It is a pity that the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) failed to rise to the occasion.

Yesterday morning, I was listening to "Yesterday in Parliament", which was reporting on Tuesday's debate, a debate called by the hon. Gentleman to hold the Government to account. Unfortunately, I could not be present for the debate; normally I would have been and, probably, I would have wound it up. I was keen to hear what had gone on. I was in the Ukraine at a joint exercise involving British, Ukrainian and Polish troops, an annual exercise that has been going for seven years.

The BBC had built up Tuesday's debate, suggesting that the Secretary of State was going to come under intense scrutiny. I was stunned when the BBC commentator said that that was not the case. In fact, he directly criticised the hon. Member for North Essex for failing to deliver the knockout punch, or even a punch at all. The commentator said that, for the Secretary of State for Defence, it was no more than a stroll in the park.

That is why I want to make this point to the hon. Gentleman about his speech. He personalised, as he has a tendency sometimes to do, at a time when we are dealing with big and complex issues. The repeat performance today ill serves the House, but is perhaps a true reflection on him; not one word did he utter about the subject matter.

The Secretary of State rightly praised the men and women of our armed forces and the contribution that they make in the United Kingdom and globally. They continue to provide a highly skilled and well-organised resource on which the civil authorities and the wider community can draw in times of crisis. I am grateful to all Members who recognised this today.

We must not confuse the role of the armed forces in the defence of the UK with the wider contribution that they can make in the UK. As the Secretary of State said, the days of defending our shores from invasion are long gone. We all understand the advantage of dealing with a potential threat before it reaches our shores. We should not assume that solutions are always military ones.

The right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) made a strong contribution. I did not agree with everything he said, but he highlighted two points with which I did agree. The first concerned the question of where the front line is; the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) made the same point in winding up for the Opposition. The front line is no longer here, but elsewhere.

The other point that the right hon. Gentleman raised concerned the MOD itself—the nature of the Department, its unique flavour and ethos. He said that it is a privilege for Ministers to serve there, and I echo that. I have been at the Department for more than two years and I have learned that that is so. The right hon. Gentleman rested his case on the importance of that ethos and on the bonds of loyalty that exist. I can tell the House that those bonds of loyalty are still there. The Department has the utmost support from the Secretary of State, and that is returned. That applies in respect of all Ministers who serve there.

The right hon. Gentleman also referred to the Prime Minister commenting to the Indian Prime Minister in relation to the terrible atrocity that had occurred in that country that the issue was engaging with those who were posing the threat, who might be from a neighbouring country or countries. The right hon. Gentleman tried to draw a parallel with what has happened in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere. I know that he understands the clear difference between the threat posed by domestic terrorism and that posed by international terrorism. The four years that I spent in Northern Ireland taught me that the way to resolve the threat posed by domestic terrorism is, first, to resolve never to be defeated or deflected by it and, second, always to look for the points of accommodation and agreement on the basis of which progress can be made. We would not be in the situation we are in today in Northern Ireland without the bravery and determination of the Prime Minister to take some big risks. We should ask the people of Northern Ireland whether the point that my right hon. Friend was making to the Prime Minister of India applies to Northern Ireland. It is now a different and better place, and it will get better still, because we dealt with the threat by understanding the roots of the problem and finding solutions.

We should not relax our stance on our security or resilience at home. Notwithstanding some of the contributions made to the debate, the Government have a robust counter-terrorism strategy in place, under the direction of the Home Secretary. Much progress has been made, much of it—understandably—not advertised. It may be what people call secret or confidential, but the very nature of our response means that it has to be kept on a very close hold. The more we expose what we seek to do to counter terrorism or terrorist threats, the more those who wish to take action learn from it. Other nations may develop their strategies differently, but we have had 30 years of dealing with domestic terrorism. That has stood us in good stead, but I am sure we all agree that if our approach needs to change, we in this country learn lessons and adapt quickly and constructively to meet any new threat.

I know that what we have in place is robust because I have the privilege of serving on some of the Committees that deal with the issues. I have seen our response evolve and develop after 11 September 2001. The real test is not so much who is in charge, but what the response is to a particular threat. We have not had to face some of the scenarios that could apply, but we are increasingly holding exercises, with a range of scenarios, to test the resilience of our capabilities.

Last weekend, of course, we saw the exercise in London. I was also recently the lead Minister on a major exercise in Norfolk with a nuclear incident scenario. Interestingly, the lead Department was the Ministry of Defence, not the Home Office. All the services answer, through the various response mechanisms that are laid down, to the one lead Minister. The idea is to ensure that the mechanisms are robust and respond coherently. We learn lessons from every one of those exercises, and there is no point holding them otherwise. We will have more exercises in the future, and we hope that they are only ever exercises that test the integrity and strength of our systems. I have confidence that all the services would respond—

Patrick Mercer *rose—*

Mr. Ingram: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I must say that I do not know why he was not given the opportunity to wind up in this debate. I note that he calls himself a shadow Minister, but he is more of a ghost Minister, because he does not have a Department to shadow. If he is going to pop up every time—*[Interruption.]* I am being told that it is my fault. I am not sure that it is. I am not sure that there is a fault at all, as I have set out what I believe to be a strong structure. I shall deal with the details in response to some of the contributions made earlier.

Patrick Mercer: Ghost or not, I shall try not to be a spectre at the feast.

To the best of my knowledge, last Sunday's exercise was the first field-training exercise for two years. It was not a command-post, table-top or procedural exercise. Will the Minister guarantee that there will be many more such exercises, and that they happen not just in London, but in the regional capitals and other areas of great sensitivity? If not, they will be worthless.

Mr. Ingram: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman was listening to me. I said that there will be future exercises, and a lot of effort is being put in to develop the scenarios. However, we should not over-exercise, as that would give the impression that we were dealing with real threats, rather than perceived ones, and that intelligence exists that makes the exercises necessary to meet those real threats. I do not accuse the hon. Gentleman of using that as an argument, but others have commented on the matter and will over-interpret anything that we do in respect of exercises. The media, of course, are guilty of that. There is always the risk that, if an exercise structure is put in place, people will then speculate, through the conspiracy theory model, that an exercise is for real. That is the spin that they put on it.

Mr. Jenkin: You do not have the money—that is the truth.

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Member for North Essex is now trying to make a contribution to the debate from a sedentary position. If he wants to tell us his views—he did not mention them earlier—I should be happy to give way to him.

Patrick Mercer: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ingram: No. There are many other hon. Members to whom I want to respond.

HOUSE OF COMMONS PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD) ● 2002-03

CHADWYCK-HEALEY Vol. 410 (Part 1) cols. 555 - 742 8 Sept - 6 Oct 2003

[Mr. Ingram]

The Ministry of Defence has an important part to play, and the strategic defence review new chapter formed part of the work that went into developing that strategy. The measures that we are introducing as a result will ensure that the armed forces continue to make an important contribution to security at home, but that contribution is properly made in support of the civil authorities.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), who is Chairman of the Defence Committee, the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) and my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire)—both of them members of the Defence Committee—made contributions based on their knowledge. As members of Select Committees who sign up to a report tend to, they continued to argue for the core points of their report—they would not have signed up to it otherwise. Meanwhile, they have been trying to convince Ministers to change their position. I ask them to consider that their judgment on this matter might be wrong. All of us should always revisit our assumptions and conclusions, to make sure that we have got things right.

I am not ducking the issue, but most of the points raised in the debate are the responsibility of the Home Secretary. I accept that we should adopt a joined-up-government approach, but the Government never ignore the question of which Department is the best one to deal with an issue, or of whether different mechanisms should be established. In this case, however, the Government have concluded that the approach proposed by the Committee, for the reasons that have been set out to the Committee, is not appropriate. We will study any contributions made in this debate and, if another Department is asked to consider matters, it is for that Department to decide whether it will respond. I shall draw the various comments today to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South mentioned the draft civil contingencies Bill. The Government welcome all reports produced by his or any other Select Committee that comments on Government activity, although we do not always agree with a Committee's conclusions. The House will be aware that a Joint Committee has been set up to consider the draft Bill, and the Defence Committee's report will form a valuable strand of its work. It is up to the Joint Committee to take on board the detailed arguments advanced. That sort of pre-legislative assessment is a useful, relatively new departure for Government. It will make the legislation better, helping understanding of the various points made and enabling us not to rush too quickly into legislation while drawing on all the experience available. The report will be picked up by the Joint Committee before the Bill is debated here and in the other place.

The hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) asked about future carriers. The carrier programme continues to meet the schedule set down at the start of the programme. We plan to award a build contract in spring 2004. We currently plan for the new carriers to be in service in 2012 and 2015, and that is on course. The future carriers will set new standards of military capability and flexibility. They will significantly enhance our ability to respond to crises around the world. They are a key part of fulfilling the 1998 strategic defence review and remain a high priority in the defence programme.

Mr. Keetch: I am grateful for that clear answer. Can the Minister extend it one further step by confirming that the size originally envisaged for those carriers in the SDR has not been decreased and that the number of aircraft that they will be likely to carry is that which was originally envisaged?

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman should wait to see what the build—

Mr. Jenkin: Ah!

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman should wait to see what the build programme says. This is a step forward in our capability. I know that there are some who want to diminish what we seek to do instead of welcoming not just the shipbuilding capability it will bring this country but, more importantly, the capability it will give to the Royal Navy. It is the biggest shipbuilding programme since the second world war—yet all we get from the Conservatives are sneers.

Mr. Jenkin: Please give way.

Mr. Ingram: No.

The hon. Member for Hereford asked about outflow. At periods of high operational tempo, planned discharge dates may be delayed. That is in the nature of the way in which we have to deal with them. In addition, some personnel volunteer to extend their service because they want to make a contribution. At the end of such a period, a temporary increase in outflow is to be expected because of the bottleneck. We are conscious of that factor, but it is too early to say whether it will happen and to what extent it might happen. We are monitoring the situation closely. We are talking about skilled people who are important without our structures. We do not want to lose people other than those who would go anyway. We shall monitor the situation with both the regulars and the reserves. My best guess at the moment is that all three services expect any increase in outflow this year to be manageable. They are beginning to predict what the impact may be, but it is too early to be precise.

The hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Conway) gave some figures on shortfalls. I can correct them. For the Navy, the shortfall is 910; for the RAF, it is 750; and for the Army, it is 4,850. In reality, shortfalls have decreased this year, and recruitment and retention initiatives continue to be successful. We are putting a lot of effort into those initiatives. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for North Essex says that it is a disaster, but he could have made the point in the debate and he did not want to do so.

Mr. Jenkin: I gave the figures during my speech.

Mr. Ingram: I gave the hon. Gentleman an opportunity earlier and I now want to deal with other hon. Members who made a substantial contribution to the debate.

The hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing), who is no longer in her place, was concerned about the future of Almondbank. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State dealt with that matter. I am grateful to members of the Scottish National party now that they are wrapping themselves in the Union flag and are keen to have United Kingdom defence expenditure in their constituencies. Only a few weeks ago, the defence spokesman for the SNP was saying in the Glasgow press that he was going to hold me and the Ministry of Defence to account on a range of issues—he is not in his place either and did not join in the debate today, although I was with him last night to watch Scotland nearly beat Germany, so I know that he was in London for that. The interesting aspect of the SNP argument is that while they argue for jobs to be retained in their constituencies, they are campaigning for thousands of defence jobs to go elsewhere in Scotland and the UK. Indeed, they want to close down the Faslane base, with a loss of about 10,000 jobs. There is an inherent contradiction in what they want to do. I hope that they will read my comments. It is a pity that they are not here to respond and I would have given way to them if they had been.

My hon. Friends the Members for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) and for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) rightly mentioned "end to end" and the impact that they perceived it might have on DARA. A written statement has been produced on the "end to end" report, which sets out a summary of a detailed report and points a way forward.

I gave some parameters for the debate at Defence questions on Monday. It is a big study into £11.2 billion of Government expenditure and 105,000 people in the air and land environment—roughly a ratio of 60:40 military to civilian. Overall, the logistics chain amounts to about £15 billion. The study says that there is the potential for a saving of in the region of £600 million. It would be wrong for any Minister not to look seriously at that.

One of the main conclusions in the report is that the contraction from four lines of maintenance to two is a sensible way forward—interestingly, my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan accepts this. However, the debate is then about whether the four collapsing into two collapses forward or backwards. DARA has put up a counter-proposal. We have told the work force, DARA and the trade unions that all the proposals have to be studied on the basis of a proper investment analysis. I do not believe that that poses a threat.

I said when I visited Almondbank to open the £5 million state-of-the-art facility there that I had come not to bury Almondbank but to praise it. The £77 million contract that I announced for the super hanger at St Athan in south Wales was another vote of confidence for everything that has taken place in DARA. Of course, the same applies to Sealand. I understand that a new training facility is to be opened up, which will be linked to the Sealand facility, with the support of the Welsh Development Agency and the local college there. To those who seem to be trying to exploit the situation—it is not my hon. Friends who are doing so—by saying that it is a public versus private debate I would say that by establishing that trading fund we have allowed the public sector to take work away from the private sector. They are doing that successfully, so it is an endorsement of the public sector, not a threat. As I told the work force at Almondbank, the very future of DARA rests in the hands not only of the management, who have done a tremendous job, but of the workers, who have accepted major changes. The work force have dropped from 7,000 to 4,000, which shows that they are determined to raise their productivity so that they will be the best and can beat the private sector. I have confidence both in the future of DARA and that the challenges posed by the "end to end" study will be taken on board by the work force and the management, and that they will seek the best solution for their interests.

Mr. Viggers: The future of DARA sites—apart from Fleetlands—has been mentioned. So that we do not risk leaving out that important establishment, will the Minister confirm that the skills of the workers there and the investment that has been made should safeguard its future?

Mr. Ingram: The same thing applies to all the sites; they have all taken major changes on board. There has been investment in that facility. When I talk about DARA, I am referring to all four sites. There are excellent skill bases in all of them, but we have told them that they cannot rely solely on defence procurement streams. Their future lies in a marriage between what we need and what they can win from the private sector, and they are competing and winning orders and contracts. People who call the future of DARA into question are making it difficult for the agency to succeed in an extremely competitive market. If I was in private industry and wanted to place a contract with DARA but was told it had no future, I might think twice about doing so. My hon. Friends the Members for Alyn and Deeside and for Vale of Glamorgan do not, of course, make such remarks; their objectives are clear and I welcome their contributions.

As always, the debate has been wide ranging, well informed and useful. I know that the House holds our service personnel in the highest esteem. It is the calibre of our service personnel that gets the job done, time after time, in the most difficult and dangerous circumstances. As I speak, thousands of our servicemen and women are helping to bring peace and stability across the world.

We also recognise the vital role our service personnel play here at home. The armed forces have a presence across the whole of the UK. They serve the people of the UK, as part of the wider community and the economy, in conjunction with many other agencies and emergency services. The role of the armed forces in assisting home defence tasks will be enhanced through the use of the civil contingencies reaction forces, which are on target to be fully operational by the end of this year.

More widely, the MOD is an important partner in many communities; for example, as an employer and through our many contracts with UK industry. UK companies are involved in a wide range of procurement projects including the largest procurement programme of new ships for the Royal Navy in many years, as I said earlier. Our defence industrial policy, published last

[Mr. Ingram]

year, aims to enable the competitiveness of the UK defence industry, ensuring that the armed forces are provided with the equipment that they need at best value for money for the taxpayer.

Across the UK, from the south of England to Scotland and from East Anglia to Northern Ireland, defence continues to play a vital role in our community. The contribution made by our people, both military and civilian, to ensuring that all the tasks we undertake are successful is truly remarkable.

I know that the House will agree that our continued success depends upon our people. Their commitment, flexibility and willingness to get the job done no matter what all underpin their well-deserved reputation for excellence both at home and around the world.

Gillian Merron (Lincoln): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

NORTHERN IRELAND (MONITORING COMMISSION ETC.) BILL

Ordered,

That, if a Bill entitled the Northern Ireland (Monitoring Commission etc.) Bill is brought from the Lords and read the first time, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee in respect of the Bill may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That—

(1) at the sittings on Tuesday 16th, Wednesday 17th and Thursday 18th September, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until any Message from the Lords has been received and any Committee to draw up Reasons which has been appointed at the sitting has reported; and

(2) at the sitting on Thursday 18th September, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until he has reported the Royal Assent to any Act agreed upon by both Houses.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT CHANGES: AMENDMENTS TO STANDING ORDERS

Ordered,

That—

(1) Standing Order No. 94 (Scottish Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)) be amended in line 2 by leaving out the second 'Scottish' and inserting 'Scotland';

(2) Standing Order No. 103 (Welsh Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)) be amended in line 2 by leaving out the second 'Welsh' and inserting 'Wales';

(3) Standing Order No. 119 (European Standing Committees) be amended in the table in paragraph (6), as follows:

(a) in line 5, by leaving out 'Transport, Local Government and the Regions' and inserting 'Transport; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister';

(b) in line 12, by leaving out 'Lord Chancellor's Department' and inserting 'Department for Constitutional Affairs (excluding those responsibilities of the Scotland and Wales Offices which fall to European Standing Committee A)';

(4) Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments) be amended in the Table in paragraph (2), as follows:

(a) before item 1 insert

'1	Constitutional Affairs	Department for Constitutional Affairs (including the work of staff provided for the administrative work of courts and tribunals, but excluding consideration of individual cases and appointments, and excluding the work of the Scotland and Wales Offices and of the Advocate General for Scotland) 11';

(b) leave out the item relating to the Lord Chancellor's Department inserted on 27th January;

(c) in item 16, leave out 'Welsh Office (Office of the Secretary of State for Wales (including relations with the National Assembly for Wales))' and insert 'Wales Office (including relations with the National Assembly for Wales)'; and

(5) the Order of 5th November 2001 relating to Liaison Committee (Membership) be amended, in paragraph (2), by leaving out 'Lord Chancellor's Department' and inserting 'Constitutional Affairs'.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Mr Michael Meacher be discharged from the Environmental Audit Committee and Mr Elliot Morley be added.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

Youth Disorder and Antisocial Behaviour

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn. —*[Gillian Merron.]*

5.55 pm

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): First, I want to thank Mr. Speaker for allowing me to initiate this debate in the House. It could not be at a more topical time, as the Government's Anti-Social Behaviour Bill is being debated at this moment in the House of Lords. Antisocial behaviour and youth disorder are complicated words to describe a well-known fact. People's lives are being made a misery by the irresponsible, antisocial and often criminal behaviour of their neighbours. In this debate, I will set out some of the problems facing Tower Hamlets and some of the solutions.

As a Tower Hamlets resident, I modestly believe that it is the best place in Britain. Many of my constituents would disagree, however. One constituent wrote to me to say that residents are growing weary of home burglary, dangerous and ugly burnt-out cars and streets that do not feel safe, where gangs of teenage boys gather every evening on corners, trading drugs, having fights and alienating any sense of community and mutual responsibility. I know what she is talking about. I have seen it. I have turned down a back street in my constituency and come face to face with 40 young men wielding baseball bats, chains and knives. I have waded through the rubbish left behind by drugs misusers: foil, plastic bottles, discarded syringes, invariably vomit and occasionally human faeces. I have seen the half-drugged prostitutes looking for business at 11 am, some of them as young as 12-years-old.

It is not what I have seen that illustrates the problems—on the whole, I still feel safer in Tower Hamlets than in most other parts of London—but what I have heard. I have listened to hundreds of Tower Hamlets residents and have asked them to fill in a questionnaire on antisocial behaviour to illustrate how it affects their lives and what they believe the best solutions could be. The following responses about experiences of antisocial behaviour are all from different constituents. One writes:

"On multiple occasions I have witnessed elderly residents being verbally abused."

Another states:

"The gang jumped over the wall into my garden, vandalised my tree and then tried to come in my back door as it was open."

Another says:

"I was attacked by six or seven youth, whilst I was coming through Weavers fields. I was driving my mobility scooter when I was confronted by these youths who were flicking cigarette stubs into my face."

Another writes:

"A friend of mine was going from his cousin's house to his car when a gang approached him and beat him up."

Another says:

"An aunt of mine, in her 70s, was leaving a shop in Wapping Lane and couldn't get past a gang of young boys. She said 'excuse me' and they deliberately jostled her, called her names and spat at her."

Another response states:

"We generally don't leave the house after 6 pm, and avoid walking the streets. We take cabs everywhere."

Another constituent says:

"I have had stones, cans and even dead rats thrown at me."

Finally, another constituent, who bought her first home in Tower Hamlets under the Government's part rent, part buy scheme two years ago, wrote:

"I've been burgled twice. There's a burnt-out car in my street at the moment."

She said that it had been there for two weeks. She said:

"most evenings the dumped sofas, wardrobes, fridges, mattresses and industrial waste around the railway arches at the top of my street are set alight—mainly for fun, cos the kids have nothing to do."

She said that the issues threaten the whole community and undermine

"the sense of hope that everyone shared when . . . moving into their new houses. We are all living in new houses but the yob culture and squalour of the rubbish dumping is undermining and wiping out . . . the benefits of regeneration."

One problem is that many Tower Hamlets residents are living in old houses and overcrowded conditions. Young people face high unemployment and low aspirations. As a police officer said about the young gang members with whom he deals:

"All they own is the pavement they stand on. And that is where their loyalties lie".

Anyone who has looked into the problem of gang behaviour will know that it centres on territory and the battle for territory. Ordinary residents who get caught up in that can find it terrifying. The situation is getting markedly worse on several estates in Tower Hamlets. So, what is the local authority doing about it? Tower Hamlets has just carried out a best-value review of its services to combat antisocial behaviour and, as far as I know, it is the first in the country—

It being Six o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn. *[Gillian Merron.]*

Ms King: The council is the first in the country to introduce a best-value review and should be congratulated on that. It will lead to improved joint working in the council and among agencies and to plans to improve a range of services from closed circuit television and street cleansing to youth provision, citizenship education and a rapid response service for when problems arise. Through consultation on the review, it has become clear that community engagement sits at the heart of future success. If the community is not working with the authorities that try to deal with the matter, we are absolutely doomed to failure. The council is planning to use the Government's cutting crime together toolkit with groups of local residents.

It is important to bear in mind the fact that when tackling antisocial behaviour, young people are often cited as the culprits to the exclusion of all others. It is important to put that in perspective and realise that although a minority of young people cause terrible problems for their neighbours, most young people are well-behaved law-abiding individuals who make a positive contribution to community life. Many types of

[Ms King]

antisocial behaviour, such as noise nuisance, neighbour disputes, harassment, fly tipping and permitting dog fouling, are more commonly carried out by adults. That means that a wide range of actions is required to tackle antisocial behaviour in all its forms.

The antisocial behaviour control unit is at the front line of tackling antisocial behaviour. It has several teams that can investigate the full range of antisocial behaviour cases and take enforcement action against people whose behaviour has an adverse effect on their community. It is a fact that a minority of residents have consistently been able to breach their tenancy agreements with impunity and make the lives of residents on their estates a misery. I know that the antisocial behaviour unit will be examining the situation and I trust that it will change.

Further council initiatives include: specialist cleaning teams to remove rubbish and litter; an abandoned vehicles team, which, notwithstanding the example I gave earlier, has one of the best track records in London; successful pilot programmes of a wardens service; anti-graffiti services; increased youth provision, including new mobile youth clubs; and a youth service rapid response team, which can be deployed at short notice to help to calm a neighbourhood. I have spoken to the local police who told me that the youth service rapid response team has been of particular value. I commend all those who have worked on it.

The police and the council have been working more and more closely together. They face incredible pressure. The police and council combined receive more than 30,000 call-outs from residents each year. It is simply impossible for each one to be dealt with promptly, and calls must be prioritised. However, the result is that there are inevitably problems with the response call-out time. Given the 25 per cent. increase in police numbers, I know that the borough commander, Mark Simmons, will be working hard to translate that to reduced call-out times. My hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Canning Town (Jim Fitzpatrick) recently spent time with the local police and saw the astonishingly complex job with which they are tasked, and he was full of admiration.

What of the national picture and the Government's approach? The Anti-Social Behaviour Bill contains various proposals. The main proposal is to give £75 million over the next three years to assist local agencies to tackle antisocial behaviour. It will deal with neighbours from hell to make it easier for local authorities to fine noisy neighbours £100 and confiscate stereos. It will allow local authority tenants to be put on probation, which will make it easier to evict them. The police will be given powers to close and seal crack houses within 48 hours.

In addition, there are proposals to introduce curfews and powers to disperse young people if they cause a problem.

Some people disagree with some of those powers because they think they go too far. Organisations I respect greatly, such as Barnardo's, the Children's Society and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, say that the proposals infringe people's liberties and rights. But the point is this: liberties and rights are being infringed right now, especially in some of the most deprived parts of Britain. That is why I began by giving voice to some of my residents' experiences, because otherwise people lose the human dimension to the problem. We have to address those experiences. That is why I hope that we will try out the Government's new measures and that they are successful.

In the spirit of what Tower Hamlets council is doing, I hope that we, too, will have a best-value review to see what works. Headlines do not work, but wardens, for example, do work, as they have been shown to do in my area. A more integrated response between the council and the police has paid dividends. Community policing has also been helpful.

Finally, I return to the point where I started—the residents. What do the residents think will work? Their top two answers to the questionnaire that hundreds of them filled in was, first, that there should be more police on foot and, secondly, more youth workers. I thought that an interesting combination. Their other requests included greater installation of CCTV, posters and warning signs to gangs telling them that they are being watched, the provision of youth clubs and sport and leisure facilities, and roving vans with a video camera to record youth activities. Interestingly, many residents wanted that footage to be shown to the parents of gang members. They also wanted the possibility of prosecuting the parents of people under 18.

I am sure that the Minister will mention some of the measures that the Government are introducing to deal with parental responsibility, such as parenting orders. We must ensure that we take a holistic approach to the problem. Tougher policing and sanctions is the stick; greater youth provision and social inclusion is the carrot. However, even taken together they will not solve the problem unless personal responsibility is the byword that defines our society. Laws cannot create respect; individuals can. I appeal to everyone to play their part to tackle the scourge of antisocial behaviour.

6.8 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Fiona Mactaggart): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) for giving me my first opportunity to respond to an Adjournment debate as a Minister. The issue is close to the heart of every hon. Member, including mine. The debate also gives me the chance to congratulate her on doing more than many of her colleagues to ensure that her constituents' voice in rejecting antisocial behaviour is properly heard and used to frame and shape the response that the Government and public institutions take. In addition, I congratulate her on the conference that she organised on 17 July, attended by the Home Secretary, the director of the antisocial behaviour unit and others. It allowed the residents of Tower Hamlets to articulate, as they always do so powerfully, many of the points that she has once again reported in the words of the people who have written to her.

I also thank my hon. Friend for the way in which she recognises—indeed, she demonstrates the extent to which her constituents recognise—that the problem must be shared by all citizens. We should not expect the

Government to drop a solution on our heads. We all need to work together. I was struck by the words used in a letter from one of my hon. Friend's constituents. The correspondent pointed out how antisocial behaviour was alienating any sense of community and mutual responsibility. Towards the end of my hon. Friend's remarks, she focused on how the respondents to her survey's had recognised that the solution is, in part, increased policing and recognising our community and mutual responsibility. We need wardens, CCTV and policing, but we also need opportunities for young people to have appropriate activities and things to do.

My hon. Friend demonstrated powerfully the contribution that the citizen can make to Government policy. It is a voice that is too often ignored, but it is one that helps the Government to remember that the answer cannot be arrived at merely by pressing one button. The Government should recognise that if the resources of ordinary people whose lives are being made a misery by antisocial behaviour can be mobilised, that in itself is part of the solution.

My hon. Friend described the problems that are so acute in her constituency, such as graffiti, abandoned cars, drugs, drugs paraphernalia in the street for adults and children to trip over, youth prostitution, young people hanging about intimidating people or being disrespectful to them and inappropriate begging. Those problems are often dismissed as being of low level; yet they make such a difference to the quality of life of many of our constituents. That is why the Government are determined to tackle the problem.

We need to be clear about what we have achieved, and we have achieved much. Crime in general is down and police numbers have never been higher. Wardens and community safety officers are on our streets to protect and reassure people. Nevertheless, there is more to be done. I hope that I shall be able to show that in the work that we are undertaking, and in the new legislation that we are proposing, some of the issues that my hon. Friend has so clearly identified are beginning to be tackled.

Police strength in Tower Hamlets has increased by 191 since 1997. There are now 26,868 Metropolitan police officers, which is an increase of 3.5 per cent. The civilian police strength at March 2002 stood at 10,459, an increase of 4.2 per cent. on the previous year. The numbers on their own are important, but the way in which officers are deployed is also important. I share my hon. Friend's congratulations to her borough commander and, like her, commend the determination of the local police force to ensure that it is tackling the issues that most concern residents.

The force is making sure that police officers are situated in schools in Tower Hamlets. That has a number of products. First, it means that relationships between young people and the police are improved. Secondly, it means that police officers are more aware of which young people have the most challenging behaviour because they can be involved, for example, in some of the activities that need to be undertaken to tackle truanting. Their engagement with the community by being based in schools can become more powerful and more real. In the Met of all police forces, it is quite difficult to get that level of community engagement. Working closely with schools is one of the tools that they can use to do that. In addition, the Met has £1.5 million to deliver more community support officers in the coming year—250 in total, 18 of whom will be allocated to Tower Hamlets—and there are 23 wardens in the borough.

Community support officers and wardens do not have the same powers as the police, but they have the opportunity to tackle some of the issues that most featured in my hon. Friend's speech—for example, the degradation of the environment that encourages antisocial behaviour. When people say to me, "What will these wardens do to stop the people who are throwing bricks through windows, as they can't arrest them?", I tell them that one thing that they can do is to make sure that the bricks are not there on the streets in the first place. Tackling the environmental degradation that fuels crime is an important part of the strategy of bearing down on antisocial behaviour—in effect, by stopping it from starting. A lot of antisocial behaviour arises from opportunity. In a way, that reflects what my hon. Friend said about people feeling that the street is a piece of ground that they own. If we make it a space that people are proud of and which encourages appropriate behaviour, that will in itself reduce antisocial behaviour and make people feel more positive about their environment.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on listening to people. For a long time, crime debates in this House have concentrated too much on the most serious crime. That might seem an odd thing to say. However, such crime is, thankfully, relatively rare—most of us do not experience the kind that is based on a network of criminality and results in complex court cases—whereas it is all too common for people to experience the kind that used to be dismissed as low-level antisocial behaviour, not treated as criminality. In recent years, that has changed, and debates often focus on so-called antisocial behaviour. That is because Members such as my hon. Friend have first, listened to their constituents, and secondly, know the extent to which such antisocial behaviour is a precursor to more serious crime.

My hon. Friend's constituents, having been victims of the culture of disrespect described in many of the letters that she read out, say, "We don't only want more and better policing—we want purposeful activities for young people." That is another reminder of the wisdom of the people who sent us to this House to represent them. They recognise that these issues cannot be resolved with a one-trick solution. It cannot be done by flooding the community with police officers or by cleaning the streets, although those are both important; we also need to divert young people from the belief that there is nothing else worth doing.

I am glad that we have invested so much in ensuring that young people have appropriate activities in, for example, their holidays. Since 2000, £14.5 million has been spent on setting up Splash Extra, which is a diversionary activity programme that takes place throughout the school holidays and focuses especially on 13 to 17-year-olds. It takes particular account of

[Fiona Mactaggart]

those who are most at risk of misbehaving. It focuses on high crime neighbourhoods—regrettably, my hon. Friend's is such a neighbourhood—and providing appropriate activities to reduce crime. It is helping to make a genuine difference in diverting young people from criminal behaviour.

My hon. Friend described the strong commitment in Tower Hamlets to working with children and young people to prevent problems. A community cohesion project is under way in her constituency. It works on inter-generation, inter-racial and inter-faith issues and tries to bring young and older people together.

My hon. Friend said that young people are often demonised as criminals when they are frequently the victims of crime. We therefore need to improve communications between the old and the young when trying to deal with those matters. The rapid response team and the youth offending team in Tower Hamlets are working on restorative justice and prevention. They are therefore working on dealing with not only young people who have been guilty of crimes and have victimised fellow residents, but those to whom that does not yet apply. It is important to recognise that both groups—those who have previously offended and need to be prevented from reoffending and those who are at risk of offending—are targets. The teams are working on early, constructive intervention and involving the community and the victims of crimes in the justice process.

My hon. Friend's account demonstrates the extent of the wisdom of the victims of crime. They do not simply want punishment or retribution; they want prevention and strategies to ensure that others do not suffer as they have done. Some of the work is making a difference and the results in my hon. Friend's constituency speak for themselves. Tower Hamlets has falling rates of youth offending and youth victimisation and the percentage of crimes in the borough committed by young people because it has targeted young people. It shows that such focusing can work, and I wish the teams well.

When people cross the line, we must ensure that we take action to enforce and uphold standards of behaviour. We have introduced tools to prevent people from causing problems, through antisocial behaviour orders, and to prohibit behaviour that causes harassment, alarm and distress, through fixed penalty notices for disorder, parenting orders and acceptable behaviour contracts. The parenting orders constitute another example of Tower Hamlets combining the legal and justice frameworks with working both with people who have come to the notice of the relevant institutions and those who have not yet come to their notice. That combination is a powerful method of proceeding. In my hon. Friend's borough, it is striking that parenting classes contain more parents who attend voluntarily than parents who have been sent under parenting orders.

I am glad that we are holding the debate this week, when the Green Paper on children at risk has been published. It aims to ensure that no child falls through the net and to help all children to achieve their potential. It shifts the balance from dealing with problems—whether criminality or victimisation among young people—after they have occurred to preventing children from becoming criminals or victims by tackling child poverty, improving education and child care, raising school standards and supporting parents. These measures are already making a difference, but we need to be honest—we have to do more.

We have made tackling antisocial behaviour a key priority for the police. We need to ensure that all the practitioners that I have mentioned, as well as citizens, have the tools to do their job. That is why we are introducing the Anti-Social Behaviour Bill, which has gone through its stages in this House and is currently being discussed in the other place. It will provide new powers to deal with noise nuisance, tackle serious youth nuisance and close crack houses.

My hon. Friend and I share a tradition of being concerned about civil liberties and of understanding the views of those organisations that are anxious about some of the powers in the Bill to disperse young people. However, we also share the experience of our constituents who have been terrorised when going out of their houses—not by groups of young people for whom the street is a reasonable place to meet and who want to play out there and entertain themselves, but by those who abuse, terrorise and intimidate residents who are simply going about their daily lives and doing their shopping. We need to have the powers to disperse those young people when that happens.

I assure hon. Members that the Home Office does not intend those powers to be used willy-nilly or lightly. They are, however, powers that those who are trying to deal with these issues need to have available to them. I hope that, through the prevention work that we are doing, and through more effective youth work and improved relations between the police and the communities they serve, we can make the additional powers unnecessary. It would be wonderful if that were the case, but we need those measures to be available.

We are not introducing the powers in the Bill so that they can sit on the shelf, or so that they can be shouted at people. We need to ensure that they are used intelligently and put to work to protect the victims of antisocial behaviour, whose lives are being made a misery by it, and whose new homes, of which they want to feel proud, have become a burden to them because of it. That is why the Home Office has set up an antisocial behaviour unit to work with practitioners, with the local authorities that are focusing on the issue in the way that my hon. Friend described, and with the police, to make a difference where antisocial behaviour is at its worst. We shall not need these powers to deal with people who occasionally litter or who spit out their chewing gum on the street, although we all know that that can be extremely irritating. The powers might be needed to make the extra difference where antisocial behaviour is at its worst, and where the more positive powers have not changed behaviour sufficiently.

We shall shortly be publishing an action plan, but the biggest challenge for everyone involved will be to put the words that my hon. Friend and I have exchanged today into practice and to ensure that the approach that her

speech so powerfully illustrated is not just an issue for the professionals. It is an issue in which the voice of the resident, the activity of the citizen, the experience of the young person and the anxiety of the parent can come together to ensure that we tackle antisocial behaviour. We must put our words into action to ensure that the victims are helped and protected, and are able to live their lives free from the harassment and distress that my hon. Friend has so powerfully described. I promise that the entire Home Office team will do its best to do that.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Six o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 15 September 2003

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Historic Royal Palaces

1. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): What recent advice she has given to Historic Royal Palaces regarding the imposition of charges to the public. [129551]

The Minister for Sport and Tourism (Mr. Richard Caborn): My noble Friend Baroness Blackstone told the trustees of Historic Royal Palaces that they have the power to introduce charges for entry to the gardens at Hampton Court palace provided that the cost is reasonable, related to upkeep, and not at a level that effectively restricts public access.

Dr. Cable: Does the Minister have any constructive proposals to deal with a basic inequity, arising from a ruling of the European Court of Justice, that local people who use royal palaces—Hampton Court gardens in the case that we are considering—or other national monuments cannot be exempted from or given any sort of preference with regard to charges, which are designed to apply to tourists who visit those places perhaps once in a lifetime?

Mr. Caborn: I know that the hon. Gentleman and some of his colleagues will meet my right hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for media and heritage on Friday and I am sure that they will be able to hold a dialogue. I assure him that no final decision has been made about the subject. "Not to be announced" appears more times on the briefing sheet than I have previously seen since becoming a Minister. That is unfortunate, but I am sure that all will be revealed to the hon. Gentleman. I hope that what is under discussion will be helpful in dealing with not only the concern that he raised directly, but others.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Does the Minister know what happens in royal palaces in other countries? For example, visitors to Swedish royal palaces properly pay, but do local people have free access to the grounds? Can the Minister find out?

Mr. Caborn: Royal palaces in other countries probably experience the same problems with visitor numbers as those here. That is why they are revisiting the issue of charging. However, I do not have the information that the hon. Gentleman requests to hand.

Mind Sports

2. **Dr. Evan Harris** (Oxford, West and Abingdon): Whether it is the Government's policy to seek to legislate to permit certain mind sports to be recognised as sports for the purpose of receiving national lottery funding. [129552]

The Minister for Sport and Tourism (Mr. Richard Caborn): The Government recognise the benefits of participation in chess and other mind games and continue to look at the case for amending the Physical Training and Recreation Act 1937. That could allow the sports councils to fund mind games. It would then be for the councils, including those of the devolved Administrations, to decide whether to recognise individual mind games as sports for funding purposes.

Dr. Harris: I am grateful for that response and the moral support that the Minister and the Secretary of State for Education and Skills have given to chess and bridge. However, will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge the unfairness, which means that British top-class and world-class players, especially juniors and disabled players, are sometimes unable to access the international competition that we should like them to experience because, consequent on the 1937 legislation, they cannot get lottery funding?

Mr. Caborn: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but chess is funded directly by the Exchequer to the tune of £50,000. Indeed, in 2003, the figure will be £60,000. It has also received just under £500,000 directly since the lottery's inception. Funding streams can therefore be accessed for chess and other mind games. I am aware of the world-class performance, but until the problem of the 1937 Act is resolved and chess is included in the definition of sport, it cannot have access to direct funding from the Sports Councils.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): I wish to support the line of questioning of the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), who is my bridge partner in the House of Commons team. However, my question does not constitute special pleading because although I do not believe that the House of Commons team will apply for any grants, we are considering a serious issue. In my constituency many people play contract bridge, but travel to events, booking halls and so on are restricted to those who are reasonably wealthy. Recent studies clearly show that Alzheimer's and such conditions can be ameliorated by engagement with mind sports. I therefore urge my right hon. Friend to continue to use his best efforts to widen the canvas on which his brush is currently painting.

Mr. Caborn: Notwithstanding all those points, I suggest that my hon. Friend gets a partner from either Scotland or Wales who could put some pressure on the respective Sports Councils. I have raised the matter at the sports cabinet, which Sports Ministers of the devolved Administrations attend. I am bound to say

that there is currently no appetite for change. Unless there is such appetite in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, it will be difficult to proceed with changes to the 1937 Act.

Performing Arts

3. **Mr. Eric Illsley** (Barnsley, Central): If she will make a statement on the most recent funding settlement from the Arts Council for the performing arts in the regions. [129553]

The Minister for the Arts (Estelle Morris): While the allocation of funding is a matter for Arts Council England, I am pleased that so many arts organisations in all regions of England are benefiting from the increased funding that we secured for the arts in the last spending review. This will see arts expenditure increase to £410 million by 2005–06, a 117 per cent. increase since 1997.

Mr. Illsley: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. She will be aware that theatre provision in my constituency has been inadequate since the closure of the Barnsley Civic theatre several years ago due to the necessity for structural repairs. Unfortunately, successive bids for lottery funding have failed, and the Arts Council obviously now has less money available to distribute to such causes. Will my right hon. Friend examine this situation to see whether any further assistance can be given to my local authority, so that it can provide a theatre in my constituency?

Estelle Morris: I have a great deal of sympathy with what my hon. Friend says, in view of the fact that the theatre in his constituency has now been dark for some years and was unsuccessful in the last bidding round. It is not for me to say whether any help can be given, because it is important that the allocation of funds by Arts Council England is independent of the Government. I note, however, that Barnsley is one of the priority areas in Yorkshire for development by the Arts Council, which recently funded a development officer in the town to help with cultural regeneration. I am delighted that culture is forming such an important part of the economic regeneration there. I would also point out to my hon. Friend that it is possible to bid again, and I hope that careful contact with the Arts Council prior to the bid being put in will secure a better result next time. If that were the case, I would join him in being absolutely delighted.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Is it not the case that the Arts Council and other organisations expected additional money when the Millennium Commission was wound up? Notwithstanding that, is the right hon. Lady aware that the Arts Council has given a generous grant to the Garrick theatre in my constituency, which the Secretary of State opened when she visited Lichfield recently? Does this not just go to show that when bodies have decent organisation and make decent applications, money can sometimes be found?

Estelle Morris: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that many good quality bids have been funded. I was delighted, on my only other appearance at DCMS questions, to celebrate with him what has happened at the theatre in Lichfield, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State opened the following day. I would, however, question something that he said. I do not think that he meant to give the impression that the bid from Barnsley was no good. I am sure that in Yorkshire, as in the west midlands, Humberside and other regions, there are good quality bids. I am pleased to say that the bids coming in from cultural organisations for investment in regeneration are now of such quality that it is becoming difficult to make final decisions. I agree with the hon. Gentleman, however, that we should always ensure that we have as much money as possible to fund good bids, as such projects form an essential part of the economic infrastructure of the country and provide for people to enjoy their leisure time.

Athletics (North-East)

4. **Mr. Stephen Hepburn** (Jarrow): If she will make a statement on Government-funded provision for athletics in the north-east. [129554]

The Minister for Sport and Tourism (Mr. Richard Caborn): Since 1998, a total of just under £2.8 million has been awarded to athletics in the north-east by Sport England from Exchequer or lottery programmes, comprising four community capital programme awards totalling just over £2.5 million, one award of £50,000 through the community athletics refurbishment programme—part of the legacy money given to UK Athletics—and 33 Awards for All grants totalling £113,000.

Mr. Hepburn: I know that the Minister is looking forward to doing the great north run next week. When he does so, he will pass Gateshead stadium, which he will see is in dire need of investment. Is he aware that the stadium has been turned down for an £11 million lottery bid, while at the same time the Duke of Northumberland, one of the richest men in the north-east, received an £11 million grant from the lottery for some old painting that he did not want any more? When the Minister is up there, will he intervene in this matter and get some public resources in so that we can get this worthwhile scheme going?

Mr. Caborn: I can assure my hon. Friend that when I am doing the great north run on Sunday, I shall be keeping my eyes in front and looking for the 13-mile marker. Seriously, though, my hon. Friend raises an important question. Sport England's review has been looking at the facilities for elite development, and it took the decision in July to review that. I was up there a few weeks ago, and it was pleasing to see how all the parties involved have come together. A meeting was called by Sport England, which has given a commitment that there will be some elite facilities there, and the development agency, the Government office and the universities are all now involved, together with the local authorities. I hope, therefore, that in the next few weeks or months, there will be a resolution to the problem to which my hon. Friend refers.

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): Notwithstanding what the Minister has just said about

funding for athletics, I assure him that athletics clubs in the north-east, in common with sports clubs throughout the country, will react with shock-horror at his decision, as outlined to me in his letter of 20 August, that clubs will have to pay the full fee for alcohol licences in future. In Committee on the Licensing Bill, his predecessor, the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells), said in response to the three amendments that I had tabled to reduce licensing fees payable by voluntary sports clubs in the north-east:

"Having regard to the strength of the argument that the hon. Gentleman has presented to the Committee"—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 6 May 2003; c. 402.]—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is out of order, so I cannot allow the Minister to answer.

Lottery Funding

5. **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): If she will make an assessment of the criteria used by the lottery funding bodies to distribute their resources to applicants. [129555]

The Minister for the Arts (Estelle Morris): The criteria vary from distributor to distributor, but they are based on national lottery financial and policy directions issued to distributors by the Department, and on distributors' own strategic plans and funding policies.

Mr. Luff: Does the Minister share my concern that the current use of highly selective types of disadvantage and deprivation by many lottery funding bodies to target their funding is causing frustration, disillusion and even anger among many other groups facing similar levels of deprivation, but who feel excluded from access to lottery funds?

Estelle Morris: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising this matter with me. He has sent a letter to the Department, which we will reply to shortly. I took the trouble to look into the background of that letter, because I thought that it may have been the reason for his question. On the face of it, the matter that came before his constituent has been clumsily dealt with by Awards for All in the west midlands. I agree with the hon. Gentleman about that. I have no control over what Awards for All writes in letters, but had I been the hon. Gentleman's constituent and read about the priority for funding as explained to him, I may have had the same response as he had. I hope that that message gets back.

The letter to the hon. Gentleman's constituent was clumsily written, but the policy is not clumsy or ill-thought-out. It is important that all lottery distributors examine how money is being distributed and ensure that under-represented groups are assisted to make better quality applications or to get their fair share. The letter was a reflection of that. The groups that were highlighted in the letter have been significantly under-represented in applications and awards from the Awards for All lottery fund. The issue could have been described in a much better way that would not have antagonised people.

Groups other than those highlighted receive funds from Awards for All. May I compare the hon. Gentleman's constituency with mine as an example? His constituency has had £500,000 in 37 awards, whereas my constituency has had £31,000 in eight awards. On that basis, perhaps it is me rather than him who should be complaining about the criteria and the priorities.

Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): Will my right hon. Friend pause to consider the winner of last night's "Restoration" programme? Victoria baths, which lies between my constituency and that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), was refused lottery funding on a number of occasions. That does not necessarily reflect on the lottery per se, but it shows that the people sometimes have very different priorities from those of the lottery. Will she join me in congratulating Gill Wright and all the many people who made the bid for Victoria baths so successful?

Estelle Morris: Of course I will join my hon. Friend. With my connections, affection for the city and knowledge of the area, I am delighted that the people expressed that view. In the consultation paper on the national lottery, we are looking for ways in which the general public can make clear their priorities. Perhaps there is a message from last night, which may reach the ears of those who make the decisions. If so, I would be thrilled.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): We could argue until we are blue in the face about the distribution of lottery funds. Is not the issue the reduction in sales of lottery tickets, as a result of which less money is available to distribute? When the lottery began it was supposed to be a competition with one big jackpot. Since then it has fragmented. What proposals does the Minister have to increase lottery sales that do not involve further fragmentation?

Estelle Morris: Ours is still the most successful lottery in the world. Since it was launched in the mid-1990s, £14.77 billion has been raised. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the pattern of sales and receipts for lotteries elsewhere in Europe and beyond, he will find that sales fall off and plateau after a number of years, and new games are needed. I have no plans to launch new games because that is not my responsibility, but the hon. Gentleman will know from an announcement made last week that Camelot has launched its first new game for some years, and it plans to diversify the games over the next few years to increase funds. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that more sales mean more money for good causes.

Olympic Bid

6. **Mr. Colin Challen** (Morley and Rothwell): What benefits for UK regions she estimates will accrue from the London Olympic bid. [129556]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): Hosting the Olympic and Paralympic games in London in 2012 should provide benefits throughout the UK as a whole. Some events, such as sailing and shooting, require specific venues and are therefore likely to be staged outside London. The Olympic football competition is also likely to be held in

stadiums around the country. In addition, there will be opportunities to secure investment in improved sporting facilities around the country by some of the visiting teams as they arrive for training and preparation in the year leading up to the games. We intend to do all we can to ensure that as much of the country as possible benefits from the opportunities that the games will create.

Mr. Challen: I thank my right hon. Friend for that helpful reply. I am sure that the whole country will take great pride in a successful London bid for 2012, but that pride might just turn to resentment if people in the regions feel that more money is being sucked into London's infrastructure when London already receives more per capita funds by a mile than any other region. I am particularly anxious that lottery money used for the bid should be seen to be distributed equitably. As my right hon. Friend knows, a number of Members on both sides of the House have campaigned for a fairer share of lottery money, and I hope that she will give special attention to that aspect.

Tessa Jowell: I shall certainly do that. I pay tribute to the efforts, led by my hon. Friend, to focus on the problem that lottery money is not always distributed equitably.

As for the balance between London and the rest of the country, it should be remembered that a substantial part of the estimated cost of hosting the games will be met from London as well as the lottery and income from the International Olympic Committee. While preparing the detailed case for bidding, however, the Government consulted all the regional development agencies to test the very issue raised by my hon. Friend. The response was unanimous across the country: RDAs recognised that hosting the games in London had the potential to benefit every region if it was done properly. We need to ensure that those benefits are realised in practice wherever people may be.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): I can confirm that the official Opposition support the bid and expect the UK regions to benefit if it succeeds. But should not the House be more than a little concerned about the fact that the Government have still not appointed a chief executive officer, while Paris has more than 100 people working full-time on its bid? It appears that our preparations are behind even those of Havana. If the Government are serious about the bid, should not senior Ministers be treating the matter with far more urgency?

Tessa Jowell: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his Front-Bench responsibilities. I also welcome the cross-party support for the bid. However, it is not the Government's job to appoint the chief executive of the bidding company; that is the job of the bidding chair, and she has that process in hand. She is determined to recruit the best possible person—*[Interruption.]* That is a judgment that she will make, with great respect. On Friday she announced the names of board members, and I think all who have seen them will recognise the strength of the sporting interests involved and the commitment to representing and promoting regional interests, as well as drawing on the experience of the very successful Commonwealth games in Manchester last year.

Therefore, progress is being made, greatly helped by the very detailed preparation that was undertaken in advance of the Government's decision to bid. In addition to the announcement of the board, the bidding chair has announced the name of her chief operating officer, so the organisation is being put together. The work is proceeding and the important thing now is that hon. Members on both sides of the House do not simply talk about support, but deliver it in practice at every turn.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): Can my right hon. Friend shed some light on why neither of the two candidates for the post of chief executive took the job? Can she explain why that was the case?

Tessa Jowell: No, these are decisions for the chair of the bidding company and I do not think that it is right that I should speculate on the reasons why Barbara Cassani is continuing to interview candidates for chief executive.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Does the Minister accept that the eastern region and Essex in particular have a major part to play in the London Olympic bid? Will she ensure that the Government bring forward resources and co-operate with Essex to ensure that Essex can benefit from the bid and that the bid is successful?

Tessa Jowell: I understand why the hon. Gentleman, as a diligent constituency MP, wishes to highlight the interests of his constituents but I do not have anything to add to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Rothwell (Mr. Challen), which is to state in broad terms the Government's commitment to ensuring that the whole country benefits as much as possible from the investment in the Olympics.

Analogue/Digital Television

7. **David Cairns** (Greenock and Inverclyde): What responsibilities the Government have regarding the availability of (a) analogue and (b) digital television services in Greenock and Inverclyde. [129557]

The Minister for the Arts (Estelle Morris): The Independent Television Commission and the BBC are jointly responsible for television broadcasting in the UK. As my hon. Friend knows, analogue coverage is provided in Greenock and Inverclyde by the Rosneath and Rothesay transmitters. However, reception in parts of Greenock and Inverclyde is affected by local topography.

David Cairns: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. As she knows, many of my constituents in Inverkip cannot get an analogue signal, so they have subscribed to BSkyB Digital. Now, on a Saturday afternoon when they want to watch on the BBC a live football match, they get a blank screen with a sign saying, "Switch to analogue to watch this match because of other contractual arrangements." That is not an option for them. Should there not be one simple principle written into the new BBC charter that, if one

pays one's licence fee, one should be able to watch the BBC, irrespective of any other commercial or technological impediments?

Estelle Morris: Obviously, comments about the future of the BBC charter will be for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in future months and years, but I have some sympathy with my hon. Friend's constituents. Less than 1 per cent. of people in the United Kingdom cannot receive analogue television, but for his constituents it is 100 per cent. I can imagine their dismay at not being able to watch Scottish football on a Saturday afternoon. He makes a powerful point. All I would say is that the rights and ability to watch analogue television are as important to his constituents as they are to anyone else's throughout the UK. We will do as much as we can to put pressure on the relevant authorities. We will take up his point with them.

BBC

9. **Hugh Bayley** (City of York): If she will make a statement on the (a) governance, (b) independence and (c) accountability of the BBC. [129559]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): We are committed to a BBC that is independent of Government and accountable to Parliament and licence fee payers and to a governance regime that delivers on those requirements. The forthcoming charter review will provide the opportunity for a full public and industry debate about those issues.

Hugh Bayley: When does my right hon. Friend intend to launch the review of the charter of the BBC and what form will it take? Who, for example, will undertake it? Will it be civil servants in her Department or an independent commission? Among other things, will the charter review look at the proposition that the BBC should be regulated in terms of the quality of its programmes by Ofcom, in the same way that ITV and independent radio are?

Tessa Jowell: There are two answers to my hon. Friend. First, when I spoke recently at the Edinburgh television festival, I made it clear that, over the next few weeks, I would set out in detail the way in which the Government intended to approach the charter review, which will run over a period of time. The present charter is in place until 2007. I repeat today that I attach enormous importance to the charter review involving public consultation in every way that we can. That will be one of the features and I will make the announcement over the next few weeks.

Previous charter reviews have coalesced in about four areas. Governance, funding and the BBC's position as a monopoly—less the case now, but certainly an issue in the past—have always been issues. Also, building on the Communications Act 2003, we will want to look at the BBC's role in a multichannel world. These questions are not new and recur every time the BBC charter is up for renewal. We are strongly of the view that the voices of the people of this country, who pay for the BBC, should be powerful in shaping the charter review argument.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): Does the Secretary of State accept that despite her assurances that the charter review will not be influenced by the Government's arguments with the BBC about Andrew Gilligan and the "Today" programme, the process has not been helped by the reports of threats against the BBC from Ministers and, indeed, former Ministers? Does she agree that it is all the more important that the process is seen to be objective and transparent? Given that we have known for 10 years that the review is to happen, why is she not in a position today to announce how the Government intend to go about it?

Tessa Jowell: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, I can state categorically that the conclusions of the Hutton report will impinge on the charter review only where any conclusions are relevant to the process of the charter review. I have made that clear and the position has not changed. There have been no threats, nor anything else that would undermine the integrity of the process, which is crucial. Given that the charter review process will take up to three years, it is right that all the preliminary work—leading on from the Communications Act, which received Royal Assent in the summer—is done properly. We will make an announcement when the work has been undertaken, rather than at the prompting of the Opposition.

Mr. Whittingdale: The report of the Secretary of State's interview in *The Times* said:

> "Ministers have long favoured handing the board of governors' regulatory responsibilities over to Ofcom."

That came as news to the Opposition, as we argued that case throughout the passage of the Communications Act. Does she accept that the events of the summer have once again highlighted the need for the BBC to be made accountable to an external and independent body, rather than the rather cosy arrangement that exists at present?

Tessa Jowell: During the passage of the Communications Act, it was clear that the issue of governance would be revisited at the time of the charter review, but that the Act represented a broad settlement for now. As I said in response to my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley), that is not new. There will always be malicious forces seeking to misrepresent and distort, but I restate that decisions about the future funding, organisation and governance of the BBC will be affected by the outcome of the Hutton inquiry only where there is clear and direct relevance. That is the position, whatever kind of mischievous or malevolent spin Opposition Members try to put on it.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Is not the current state of the governance and accountability of the BBC utterly unacceptable when the head and deputy director of BBC News and the editor of the "Today" programme are allowed to get away with colluding in the back-door briefing of members of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and that editor is able to get away

with approving a contentious article written by Andrew Gilligan for *The Mail on Sunday*? Apart from the resignations at all levels that we need to expect from the BBC, is it not time that, instead of buckets of whitewash, the BBC's accountability should be the sole responsibility of the new body, Ofcom, as recommended by the Culture, Media and Sport Committee?

Tessa Jowell: My right hon. Friend has set out some of the evidence received by the Hutton inquiry. I do not intend to be drawn into that—we will wait until the inquiry has concluded before making any judgment on any of the points that he raises. My right hon. Friend refers also to the governance of the BBC. His Committee's view is well known, but the Communications Act 2003 takes a different view. However, none of us must forget the BBC's importance not just in this country, but in terms of the way that the rest of the world sees us. That is why it is so important that we get the charter review right, and that at its outcome we have a BBC that is strong and independent of government, and that does the job for the people of this country, and across the world, for which it is so respected and admired.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Leaving aside the Hutton inquiry, and given that members of the public both abhor fence-sitting by politicians and applaud those politicians of all parties who say openly what they think, can the right hon. Lady tell the House this afternoon, on the criteria of governance, independence and accountability, what marks she would award the BBC on a rising scale of one to 10?

Tessa Jowell: With great respect, that was an elegant but insubstantial question. The hon. Gentleman has repeated the framework of first-stage questions for charter review, which we will engage with over the next two to three years.

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): Does my right hon. Friend agree that through their recent actions, the BBC governors have in fact confirmed the value of their role, independent of government and of commercial regulators, first by stoutly rebutting claims of anti-war bias; secondly, by instituting a review of the rules on BBC journalists writing for newspapers; and thirdly, by upholding a complaint about the use of footage of two dead British soldiers during the "Correspondent" programme—a complaint which, unlike that of Mr. Alastair Campbell, was formally made to those governors?

Tessa Jowell: My hon. Friend will be aware that the duty of impartiality and accuracy defines the governors' regulatory responsibility. The contributions that we have heard give a flavour of the debate to come, in the context of charter review, on the future governance, funding and nature of the BBC.

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): Notwithstanding what the right hon. Lady says about her willingness to consult the people about their continuing desire to pay £116 a year for the privilege of watching "Fame Academy" and so on, can she say whether she and the Labour Government remain committed in principle to the licence fee as the means of funding the BBC?

Tessa Jowell: Again, the charter review will address that issue. As I have said on many occasions, we want the review to be wide-ranging and fundamental, so it would be wrong at this stage for the Government to express a view that would constrain a debate that is just beginning. No doubt the hon. Gentleman, in his characteristic way, will have many robust contributions to make in the months ahead.

Amateur Sports Clubs

10. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): If she will make a statement on her policy on rate relief for amateur sports clubs. [129561]

The Minister for Sport and Tourism (Mr. Richard Caborn): I am pleased that the Government were able to introduce an amendment to the Local Government Bill on 10 September. The amendment will provide mandatory rate relief for registered community amateur sports clubs. That further demonstrates the Government's commitment to supporting our 110,000 amateur clubs, and I believe that it is excellent news for sport.

Mr. Edwards: I thank my right hon. Friend for that excellent news and for the Government's commitment to supporting grass-roots sport. I can assure him that the secretary of Chepstow rugby club, whom I spoke to this morning, knows that 80 per cent. rate relief on the £4,000 that the club currently pays to Monmouthshire county council will be immensely beneficial. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that all the amateur sports clubs that stand to gain from this excellent policy will be informed and encouraged to apply?

Mr. Caborn: Very much so. I received a letter congratulating the Government—such letters are not very common these days—from the National Playing Fields Association. It reminded me of the association's annual report of 1930 and provided rather more detail than appeared in the *Hansard* when the matter was discussed at the time. That letter also referred to the annual report of 1931, which referred to efforts made

> "to obtain rate relief from the additional rate burdens that now oppress sports clubs".

That letter continued:

> "70+ years later you deserve the credit for introducing something very simple, obvious and helpful to community sports".

From time to time the National Playing Fields Association has bashed the Government, but on this occasion I thank it for congratulating us.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): The Minister's announcement and the amendment to which he referred are extremely welcome, as his hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) rightly said. However, will he ensure that his definition of registered

community sports clubs leaves no room for political correctness and, in particular, allows target-shooting sports access to the rate relief?

Mr. Caborn: We provided a definition of community amateur sports clubs, or CASCs, about 12 months ago and we have sent out 110,000 leaflets to the nine regions, establishing a one-stop shop for any amateur sports club that wants information on the subject, so it is not the burden that some people have suggested. We agreed the definition with the Treasury and that definition has been sent out to the clubs. I do not know whether the shooting fraternity has applied for CASC relief, but I shall look further into it and write to the hon. Gentleman.

Free-to-view Television

11. **Mr. Russell Brown** (Dumfries): What discussions she has had with (a) ITV, (b) Channel 4, (c) Channel 5 and (d) BSkyB regarding their policy on free-to view access to their services on digital satellite television. [129562]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): I accept that this question deals with a serious matter that many constituents have raised with their MPs of all political parties. The position is that, until May, the BBC provided Solus viewing cards to satellite viewers who did not have a subscription to a pay-TV service. That allowed them to receive BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 free-to-view. In May the BBC moved its services to a new satellite, which meant that viewers could receive them without any viewing card. The BBC ended payment to BskyB for the provision of the cards, and it is now for ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 to find an arrangement to ensure that customers continue to receive their public service channels without the need to subscribe to Sky. I have written to the chief executives to ask about their intentions and their responses indicate that the broadcasters are considering various options. I am closely monitoring the discussions, which I understand are making progress.

Mr. Brown: I thank my hon. Friend for her efforts thus far. In common with my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns), I know that this is a serious issue. The problem is not just the lack of an analogue signal in some localities, but the lack of cable and free-view in rural parts of Dumfries and Galloway. The recent decision to broadcast unencrypted on satellite and to withdraw support from free-to-view viewing cards means, as my right hon. Friend rightly says, no signal for ITV, Channel 4 or Channel 5 unless people subscribe to Sky. Will she therefore highlight to broadcasters the complete lack of access to free-to-view channels for those viewers and, if broadcasters are not prepared to find an answer, will she use the provisions of the Communications Act 2003 to empower Ofcom to insist on finding an answer?

Tessa Jowell: I thank my hon. Friend for posing that question on behalf of his constituents. It is important to be clear that we are not at that stage. Negotiations are proceeding and we are optimistic that the broadcasters will develop a solution. As I have made clear, we will keep the situation under review and we recognise the concern and anxiety that it causes to the thousands of people who are directly affected.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The hon. Member for Gosport, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Marked Electoral Registers

21. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff, West): To ask the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, what discussions the Committee has had with the Electoral Commission on the use of marked electoral registers in political campaigning. [129572]

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): The Speaker's Committee has had no such discussions. However, I am informed by the commission that it is currently reviewing the use and supply of, and access to, marked electoral registers and intends to make recommendations to Government when its review is complete.

Kevin Brennan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that reply. In any discussions he has with the Electoral Commission, will he remind it that the Chartists campaigned for the fundamental human right to vote, and in secret, not for the fundamental human right to keep secret whether one voted or not? If the Electoral Commission did not allow marked registers to be made available to political parties, would not that represent yet another erosion of the idea of voting as a duty, rather than just another lifestyle consumer choice?

Mr. Viggers: I hear the representation made by the hon. Gentleman, but issues of law and principle, human rights and data protection are involved, as well as practical issues about the provision of an accurate register, especially during the campaign period itself. The commission is assessing those issues alongside the views of political parties and the public.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Will the hon. Gentleman put the other side of the argument to the Electoral Commission, especially with regard to Northern Ireland? In the past it has been the practice of certain political parties in Northern Ireland to make use of marked registers to see who has not voted for the purpose of personation.

Mr. Viggers: The Electoral Commission is considering all those matters, but it takes the view that if the marked registers can be made available—subject to the caveats that I have just described—it would be in the general public interest for them to be made available.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Sexual Orientation (Employees)

22. **Dr. Evan Harris** (Oxford, West and Abingdon): Whether the Church Commissioners have set or intend to set a requirement relating to sexual orientation for any of their employees in non-proselytising roles; and if he will make a statement. [129573]

Second Church Estates Commissioner (Mr. Stuart Bell): Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. The Church Commissioners and the other national Church institutions are committed to an equal opportunities policy that provides comprehensive safeguards against discrimination on those and other grounds. The policy is currently being examined to ensure that it is consistent with the two new sets of employment regulations that will come into force in December. It is unlikely to need fundamental change.

Dr. Harris: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the sexual orientation employment regulations were changed at a late stage to allow organised religions to set an employment requirement on grounds of sexual orientation in order to comply with religious doctrine or to avoid offending the religious susceptibilities of a significant number of their followers. That exemption has been questioned by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments as possibly being ultra vires, and a judicial review is threatened by the trade unions. Therefore, how can he say what he has just said and how does he justify his remarks earlier this year, when he said that the Church

"is opposed entirely to discrimination of any sort and, in particular, to the discrimination of the sort to which my hon. Friend refers."?—[*Official Report*, 30 June 2003; Vol. 408, c. 17.]

Furthermore, a letter from the Archbishops Council, dated 23 January, requests the Government to add to the regulations the very words that I have cited.

Mr. Bell: I surmise that that supplementary was written before the hon. Gentleman heard my reply. All anti-discrimination legislation carries the scope for organisations to apply genuine occupational requirements to jobs for which it can be objectively demonstrated that a person with or without a particular characteristic is required. Our policy is comprehensive, and it covers discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, nationality, colour, culture, sexual orientation, disability or age.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): I wonder, therefore, whether my hon. Friend will comment on the fact that at present the Church is able to discriminate on the grounds of gender against its women employees taking high office in the Church?

Mr. Bell: There is no such discrimination in the Church and I beg to differ from my hon. Friend. She will be aware that 2,000 women have been ordained in the Church of England since the Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure 1993. As I have already pointed out, we are anti-discriminatory in our Church and will continue to be so.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his answer; it is about as clear as it can be that dinner ladies employed in Church of England schools are not going to be sacked because they are lesbian and that caretakers are not going to be sacked because they are gay. Could the Church also take on something of a proselytising role and persuade other Churches to follow its example and, for that matter, in its own proselytising jobs, including bishoprics, could it adopt the same policy?

Mr. Bell: I am always grateful for interventions from my hon. Friend. He relieves me somewhat, however, as the question dealt only with non-proselytising roles.

Church Access (Disability Discrimination)

23. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): What plans the Church Commissioners have to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 with regard to access to churches and church buildings. [129574]

Second Church Estates Commissioner (Mr. Stuart Bell): The Council for the Care of Churches and the Cathedrals Fabric Commission, within whose remit those matters lie, has issued a guidance note which explains the Act and its ramifications for the Church. That document can be found on the Church Care website.

Mr. Edwards: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Does he agree that churches and chapels should not feel threatened by the Act, as it requires that reasonable steps be made and in fact many churches and chapels make reasonable steps? However, given the age and design of many churches and chapels, it would be a great help if they were able to apply for public moneys to adapt churches and church entrances for the benefit of people with disabilities.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The question of public moneys is for the Chancellor of the Exchequer and not for the Church, but the Church takes reasonable steps to ensure that any disabled person who has difficulty can take communion. There is also provision of auxiliary aids, such as hearing loops, large-print hymn sheets and handrails. We are careful to ensure that there is no discrimination as regards worship or access to churches.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): While of course we all support, in spirit and in law, the provisions of the DDA, will the hon. Gentleman confirm that it is his hope that there will be a light touch where meeting those provisions involves serious alterations to buildings of outstanding architectural merit? As many of our churches are among our country's 500,000 listed buildings, it would be wrong deleteriously to affect their

design by meeting the provisions of the Act, so a sensible compromise is needed, such as that we have found, I hope, in the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Modifying churches to allow access is relatively inexpensive, although lack of funds is never an excuse to ignore the requirements of the Act. However, awareness of our heritage and of the number of buildings that are either listed or extremely old is a point well worth making.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Is my hon. Friend aware that many churches have an outstanding record in responding to the needs of people with disabilities, especially in the provision of hearing loops, to which he referred? Will they continue to do that in the interest of best practice in public buildings?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I, like many other hon. Members, remember his sterling work for disabled people over many years and of the particular private Member's Bill that he put through. His point is well taken and will be well received in the Church.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): Further to the hon. Gentleman's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman), does he agree that, although it is essential that our churches are available to everyone who wants to visit them or worship in them, it would be wrong for structural changes to compromise the outstanding beauty and architectural merit of some of the historic churches that are part of our national heritage?

Mr. Bell: That point was well made. However, we would not wish to deny any member of our society—disabled or otherwise—access to holy communion, so any necessary steps should be taken to allow participation. In fact, to act to the contrary would be unlawful.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The hon. Member for Gosport, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Postal Votes (Intimidation)

24. **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): If he will make a statement on the commission's assessment of measures necessary for the prevention of intimidation of postal voters. [129575]

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): In its reports, "Absent Voting in Great Britain" and "The Shape of Elections to Come", which were published earlier this year, the Electoral Commission has recommended a range of measures designed to reinforce the arrangements to prevent the abuse of postal votes.

Mr. Turner: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. I am sure that he will be aware that our forebears fought for the secrecy of the ballot and that that secrecy would be compromised by having to mark ballot papers or being able to mark them in public, whether in the presence of a landlord, a trade union official or the head of a household. What is the Electoral Commission doing to ensure that no undue influence is exercised on people because of the requirement for them to mark their ballot papers in public?

Mr. Viggers: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. Of course, the Electoral Commission has to balance that against the clear advantage of the increase in voter participation with postal ballots. The commission has recommended a wide range of measures, including replacing the current declaration of identity with a new security statement, signed by the voter; new secrecy warnings on postal voting literature and ballot papers; more effective tools for prosecutors; a new police power of arrest on reasonable suspicion of personation at any location, not just at polling stations; a marked register, showing who has cast a vote by post, available after elections; and a new code of practice on handling postal ballot papers by candidates and party workers.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): The hon. Member will recognise that most recent election disputes have been over postal and proxy votes. As we are increasingly moving into an era of all-postal votes, is he absolutely certain that local police, local authorities and returning officers will have adequate powers to ensure that votes are in fact cast in the way that was intended by the said voters, so that the voting is not a sham?

Mr. Viggers: The Electoral Commission will propose that we move forward on the basis that I have just described, but of course, it will keep the situation under review, and I am sure that, if further action is required, it will be anxious to proceed with that as quickly as possible. I have to inform the House that, having examined the operation of the pilot schemes, the commission has recommended that all-postal voting, if backed by changes in the law to minimise the risk of electoral abuses, should become the standard approach at local elections. That is the commission's proposal; it will be for the Government to decide whether to act on it; and then, of course, ultimately for the House to implement any change.

Boundary Reviews

25. **Mr. Bill O'Brien** (Normanton): What provision is made to assist stakeholders interested in local government and boundary reviews to obtain information to help them to make submissions to the boundary committee; and if he will make a statement. [129576]

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): The boundary committee provides a wide range of information to assist stakeholders in making submissions, including leaflets, information in the local press and through the committee's website. The committee also holds briefing meetings in the areas under review.

Mr. O'Brien: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware of the report that the Select Committee on the

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister issued after taking evidence from the chairman of the boundary commission and the boundary committee which identified that people in the wards under review are at a disadvantage because maps, statistics and professional help are not available to them, but are available to the local authority. I am disappointed with the hon. Gentleman's response because the real issue has apparently not been addressed: the need to give that information to stakeholders to help them to submit an alternative to the boundary committee's proposals. That lack of information denies many people their democratic right to have some say in their own destiny. Will the hon. Gentleman relay that point to the boundary committee and ensure that information is made available to stakeholders, so that they can compete with local authorities when submitting a response to the boundary committee?

Mr. Viggers: I am instructed that the Electoral Commission and its boundary committee give equal consideration to all submissions that are received. Where appropriate, it requests that the local authority provide interested parties with further detailed information and some assistance. The boundary committee will also make its information available to interested parties. The main consideration is always the argument and evidence that accompanies any submission.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that the boundary committee is in the process of a major review of local government boundaries in three regions in this country, including the north-west, which I represent, as a result of the proposed referendums on regional government. In terms of providing information to stakeholders and others, will the committee publish how much that review will cost?

Mr. Viggers: I must say to my hon. Friend that the work undertaken by the boundary committee is at the instruction of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, to which any questions on that subject should be put.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am confident that it will not have escaped your notice that yesterday's edition of *The Mail on Sunday* set out in terms a personal minute from the Foreign Secretary, dated 17 March this year, to the Prime Minister, in which he urged the Prime Minister to stop short of military engagement in the Iraq war. As you will be aware, the very next day, on 18 March, at column 901 of the *Official Report*, the Foreign Secretary told the House on a Government motion authorising United Kingdom military engagement in Iraq:

"I am as certain as I can that the Government's course of action is right." – [*Official Report*, 18 March 2003; Vol. 401, c. 901.]

Given the apparent irreconcilable contradiction between the Foreign Secretary's personal minute and his statement to this House, has he requested to come to the House to make a personal statement to explain why he expressed one view on this major issue to the Prime Minister on one day and a totally opposite view to the House on the next day, and to clear up which of them accurately reflected his view?

Mr. Speaker: It is for any Minister to decide when he or she wishes to make a statement. It is not a matter for me to be drawn into at this stage.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. On a House of Commons point, when such grave charges as these are laid, do not Ministers owe it to the House to say one thing or the other, whether it is true or false, because it is deeply unsatisfactory that such grave charges should be left in limbo?

Mr. Speaker: I have already said to the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) that this is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker

Mr. Speaker: I have said to two Members that this is not a point of order, but I will listen to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you confirm that although the information that my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) has just used came to us from only one source, that would not have been a bar from the Government making a statement?

Mr. Speaker: As I said, I will not be drawn into this matter.

Programme Motions

WATER BILL *[LORDS]* (PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders (28 June 2001 and 29 October 2002).

That the programme order of 8th September 2003 in relation to the Water Bill [*Lords*] be amended by the substitution in paragraph (2) (time for conclusion of proceedings in Standing Committee) for the words 'Tuesday 21st October' of the words 'Thursday 23rd October'. – [*Mr. Ainger.*]

The House divided: Ayes 240, Noes 98.

Division No. 308] **[3:32 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bell, Stuart
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blunkett, rh David
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Doran, Frank
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Heath, David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hoyle, Lindsay

Hughes, Beverley *(Stret'ord & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pound, Stephen
Prosser, Gwyn
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Vernon Coaker and
Ms Bridget Prentice

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ancram, rh Michael
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, rh David
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Soames, Nicholas
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wishart, Pete
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mark Francois and
Mr. John Randall

Question accordingly agreed to.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 4)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders (28 June 2001 and 29 October 2002).

That the following provisions shall apply to the Local Government Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Orders of 7th January 2003, 28th January 2003 and 25th February 2003:

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption at this day's sitting.

2. Those proceedings shall be taken in the order shown in the first column of the following Table, and each part of those proceedings shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the time shown in the second column.

TABLE

Lords amendments	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
Nos. 3, 6, 19 and 20	2½ hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order
Nos. 1 and 2, 4 and 5, 7 to 18 and 21 to 56	The moment of interruption

Subsequent stages

3. Any further Message from the Lords may be considered forthwith without any Question put.

4. The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—[*Mr. Raynsford.*]

The House divided: Ayes 237, Noes 140.

Division No. 309] **[3:46 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bell, Stuart
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blunkett, rh David
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Doran, Frank
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Heath, David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pound, Stephen
Prosser, Gwyn
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes: Vernon Coaker and Ms Bridget Prentice

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ancram, rh Michael
Atkinson, David *(Bourn'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Berosford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, rh David
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Soames, Nicholas
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wishart, Pete
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mark Francois and
Mr. John Randall

Question accordingly agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Local Government Bill

Lords amendments considered. [Queen's consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified.]

Mr. Speaker: I draw the House's attention to the fact that privilege is involved in Lords amendments Nos. 3, 6, 18 to 22, 27, 47 to 49, 53 and 54, which are to be considered today. If the House agrees to these Lords amendments, I shall ensure that the appropriate entry is made in the Journal.

Clause 11

USE OF CAPITAL RECEIPTS

Lords amendment No. 3

3.58 pm

The Minister for Local Government, Regional Governance and Fire (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

We are considering a vital issue. Agreement with the amendment would undermine one of the fundamental principles of housing finance, which allows the redistribution of housing capital receipts to the areas of greatest need. Accepting the amendment would deprive housing authorities in areas of high housing stress of the resources that they need to fulfil pressing demands for housing. Simply letting housing authorities keep their housing capital receipts, irrespective of need and of how they intended to apply them, would be an unfair and irresponsible way of allocating limited resources.

We have always taken the view that the proceeds from the sale of council housing should be used to help the areas in which housing need is greatest. That is the purpose of redistribution, and was indeed the principle underlying the legislation introduced by the previous Conservative Government and operated since 1990. The Bill repeals the part of that legislation governing the current redistribution system—the set-aside mechanism. The drawback to set-aside, as we have said many times before, is that it does not apply to all authorities. Redistribution must apply equally to all, if it is to be fair to all. This is the anomaly in the present system that our pooling proposals address.

It is simply wrong that some authorities should have more resources than others, regardless of need, simply because they happen to be rich in right-to-buy receipts or debt-free. I stress that we are not talking about funds generated by good financial management or good planning, but those generated simply because tenants have decided to buy their own house in areas where house prices are buoyant. The local authority cannot determine or manage such sales and, contrary to what was said in another place, they cannot claim any credit for them.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. Before thirsting to reduce local authority autonomy in such a way as to allow him to pursue his redistributionist agenda, it is

incumbent on him first to consider the efficacy or otherwise of existing policy. In that context, will he oblige the House by telling us what assessment he has made of the effect of the change in the rules on the use of capital receipts from the sale of council houses in the last Parliament on the size of interest repayments on local authority debt?

Mr. Raynsford: Approximately £1.2 billion received from the sale of council houses is currently brought within the overall framework, which allows the pooling to take place through the set-aside mechanism. The problem with that mechanism is that it does not apply to those authorities that are debt-free; that is just the nature of the mechanics involved. The principle of redistribution, which was argued strongly by the hon. Gentleman's own party when it was in government, and part of the approach that it adopted in the 1990 legislation, was to ensure that the receipts would be distributed to meet housing need rather than simply lying arbitrarily where they arose because of the vagaries of the housing market or the whims of tenants in particular areas.

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I give way to the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey).

Mr. Davey: In the Minister's opening remarks, he tried to suggest that all the councils that are debt-free were just lucky, because they were in areas where house prices were high and had received a large windfall from right-to-buy receipts. Surely some of those councils have managed their finances prudently, however, and worked hard to become debt-free. In some cases, they may have taken painful decisions to reach that point. Should they not now be allowed the chance to benefit from the freedoms that they have won after going through the pain of putting their finances in order?

Mr. Raynsford: Lots of other authorities have worked extremely hard to run their finances in the most efficient way possible, but, because they happen to be in areas with low house values, where capital receipts do not generate the same amount of money, they have not been able to reach the same position as those lucky enough to be located predominantly in the south-east. Frankly, it is curious for the hon. Gentleman representing the Liberal Democrats to be advocating a policy that would have a strongly redistributive effect, which favoured the affluent areas, rather than the areas of greatest need. That would be the effect of the policy that he is advocating. I can understand why the Tory party would pursue that line, but it is strange, to say the least, that the Liberal Democrats should do so.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): The Minister quoted a figure to my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow). Will he confirm for the record that the sum involved in relation to debt-free authorities—the only ones that will be directly affected in cash terms by the measure—is about £120 million, and not £800 million, £1.8 billion or any other exaggerated figure?

Mr. Raynsford: The figure that I quoted was the total sum that we estimate will be brought within the pooling arrangements. That is similar to the set-aside. The figure for debt-free authorities is £120 million, as the hon. Gentleman rightly said. That is a significant sum, and can contribute substantially to meeting housing needs. I remind him of a little debate that we had in Committee. He will recall that I flourished a Liberal Democrat "Focus" leaflet. I do not usually do that.

Mr. Bercow: Where is it?

Mr. Raynsford: I am afraid that I put it in the bin. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that, on the whole, that was the right course of action. The Liberal Democrats in Mole Valley argued that it was scandalous that Mole Valley council had received substantial capital receipts—probably not through any great effort of its own, but because housing in the area has a high value—but was not proposing to use those receipts to meet housing need. Instead, it intended to spend the money on other things. The Liberal Democrats in Mole Valley said that that was monstrous and wrong.

It is typical of the Liberal Democrats to say one thing to one group of people and something else to another. In Mole Valley they said it was monstrous and wrong not to spend the money on housing, but when they are confronted with a Bill that ensures that capital receipts are used for housing where the need is greatest, they oppose it, because they want to say something different to a different audience.

Mr. Edward Davey: I thought that we had educated the Minister on this point in Committee. We said that it was about local democracy. The Liberal Democrats in Mole Valley were right to fight elections in that constituency on the proposition that housing receipts raised locally should be spent locally on affordable housing. That was a fair point, and it is consistent with the Liberal Democrats saying that the council should be allowed to do that. The Government want to take away the right of local authorities to spend receipts in their local area. The Minister is the one who is inconsistent. He is going against his policy of so-called new localism.

Mr. Raynsford: That was a pretty feeble effort. In Mole Valley, the Liberal Democrats campaigned on the simple principle that money from housing receipts should be used for housing. As soon as the Liberal Democrats have a chance to give effect to that principle in the House, they take a different view. It is the same old story.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Liberal Democrats have the opportunity to set the record straight? With respect to national policy, will my right hon. Friend confirm that the effect on the borough of Brent of this Liberal Democrat and Tory sponsored amendment would be to take away £2.1 million from the people of Brent? What the Liberal Democrats are saying on the doorsteps about investment in local housing would drive a coach

[Mr. Barry Gardiner]

and horses through what Brent council could do, unless it was prepared, as a matter of national policy, to say that Brent people should pay higher taxes to receive the same level of service, because the Bill would put £2.1 million on to its budget.

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend has hit the nail on the head. In Brent, the Liberal Democrats no doubt claim that they would do many things to help Brent, but at the same time they actively supported an amendment in the House just last week that would have exactly the effect that my hon. Friend describes. It would take £2.1 million away from the London borough of Brent that could and should be used to meet housing needs in that borough, which has enormous pressures.

Matthew Green (Ludlow): The Minister should be careful about what he says. We cannot take away something that is not there. Language needs to be used more carefully. Is he saying that Brent is an area of low house prices, which is why it is where it is? His argument was that places in London and the south-east would be the beneficiaries of the Opposition's amendment. Is he suggesting that house prices in Brent are very low?

Mr. Raynsford: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman does not understand the issue. There is a relationship between house prices and house values, and that is one of the important elements, but there is also housing need. Brent is an area of enormous housing need. The scale of the capital receipts that the borough receives is not proportionate to the scale of housing need in that area. Brent is one of the boroughs that will gain substantially from our proposal for a proper redistributive system that applies universally.

It should be remembered that the redistribution mechanism already applies. It applies to all authorities except those that are debt-free. The Liberal Democrats are essentially saying that they want to help very affluent, mainly Tory authorities in the south-east at the expense of areas such as Brent and a number of others. That is an extraordinary comment on a party that tries to claim that it has some pretensions to a concern for social justice.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister will recall that in Committee we offered an opportunity to ensure that right-to-buy receipts were recycled into housing in the local authorities involved, and he rejected that opportunity.

Does the Minister at least accept that at a time when one of the most pressing housing issues facing the Government and authorities in the south-east is affordable housing for key public-sector workers, there is a close correlation between high house prices and the need for such housing?

Mr. Raynsford: Indeed. That is exactly why we have increased investment by two and a half times the amount we inherited, and why we have been concentrating on the provision of new housing in areas of stress—particularly in areas where that can be achieved with good use of brownfield sites, such as the Thames gateway—while also investing in improving housing stock in areas of less demand, where serious problems are caused by property in poor condition and the fact that people are living in unsatisfactory houses. We have a responsibility to do both those things.

We are certainly keen to expand the housing supply in areas of need, and that is part of the programme. Our objective, however, is to be fair in the allocation, not arbitrary. The problem with the hon. Gentleman's position and that of his party is that the allocation system that the Conservatives supported—although they did not support it in 1990—would arbitrarily give huge buckshee benefits to certain areas simply because they happened to be receipt-rich and with relatively low needs, while denying other areas that were receipt-poor or whose needs were too high to be met from the receipts that they had.

Mr. Hammond: Is the Minister suggesting that, having sequestered my local authority's right-to-buy receipts, he expects nurses, policeman and school teachers who are needed in Surrey to commute daily from the Thames gateway around the M25? Is that his grand strategy for the future of the south-east?

Mr. Raynsford: No, it is not. As the hon. Gentleman will recall, I used the Thames gateway as an example to highlight the importance of using brownfield sites; but of course we are looking at brownfield sites elsewhere. What I am sure the hon. Gentleman does not want is indiscriminate building on greenfield sites in his area. That would be an entirely undesirable policy—a policy that was, as it happens, supported by the hon. Gentleman's party when it was in government: it let rip with development by private developers throughout the south-east, and particularly in the Thames valley.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that one of the areas that would be disadvantaged by this measure is Milton Keynes? Will he join me in urging Milton Keynes council, which is of course controlled by the Liberal Democrats, to devote some of its efforts to educating Liberal Democrat Front Benchers here, to ensure that the party is not saying one thing in Milton Keynes and another in Westminster?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Milton Keynes is another of the areas that stand to lose if the amendment supported by the Liberal Democrats is passed. Of course, it is not the only one; a number of other areas stand to lose. Liverpool stands to lose substantially, and so Sutton and Basildon.

I can understand the Tories' supporting the amendment, as it will generally favour their affluent south-east strongholds, but I fail to understand why the Liberal Democrats want to harm so many areas that they control. It is either the result of a sudden burst of masochism, or an example of their being highly confused and not quite knowing what they are doing. Because they are saying one thing to one group of people and something else to another group, they forget the plot and vote for something that will have catastrophic consequences for many Liberal Democrat authorities—including Milton Keynes.

4.15 pm

Mr. Bercow: It is always a particular pleasure to joust with the Minister but the endless tergiversations and chameleon-like behaviour of the Liberal Democrats could readily absorb all the time available for debate today, and it does not seem very profitable for us to allow that to happen. The question that I would like answered is the question that I did ask, not that which I did not. Can the right hon. Gentleman simply tell me on a non-partisan basis what assessment he has made of the effect of the change made in the previous Parliament on policy towards the use of capital receipts from the sale of council houses on the level of interest repayments on local authority debt?

Mr. Raynsford: I cannot because the hon. Gentleman is asking some rather odd questions. There was no change of policy in the previous Parliament on the application of right-to-buy receipts. We have constantly said that it is right that right- to-buy receipts should be made available for and used for housing need to the extent that we operate a redistributive system, a system that, as I have said, we inherited from the previous Government. That system has remained in place since 1990. It is now being changed because of this Bill, but there has been no other change in policy.

There may have been changes in policy on some of the detailed points about the level of discount that will apply. Of course, there have been significant changes in interest rates because of the Government's prudent management of the economy, which results in a substantially better position in terms of all those people paying interest. That is to everyone's advantage. All those matters can be taken into account by economists, who will no doubt come up with a sophisticated answer to the hon. Gentleman's question, but there is no policy change along the lines that he has proposed.

Mr. Hammond: Before we move on, can the Minister confirm who he thinks controls Basildon council?

Mr. Raynsford: I was referring to a number of authorities. There are many areas that are affected, including some Tory-controlled areas. Of course, the Tories are being a bit foolish in favouring the interests of their south-east heartlands at the expense of some of their other councils, which happen to have rather greater housing needs. No doubt the voice of Essex will be heard in due course, telling us that we should be fairer to Essex and insisting on the redistribution of capital receipts to favour Basildon. That is certainly a policy I would be happy—

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Raynsford: I must make progress.

The amendment would remove the proposed replacement for set-aside and end redistribution. We would, therefore, no longer be able to recycle housing capital receipts fairly. The alternative to a redistribution system is higher taxes, less investment or cuts in other programmes. Affordable housing for key workers, decent homes, market renewal in low-demand areas would all be put at risk. Without redistribution, the majority of local authorities—those with debt, with lower capital receipts and with greater housing investment need—will lose out. That would be irresponsible and indefensible.

Without pooling, we would probably have to continue to operate a mechanism based on the principles underlying the current system. That could be only a partial solution and would lack the transparency and simplicity of pooling. Debt-free housing authorities rich in right-to-buy receipts would retain the benefit of their housing capital receipts regardless of housing need and be able to use receipts for whatever purpose they saw fit. I mentioned earlier the interesting example of Mole Valley being a classic illustration of that.

Agreeing to the Lords amendment would perpetuate the anomaly inherent in the current system and disadvantage most of the nearly 260 local authorities with housing stock. I have quoted a number of the authorities that are affected. Let me repeat that there are currently around 40 debt-free authorities with housing stock in England. Under our proposals, pooling will apply to a proportion of their housing capital receipts, not all of it, and it will not apply to other capital receipts.

That does not mean that those authorities will have no resources to use. On the contrary, they will have access to all their other receipts and indeed to 25 per cent. of their housing capital receipts, and they will have the additional allocations that come through the new framework for distributing funding. Those depend on decisions by the regional housing boards, which will make recommendations to Ministers in a month or so, so I am not able to anticipate the precise allocations at this stage, but additional sums will be allocated in relation to need and some of those debt-free authorities will certainly be likely to qualify to some extent under those rules.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister has said that authorities will continue to have access to 25 per cent. of their right to buy receipts. For clarity—and for those who have not gone through the tortuous Committee process—will the Minister confirm that he is quoting the draft regulation that he has published, but that the Bill allows the Secretary of State to take up to 100 per cent. of receipts?

Mr. Raynsford: We specify amounts by regulation rather than putting them in the Bill; therefore, there is that power. But, on a number of occasions, I have made it clear that our policy intention is not to change the percentage from the 75 per cent. that currently applies to the great majority of authorities in the country. It is an anomaly that a relatively small number of debt-free authorities get preferential treatment and it would be quite wrong for that to be perpetuated. That would be the effect of the amendment, which is why we ask the House to reject the Lords amendment and to restore the Bill s provisions as originally presented and discussed in Committee.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister is talking as if it were counter-intuitive that debt-free authorities should be allowed to keep their capital receipts. To most people, it would be intuitive that somebody in debt should use their capital receipts to offset their debt and that

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somebody not in debt should be free to use their capital receipts as they wished. Surely that is how the great majority of people would see it.

Mr. Raynsford: I disagree profoundly. In my view, it is counter-intuitive to argue that one relatively small group of authorities should be given preferential treatment and should not be required in any way to make use of capital receipts for housing purposes when all other authorities are required to do so. That is the anomaly that we are putting right.

I am glad that the hon. Gentleman raised the question of incentives for prudent financial management; we are keen on them. The new borrowing regime in part 1 will help by enabling authorities to take a broader view of their finances and to borrow without having to get Government approval at any point. They can take regular decisions as to the advantage of borrowing on a particular project or financing it by other means without their decisions being distorted by an arbitrary factor; that is, if they remain debt free, they get a particular benefit. If they are able to organise their finances while looking at the respective merits of financing and new investment, they can take sensible decisions without being precluded from considering the borrowing option.

Matthew Green: If it were the Minister's intention that debt-free authorities with housing stock should spend their money on housing, why did he not make that the law instead of taking 75 per cent. away from an authority such as Bridgnorth in my area, which is debt free and has its housing stock? If Bridgnorth undertook large-scale voluntary transfer, 75 per cent. of receipts would be taken away and spent in other local authorities elsewhere. That cannot be right.

Mr. Raynsford: Once again, the hon. Gentleman is very confused. He and his party believe that it is right to spend money on housing; we wholly agree. It is also right to ensure that allocations should reflect the needs of different areas. If the hon. Gentleman is arguing that the right way is to leave the receipts where they lie, irrespective of need, inevitably that will disadvantage substantial numbers of areas with high needs and low receipts. If he is arguing that, I wish him luck; the people of Liverpool will have an extremely jaundiced view about the Liberal Democrat proposal to take £1.5 million away from that city and from many other areas that would be badly affected by the arrangements that his party has suggested in the Lords.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Liverpool, of course, has a declining population in comparison with many areas of the south-east. However, is not the process that the Minister is introducing analogous to saying to someone who has paid off their mortgage that they must now hand some of their money to others to help them pay off their mortgages?

Mr. Raynsford: No, it is analogous to an arrangement in which someone has provided the finance for an asset. All these houses were built with very substantial Government subsidy—in many cases, meeting the full costs—and national Government have a right to have an interest on the disposal of that asset. That would be regarded as an absolutely normal principle in any commercial operation, or, indeed, in any public service operation.

Mr. Bercow: Unfortunately, the right hon. Gentleman's position will not do; it is as perverse as his appetite for nationalisation of local decision making seems insatiable. Does he not at least concede that where a local authority has substantial debts and some resources from the sale of council houses, it has a responsibility to use the latter to pay off the former, before benefiting from other councils' legitimately acquired funds?

Mr. Raynsford: No, the right position is that every authority—not just those that the hon. Gentleman gives as examples—should have a framework that provides an incentive to repay debt and to act prudently. That is part of the framework that we are introducing, which will be reinforced by the housing revenue account subsidy system. It will enable authorities to repay debt, but it will also recognise that many authorities still have very high housing needs that must be met. It is quite wrong that areas with high needs and few resources from receipts should be penalised, as the amendment passed in another place would do. This is a matter of social justice and fairness, and of ensuring a decent housing policy that looks after the interests of people throughout the country, rather than favouring just a limited number of areas that happen to have the good fortune of substantial receipts.

I want to put the arrangements for receipts in context. The Government are now providing some £2.5 billion in investment each year, to be allocated on the advice of the regional housing boards. Some £2.5 billion in investment—more than two and a half times the amount that went into housing in 1997–98—will address the needs in all authorities, not just in some.

Finally, we have recognised the level of concern expressed by debt-free authorities about the introduction of pooling. That is why we offered them the reimbursement of a reducing proportion of the estimated £120 million in capital receipts that they would be required to pool for the next three years: 75 per cent. in 2004–05, 50 per cent. in 2005–06, and 25 per cent. in 2006–07.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister said a moment ago that this large sum would be allocated on the advice of the regional housing boards. Will he confirm who advises on the distribution of that sum between the boards? I assume that he was referring to distribution within a region by the boards.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We seek a national framework to ensure a fair regional distribution overall, and we will then invite regional housing boards to make recommendations within their regions about actual distribution. The decision on the allocation between regions is ours. The regional housing boards make recommendations on decisions within regions, but they are obviously subject to the agreement of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning.

Mr. Hammond: So that we can see what the flow of funds looks like, can the Minister explain the

distribution between the eight English regions, by percentage, of those funds, and the distribution by region of the £120 million in capital receipts taken from debt-free authorities? If he does not have the figures in his voluminous folder, perhaps he can get hold of them.

Mr. Raynsford: I will happily provide the hon. Gentleman with answers to both those questions by writing to him. But to ensure that he has a full and fair picture, I should remind him of a third element: what the allocations are following the recommendations of the regional housing boards. That information will complete the picture by showing where the money is going to, as well as where it is coming from.

The arrangement that I have described, which gives generous transitional support to enable debt-free authorities to adjust rationally over time, is the right way forward, rather than the removal of these important provisions. I trust that, as when the House previously debated this issue, it will recognise that it is both fair and right to continue with the framework of redistribution of capital receipts, which should apply to all authorities, rather than just to an arbitrary group that happens not to be debt-free. I ask that the House resist this amendment.

Mr. Hammond: We are now 45 minutes into the allocated time, and hon. Members will have noticed that the long summer recess has not increased the Government's appetite for the proper scrutiny of their business. We have the three most controversial groups of amendments to consider in a time-limited period of two and a half hours, and the remainder of the evening for—

4.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Phil Hope): So get on with it.

Mr. Hammond: The Under-Secretary says, "Get on with it," but I want to get on with placing on record our perplexity at the allocation of time as between the first three groups of amendments and the remainder. Why the Government could not have allowed us three, four or even five hours to debate the first three groups is completely beyond Conservative Members.

The amendment carried by the Lords was originally moved in Committee by my hon. Friends and me and was supported by the Liberal Democrats—*[Interruption]*—and I am grateful for that support. I described clause 11 as one of the most important in the Bill. It is also the clause that gives the lie to the Government's intentions. The Minister likes to describe the Bill as conferring new freedoms and flexibilities on local authorities, but, as drafted, the clause gives the Secretary of State the power to force local authorities to hand over to him some or all of their capital receipts, principally gained through right-to-buy sales. It is a central Government tax on local authority capital receipts: however the Minister chooses to dress it up, that is precisely what it is.

We are not talking about a tax of 10, 20 or 30 per cent. The Minister has already told us about—and the regulations that he has circulated already show—the intention to tax the receipts at 75 per cent. As I said in an earlier intervention, there is nothing in the Bill to prevent the Secretary of State from increasing the take-up to 100 per cent.

The Minister calls that "pooling", but the word does not appear anywhere in the Bill. He says that it is redistribution of capital receipts. Of course all taxation is potentially redistributive, depending on how the Secretary of State chooses to exercise his discretion in distributing the proceeds of this tax on local authorities. Undoubtedly it is a redistribution of power away from local authorities to the Secretary of State. No matter how the Minister tries to dress that up, local authorities, the Local Government Association and Opposition politicians of all parties clearly recognise that the measure goes directly against the thrust of the policy that the Government profess to be implementing through the Bill.

Mr. Gardiner: In many respects, the hon. Gentleman may be said to be making a powerful case about how moneys should not be redistributed and about local democracy, but he is suggesting that the policy is being implemented by the Government to change the status quo. It is not. In fact, the previous Conservative Administration introduced the policy and decided that that was the way to pool and redistribute moneys—

Mr. Raynsford: And the 75 per cent.

Mr. Gardiner: As my right hon. Friend rightly says, they also introduced the 75 per cent. figure. Will the hon. Gentleman therefore explain to the House why there is so much outrage about what the Government are supposed to be doing, when what they are actually doing in this instance is maintaining the status quo and when it is the hon. Gentleman who wants to change it?

Mr. Hammond: That is an extraordinary argument. The hon. Gentleman should ask the Local Government Association why there is so much outrage. If we take his point literally, he is suggesting that if we accept the Government's proposals, nothing will change. That is simply not true. Local authorities that have been free to spend their capital receipts because they are debt-free will find that 75 per cent. of those receipts will be sequestered by the Secretary of State. They will also potentially be exposed to a 100 per cent. sequestration of their right-to-buy capital receipts. In particular the 34 debt-free authorities, which have been ably represented by the capital receipts group over the course of this long battle, will feel the impact. Other local authorities do not have access to their capital receipts in the same way, precisely because they are indebted. That is another example of the Government's determined assault on well-managed, prudent councils in order to prop up their favoured authorities, including—I have to say—the odd basket case. It is also a frontal assault on the principle of localism.

The Minister's first, and rather lame, argument, which he has already deployed this afternoon, is that local authority housing stock should somehow be seen as a national rather than a local asset. The Minister says that it was originally built, all those years ago, with central Government subsidy. He is of course right, but

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it was also built with borrowings which, by definition, debt-free authorities have repaid. The stock's value has also been maintained and enhanced by maintenance and improvements carried out at the expense of tenants and council tax payers in many of those local authorities that have been in nil or negative housing subsidy for many years.

Mr. Raynsford: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that the authorities would have received Government subsidy both for the repayment of the debt, because that was taken into account, and also—in many cases—for the renovation and improvement of the properties?

Mr. Hammond: Some of the authorities may have done so, but many—as the Minister well knows—have been in negative housing subsidy. The value of the housing stock has been enhanced by the care and maintenance of the local authorities and their tenants over the years. It is those tenants and council tax payers who should benefit from a capital receipt by their local authority.

Mr. Edward Davey: I shall address this issue in greater detail when I make my speech, but I am sure the hon. Gentleman would agree that we should not let the Government get away with the notion that all those houses were built and maintained solely by central Government subsidy and the taxpayer. Many of them were built under local authority initiative, decades and sometimes centuries ago, as local communities acted to provide homes for the needy in their areas. The Government are trying to rewrite history, and we should not let them get away with it.

Mr. Hammond: The hon. Gentleman is right, but even if the Minister has a point about the original financing of the housing stocks, it is bizarre to try to rewrite the rules 30 or 40 years later by saying what was given as a grant is now subject to a clawback: it is as if the Government were saying, "Sorry, we forgot to tell you at the time."

Mr. Raynsford: If that is bizarre, can the hon. Gentleman tell me what was the logic of his party when it introduced this arrangement in 1990?

Mr. Hammond: I do not suggest that authorities that have access to their capital receipts should be subject to a retrospective clawback, which is what the Minister's argument appears to be.

My noble Friends targeted their amendment precisely. They sought to remove the Secretary of State's power to levy a tax on capital receipts, but would have left in the Bill the power to direct the use of receipts, either for debt reduction or for capital expenditure. We can effectively demolish the Minister's second line of argument, which he deployed extensively in Committee, that many local authorities have not used their capital receipts to the full for housing or urban regeneration. We have some sympathy with that argument. Of course, to restrict those local authorities in the use of their capital receipts would be a restriction on local freedom, but—in the spirit of compromise—we were prepared to meet the Minister halfway on that. We tabled an amendment that would have allowed the Minister to direct that those receipts retained by local authorities should be used for specified purposes—housing investment and urban regeneration—which would have entirely addressed the concern that the Minister outlined. The amendment was also supported by the Liberal Democrats, but the Government rejected it.

It is a fact that it is often the areas with high property values, and thus buoyant right-to-buy capital receipts, that have the greatest need for affordable housing. I make no bones about the fact that I am thinking of constituencies such as mine and that of the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) in making that statement; we know that we are not in areas that are likely to be favoured by the Secretary of State's largesse when he redistributes the so-called pooled receipts. We know that as a consequence public services in our constituencies will suffer, as our public authorities are unable to employ the teachers, nurses, social workers and police officers whose employment our constituents have a right to expect so that they, too, can enjoy decent public services notwithstanding the high cost of delivering such services in the south-east. If the Minister thinks about it, he will find that there is a strong correlation between buoyant right-to-buy receipts, which, as he correctly says, indicate high housing demand and high house prices, and real need in the present context for the delivery of affordable housing.

At present, the most pressing housing issue facing both the country and the Government—who will be judged on whether or not they can improve public service delivery—is to provide affordable housing for people who will work at the kind of nationally negotiated salaries that the public services are able to offer. As the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) knows, that is a real problem in the south-east and it is worse outside than inside London, because our public sector workers do not have the benefit of London weighting, yet they often face higher living and housing costs than people who live in the outer London boroughs.

Matthew Green: I would not like the hon. Gentleman to leave the list of areas that suffer a shortage of affordable housing without mentioning places like Shropshire and Cornwall where shortages exist for different reasons. Shortages in those areas are due to people either buying holiday homes or retiring to the area, yet local salaries are much lower than nationally agreed pay settlements for the public sector. There are good public sector jobs in Shropshire, but houses cost £200,000.

Mr. Hammond: I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's point. It is important to recognise that the issue is not confined to the south-east of England; there are other areas with buoyant right-to-buy receipts and buoyant housing markets. They all have one thing in common: they suffer from the problem of how to provide affordable housing for public sector workers.

Mr. Gardiner: May I respond to the serious comments that the hon. Gentleman makes about house prices in the south-east by reference to my borough of Brent? I

understand perfectly that the south-east is a high house price area, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will reflect on and take to heart the fact that inner-city and outer-London boroughs such as Brent are subject to peculiar pressures in attracting key workers, which are not simply mirrored in house prices. The pressures of working in those environments are a disincentive to workers, so if we are to address the problems of public service delivery and key worker housing, which he rightly highlights, boroughs such as Brent, where key sector workers face complex difficulties, need the sort of investment that has meant £2.1 million to meet Brent's housing needs.

Mr. Hammond: I do not for a minute suggest that there are no problems in boroughs such as Brent. We are all aware of the broader issues of dealing with inner and outer-city deprivation; the list of problems is endless. However, it is wrong for the Minister to characterise areas that will have that money—the 75 per cent.—taken from them as areas that do not have a problem. They are leafy, they have buoyant housing markets—

Phil Hope: They may have high housing need.

Mr. Hammond: In Standing Committee, I cited Lord Rooker who said outside the House that it was likely that only one authority—Barking and Dagenham—of the then 34 debt-free authorities with housing stock was likely to be regarded by the Government as in housing need—*[Interruption.]* No doubt the Minister will correct me if that is incorrect.

4.45 pm

Let me just tell the Minister how this looks from the point of view of an authority that will lose 75 per cent. of its capital receipts and that will have to change its plans accordingly. Runnymede borough council—my local authority—is debt free, with housing stock and good right-to-buy receipts, but it is in desperate need of investment to improve pre-war, inter-war and immediate post-war system-built housing, some of which the Minister knows about, and I am pleased to say that he has recently approved such a scheme. There is a desperate need to invest in improving the quality of some of that, frankly, life-expired housing stock, as well as a desperate need to invest in new affordable housing, precisely to allow the area's economy and public services to continue to function. Local people do not understand why the Government apparently do not recognise that need and are apparently hell bent on taking such money away from our communities and redistributing it elsewhere. We believe that there is a clear need for that housing investment to take place locally.

The proceeds of this tax on local authorities will be used to finance Government dirigisme, channelling development to specific areas. The Minister has already mentioned the Thames gateway. *[Interruption.]* I do not know why the Minister is shaking his head, because that information is in the public domain. The money will be spent in Ashford, the Thames gateway and Milton Keynes; it will not be spent in Runnymede. If the Minister has some good news that I was unaware of, I should be very pleased to hear it, but that looks like channelling development to the Government's priority areas at the expense of local solutions to local problems. The Minister denied this when I put it to him earlier, but I am afraid that, from where I sit in north-west Surrey, the Thames gateway looks like a massive dormitory at the end of a 40-mile stationary car park called the M25, which key workers in Surrey will have to travel to and from to find affordable housing.

The Government can go on all they like about decentralisation and local authority freedom and flexibility, but we will judge the Government by their actions, not their words. This confiscatory swipe at the capital receipts of some of the best-run local authorities in England, including those under the control of all the parties and none, shows us the Government's true colours. We had it right when we previously debated this issue in the House, when we proposed to scratch that confiscatory power from the Bill. The Lords have got it right now in deleting from the Bill a power of confiscatory taxation, which we know full well the Secretary of State proposes to use to reduce to local discretion, to fuel the redistribution pork barrel and to reinforce his wider attack on the right to buy. *[Interruption.]* The right-to-buy policy has given real hope and opportunity to millions of hard-working families over the past decade or so—something that the Labour party obviously cannot abide and that the Minister appears to find funny.

I urge my hon. Friends to resist the Government's crude attempt, in pursuit of their centralising and confiscatory agenda, to ignore the collective wisdom of all the Opposition parties in the House and of the majority of the House of Lords.

Mr. Edward Davey: This issue has been debated more than any other during debates on the Bill in both Houses. The arguments have been explored in great detail, and the Opposition have had to think hard about the Government's arguments. The Minister will admit that the Opposition have tested the Government's arguments and thought hard about them. The Minister's problem seems to be that we have reached a different conclusion from him, and I shall set out the principles of why we have done so shortly.

The Minister sometimes cites councils and which parties control them. There is almost a scorecard, as though such things will be done by partisan analysis. *[Interruption.]* The Minister shakes his head, but that sounded like the point he was making in his opening remarks. That is not the right approach, and it is not one that we have adopted. The Liberal Democrat group on the Local Government Association, which I consulted widely—including representatives from all the councils that the Minister mentioned and many more—debated the matter at length before taking its decision. It knew that some councils would win and some would lose, but it wanted to decide on the right principle for the financial mechanism.

Another case in point, which the Government have mentioned, is that of Brent. For obvious reasons, Brent has raised its very pretty head in this debate—*[Interruption.]* I should make it clear that I was not referring to the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner). The Government should be careful, however, before they make opportunist points about Brent. Labour has been running Brent for a long time and has piled up some of the debts, and in recent years

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the Labour Government's local government finance settlements for Brent have not exactly been generous. I am sure that the hon. Member for Brent, North would concede that point, because I know, as *Hansard* will show, that he has not been very happy with Ministers' settlements for Brent.

Mr. Gardiner: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will recall that Brent's 1998 local government settlement for children's personal services was indeed not generous and that it had a bad effect on Brent. If we look at the Government's record, however, specifically on housing and capital allocation over the past six years, we find that the Labour council in Brent has begun the rebuilding of houses, which was left in abeyance for years by the Conservative administration in Brent and by the then Conservative Government. The record of the Labour local authority in Brent, supported by the Government, in delivering on housing need in Brent is absolutely exceptional. Last year, we had one of the largest capital allocations that we could have had. I therefore hope that the hon. Gentleman will now address the real question—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will now conclude his intervention.

Mr. Davey: You are probably right, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to admonish the hon. Gentleman, but perhaps I, too, should be admonished for giving him the opportunity to make that party broadcast. At least he confirmed, however, that he was not happy with Brent's local government finance settlement from this Government.

The Government say that the proposals will get rid of an anomaly, but the anomaly can also be seen as an incentive to reduce debt and to become debt free—a sensible element to have in the local government finance system. The Government are rightly getting rid of a lot of the nonsense that they inherited from the Conservatives—the central capital controls, supplementary credit approvals and so on—and are introducing what is more or less Liberal Democrat policy: the prudential capital regime for local authority borrowing. We wholeheartedly support the Government's welcome move in that direction, which provides greater opportunities for local authorities to manage their capital affairs well. The key question, however, is whether the Government are still allowing, within those many changes, opportunities and incentives for local government to make sure that it is managing its debt well. Let us have freedom to borrow when it is appropriate, but do we really want to take away the significant incentive to run down debts? We all agree that encouraging local authorities to reduce their debt is sensible, and I do not understand why the Government are getting rid of that important incentive. That is one issue of fiscal principle.

The other issue relates to localism and centralism. The Government say that the Bill is about freedoms and flexibilities for local authorities and that it will empower and free up local authorities. They also talk about new localism. This policy goes completely in the opposite direction. The Government justify that by saying that they have to redistribute, and the two parties do not disagree on the need to redistribute; the question is how that is done. *[Interruption.]* The Minister points to Conservative Members, but I was not including the Conservatives in that argument. Perhaps we should do so these days, but we never quite know.

Labour and the Liberal Democrats certainly agree that it is important that central Government should be used to redistribute resources around the country, but that is not the question. The question is how we do that, and it is clear in my mind that this is not the right way to do it. National Government could provide the resources for housing in Brent and other areas, should they choose to do so, but the question is whether they should take that money off other authorities that have housing needs and that have managed their financial affairs well. Should the Government be penalising them or should they be coming up with money from elsewhere?

I want to press the Government on the idea that all council housing has somehow been funded solely by central Government. Lord Rooker was at it in the other place when he said:

"Council housing is a national asset."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 4 June 2003; Vol. 648, c. GC 198.]

I have heard council houses called many things, but I have never heard them called a national asset. It is as though council housing is some sort of nationalised industry that central Government have provided and that local authorities have nothing to do with. That is clearly not the case, whether it is on the financial level or on the level of the entrepreneurship, vigour and dynamism of the local communities that have made the provision of social housing possible.

It is all very well for the Government to say, "This money came out of the central pot." However, they decided where the central pot began and ended and where the local pot began and ended. The boundaries between national and local government funds have been vague at times and have moved over the decades. Liberal Democrats believe that local authorities should have much greater financial powers, and we would like the boundaries to be shifted from central Government and more to local government. That is one reason why we think that this measure is wrong. There should be redistribution, but there should be greater autonomy, too. This measure is a step in the opposite direction to greater autonomy.

Matthew Green: Earlier, the Minister shook his head when my hon. Friend said that some of the properties go back for centuries. Many boroughs in mediaeval market towns built properties that came into the hands of councils, which turned them into flats and houses. Those properties often realise the highest possible values if they are sold. They were funded not by central Government in the 20th century, but by locally raised money or by charitable money in the 19th century.

Mr. Davey: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. Two councils in his constituency—South Shropshire and Bridgnorth—are debt free and will be affected by the measure, but they have real housing need.

That brings me to my third point of principle against the Government's proposal. Housing need is sometimes a relatively subjective concept. The Government say that they have housing need indicators, but the housing need that the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) mentioned—the need for affordable housing for key public sector workers—is a key issue. We do not know how authorities will meet that need when the money is taken from them. The Minister may say that we do not know because the Government have set up regional housing boards—a step in the right direction—which have yet to report. However, he is asking the House to take a decision on one side of the equation when we do not know the information on the other side of the equation.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge says that he is privy to the information that Lord Rooker has said that only one of the debt-free authorities that are losing out will receive money through this process. I am not sure how Lord Rooker knows that if the regional housing boards will provide and allocate the funds. Perhaps he knows something that we do not.

Mr. Gardiner: I have tried to follow the hon. Gentleman's argument closely, but I do not understand his point about the regional housing boards. Surely if those boards are to be the arbiter of genuine housing need, it is absolutely right that we take the decision on one side of the equation and not on the other. That is precisely because of the point that the hon. Gentleman made at the beginning of his remarks: this process should be free of partisan judgment and based on objective criteria. That is exactly what the regional housing boards are supposed to provide.

5 pm

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways.. The Minister was trying to say that some authorities that do not have housing needs will lose and that other authorities with housing needs will win. We want to know about and to understand the housing needs, because we know from our constituencies, from which much of our information for such debates comes, that there are housing needs in the so-called leafy boroughs of suburban London. There are housing needs in rural areas such as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green) and in parts of Surrey. The Government cannot have it both ways. We want to know where housing need will be met before the money is taken away. Perhaps that information should come from the regional housing boards—I do not disagree with that. The process should be less partisan and should be based on objective criteria. However, we are being asked to make a decision before we know about the need.

Matthew Green: Surely it is unlikely that there will be sufficient money to meet all the housing needs in a given region, even with the pooling of money. There will be priorities. In the west midlands, it might well be decided that Birmingham needs an extra 20,000 houses. We need only 1,500 more affordable homes in South Shropshire district council, but the district contains only 30,000 people. The suspicion in South Shropshire is that it is likely that the money for the west midlands will go to areas other than South Shropshire or Bridgnorth.

Mr. Davey: Over the weekend, I talked to several council leaders and councillors who will be affected by the decisions to check whether they were still happy with our position, because this is a serious moment during the passage of the Bill. They were clear that they managed their budgets and forward planning in the knowledge that when they became debt free, they could use the moneys as they wanted.

Three Rivers district council is desperately keen to meet the decent homes standard that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister gave it and to build more affordable housing with housing associations to address its affordable housing crisis and to house some of its key public sector workers. However, it will not be able to do so because the money will be taken away and it does not think that it will be on the regional housing board's list. Councils have planned for years in the expectation that they will receive money to meet the housing needs that they know exist in their communities, but they will no longer be able to do that.

The situation is retrospective in many ways. Councils have planned and hoped for freedom so that they may make essential investment. They have even told their communities that they were making preparations, but suddenly, and without too much warning, the Government are taking the money away, which is why people are so cross. The Government and hon. Members such as the hon. Member for Brent, North must understand that.

The Government say that the transitional scheme may cushion the blow for some of the affected authorities, and indeed it will. The problem is that the scheme will last for only two or three years, after which all the money will be taken from the authorities. The situation affects not only the 38 or 40 debt-free authorities with capital receipts that the Minister mentioned. Local authorities that have been working towards becoming debt free have gone through some of the pain but will discover that the freedom that they worked for and looked forward to will be taken away.

I say to the Minister, in as friendly a way as possible, that Liberal Democrats have thought hard about the matter, as is our duty. As he said, £120 million is up for grabs throughout the country, so the way in which it is distributed and allocated is important. However, if one considers the principles of fiscal prudence and incentives to become debt free, localism versus centralism, the way in which housing needs are defined and the way in which local authorities have worked towards becoming debt free, the Minister has not made his case and we shall vote against him in the Lobby.

Mr. Raynsford: We have had a good debate on an important subject, although the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) made several rather curious allegations, the most frequent of which was that the measure is confiscatory. By that logic, the Conservative Government who introduced the whole set-aside regime were confiscatory. He alleged that the measure represents heavy-handed government forcing local authorities to do undesirable things, yet his

[Mr. Raynsford]

party, when in government, introduced measures that required local authorities to set aside capital receipts. I cannot accept his latter-day expressions of support for the idea of greater freedom for local government without reminding him of the actions of Conservative Governments.

The fundamental difference is that today we are talking about housing capital expenditure of £2.5 billion a year—two and a half times the level that we inherited when we came to power. At that stage, the redistributive mechanism that the hon. Gentleman's Government had introduced was virtually the only means of getting capital into housing.

Mr. Davey: If so much new money is available for housing needs, why is it necessary to take £120 million from the debt-free authorities that have worked so hard to become so?

Mr. Raynsford: If the hon. Gentleman bears with me, I will give him a full answer that deals with the inherent contradiction in his case. He seems to believe, as Liberal Democrats generally do, that it is possible to find ways out of difficult conflicts without any pain, but it is not. It may be so in the Liberal Democrat Valhalla, where everyone debates everything ad nauseam and outcomes are always pain free, but in the real world there are hard choices that require decisions. There is conflict between allowing receipts to remain where they fall and ensuring a fair allocation of housing resources. This is a testing moment for Opposition Members to show where they stand. Are they in favour of simply letting things lie according to the accidents of history, or do they want a fair distribution based on principle, not accident?

Mr. Davey: Is taking money away from Tory and Liberal Democrat councils and giving to it to Labour ones the hardest decision that the Minister has ever had to make?

Mr. Raynsford: It is not like that at all. It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman proposes to take money away from a substantial number of Liberal Democrat authorities. I understand exactly why Conservative Members support the measure—because, in general, Tory councils will benefit from it; it is self-interest on behalf of predominantly Tory authorities. I find it extraordinary, however, that the Liberal Democrats should argue against the interests of many of their own authorities. That is an example of the curious stance that they often take by standing on their heads on certain issues. *[Interruption.]* I shall come back to the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) in a moment. I want first to respond to the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge.

The difference between the actions of his Government and our proposal is that we are ensuring that the principles of fair distribution apply to all local authorities, which will all be part of the same mechanism. He proposes giving special benefits to a small number—around 40—that are debt free. As we know, that is because Conservative Members see that as being in the financial interests of predominantly Conservative authorities. Let me test him on this. Why should mid-Devon be treated differently from east Devon? Why should Milton Keynes be treated differently from Watford? Why should Maidstone be treated differently from Dartford? In each case, one will lose and one will gain. Can the hon. Gentleman tell me which will be the gainers and which will be the losers? We know about Milton Keynes, because we have rehearsed that already, but can he genuinely tell me what the outcome will be in the other two cases? Of course not. We know that those authorities are in broadly similar circumstances. It just happens that one has the advantage of being debt free and the other not. Why should there be an arbitrary benefit for one as against another? That is the fatal weakness of the Opposition's position. They are proposing special treatment for a small group of authorities merely on the accident of which one happens to be debt free. Why should one authority have unrestricted access to capital receipts while the other is required to set aside 75 per cent? That is the question that I must put, and there is no credible answer to it. It illustrates the confusion of both opposition parties.

Mr. Davey: The Minister is taking a static one-year view when we are talking about housing and capital finance. These things do not happen from one year to the next. The span is 25 or 30 years plus, as we have discussed. The Minister cannot say that what he has said justifies his case. He must take a much longer-term view. If he did that, he might win more of us over.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman, for whom I have great respect, could not have made my case better. Essentially, he is arguing for special treatment for a few authorities that happen at this moment to be in a favourable position. We are taking the longer-term view and saying that there should be a framework that applies fairly throughout all authorities and ensures that resources are allocated according to need. Surely the Liberal Democrat party would say that that is a fair principle, and it is the principle that underpins our policy.

The Liberal Democrats are caught on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, they argue for the use of resources to meet local housing needs, but they are not prepared to follow logic and say that that means that we cannot live with the accidents of history and geography and allow buckshee gains for some authorities that at this moment have the advantage of being debt free with substantial receipts, and needs that do not outweigh their receipts.

I am not sure what my noble friend Lord Rooker said in the other place—the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge quoted him—but some authorities that are debt free have significant needs that will be taken into account in the allocations that will be considered by the regional housing boards. Other authorities will have lesser needs. In our view, it is right that every authority should be assessed on the basis of needs, on the simple principle that housing allocations should be determined by need. That should not be based on the simple accident, as it were, of where the receipts arise.

Mr. Hammond: I have listened to everything that the Minister has said. Does he understand how he is undermining the sense that he wants to convey that he is

granting freedom to local authorities? Does he understand also the psychological significance of the provision? We are talking of only 40 authorities, but a message is being sent to all authorities and to the Local Government Association that the Government do not really want to let go and allow local authorities to manage their own affairs. Instead, they want to control what they do.

Mr. Raynsford: I hope that we shall shortly come on to the next group of amendments, which deals with financial management and accompany all the provisions that change radically the capital allocations system. The provisions will remove Government controls and will free local authorities to take decisions on capital allocations. The Government are making substantial moves towards giving local authorities greater freedom and flexibility. We are also a Government who have principles. One of those principles is that fairness in the allocation of resources to meet needs should be paramount. We are not resiling from that. It is sad that the other parties are prepared to argue for a framework that will give special advantage on the basis of accidents of history and geography to a few authorities, rather than taking the more rounded view.

We have offered generous transitional arrangements. We are prepared to help those authorities that are debt free because, as the hon. Member for [illegible] and Surbiton said, some of them have made plans. We want to ensure that those plans are not disrupted unduly by these changes. Therefore, there was opportunity for substantial help for the impact on debt-free authorities to be smoothed over for a significant time. We remain willing to assist those authorities, but that must happen in a framework that ensures fairness to all authorities, and not be a purely arbitrary benefit for a small number that will have adverse consequences for the majority.

5.15 pm

With those thoughts, I trust that hon. Members will vote to resist the amendment.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 258, Noes 154.

Division No. 310] **[5:15 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, rh George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward

Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Vernon Coaker and
Ms Bridget Prentice

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barón, John *(Billericay)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mark Field and
Mr. Mark Francois

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Before Clause 25

Lords amendment No. 6

5.30 pm

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendment would insert a new clause at the beginning of part 2. The new clause says that part 2 can be applied only to an authority that has been identified by the Audit Commission as being at risk of overspending its total budget by more than 10 per cent.

I need first to explain the perverse and highly undesirable effects of such an overspending test. It requires the Audit Commission to undertake an entirely

new task, which would be costly and potentially very hazardous. In effect, it would require the commission to create what would be a blacklist of authorities that had agreed budgets that were likely to be seriously overspent. How would that be done? The factors that lead to an overspend are extremely diverse and difficult to predict. The commission would have to examine the budget of every authority, consider the various contingencies that might affect it and their likelihood, and from that try to predict whether the outcome would be a 10 per cent. overspend. The scope for disagreement would be immense, and inclusion in the list would be highly likely to be challenged in the courts. A major input of audit resource would be required, which would be reflected in an increase in audit fees for all authorities.

What would be the effect of an authority's inclusion? It should be borne in mind that this is not a general assessment concluding that an authority is a poor performer, but, specifically, a supposedly authoritative statement that it is likely to spend at least 10 per cent. more than it put in its budget. If the authority had reserves of less than 10 per cent., that would effectively mean that it had set an illegal budget. On the other hand, if it had reserves of more than the expected overspend, it would be on the blacklist but not at any financial risk. Its reputation would be compromised for no reason.

The purpose of the amendment is apparently to apply part 2 to authorities that have unsound finances. When Hackney's chief finance officer issued his section 114 report in October 2000, he was estimating an overspend of between £14.5 million and £22 million. The reserves were £6.5 million. The general fund budget for the year, however, was £264 million. The reserves were insufficient, but the projected overspend was less than 10 per cent. of the budget.

Even if it could have foreseen that development, the Audit Commission would not have identified Hackney under the new clause. The part 2 provisions would not have applied in one of the most serious financial crises to have hit a local authority in recent years. This arbitrary test would not guarantee the identification of authorities facing financial crises, while running the risk of needlessly tarnishing the reputation of an authority with sound finances.

The new clause would have another serious consequence. Much has been made of the opposition to part 2 in local government, but one clause, clause 30, has been universally welcomed. It helps an authority to take rapid remedial action when a section 114 report has been issued. The amendment would perversely deny an authority the use of that facility unless it was on the Audit Commission list—but unexpected financial crises can affect many authorities. It is absurd that only projected overspenders would be allowed the means to take immediate action to deal with such a crisis.

Those are the reasons for our belief that this is a perverse and unworkable amendment, but there are more fundamental issues at stake. The purpose of part 2 is to reinforce important aspects of sound financial management in local government. It does that mainly by requiring authorities to follow proper procedures and have regard to appropriate considerations, while leaving the substance of the decisions to authorities themselves. This is all part of our programme to extend freedoms and flexibilities to local authorities—in this case, by repealing the restrictive policies relating to capital spending that were introduced by the last Conservative Government. I am interested to see the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) laughing at the fact that his party was responsible for the introduction of those measures.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister is going into chapter and verse about his technical objections to the amendment, but he knows that the underlying principal concern was clause 26, which, in contrast to what he has just said about giving local authorities freedom and allowing them to manage their affairs in accordance with generally accepted accounting practice, gives the Secretary of State the power to dictate reserves. Why did not the Government take the opportunity to accept the Opposition amendment that would have struck out clause 26, and then everyone would have been happy?

Mr. Raynsford: If the hon. Gentleman bears with me, I will come on to precisely that issue. I emphasise that the Bill is part of a programme to extend freedoms and flexibility but, as all sensible people recognise, with freedoms come responsibilities, and the part 2 provisions are sensible safeguards to ensure that the new freedoms are applied responsibly. Clause 26 provides a fall-back power to require an authority to budget for a minimum level of reserves but we have made it clear on many occasions that we would use that power only in very limited circumstances. We have said on the record, and I repeat tonight, that we will set a minimum only if an authority is disregarding the advice of its chief finance officer and is heading for serious financial difficulties. In deciding the level of the minimum, we would take account of the advice of the chief finance officer and any observations of the auditor.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I was laughing because the Minister was purporting to say that this is a liberalising Bill when, as my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) has pointed out, there is a very strong measure of centralisation. Before the Minister suggests that I should not be making this point, he should remember that, when I was the Minister with responsibility for local government, the only changes I made liberalised. I would have liked to liberalise more. I wish this Government would liberalise more. This is not the measure that is going to do it.

Mr. Raynsford: I remind the right hon. Gentleman that, when he was a Minister, there was a capital control regime in place that involved central decision taking about every local authority's borrowing every local authority's borrowing was determined by central Government. That was the policy that he followed. That is what we are doing away with by giving local authorities freedom to take decisions based on a sound prudential assessment of what they can afford to borrow. The only safeguard that we have put in is the safeguard that I have been referring to, which ensures that, in the event of an authority disregarding the advice of its chief finance officer and heading for serious financial difficulties as a result of that, there is a fall-back. I think that any sensible person would recognise that that is prudent and a necessary safeguard, but I hope that we will have to use it very rarely, if ever.

Mr. Edward Davey: The Minister knows that we disagree with the policy as embedded in clause 26 but

[Mr. Edward Davey]

can he elucidate a little more about when he thinks the power could be used? He said that it would be used on very rare occasions, if ever. Have his officials given him a list of occasions over the past few years when the power might have been applied, given the undertakings that he has just given?

Mr. Raynsford: As I have already said, we hope that we will never have to use these powers. There have been very infrequent occasions where authorities have disregarded the advice of their chief finance officer. There were cases some years ago where authorities got into imprudent financial arrangements, disregarding official advice, but thankfully they have been very few and infrequent, and we hope that they will not happen at all in future. That is why I can say with some confidence that I hope that we will never have to use the powers, but it is a foolish Government who do not make provision for the possibility of one rogue authority taking irresponsible decisions against the advice of its chief officers in certain unforeseen circumstances. If that were to happen and we did not have the power to intervene, I would be surprised if there were not some Opposition Members saying, "How is it that the Government have got into a position of giving these freedoms to local government without any ability to step in and to prevent the people of that area suffering as a result of irresponsible behaviour by the local authority?"

Mr. Hammond: Since the Minister places so much stock on the advice of chief finance officers, will he take some advice from the Society of County Treasurers, which told the Select Committee that the proposals for the Secretary of State to specify that local authorities maintain their reserves at a minimum level seemed to be "particularly problematic and unnecessary"?

Mr. Raynsford: I hear what the society says, and I know that local government is generally hostile to the proposal. But the hon. Gentleman should reflect on the circumstances that I am describing, in which, at some unforeseen future date, an elected authority disregards the advice of its chief finance officer and undertakes highly imprudent borrowing, putting the authority's finances at risk. If that situation arose and the Government had no means whatever to deal with it, would he and the Opposition really be silent? On reflection, he will realise that this is a sensible safeguard that is there for extreme circumstances. We hope that we will never have to use it, but it is a necessary concomitant of a policy of liberalisation that is extending substantially greater freedom to local authorities over their borrowing decisions.

Mr. Redwood: In those circumstances, the Opposition would be saying that the councillors should be changed. We want the council to be accountable. It would doubtless be a Labour or Liberal Democrat council that got into that financial pickle and we would have strong advice for the electors – choose a better council next time.

Mr. Raynsford: I do not have the right hon. Gentleman's party political certainties. I know well that the authorities in difficulty with which I have been engaged over the last two years have been under the control of all political parties. Fortunately, none is in the kind of circumstances that we are envisaging in the Bill, but it would be imprudent not to allow for the possibility that, at some future date, that might happen. This is simply a safeguard that we believe to be necessary.

We have set out in the House and in another place the evidence on which we concluded that the powers were necessary, including the findings of the Audit Commission on current levels of reserves in individual authorities. We take the point that the provisions will apply to all authorities when problems are confined to a minority. We would have sympathy with the point made if the effect of the provisions was to impose added burdens, but it is not. All that these clauses do is to give statutory backing to what is accepted as good practice that all authorities should follow.

The clauses in part 2 were debated in detail in this House and in no case was a Division called against them. I like to think that that was because, when all factors were considered, Members of this House appreciated the importance of sound financial management. Unfortunately, those considerations apparently did not carry the same weight in another place.

The Government are not prepared to take risks on the issue. If the new freedoms in the Bill are to be given to local government, we regard it as essential that the force of statute be given to these basic rules of prudence. The new clause would prevent that from happening and should be removed.

Mr. Hammond: The amendment addresses part 2 of the Bill. It is clear that, even more than in part 1 dealing with capital receipts – the provisions in part 2 are offensive to local government and undermine the Government's claim to want to free it.

We explained to the Minister during the Commons consideration – Members on both sides of the other House also tried to explain it – that the appropriate relationship between central and local Government is not, as the Government seem to think, that of a parent and a child, where freedoms are given conditionally and are undermined by the keeping of reserve powers to step in whenever local authorities do not behave exactly as central Government wish.

Baroness Hamwee described the approach as undermining the capacity of individuals within local authorities. In Committee, the hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) said that the real test of the Government's commitment to freedom was whether local authorities were to be free to go against the Government's wishes, not merely whether they were to be free to comply with them.

The Minister knows well that the earlier amendments in the House of Lords sought to delete clause 26 – the power to dictate minimum reserves. That is the key issue. The amendment represents a different approach to achieving that, by leaving the power in the Bill and limiting its application to councils at particular risk. It is an attempt by our noble Friends to meet the Government's concerns while lifting the implied slur on all local authorities that this part of the Bill, as drafted, contains.

5.45 pm

There is a real problem about the message that this part of the Bill, particularly clause 26, sends to local government. Seen through the Government's eyes and as expressed by Lord Rooker in the other place—this is a frankly astonishing quote—

"the bonfire of red tape goes beyond the wildest dreams of those in local government as regards what they will be able to do with their new freedoms—without government interference or diktat. That is the whole thrust of the Bill and there is wide consensus on it between all the parties concerned in both Houses of Parliament as well as outside in local government." [*Official Report, House of Lords*, 16 July 2003; Vol. 651, c. 902.]

I do not know where Lord Rooker gets his intelligence from, but I can assure him that he is wrong on all counts. There is no consensus between all parties in this House or in the other place, nor does it exist outside in local government not a good start for ministerial connection to the real world. As Lord Hanningfield helpfully pointed out to Lord Rooker just a few moments after he made those startling assertions, all parties in the Local Government Association had unanimously condemned clause 26.

We can cast the net a little wider to test qualified opinion. The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, in its evidence to the Select Committee, said:

"The prevailing attitude of mistrust of local government, however, is revealed once again in the Bill's clauses on financial administration"

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy—the very body on which the Government are depending, in terms of defining proper practice in the prudential borrowing regime—said:

"specifying a 'minimum level of reserves' for local authorities is impracticable and should be left to local judgment and good professional practice".

I am sure that the Minister is taking note. Not much support there, then, for the assertion of the Minister in the other place. That last quote is particularly telling. The Bill relies heavily on the principle of using standards and codes of accounting practice. They will provide the guidance on proper reserve practices, which will differ from authority to authority. The Secretary of State's having a power to override proper accounting practices and standards is inimical to the whole system that he is seeking to put in place.

The Audit Commission said:

"To date Auditors have resisted making recommendations about minimum levels because it is rightly the responsibility of local authorities to determine this for themselves based on a risk assessment of their operational and business models".

We agree with the Audit Commission, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, the Society of County Treasurers—which I quoted earlier—the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and the Local Government Association. We disagree with the Minister, and with no disrespect to him, I am afraid that the calculation of the balance of collective wisdom—with Ministers from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on one side and all those professional bodies ranged on the other—has not taken me long to perform. The Government are utterly friendless on this issue, as on so many others.

Early amendments focused on clause 26; this amendment, carried on Third Reading, uses a different approach, imposing an admittedly arbitrary threshold to try to limit the provisions' scope to local authorities that are judged to be vulnerable. In the other place, Lord Bassam quoted all sorts of technical objectives in terms of the criterion selected and the threshold chosen, but the Government understand very well the objection. They had plenty of opportunity to address it, in this place and during the Bill's passage in the Lords, but did not. My colleagues in the other place—and, I believe, Liberal Democrat peers—were prepared to agree to a sensible compromise with the Government. What they are not prepared to accept is a set of clauses that take back, via reserve powers, all the so-called freedoms that Ministers are so keen to emphasise, for use in circumstances that, by the Minister's own admission, he cannot currently foresee. In keeping those reserve powers, he has underlined how little real freedom local government is being given, how little trust this Government place in local authorities—especially their own—and how far out of touch they are with local government opinion and practice. I urge my hon. Friends to resist the Government's attempt to overturn not only the decision of the other place, but the clear view of all the qualified outside bodies who have opined on the matter.

Mr. Edward Davey: The Government are introducing some good measures on capital finance for local government. We urged them on the Conservatives, who were deaf to our calls, and we are pleased that the Government are adopting a prudential capital regime. That is very good, but having made those advances through liberalising measures, which the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) failed to do, the Government have now added a centralising measure. They have thus spoilt what would have been a good story for them to tell.

We argued in Committee, and it has been argued in the other place, that the Government have not convinced anyone that the power is necessary. The reason is that other powers are already on the statute book to ensure that, if a local authority is managing its finances imprudently, the amber and the red light will be turned on and warning given. That applies to the requirements on chief financial officers, district auditors and so forth to report, so we were left bemused about why the extra power was needed. The only answer that the Government have offered is the case of Hackney.

It is worrying when the Government have only one example to justify a new wide power. Although the Minister has offered some assurances—I accept that they are good and I am sure that they will be heard in the other place—local government and other bodies still feel that the powers may be misused. That is the worry. When the Government say that a power has been used only rarely or in one case and then use that case to justify the power, there is a danger that people will not quite trust them. That is the problem.

I would have liked to think that the Minister would learn from the mistakes of the Conservatives. The Conservative Government legislated for local government on the basis of a few rogue councils. They were partisan in pointing to a few loony left councils that they then used as an excuse for imposing huge

[Mr. Edward Davey]

centralised controls on all the good local government of the period. That was the Tory mistake, and I am surprised that the Government, despite the good aspects of the Bill, are making the same mistake in respect of this clause. I hope that the Minister and his noble Friend Lord Rooker will repeat their assurances because it is important to have them on the record. Unfortunately, they are not in the Bill, and the Minister should understand that that is why so many people are concerned.

Tonight, the Liberal Democrats will have to disagree with the Government, who will need to show in proceedings over the next few days that they are listening and taking our points into account. The Minister will not win the argument for new localism and empowering local government if the Bill that is intended to accomplish those objectives also moves in the opposite direction. He must make a stronger case than he has hitherto provided.

Mr. Redwood: I have had recent experience in my own area of Wokingham of the problem that the Minister has highlighted this evening and during the progress of the Bill. The principal unitary council, Wokingham district council, got into budgetary difficulties a couple of years ago. The council started to spend way beyond the levels laid down in its budget and was unable to increase the tax within the year, so that when the budgetary overspend became pronounced and the financial controls did not work, it ran down its reserves to pay for the spending.

When that happened, I did not ask the Minister to intervene because I happen to believe in local democracy. I felt that the answer to the problem lay in regular elections and taking the case to the electorate. The Minister may be surprised but not pleased to learn that the electorate was capable of sorting the problem out in exemplary fashion—by deciding that the Liberal Democrats who were overspending and running down the reserves were not running the council well. The electorate threw the Liberal Democrats out and put in a Conservative administration. Over the months that have passed since that election of May last year, the Conservative administration has brought spending and taxation more into line and rebuilt the reserves to a much more prudent level. It made the issue of the reserves one of the main issues of the election.

To be fair to the Liberal Democrats—not something that I am usually able to do—the Liberal Democrat councillors in Wokingham would probably say that part of the problem was due to the fact that their officers wrongly advised them. I do not believe that that is a satisfactory defence. Ministers have to take the blame for their officials, and councillors have to take the blame for their officers. I dwell on that because it goes directly to the issue raised by the Minister. He believes that there are wonderful finance officers in local government who always get it right and on whom we can entirely rely. In my view, however, councillors, like Ministers, have to make judgments based on the best available advice. The Liberal Democrat testimony from Wokingham should make us pause and consider whether the council's problems were a combination of political misjudgment and advice from finance officers who had lost control of the budget in trying to implement the policies that were pursued. One cannot always expect finance officers to get all the forecasts right. Sometimes, they may not be aware of the spending pressures that build up in some departments, which are not always under their immediate control.

My conclusion from the Wokingham experience is threefold. First, we should not rely entirely on officers of the council; it has to be a collective judgment. Secondly, such matters can be sorted out perfectly well by the electorate and by the free flow of ideas and criticisms between the political parties fighting for control of the council. It is much easier if, as in Wokingham, there are annual elections, so that issues can be dealt with even more quickly. Thirdly, I see no need to appeal to Ministers to become involved, and there is no guarantee that Ministers' judgments on these matters would be any better than those of the chief finance officers or councillors. Indeed, it would take some time for a Minister to read all the documents and get up to speed in making a difficult judgment about future revenue flows and costs and therefore about what constituted a safe level of reserves.

The Minister and the Liberal Democrat spokesman referred to my role as Minister for Local Government. I freely confess that I did not bring before the House the big liberalising measures that I would have liked, but I reassure the Minister that I tried to. He will know that in a collective and busy Government, it is not always possible to win colleagues over to all that one would like. I have always been against capping and in favour of giving local authorities much more control. I would like to see the current Minister live the brand because, after all, Labour made strong criticisms of the Conservative Administration when they were in opposition, and it is deeply disappointing that they have not lived up to all the fine rhetoric.

Local government does not mean anything unless it has reasonable power of the purse. Often local government will choose to spend more than I would like it to spend, but I believe that it is my democratic task, together with other interested groups from my party, to make the case against overspending and to seek to win elections on that basis. If every major decision is to be second-guessed or overridden by Ministers, it is hardly surprising that people do not take much interest in local government or actively participate in local elections. The Minister should trust rather more to regenerate the interest in local elections that we all want.

Finally, I am sure that the large power assumed in the clause overrides and outweighs all the freedoms that the Minister is granting. It is a clever power: in operating on one element of the budget—but an important swing element—it gives the Minister power to intervene whenever he does not like the budget of a local authority, because he can always say that the reserves are going to be taken down to too low a point and effectively force the local authority either to cut expenditure or increase its tax by rather more at a future budget round. It is an undesirable power, so I urge the Minister to think again.

6 pm

Mr. Raynsford: I feel a sense of unreality about this debate, because we have heard three speeches from Opposition Members that have not been about the new

clause that we are debating but about something that they would have preferred as an alternative—the removal of clause 26. We debated clause 26 in detail in Committee. An amendment was moved for the Liberal Democrats by the hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh), who was quoted by the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) in effusive terms. Indeed, his colleague, the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) said at the end of the debate:

"We must all accept that there will be occasions when elected representatives will get it wrong. The problem arises when they get it so badly wrong that the authority cannot deliver its statutory level of services. The higher authority, the Secretary of State, and the district auditor have a role to ensure the continuation of the services . . . I hope that he"—

the hon. Member for Southport—

will not press it to a division." [*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 30 January 2003; c. 249.]

That was the Conservative position in the Commons.

When the debate was held in the other place, clause 26 was debated and an attempt to remove it from the Bill was defeated. That is the outcome for that clause. We have had a wholly different debate this evening about the new clause that has been inserted, which would have several perverse and undesirable consequences. It would create a huge new bureaucracy, requiring the Audit Commission to do a vast amount of speculative work in making guesses about the future budgets and viability of every local authority in the country.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge pretended that the Government were friendless on the issue, but in fact the Audit Commission has made it clear that it shares our concerns about the new clause on grounds of practicality and the added regulatory burden that it would impose on all authorities. In the nicest possible way, I put it to all Opposition Members that they are supporting a new clause that would substantially increase the regulation of local authorities, impose a whole new bureaucratic framework for examining the budgets of local authorities and result in some perverse outcomes, as I identified in my opening speech.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister is keen to quote the Audit Commission selectively. Will he confirm that he understands that the Audit Commission believes it to be the responsibility of local authorities to determine their reserve levels, based on a risk assessment of their operational and business models?

Mr. Raynsford: I happily agree that that is the responsibility of local authorities. Clause 26, which we are not debating tonight, will simply put in place a reserve power that, as I have already made clear, we see as a long stop that we will be reluctant to use, and that we will use only in certain extreme circumstances. The new clause, which we are debating tonight, does not find favour with the Audit Commission, for obvious reasons. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should advocate something that is both bureaucratic and burdensome to local government.

Mr. Redwood: The Minister is addressing an important point and it would assist the House and local government interest in the debate if he could be more specific about the extraordinary circumstances that would trigger an investigation and possible action under clause 26, because I am not sure how he would do it.

Mr. Raynsford: I am not sure that the right hon. Gentleman was listening carefully when I outlined the situation. As I explained, the new clause would oblige the Audit Commission to form a judgment in respect of every local authority about its circumstances and budgets, and the circumstances that might lead it to overspend by 10 per cent. That would have some perverse consequences, because it would be unlikely to catch all those authorities that were genuinely in difficulty, while at the same time, it could tarnish the reputation of well run authorities that happened technically to breach the regulations. That cannot be a sensible framework. It is a bureaucratic and centralising proposition and I am astonished that Opposition Members should support such absurd proposals when they claim also to support our decentralising agenda of giving more freedom to local authorities, which the Bill will achieve.

Mr. Redwood: That is an interesting answer to a question that I did not ask. I asked about what the Government propose in the Bill, which is the subject of the amendment tonight. I still do not understand what work his Department will do to foresee the authorities that might get into difficulty. How bureaucratic will that be? Will there be more forms or requests for information? What would trigger an investigation and what would trigger action?

Mr. Raynsford: As I said earlier, we gave an undertaking to act only in circumstances in which two tests were passed. The first was that the chief finance officer of the local authority had given advice that was ignored by the council and, secondly, that the authority was, as a consequence, moving towards serious financial difficulties. That will not apply on very many occasions and we have no intention of employing any new staff to monitor the situation. We already have good arrangements for helping those authorities classed as "poor" under the comprehensive performance assessment. The engagement arrangements are working well and, in many cases, authorities are showing real signs of improvement. That is the way in which we will continue to work to support and help authorities in difficulties to recover. We will continue with that work, but we see the need for a long stop to guard against the extreme cases that I described earlier.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) argued that the powers in the Bill might be misused. However, the powers in the new clause are certainly capable of being misused and they should be removed from the Bill. I hope that he will agree that the powers requiring the Audit Commission to carry out an extensive survey of the finances of every local authority to guess whether it might overspend by 10 per cent. are wholly undesirable. I hope that he will not support the new clause because it is arbitrary, perverse in effect,

[Mr. Raynsford]

expensive and undesirable. It is also highly centralising, which would go against everything of which he is in favour.

Mr. Edward Davey: We want to give the Minister one more chance to think again on clause 26.

Mr. Hammond: Yes.

Mr. Davey: I am glad to have the hon. Gentleman's assent. We understand some of the imperfections of the amendment, but the Minister has an opportunity to accept the principle that underlies clause 26, which is the main driver behind the amendment. We will support the amendment tonight so that it can go back to the Lords and the Government can think again.

Mr. Raynsford: Clause 26 is not before us, but the new clause is. We debated clause 26 in Committee. Perhaps his party did not advocate it sufficiently forcefully, but I have cited the view of the Conservative spokesman from the Front Bench in Committee, who advised the Liberal Democrats not to press the amendment. I also reminded Members that the other place voted on clause 26 and the Opposition were defeated. We are not debating clause 26, because it has been debated in both Houses. We are now debating a separate new clause that would have the undesirable consequences that I have outlined.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister has said several times that we are not debating clause 26. However, the new clause seeks to limit and define the circumstances in which powers bestowed by that part of the Bill, including clause 26, could be applied. It is wrong for the Minister to say that our debate tonight should not include clause 26.

Mr. Raynsford: I did not say that we should not debate matters that might incorporate provisions that might affect clause 26; I said that we are not debating clause 26. We are debating the new clause, which would have a much wider effect because it applies to the whole of part 2, including the provisions that allow greater flexibility in responding to circumstances after the serving of a notice under section 114. That is widely welcomed by local government but would be perversely hindered by the new clause, because only those authorities that had been fingered by the Audit Commission could benefit from that provision. That is an absurd and perverse outcome. The hon. Gentleman knows that the new clause is nonsense. I am sorry that the Opposition have not yet recognised the absurdity of their position and have not withdrawn the new clause.

In response to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), I agree wholeheartedly that it is always desirable that financial difficulties should be remedied by an electoral rather than an imposed outcome. I simply put it to him that quite a lot of authorities hold elections only once every four years, so it is a bit tough to tell the long-suffering citizens of an area that they have to wait three years to remedy a serious financial crisis that could have a damaging impact on services in their area because there is no provision to act in an emergency to deal with extreme circumstances. I repeat that it is only in such extreme circumstances, where the chief finance officer has given advice that has been disregarded and the authority is seriously heading for the rocks, that we envisage using those powers. I hope that it will never be necessary to do so.

We are committed to giving local authorities more freedom; all the provisions in part 1 give substantial additional spending freedoms, in relation not only to borrowing but also in a number of other aspects. This modest provision in part 2 ensures that that freedom is matched by an accompanying safeguard against extreme circumstances. I hope that it will never be needed, but if it is needed I—and, I suspect, those who follow us in this place—will be pleased that it is there to guard against such circumstances. I hope that Members will agree that the proposed new clause, which is unworkable and undesirable, should be deleted.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 256, Noes 144.

Division No. 311] **[6:11 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blears, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, rh George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger

Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Gillian Merron and
Mr. John Heppell

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew

Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mark Francois and
Mr. John Randall

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

It being more than two and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the programme order, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded to put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of business to be concluded at that hour, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001, 29 October 2002 and this day].*

Lords amendment No. 19 disagreed to.

Lords amendment No. 20 and Government amendments (a) and (b) thereto and consequential Government amendments (c), (d), (e) and (f) agreed to.

Clause 3

DUTY TO DETERMINE AFFORDABLE BORROWING LIMIT

Lords amendment No. 1

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to consider Lords amendments Nos. 4 and 5.

Mr. Raynsford: These Government amendments to clauses 3, 15 and 21 were made on Third Reading in the other place. All three clauses include powers for the Secretary of State to make regulations referring to published codes of practice and requiring authorities to have regard to them. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the Minister. Hon. Members who are not taking part in the debate should leave quickly and quietly, as they are disturbing the order of the House.

Mr. Raynsford: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The provisions are crucial to our aim of basing the new capital finance system on independent codes of practice and accounting standards. The Lords amendments will ensure that any revised editions of such codes are covered by the regulations.

Clause 3 will establish the prudential borrowing system. Authorities will be required to determine their own affordable borrowing limits and in doing so may be required to have regard to codes of practice specified in regulations. We have of course specified the prudential code for capital finance in local authorities, which is being specially prepared by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.

The regulations under clauses 15 and 21 also refer to CIPFA codes. Clause 15 provides a power to specify general guidance and, in this case, we have named CIPFA's Treasury management code. The code is already widely used by authorities and sets out practice in areas such as investment and the management of debt.

Clause 21 deals with the accounting practices to be followed by authorities. It will enable the Secretary of State to specify proper practices, and the regulations identify two other well-established CIPFA codes—the statement of recommended practice and the best value accounting code—which together lay down the basis of local government financial management and accounting.

We always intended that the regulations should refer automatically to new editions of those codes as they were published. It would be undesirable to have to make amended regulations whenever one of the codes was reissued, as that could create uncertainty about the legal status of a new edition of a code. Also, the need for each revised edition to be approved by Government might cast doubt upon our commitment to accounting practice as the basis for the capital finance system. Our approach in that respect has the full support of local government and was endorsed in Committee.

On reviewing the drafting of those three clauses, we considered that the treatment of new editions should be clarified. These technical amendments therefore expand each clause to state that the references to codes are not limited to the existing editions.

Mr. Hammond: I wonder whether I am the only hon. Member who is completely unenlightened by the reference, used in the title of this group in the provisional groupings list, to "ambulatory references" in part 1 regulations. I have no idea why a provision that allows a regulation to refer to future versions, rather than just the existing version, should be thought an ambulatory reference, but, no doubt, some civil servant with a first class honours degree—in classics, probably—was responsible for the title and will enlighten the Minister in due course, and perhaps he will then enlighten me when the opportunity arises.

6.30 pm

The amendments clarify the power to make regulations. The Minister talked about clarifying the scope of the regulations, but the regulation was clear. The draft regulation was already before the Committee when we looked at the matter, and it clearly included the phrase:

"shall have regard to any current prudential code for capital finance".

The Minister is therefore clarifying the power of the Secretary of State to make the regulation that he intends to lay by ensuring that the Bill says clearly that a regulation can embrace future changes to a code. The Minister played down the issue and said that the Government always intended it in that way.

The Minister's noble Friend Lord Bassam said in the other place that the amendment merely clarified the original intention. I must question slightly that interpretation of events. It is my understanding that the Minister of State is the lead policy Minister in this area. We had an exchange in Committee in which the Minister said in answer to a question:

"The code will be issued under regulation, so a revision to the code would require the same procedure."

I queried that response, saying:

"as the CIPFA code was introduced by regulation, it would be appropriate for any amendment to that code to be introduced by regulation. Surely, that is incorrect, because regulation 2 states that a local authority should have regard to any current prudential code for capital finance . . . I understand that to mean that if CIPFA revises its code, in the absence of a regulation de-specifying it, that code will automatically be incorporated."

The Minister, who has lead policy responsibility, replied:

"The hon. Gentleman may well be right. I will look further into the matter and give him a detailed response."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 21 January 2003; c. 63–64.]

That suggests to me that it is not clear that it was always the Government's intention.

I am happy, however, that we now have on the same page the idea that CIPFA will define from day to day the code of practice that is in force and to which regard must be had, although of course we would expect CIPFA to liaise with the Government to ensure that the code met everybody's requirements. Via this rather tortuous ambulatory route, however, we are at last back to where I thought we were in Committee. I am pleased that the Secretary of State's power to make the regulation that he intends to make is now enshrined in the Bill beyond any reasonable doubt, and we have no problem with the amendment.

Matthew Green: This amendment is a straightforward clarification and makes a great deal of sense. I see little point in saying a great deal more about it other than that we support it.

Mr. Redwood: I hope that when the Minister replies he will clarify some of the uncertainties in my mind and in the minds of some of those who work in local government.

I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) agrees that this legislation should allow the House to grant that local authorities must have regard to regulations and guidance that have not yet been formulated, and I understand that the Minister wants to avoid coming back to this House in the event that guidance needs to change. The power that we are granting is therefore quite wide-ranging. Before the House grants the power, would it not be wise to make sure that we know what the Minister thinks "having regard to" means? How strong is it? Is the Minister saying to local government that it should read it, discuss it and put something on file to show that it knows it exists, but that it does not have to follow every dot and comma—that it can exercise its judgment? Alternatively, are the Government saying that under this wide-ranging power they will in future be able to set out prescriptive guidance that effectively gives them detailed control over important parts of local authority activity?

Mr. Hammond: My right hon. Friend probably knows from having looked at the debates on this subject in the other place that Lord Simon of Glaisdale was quoted as opining that the phrase "having regard to" meant precisely nothing.

Mr. Redwood: I did not know that, but it is one possible interpretation. I suspect that with this Government it means rather more than nothing. I think what the Government have in mind is to have more and more influence over local government by means of guidance. We are asked in these amendments to strengthen the Government's hand, and to bind local government in this rather vague way in three different types of guidance, and we are asked by the amendments to say that any future guidance should be covered by this legislation, even though the House does not have the advantage of foresight and does not know exactly what future guidance that might be. It is an all-embracing power, if the Government wish to use it in that way. I heard the Minister in the previous debate make it clear that he would like to be a liberalising Minister, leaving local government freer. That is where I become suspicious.

It would help the debate on these amendments if the Minister were to make it clear that a local council can properly have regard to guidance but ignore it—that it can properly say that it has met and considered it, that it thinks that it is very interesting and fine guidance, but that on this occasion it wishes to deviate from it, ignore it or do something better, because it believes that it is in the interests of its council tax payers and of the public that it serves that it does not follow the guidance on this occasion. If the Minister is saying that "having regard to" is strong, and that all the actual and future guidance must be followed almost to the letter, it is a prescriptive measure, and I would not share my hon. Friend's ease and comfort in welcoming it.

Mr. Raynsford: We have had a short and interesting debate. I am pleased to tell the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) that the word "ambulatory" was inserted at the instigation of parliamentary counsel, who clearly understand the significance of these forms of Latin, which, I suspect, elude most Members. As the hon. Gentleman rightly pointed out, the need for further regulations was debated in Committee, and it is true that as a result of reflecting on the exchanges that we had in Committee, we felt that there was a case to clarify and to take beyond all reasonable doubt the fact that future editions of codes would be covered without the need for new regulations, which I feared might be necessary. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for highlighting the point in Committee, and I am pleased that he agrees with the approach that we have now adopted.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) raised the interesting question of the meaning of "have regard to". He will know as a former Secretary of State that a great deal of government is based on the concept of having regard to. He will know that the nuance of that phrase lies between the absolute

[Mr. Raynsford]

requirement of a direction, which requires someone to do something, and the entire discretion to do whatever they wish. Clearly, it would not be appropriate for an authority to act without considering the message contained within the relevant guidance. It is generally understood good practice that when an authority that is subject to a duty to have regard to something chooses not to follow any specific advice, it must have good reasons for doing so. That is normally understood. It does not, however, require the authority in all circumstances to follow the guidance precisely to the letter if it has good reason for departing from it.

That is my understanding of the general framework, and I notice that the right hon. Member for Wokingham is nodding and probably has a similar understanding of the force of that particular phrase. It is certainly our wish that this guidance should be considered carefully by local authorities, not as a straitjacket but as helpful advice to ensure good administration. On that understanding, I hope that the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge and his right hon. and hon. Friends can agree to the amendments. I am grateful for the support of the Liberal Democrats.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 8

CONTROL OF CREDIT ARRANGEMENTS

Lords amendment No. 2

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendment relates to clause 8, which deals with credit arrangements such as leasing and hire purchase contracts. The clause ensures that such transactions can be brought under the prudential limit and any national limit. The amendment removes the power in clause 8(4) to impose additional restrictions on credit arrangements. The only restriction that we had in mind was to stop the use of credit for anything other than acquiring capital assets. We now accept that accounting practice offers sufficient safeguards against such practices. Accordingly, clause 8(4) is unnecessary.

Mr. Hammond: Clause 8(4) gives a broad power to the Secretary of State to vary by regulations the restrictions on local authorities in relation to credit arrangements. Regulation 7 is the one that the Government have in mind for this case and it was laid in draft before the Commons Committee that considered the Bill. It is clear that the basic purpose is to exempt private finance initiative projects from the ban on credit arrangements that would otherwise prevent local authorities from using arrangements that are a hybrid of revenue and capital provision to circumvent the prudential code restrictions on borrowing or other credit arrangements.

In Committee, we moved an amendment calling for the deletion of clause 8(4) but the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the hon. Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie), made an appearance at the Dispatch Box and vigorously resisted the deletion of the subsection. A pattern will emerge in our debates. It will become apparent to the Minister which of clauses that were vigorously defended were later abandoned. The Under-Secretary replied to the debates on them.

We argued that it was wrong to put a general catch-all subsection in a clause that specifies precise limitations. We lost the vote. We moved the same amendment in Committee in the other place and, once again, the Government rejected our proposal to delete clause 8(4). However, in time-honoured fashion, the Government moved the exact same amendment on Report. They usually try to rework Opposition amendments by changing a few words so that they can claim that they have at least contributed something. However, this amendment was rather concise and precise and it was not possible for the Government to create that smokescreen.

This case should provide us with some confidence in the system. We raise the issue once and one Minister tells us that we are talking rubbish and that it is essential for the future of democracy and civilised government as we know it that the provision remains in the Bill. We raise it a second time and a different Minister in another place says precisely the same thing. Then the Government realise that we were right all along. That tends to suggest that the system works even if the Ministers operating it are thick-skinned.

The amendments served to focus the Government clearly on the issues, and they have decided that not only the subsection but draft regulation 7 are unnecessary. We strongly support the view that local authority finances should follow generally accepted accounting practice and that it is unhelpful for the Secretary of State to have the power to impose, by regulation, additional restrictions over and above those that generally accepted accounting practice would dictate.

The Minister in the other place said that regulation 7 was unnecessary because of generally accepted accounting practice as it would ensure that credit transactions of the type of which the Government are so afeared would not be used for revenue items. That is fine; we have no problem with that. We have got what we wanted, but perhaps I have missed something. I am left asking the Minister, "What about PFI projects?"

6.45 pm

I understand that the original purpose of regulation 7 was to allow PFI projects to fall within the permitted category for credit arrangements. It was never clear to me quite what that would mean. It seemed to me at the time that the correct accounting procedure for a PFI project would be to distinguish the capital element of a PFI charge from the finance cost element and any service provision elements and that, in the absence of the regulation, there would be no difficulty in dealing with PFI projects. In a practice that is well understood to accountants and those who prepare business accounts all the time, the different components of a single charge would be analysed to their separate heads and dealt with accordingly.

As I read it, the Government's proposed regulation 7 would have exempted PFI projects from the restriction on credit arrangements. My understanding was that they were effectively to be given an advantage over other forms of arrangement and were to be allowed to go through without being treated as an entry against a

borrowing limit in the full amount of the total cost of the PFI charges under the project. What is the position now that that draft regulation has been dropped?

Clause 8(2)(a) still provides that the cost of the arrangement – I take it that this would now include a PFI arrangement – is to be set against borrowing limits. It does not say anything about the capital element of the cost or the capital and finance charge element. It refers to

"the cost of the arrangement".

In a PFI transaction, my understanding is that that would be the total stream of payments to be made under the PFI arrangement. That is the wrong way to go about things from the standard accounting practice point of view if the stream of payments represents the provision of a capital asset, the financing charges for that capital asset and the provision of some revenue services that are being provided, such as building maintenance in a classic property PFI that would normally be a revenue charge for the account of the occupier.

Adopting the generally accepted accounting practice approach should mean that the cost of the arrangements should be apportioned between capital financing and revenue costs. However, my understanding is that, without the benefit of regulation 7, we are back to the position in which the whole PFI charge would be charged against the borrowing limit of the authority. That seems perverse. Does the Minister understand that to be the case? What does he understand regulation 7 would have done in such PFI arrangements?

The Minister who moved the amendment in the other place said that the Government had satisfied themselves that the regulation, and thus the power to make it, were not necessary because of generally accepted accounting practice and that the matter would be taken care of. He did not deal with the question whether clause 8(2)(a) will effectively intervene to disapply such accounting practice. The Government might be intending to use their powers under clause 8(3) to make further regulations that we have not yet seen to resolve the matter. They clearly could make powers under clause 8(3) to determine what would and would not count as the cost of a credit arrangement so that only part of PFI charge fell into the calculation of the cost of the credit arrangement. It would help the House to hear an explanation.

To summarise, the question is whether PFI projects are now to be treated as all other credit arrangements, whether that means that all costs will be applied against the borrowing limits and whether regulation 7 was designed to prevent the outcome that all PFI charges would be regarded as charges against borrowing limits. If the Minister is now relying on accounting practice to prevent avoidance, which would generally seem to be the correct approach, why will regulation 3 remain in the draft regulations—and as far as I am aware he has no intention of dropping it? It says:

"A lease which, apart from this regulation, would not be a credit arrangement shall be treated as falling within section 7(2)(a)".

In Committee, I drew attention to the similarities of leases and PFI arrangements and asked why the Government were exempting PFI but not leases. They are changing the arrangements for PFI by deleting the power to make regulation 7, so I ask again why leases should be treated differently and why the Minister cannot rely on generally accepted accounting practices to prevent any abuse of a lease mechanism to provide a covert route for financing revenue expenditure.

Of course I support the amendment because I moved it in Committee. However, I am puzzled about the Government's rationale for agreeing to it now and abandoning regulation 7 without addressing the issues dealt with by regulation 3. Given the effect of clause 8(2)(a), it is not clear that regulation 7 has become redundant for the purposes of avoiding an unfair treatment of costs under PFI schemes, unless the Minister's explanation is that he intends to make regulations under clause 8(3) to clarify the treatment of PFI charges.

Matthew Green: We have discovered a new Tory tactic: they say, "If you score a victory, milk it." However, to take things a bit more seriously, we welcome the removal of clause 8(4). It would have given the Secretary of State apparently wide-ranging powers, although I know the Minister said that they were unlikely to be used in such a way. We welcome the amendment because there are too many occasions on which the Secretary of State accrues powers and too few occasions when such powers are removed, so this is a rare and welcome occasion.

Mr. Raynsford: I am delighted that there is broad support for the amendment, which simply reflects our growing appreciation of worries that were voiced during the passage of the Bill in both Houses about clause 8(4) and the scope for achieving by other means the policy objectives for which we had framed the provision. Our overall objective has been to maintain the prohibition on using credit for anything other than the acquisition of capital assets. Long-term credit such as borrowing should be used only to meet capital needs and not to pay for running costs. Such a restriction has existed since 1990 and currently exists in primary legislation, but it has given rise to technical difficulties. We therefore concluded that a rule could be dealt with more flexibly in regulations, so we drafted clause 8(4) to give us the power to make such regulations. However, the debates in this House and the Grand Committee in the other place convinced us that there were genuine concerns about the measure because it was drafted in broad terms and could conceivably have been used in ways that were different from what we intended.

Of course, we have tried to base the capital regime in the Bill on accounting principles as much as possible. We therefore checked whether modern accounting practice might offer a sufficient safeguard against the use of credit for revenue purposes. After careful consideration, we concluded that there was such an accounting safeguard. An authority that received a form of service and had the fees deferred for several years would be required to make a charge to revenue during those years, so there would be no perverse incentive to acquire services on credit. That means that regulation 7 may be deleted from the draft capital finance regulations, and as the power to make such a regulation is no longer needed, clause 8(4) may be removed.

I shall now address the other issues raised by the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond). I make it clear that private finance initiative projects will follow accounting practice. If the deals are

[Mr. Raynsford]

off balance sheet, they will not score as credit, and, conversely, if they are on balance sheet, they will score as credit—that is the key distinction.

The issue was debated in detail for some time in the other place at the instigation of Lord Hanningfield. Our understanding is that accounting practice is highly relevant to PFI and that we can achieve everything necessary by using regulation 5 in the draft capital finance regulations, which deals with PFI contracts, by implication, and other forms of long-term credit. Its effect is that for the purpose of the new capital finance system, such transactions should be treated in accordance with proper accounting practice. If a contract has to be recognised on a local authority's balance sheet, it must be treated exactly like borrowing and count against the borrowing limits that apply to the authority. If it does not fall to be recognised on the balance sheet, it will not score as a credit agreement and, therefore, will not count against an authority's borrowing limits.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister has partly addressed my worry, but I was concerned that there seemed to be an all-or-nothing approach: a PFI charge must count either wholly against a borrowing limit or not at all. I am not an accountant—I usually stand up to say that I am not a lawyer—but it is likely that in a complex PFI deal, part of the charge would fall to be treated as a balance sheet item to finance a capital asset and part would fall to be treated as a revenue item. Does the Minister acknowledge that that could be proper practice?

Mr. Raynsford: I am in the same position as the hon. Gentleman because I am not an accountant. I have to ask for advice on such matters and I am told that PFI revenue costs are treated as part of the total package, which is what accounting practice requires. Revenue and capital costs cannot be split up in a proper PFI deal.

Mr. Hammond: Is the Minister concerned that that will create a perverse incentive not to do PFI deals and that such deals will become less attractive to local authorities, which would go against the grain of what the Chancellor has tried to encourage? Was the purpose of regulation 7, which will not be made, to exempt PFI transactions from counting against borrowing limits altogether because that appeared to be the case?

Mr. Raynsford: No. As I have already explained, the purpose of regulation 7 was to provide a safeguard against the possible perverse treatment of expenditure for revenue purposes under the capital framework, which would not be appropriate. There are separate rulings on PFI and I have spelled out my understanding of the treatment of PFI projects. I do not believe that there will be a perverse incentive not to undertake PFI projects, although if a local authority undertakes a PFI project that falls on balance sheet, it will have to take account of the obvious consequences for its finances, which is right and proper.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge also asked about regulation 3, which relates to leases. We conclude that the regulation will not be needed, so it will be deleted. Accountancy practice supplies all that is required to provide necessary safeguards. With those assurances, I hope that the House will support the amendment.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 4 and 5 agreed to.

Clause 31

POWER TO PAY GRANT

Lords amendment No. 7.

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider Lords amendments Nos. 8 to 12.

Mr. Raynsford: Lords amendment No. 11 will remove clause 32, which would enable a Minister or the National Assembly for Wales to seek any information necessary when considering the award of a grant to an authority under clause 31. It will also allow Ministers to require retrospective information on the way in which a grant has been used. Clause 32 provides that a local authority must supply such information. In the light of concerns expressed in Committee and in another place about the wide scope of that power, we agreed to look at it again.

7 pm

By contrast, clause 31(3) allows conditions to be attached to the payment of grant. Such a condition could be that the receiving authority must supply certain information, if ever necessary. That power is much more limited in scope, as it is linked to the actual payment of the grant. It is also entirely in keeping with our policy of removing unnecessary restrictions and burdens on local authorities. The provision makes a separate clause unnecessary. To enable the National Assembly for Wales to use the grant-making power, it makes sense to remove clause 34 and to include its provisions in clause 31.

Mr. Hammond: The deletion of clause 32 is welcome. It was an unnecessary additional power for the Secretary of State to require information to be delivered by local authorities. As Lord Rooker said in the other place, and the Minister repeated, there are other ways of securing information, if it is really required, after a grant is paid rather than at the time when the Secretary of State is merely contemplating payment under the powers in clause 31(4). We have no problem with that.

Perhaps I am having a bad day, but I have a little more difficulty in understanding the logic of the Welsh provisions. Lord Rooker told the House of Lords that because of the deletion of clause 32 there was no longer any need for clause 34, which, in respect of Welsh local authorities, extended the definition of "Minister" to include the Welsh Assembly. If the essentially technical changes that remove clause 34, and insert the relevant amendments in clause 31, are intended to tidy up the Bill so that there is not a separate reference to Wales in

clause 34, I have no objection to them—but that is not what Lord Rooker and the Minister say. They say that it is a change consequential upon the deletion of clause 32—in other words, that clause 34 is no longer needed owing to the deletion of clause 32. I am afraid that I have not been able to work out how the one follows logically from the other. Will the Minister explain how the wholly laudable decision to drop clause 32 makes clause 34 redundant in such a way as to make the other amendments consequential on the deletion of clause 32 instead of mere redrafting and tidying amendments? As I cannot see the chain of causality, I am worried that I may be missing something important. If so, no doubt the Minister will enlighten me.

Matthew Green: We welcome the removal of clause 32, which was triggered by amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey). The clauses provided for powers on the requiring of information that, with the benefit of time over the summer, the Minister rightly decided were not needed. The Welsh provisions are merely a tidying exercise; as such, we are happy with them.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green) is right that this is purely and simply a tidying measure in respect of Wales.

I can understand why the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge is confused about the interrelationship of references to a Minister of the Crown and to the National Assembly for Wales in the four clauses, so I shall try to clarify the consequences of the amendments. Originally, clause 31 gave powers for Ministers to pay grants to a local authority, clause 32 gave additional powers for Ministers to require information in that respect, and clause 34 extended references to a Minister to include the National Assembly for Wales. The new provisions of clause 31 make it clear that Ministers can make grants to local authorities in England and that Ministers or the National Assembly for Wales may pay grant to local authorities in Wales. There is therefore no need for the separate provisions of clause 34, which essentially imply that a reference to a Minister should be taken to cover the National Assembly for Wales. I hope that that clarifies the provision and puts the hon. Gentleman's mind at rest.

Mr. Hammond *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I fear that it does not.

Mr. Hammond: If the Minister is acknowledging that the demise of clause 34 is in no way consequent upon the demise of clause 32, I will be happy. However, Lord Rooker clearly stated that clause 34 was no longer necessary as a result of the deletion of clause 32. It seems to me that clause 34 and the changes to clause 31 are self-contained, but clause 32 is a different matter.

Mr. Raynsford: I thought I had explained that the two were interdependent. We decided that clause 32 could be removed from the Bill only when we were satisfied that the powers under clause 31, specifically subsection (4), would enable Ministers or the National Assembly for Wales to obtain the information necessary to satisfy them when making a grant. Clause 34 extended to the Welsh Assembly the powers that were otherwise granted only to the Minister. That is the nature of the interrelationship.

I accept that it is a complex matter, and I understand the hon. Gentleman's difficulties, but I hope that he agrees that the outcome is better. The change reduces by two the number of clauses, reduces an unnecessary burden on local authorities and streamlines the procedure for ensuring that grants can be paid in a suitable framework with the ability of the grant-giving body—a Minister or the National Assembly for Wales—to obtain the information that it needs to satisfy himself or itself that the grant will be spent for the purposes for which it is made. I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees and that the amendments can be accepted.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 8 to 12 agreed to.

Clause 49

BID REVENUE ACCOUNT

Lords amendment No. 13

Phil Hope: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider amendments Nos. 14 to 17, 22 to 25, 29, 30, 33 to 35, 45, 46, 50 and 55.

Phil Hope: This large group of amendments is significant because it implements recommendations made in the 16th report of the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee. As such, I am sure that the whole House will welcome it. We accepted the Committee's recommendations on business improvement districts; provision of information in respect of non-domestic rates; adaptation of enactments with regard to housing revenue accounts; charging and trading; and clause 122, which makes standard provision for orders and regulations in the Bill.

Mr. Hammond: Ministers have developed a new technique—rapid fire.

This large group of amendments reflects the observations of the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee, an admirable body that has helped to ensure that legislation avoids some of the pitfalls that it can often encounter as a result of the inadequacy of the time that we have to scrutinise Bills in detail in Committee. I hope that the Government are learning how to filter out some of the unnecessary and inappropriate provisions at an earlier stage so that they do not have to wait until the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee, rather publicly, recommends that they do so. If we see a reduction in these catch-all clauses in future and more requirements for affirmative resolutions where it is appropriate in the original drafts of Bills, that will be a good thing.

Lords amendment No. 13 removes the odious provision in clause 49 that allows regulations under subsection (4)—I am about to fall into the trap of which

[Mr. Hammond]

I cautioned the Minister of using the wrong clause references because we are working with two different editions of the Bill. There is the Bill as it went from this place and the Bill as amended on Report in the House of Lords. The issue is the power that is being given by regulations to amend any enactment. There are always questions both in this place and in the other place about the use of secondary legislation to amend primary legislation. That has to be the position so long as our arrangements for scrutinising secondary legislation are such as they are. In this instance, however, we are discussing the breadth of the power. It is a power to amend any enactment past or future. In other words, no matter what a future Parliament were to legislate, the powers under this Act would enable a Secretary of State by statutory instrument to amend legislation in the interests of his regime under this regulation. It is absolutely right to remove that power.

I must check my clause numbers and not go wrong again. If it is right to remove the provision at clause 49, why is it not also right to remove the provision at clause 58(2), where a similar provision to make regulations amending any enactment is included? Baroness Hanham moved an amendment in another place. We know that proceedings in the other place are slightly different from those in this place. Rather curiously, Lord Rooker, the Minister of State, signed my noble Friend's amendment. Later, they had a slight disagreement over whose amendment it was. Lord Bassam of Brighton seemed to take the slightly imperial view that notwithstanding the fact that my noble Friend had tabled the amendment, the mere fact that his noble Friend had signed it made it the Government's amendment.

After Lady Hanham had thanked the Government for accepting her amendment, Lord Bassam said, rather churlishly:

"We could haggle over whose it is, but I will not do so. We are grateful for the noble Baroness's support for our amendment."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 11 June 2003; Vol. 649, GC 142.]

We could go on endlessly. The fact is that in the Bill the Government attempt to give themselves sweeping powers. The Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee cries foul and my noble Friend proposes an amendment to implement that illustrious Committee's recommendations. A Minister then signs the amendment and tries to claim the credit for amending the Bill. Perhaps the best solution would be if, next time, the Government try to anticipate the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee and get the Bill right the first time round. Let them be a little more circumspect in the granting of sweeping powers to themselves.

7.15 pm

I move on to Lords amendments 14 to 16, and 29 and 30, which are consequential. We welcome the inclusion of a requirement for affirmative resolutions to confirm regulations made under these sections. This is a great step in the right direction. As the Minister knows, all Ministers who have to deal with the Opposition in Committee know that we greatly prefer affirmative procedures to negative procedures. All that we need to do now is to implement an effective process for scrutiny of secondary legislation. At present, all a Minister has to do in a Standing Committee—I am not suggesting that the present Minister would do so—is to keep his head down and blather for 90 minutes, and then write a letter afterwards correcting what he said. I emphasise that I am not referring to the Minister of State. However, I could name Ministers who adopt that approach.

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): It is interesting to hear my hon. Friend. He is doing what perhaps the Minister should have done, which is to explain fully what is happening in this instance. Does not this example demonstrate the utility of the House of Lords not only in itself but in improving democracy in this place?

Mr. Hammond: As my hon. Friend rightly observes, we have come to a sorry state of affairs when our democracy and our democratic scrutiny in this Chamber is so severely curtailed by the extensive use of timetable motions—

Phil Hope: Oh, come on.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister says, "Oh, come on." We have seen a classic example of that process this evening. It seems unlikely that the debate will reach the moment of interruption, yet we have been deprived of an opportunity to talk about quite an important set of amendments in respect of which there has been a meeting of minds. The Government have come some way to meeting the Opposition's proposals in the other place. There has been an informative and constructive suggestion, and we could have asked the Minister to explain further the Government's position. That debate will take place tomorrow in the other place because we have not been able to clarify exactly what the compromise means in this place.

I think that all right hon. and hon. Members would recognise that this type of minor tidying and correction of a Bill—improving future scrutiny of secondary legislation—is increasingly being left to the House of Lords and the Select Committee on Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform. I suspect that it is only a matter of time before the Government seek to impose the same kind of inflexibility on the House of Lords to curtail debate there, as they have already curtailed debate in this place.

I am not sure that merely moving from a negative procedure to an affirmative procedure in relation to clause 58 answers or meets my objection to clause 58(2). Clearly, the affirmative procedure rather than the negative is always to be preferred.

Amendment No. 17 removes the references in clauses 54 to 56 to the affirmative provision for Wales. It is clear that Wales cannot be subject to the regime because of devolution. Welsh matters that come properly within the jurisdiction of the Welsh Assembly cannot be subject to an affirmative resolution in this place. The effect of the resolution, however, is to deny to Welsh business ratepayers the additional protection that the affirmative procedure provides in respect of any modifications that are proposed by the Secretary of State in England to their English counterparts. It may be that the Minister can clarify the procedure in Wales.

Welsh Assembly regulations are not even subject to the negative procedure. It appears, therefore, that there would be a serious lack of scrutiny in respect of Wales. I do not claim to be an expert on the procedures of the Welsh Assembly. Perhaps it has procedures in place that give effective scrutiny of regulatory proposals by the Executive; if so, there is no mention of them in the Bill. I would be interested to know what the procedures are.

Mr. Raynsford: It is a devolved matter.

Mr. Hammond: That should not stop hon. Members, when dealing with matters that will be devolved, expressing an interest in the existing arrangements in the Welsh Assembly. We could thus perhaps draw conclusions about the scrutiny available for corresponding English measures through our rather weak secondary legislation procedure.

Amendment No. 22 places a minor limitation on the Secretary of State's sweeping power to amend part VI of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. I do not want to sound churlish because any limitation is welcome even if it is a minor reduction in a wide power. None the less, the Secretary of State retains a substantial power.

Amendments Nos. 23 to 25 are tidying provisions, although I should have preferred the Government to use amendment No. 24 to clarify matters by ruling out instead of confirming the ability to amend future legislation across the board consistently. As I understand it, the other amendments in the group are minor and consequential.

The group is wide ranging. I should be grateful if the Minister dealt with the specific issues that I raised. If he wants to display some generosity of spirit and confirm, as Lord Bassam refused to do, that my noble Friend Baroness Hanham should receive the credit for amendment No. 13, I should welcome that.

Mr. Edward Davey: I congratulate the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) on speaking for 12 minutes on the group. I was at a loss to find much to say because the Government have moved in the right direction. Before the Minister gets too happy, I should say that I emphasised on Second Reading that the Government were taking many more regulatory powers while telling people that the measure would remove the burden from local government. The amendments would not remove the powers but ensure that they were subject to affirmative procedure, as the hon. Gentleman said. That shift is welcome and reflects the opinion of all parties in the other place and some comments made in Committee. Frankly, that is all that needs to be said.

Phil Hope: The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) is right to describe the group as large, wide ranging and detailed. However, it is not necessary to divide the House on the amendments. He is right that making law is a learning process; we are a listening and learning Government, as today's proceedings demonstrate. I regret that the hon. Gentleman defended the role of the reformed House of Lords—a measure that the Conservative party vigorously opposed when it was discussed in the previous Parliament. However, I shall linger on neither that point nor the debate between different Lords about whose amendment it is. I do not want to enter such territory.

Let me deal with the hon. Gentleman's substantive points. We shall not remove clause 58(2) because the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee's 16th report did not recommend its deletion. It therefore remains.

The decisions of the Welsh Assembly are a matter for that body. That is the nature of devolution. Earlier, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) bemoaned the Government's retention of reserved powers, yet now the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge appears to want us to retain more. However, I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support and that of Liberal Democrat Members.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 14 to 17 agreed to.

After Clause 65

Lords amendment No. 18

Phil Hope: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

The Government have always supported the important role that sports clubs play in promoting health and well-being and encouraging social cohesion. We believe that sports clubs would have benefited from the small business rate relief. With the additional assistance of local authority discretionary relief, it would have provided a generous package for sports clubs.

We have also promoted the opportunity that has existed for sports clubs to register as charities to obtain mandatory 80 per cent. relief. However, we accept the widely held belief that that route can be onerous for small, voluntary sports clubs. The amendment offers a simple route for registered community amateur sports clubs to qualify for the mandatory 80 per cent. relief.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I wholeheartedly welcome the Government's acceptance of the argument, which hon. Members of all parties, including my noble Friend, Lord Phillips of Sudbury, presented. However, does the Under-Secretary accept that amateur sports club officials became frustrated by the charity route, found that they were increasingly hitting a wall of bureaucracy and that now it is important that the message gets through to them that there is an easier route that will greatly benefit the relevant clubs?

Phil Hope: I thank the hon. Gentleman for those comments. The onerous nature of the transition to charitable status was one of the reasons for the amendment and the change.

Mr. Edward Davey: Following my hon. Friend's point, what steps will the Government take to ensure that sports clubs know that they are eligible for the relief? Will the Under-Secretary write to every sports

[Mr. Edward Davey]

club on the register and use various bodies and foundations to promote it? How can we ensure maximum benefit from the new relief?

Phil Hope: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Since the amendment became public, the widespread response from sporting associations suggests comprehensive take-up. However, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport will handle most of the marketing of the new relief.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): As my hon. Friend knows, people were slow to take up the tax exemptions under the Finance Act 2002. He will be pleased to know that Sport England, among other agencies, has been undertaking regional roadshows to ensure that sports clubs are aware of them. Since then, the take-up of additional benefits through the tax exemptions has increased. I hope that he will use his influence to ensure that the same happens with the relief that we are considering. However, as my hon. Friend said, sports clubs know that the relief is coming and have been waiting for it for years.

Phil Hope: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point about Sport England's work to promote a range of reliefs that we are establishing to help local sports clubs. I want to put on record my thanks to Members of Parliament such as my hon. Friend for not only their work in raising the issue and pressing hard during the Bill's passage but their work with their community amateur sports clubs. That applies especially to my hon. Friend, who does such work not only in his constituency but throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): Conservative Members obviously welcome the rate relief, which we have requested for many years. Does not the Under-Secretary believe that perhaps its advantages will be nullified by the decision of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport not to give any relief to sports clubs for the licensing fees that the Licensing Act 2003 will introduce, despite the assurance that the then Minister gave me in Committee that he would take a positive view of the amendments that we tabled?

7.30 pm

Phil Hope: Having stood beside the hon. Gentleman on a tennis court—regrettably not very successfully—in another kind of amateur sports club, I am very pleased to hear his enthusiasm for this measure today. It is a matter of regret, of course, that the previous Conservative Administration did not see fit to offer these rate reliefs to community amateur sports clubs.

In terms of the holistic picture of community amateur sports clubs having greater flexibility and more resources, and being able to grow as a result of this measure, I am confident that the complete package—which will include this rate relief and others—will provide a huge incentive for local clubs to develop, to recruit and to provide better sporting facilities for people of all ages in the community. I am not persuaded by the case briefly put by the hon. Gentleman today that other measures might hinder that. There is an across-the-board position in government to promote community amateur sports clubs effectively because of the wider benefits that they bring, not just in terms of sport and of raising performance and participation, but in terms of what that means for the community and for the health of the individuals who get involved.

Amendment No. 18 would amend the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and provide mandatory rate relief at both the occupied and unoccupied rates for registered community amateur sports clubs, under schedule 18 to the Finance Act 2002. Registered community amateur sports clubs can also have this relief increased at the discretion of local authorities. Sports clubs that do not meet the requirements for community amateur sports club registration—and, therefore, for mandatory rate relief—will still remain eligible for discretionary rate relief. Of course, the decisions on the award of discretionary rate relief are, and will remain, a matter for individual local authorities.

I hope that this provision demonstrates to hon. Members that we have listened carefully to the representations of the many people, both inside and outside the House, who support this important measure. I am very pleased to announce that we are introducing this relief. It represents a great opportunity for small community sports clubs, which I know that my colleagues in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport have strongly welcomed. It has also been widely welcomed by the sports bodies and, in particular, by the Central Council of Physical Recreation, which has, along with many other bodies, sought support for this measure for some time.

Mr. Hammond: I, too, am delighted to welcome the extension of the rating relief enjoyed by charities to community amateur sports clubs, so that those that are unable or unwilling to adopt charitable status because of the burdens mentioned by the Minister can benefit none the less. The issue of rate relief was most recently raised in relation to the Finance Act 2002, when other taxation reliefs were extended to the newly defined community amateur sports clubs. There was all-party consensus on the matter at that time.

The matter was also raised at the Committee stage of this Bill in the Commons by the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow), a Labour Back Bencher. His initiative at that time received support from the official Opposition and from the Liberal Front-Bench team. When the same issue was raised in the other place by Lord Phillips of Sudbury, it was again supported by all sides, and Lord Phillips aptly described the measure as an amendment "with no enemies"—*[Interruption.]* The Minister mentions the Treasury, and I shall come to that issue in a moment.

When the hon. Member for South Ribble raised the issue in Committee, it will surprise no one who has attended the earlier parts of these debates that it was the Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs, the hon. Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) who had to stand up robustly to resist the suggestion that the Government might extend business rate relief to community amateur sports clubs. He basically told the Committee that the reliefs provided in the Finance Act 2002 would do the trick for sports clubs, if only they were given a chance. He must be feeling a little sheepish now about having so

slavishly read out what was obviously a pretty dud brief. Lord Rooker was a little quicker to ad lib his total support for the measure when he sensed the mood in the other place, before reverting to reading out his brief explaining why he could not accept it. He then had the pleasure of collecting the plaudits for introducing it on Third Reading in the Lords. It might be thought that a matter effectively dealing with taxation such as this would have been better introduced and dealt with in the House of Commons. We are all glad that it has got here in the end, but it would have been preferable had it been inserted into the Bill initially in this place.

I do not doubt for a moment that, behind the smooth consensus, there have been detailed discussions with the Treasury, and I have two questions for the Minister on this issue. In the House of Lords, the question of who would actually pay for the relief was raised almost as an aside. Those who regularly go into the other place to be entertained when Lord Rooker is speaking will know that he is not the most slavish adherent to the conventions of parliamentary procedure and language, and his reply to that question was, "Who cares?" Once he had recovered his composure slightly, however, he said that it would be the Treasury. That issue was not probed further in the other place, but I would be keen to learn from the Minister the mechanism by which the Treasury will pay, because there remains a lurking concern that, while the Treasury claims credit for providing the largesse, it will be other business rate payers – albeit spread very thinly across the board – who will pick up the tab. Perhaps the Minister could explain the mechanism by which a specific grant from the Treasury will fill the gap.

Secondly, will the Minister confirm that we are now left with a somewhat anomalous position in Northern Ireland? Ironically, sports clubs there have enjoyed mandatory relief at 80 per cent. for some time. They will continue to do so, but there is no provision in this measure to give local authorities there the discretion, which will exist in England, to extend 100 per cent. discretionary relief to sports clubs. Do the Government have any plans to address that anomaly? This issue was raised during the Lords debate last week, and I would be interested to know what the Government intend to do about it.

I do not want to dwell on technicalities. This is a tremendous victory for the will of Parliament over the instinctive parsimony of the Treasury, and congratulations are due to Members on both sides of this House and the other place who have fought for this new clause, and to the Ministers, who have no doubt had to fight long and hard behind the scenes against the Treasury to achieve such an excellent result. I know that amateur sports clubs throughout the country – I think it is safe to say in every single constituency represented in the House – will be extremely grateful for the effort that everyone involved has made.

Mr. Reed: I rise to welcome the measure as one who introduced a ten-minute Bill three or four years ago to define community amateur sports clubs. Its purpose was to allow the tax reliefs to be brought in, and I always envisaged that, when we talked about tax relief, it would include not only the package in the Finance Act 2002 but rate relief as well. When the Minister informed me a couple of weeks ago that this measure was to be introduced, I thought that there would be a big hole in my life. Community amateur sports clubs seem to have been a part of everything that I have done in this place over the past three or four years, so I am not quite sure what I shall do with my winter evenings now that I no longer need to discuss the benefits of tax relief for those clubs. However, it is a hole that I am very happy to accept into my life.

When we were talking about tax relief for community amateur sports clubs as part of the Finance Act, those of us who were lobbying behind the scenes were not expecting a package to come forward. Even the evening before the Budget, we had no indication whatever. I wish that the Treasury and the Department would ensure that we did not have such cliffhangers. In this instance, the will of Parliament was well known in plenty of time. People had been discussing this measure for a long time, and it had cross-party support.

I do not want to be churlish, but I noted that Opposition Members made the point that this proposal has been around a long time. It was not introduced by the Conservative Government, and it is a shame that it has taken so long to get this far. However, I do not want to sound like a Liberal Democrat whinger – they always want a bit more and argue that something should have been done sooner. To be fair to those in the Chamber and outside, there has been genuine cross-party support for this measure. We always joke about such things, but it is worth noting that, although the cost to the Treasury could be small, the benefit to community amateur sports clubs, especially those that are currently struggling, could be enormous. According to research carried out by the Central Council of Physical Recreation and Sport England, it could be the difference between clubs going under or staying afloat.

I declare a sort of interest. I played for my rugby club, Birstall, on Saturday, and within the first five minutes of the first part of the season I managed to dislocate my little finger. We do not have our own premises, so we will not necessarily benefit from this measure, but the clubs that we play against across the county will benefit from the tax reliefs. I know that currently they struggle from week to week with a reduced numbers of players in individual clubs. I hope that this measure will allow them to invest and turn around the steady decline in participation rates at community amateur sports club level, which is what it is all about.

Money has gone into the elite sports. In Loughborough, almost £35 million has gone into the English Institute of Sport. The elite athletes have fantastic facilities, but insufficient numbers of people have participated at community amateur sports club level. In the recent world athletics championships, Sweden did particularly well. The participation rate of the Swedes is more than 60 per cent., whereas in this country it is between 30 and 40 per cent., and there is a strong decline in that figure as the age profile increases, especially among women. This measure is to be welcomed.

I want to thank the individuals who have played an important part in introducing this measure. It is a fitting retirement present for Nigel Hook of the CCPR, who has been battling to achieve this for about 20 years. As hon. Members know, he retired in September, so perhaps this was a thank you present for all his hard

[Mr. Reed]

work in supporting Members and community amateur sports clubs up and down the country. If it is, it is a fitting tribute to his hard work.

In the past three or four years, I have had the pleasure of working with Lord Phillips of Sudbury. He has brought a sense of urgency, a sense of purpose and the single-mindedness that has helped to drive this measure through in the other place.

What encouragement will there be for local authorities to go even further than the 80 per cent.? There is a discretionary level, but local authorities always argue that they never have enough resources, so I suspect that 80 per cent. will become the norm. Will the Minister ensure that there is some incentive for local authorities to go that extra mile. That leads on to the question put by the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond). Who pays? It is important to know where the money is to come from, so that we know that it is for the long term and not just a short-term fix. I am sure that it is not, but it would be reassuring to know that.

This is a welcome change of mind. I never mind when people climb down or do U-turns—call it what you like. As long as we get the right result, I care not what has happened over the past three or four years. This campaign has been worth fighting. It has been carried out in the best of humour, and those of us who believed that the arguments were right were confident that the Government would listen. They have, and that deserves a big thank you.

7.45 pm

Mr. Edward Davey: Members have already mentioned that many people from across the parties have been involved in this long campaign, not least the hon. Member for Loughborough (Mr. Reed). Despite his comments about the Liberal Democrats, I congratulate him. I also congratulate Liberal Democrat peers, most notably my noble Friend Lord Phillips of Sudbury, who moved the amendment in the other place. He got the Government worried that the House of Lords was going to push this amendment. Although we had the amendment from the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow), we could not persuade the Government. However, there was the will to push the issue in the other place, and the Government had to face up to that. My noble Friend deserves great credit for getting that coalition together and, given that votes do not always go the Executive's way, ensuring that pressure was put on the Government.

We should also pay tribute to Ministers. They have had to argue long and hard for this measure. Whether it was the Minister or his predecessor who pushed it—I am sure that it was the hon. Member for Corby (Phil Hope) who really pushed it—they have done their job, and that is welcome. The Treasury is a difficult animal to move. I am surprised that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has not issued a press release. He is not modest about coming forward to take credit for such measures. In the press release for the Finance Bill 2002, when the initial steps were taken, he suggested that that was all that was needed: it was such a generous relief that everyone would flock to this new creation and shift over, so the problem was solved. The Liberal Democrats and, I am sure, the Conservatives and probably some Labour Back Benchers said that we did not think that that was right. The situation created by the Chancellor was not powerful enough to persuade people to shift. They had the difficult choice between the bureaucracy of the charity route, which many people did not want, as was shown by the figures, or the community amateur sports club route, which was a nice new creation, but did not provide sufficient incentive for people to move. With this amendment, we have the critical mass of a meaningful incentive. If there is encouragement from the Government and organisations such as Sport England, there will be a major shift.

I hope that the Minister will reassure the House that he will talk to his colleagues in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to ensure that they play a positive part, with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, in ensuring that this measure becomes well known and that there is a quick shift.

This is a significant measure. The amounts of money involved for the Exchequer are small, but the difference that it will make to small sports clubs is huge. It is disproportionate to the cost to the central purse. That has been one of the strong arguments used by campaigners. I am sure that, when Members go round their constituencies, they see the typed up accounts of the local cricket, rugby or football club. Those accounts are often done by an elderly member on a typewriter not a word processor, and show the rates as a significant amount on the expenditure side. With that cost gone, those clubs will use the money entrepreneurially and encourage youngsters and new activities. They could use it to lower the fees that they have to charge, and thus ensure greater access to the sporting facility. It is a good measure for social inclusion.

This important measure will have a benefit way above the actual cost. I hope that the Minister will answer the questions posed by the hon. Members for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) and for Loughborough about where the money is to come from, because it is important for the House to dwell on that. We should also dwell on the benefits, which will be huge.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): It is not often that we move an amendment in Committee, back down to the Government on it and accept that no action could be taken, but find several months later that the Government have moved on the issue. The fact that the Government have changed their view on a measure that involves the Treasury in a major way is a sign that Parliament is working. When the amendment was debated in Committee months ago, if Government Back Benchers had accepted that that was the will of the Government and that it could not change, nothing would have happened. We constantly lobby behind the scenes in the hope that eventually the will of Parliament will prevail on the Treasury and other Departments. That is what seems to have happened in this case. It did not happen overnight, and the amendment that I tabled in Committee did not emerge from thin air; the idea had been discussed for years before I had the privilege. A number of people in Parliament and outside worked for a long time to achieve that.

Mr. Hammond: I am sure the hon. Gentleman is right, but does he agree that the bit of Parliament that has been

shown to be working in this instance is the cross-party consensus in the House of Lords—the one thing in this place that is guaranteed to put Governments in fear?

Mr. Borrow: I am certain that if the Treasury had not wanted to make the money available, it would have continued to block it, and would have prevailed over the House of Lords in the end. The hon. Gentleman is right about the cross-party consensus in this case. The result that we have secured is, I think, due to the fact that there has been no battle on a purely party issue: members of all parties, and those who belong to no party, have worked and lobbied together for many months and years.

I have only one question to ask my right hon. Friend. Is he certain that all the clubs in the country that could have access to this assistance will be able to do so, and will every measure to secure that be taken? What will he and his Department do to ensure a 100 per cent. take-up?

Phil Hope: I am pleased to learn that Members on both sides of the House welcome the amendment. My grateful thanks are due to, among others, my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow), who pushed the case for it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Mr. Reed) mentioned the number of clubs that would benefit. I know from my constituency experience that during a weekend in Corby up to 2,000 young people may be out on football pitches with their mums and dads helping out, acting as referees, washing the kit and so on. All that excellent community activity will be reinforced by the 80 per cent. relief for qualifying clubs.

Mr. Reed: My hon. Friend is right, but when it comes to the role of amateur sports clubs, it never seems to be realised that some 27 per cent. of volunteers support them. We often forget that when we talk about the voluntary sector. A wealth of talent is involved: some 1.5 million people give up their time freely to help clubs throughout the country.

Phil Hope: My hon. Friend is right to mention that important statistic. We use jargon about building social capital, and ensuring that communities flourish, thrive and are successful and inclusive. Sport plays a critical role in that, and I hope that the measure will contribute to the wider agenda of community and civic renewal and urban regeneration for which so many of us are working so hard.

A number of speakers asked who would pay. Inevitably, there is a degree of uncertainty about the cost, because it depends on the take-up that Members want to see. The Treasury has been mentioned. Support for the idea that clubs should qualify for 80 per cent. relief has already been agreed. What we are doing is changing the mechanism to make it less onerous, allowing community amateur sports clubs to qualify without having to become registered charities. The Government, of course, will pay for the relief, and both Liberal Democrats and Conservatives will know that we are one Government. I can give an assurance that there is no intention of imposing additional costs on ratepayers; this resource, like others, will come from the centre.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) raised an interesting point about Northern Ireland, which I will draw to the attention of my colleagues in the Northern Ireland Office.

We have experienced a bit of a cliffhanger in order to arrive at this point, but I think that in this case it has been better to arrive than to travel. We now have an excellent new measure that will widen the base of the pyramid of participation and support, thus raising levels of achievement. That is important to a nation such as ours, which is so aspirational when it comes to sport. As I said earlier, the amendment will have huge implications not just for the healthy lives of the many people who become involved in community sport, but for community development and regeneration as a whole.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 76

SECOND AND EMPTY HOMES: ENGLAND

Lords amendment No. 21.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider Lords amendments Nos. 36, 37, 41, 42, 47 to 49 and 54.

Phil Hope: I beg to move that this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendments deal with the fear that, if we passed clause 76 in its original form, Welsh authorities would have a less flexible power to provide council tax discounts on second homes than would English authorities. The principal amendment, Lords amendment No. 21, will replace the existing provision in Wales and give the National Assembly for Wales the ability that we are giving the Secretary of State to prescribe classes of dwellings in the case of which billing authorities can reduce or remove the nationally set discounts.

Subsections (3), (4) and (5) of the new section 12 to be inserted in the Local Government Finance Act 1992 are transitional provisions. They preserve the effect of existing regulations prescribing classes of dwellings for which Welsh billing authorities can reduce the 50 per cent. discount to 25 per cent. or zero, and preserve the effect of any existing determinations to reduce discounts made by Welsh authorities. While the new section 12 will give Welsh authorities more flexibility, the transitional provisions ensure that Welsh authorities are not forced to make new decisions if they would not have decided differently under the new powers.

The other amendments, with the exception of Lords amendment No. 43, are consequential on Lords amendment No. 21. It should be noted that Lords amendments Nos. 36, 37, 41 and 42 amend clause 127, enabling the National Assembly for Wales to choose when to begin the new powers in Wales.

Lords amendment No. 47 is merely a consequential amendment to clause 76, to ensure that in England any reductions in council tax liability under regulations made under section 13 of the 1992 Act—for instance, reductions relating to disabilities—are additional to any discounts under the section 11A inserted by clause 76.

Mr. Hammond: I assume that the Welsh Assembly has asked for the inclusion of this measure, and did not ask

[Mr. Hammond]

for its inclusion at the time of the Bill's original publication. It would be interesting to hear from the Minister by what process the Assembly either determined that it needed the primary legislation to do what it wanted to do, or decided that it wanted a power that it had not wanted previously.

If I read them correctly, Lords amendment No. 21 and the consequential amendments simply place Wales on the same basis as England following the changes in the 1992 Act made by clause 76.

I was not involved in the Committee stage, but I have the impression from reading the reports of it that what little consideration was allowed for this part of the Bill—given the desperately inadequate time allowed owing to the knives introduced by the timetable motion—focused principally on the issue of who would keep any extra money that was raised. The answer, as we might have anticipated, is the Government, rather than the local authority. However, it seems entirely reasonable to give similar powers to Welsh authorities, although I assume that it is a matter for the Welsh Assembly, as it seems to be more about housing policy than about revenue raising; clearly, the authorities themselves will not benefit in terms of the additional revenue but they will be able to use the provision as a tool of housing policy. I for one am very happy for Wales to have equality of treatment with England.

8 pm

The job of the Opposition is to find something to say about all these things, even when there is not obviously anything much to say, but I have found something to ask the Minister, he will be pleased to know. I understand that the title of the clause is not technically a part of the Bill but it seems a little odd that the clause is headed "Second and empty homes: England" when the second part of it will deal with second and empty homes in Wales. Perhaps he can confirm that it is within the scope of minor amendment, printing or whatever for the heading, "Second and empty homes: England" to be changed to "Second and empty homes: England and Wales" or possibly just "Second and empty homes." It would be a little anomalous if we passed a measure headed "Second and empty homes: England" when the second half of its text was devoted to second and empty homes in Wales.

Mr. Edward Davey: I do not think that there is much to say on these amendments. I think that the National Assembly for Wales has asked for them. It is important to devolve more power to it. We on the Liberal Democrat Benches would like the Government to go even further. I would certainly like the National Assembly to have the power to determine the form of local taxation. I know that there is a movement in Wales against the unfair council tax and that many people in Wales would like a tax related to ability to pay. If anything, while these are welcome powers, they do not go far enough because they do not devolve further powers to the National Assembly over the local government finance regime for Wales. However, that is perhaps going wide of the debate and I am conscious that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may bring me to order. There is nothing wrong with the amendments. They go in the right direction and I just hope that the Government will go even further on the path of devolution at a later date.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I too welcome the amendments. Clearly, they are necessary and it is right that there should be parity with our friends in England. I never understood the logic behind allowing a discount for a second home. It beat me throughout the years that I thought about it. I am pleased that it is being dealt with. The provision can be used as a tool in housing policy and so on. I am pleased, therefore, that the Government are going to extend the provisions to Wales.

I echo what has just been said. I hope that there will be further devolution, stronger devolution, and that these matters will come within the ambit of the National Assembly without having to be referred to this Chamber. That said, I am pleased that the proposals are on the table and I am sure that they will pass into law without much hindrance from anyone in the Chamber.

Phil Hope: I am grateful to hon. Members who have supported the proposals, including the hon. Members for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) and for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd). Two questions have arisen. One was, how did the Welsh Assembly change its mind? That is devolution for you. It is up to the Members of the Welsh Assembly. If the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) wants to write to them, he is perfectly entitled to do so.

Mr. Hammond *rose—*

Phil Hope: I knew that I should not have suggested that he write to them.

Mr. Hammond: I am sorry but it is just that the Minister said on the question of why the Welsh Assembly changed its mind, "It just did." If that is the answer, that is fine, but it is not necessarily obvious that the Welsh Assembly has changed its mind. It might be that it always wanted these powers, and it became evident that there was a need for primary legislation to get them, as opposed to the Assembly deciding after the legislation had been published that it wanted to go down that route.

Phil Hope: I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. "Do not know" still has to be my reply. He will have to ask the Welsh Assembly whether it was something that it always wanted to do, whether it changed its mind or whatever. Thankfully, the measure is in the Bill.

The hon. Gentleman raised a technical point about a clause headed "Second and empty homes: England" referring to Wales. That will obviously be a matter for the parliamentary draftsmen, who will no doubt note what he said.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 22 to 25 agreed to [One with special entry].

Clause 117

LOCAL POLLS

Lords amendment No. 26

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That the House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Clause 117 confirms the right of a local authority to conduct an advisory poll. The provision creates an express power and removes doubt about the freedom of local authorities to hold advisory polls. It gives councils maximum flexibility on who is polled and how the poll is conducted.

We carefully considered the points raised in the Lords Committee on requiring local authorities to have regard to guidance about making local polls accessible to local people and in particular to people with disabilities. We have tabled the amendment in order to provide for the Secretary of State in England and the National Assembly for Wales in Wales to be able to issue guidance to which local authorities must have regard on facilitating participation by disabled people in a local poll. I am sure that that will be widely welcomed and I hope that no one will object to its becoming part of the Bill.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister is right. No one, I am sure, will object to the amendment, but that does not mean that no one will have any questions about it. The provision allows guidance to be issued on disabled access to local polls—polls for the purpose of testing local opinion by local authorities, as distinct from local election polls. It looks like mum and apple pie. I agree with the Minister: who could possibly be against it? My question relates to the fact that the guidance referred to here must be in respect specifically of the local advisory polls; the right to conduct them is confirmed by clause 117.

The thrust of the Bill is to be decentralising; the Minister keeps reciting the mantra of freedom and flexibility. It would be odd if the appropriate person, the Secretary of State in England and the relevant Minister in the Welsh Assembly, could issue guidance to local authorities in relation to section 117 polls which did not have to be complied with in relation to elections or referendums conducted out of the same polling stations. We are all for access but the obligations on local authorities conducting section 117 polls must not be more onerous than in the case of the arguably more important elections and referendums that will often take place in the same buildings.

I am hoping and expecting that the Minister will tell me that he will undertake that the guidance that will be issued in relation to section 117 polls will reflect only requirements that are imposed on returning officers in relation to elections and referendums. It would be entirely appropriate if this measure were seen as a way of ensuring that the good practice that the Government will, I hope, seek to impose in terms of ensuring disabled access to polling stations for referendums and elections will be carried over into these local polls that local authorities hold. I would not like to see a more onerous obligation in respect of those polls than those imposed in respect of elections and referendums. The sentiment behind the amendment is sound, but I seek reassurance from the Minister that the bizarre circumstances that I postulated will not arise and that he will issue guidance to ensure that that does not occur.

Mr. Edward Davey: I support the amendment, which was presaged by an amendment tabled by Baroness Hamwee on 24 June in the other place. She tabled the amendment following discussions with the Royal National Institute for the Blind, which felt that this would be a useful move. The Government have clearly responded to that positively, which is to be welcomed.

In passing, it is interesting to note that we did not have a chance to debate the clause in Committee. We could have a spat about whether it was the Government or the Opposition who were to blame. However, there were a number of long and tedious speeches that went off the point—

Mr. Hammond: The hon. Gentleman will recall that we voted against the timetable motion in Committee.

Mr. Davey: I do recall that. The point I was making was that we did not get to examine the clause the first time around. No doubt we could have raised points about it and other matters that have not been debated.

The new power under the clause is clearly to be welcomed. It is important that disabled people are able to participate in polls, and I hope that we can move on.

Mr. Raynsford: There was no intention to impose requirements in respect of local polls more onerous than those that apply to elections or referendums conducted other than under the provisions of the clause. However, during the Lords debate, questions were raised as to whether the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 applied in this area. Under the Act, it will be unlawful from October 2004 for service providers, including public authorities, to discriminate against a disabled person in how the provider provides services. There has been some doubt as to whether "services" includes the provision of polling facilities for local and national elections or local polls. We expect the future extension of the Act to cover local authority functions to clarify whether it applies to local polls. This will not come into force until 2006. In that situation, we felt it sensible that guidance should be extended to ensure that what applies in relation to elections—for example, guidance issued by the Electoral Commission—should also apply to local polls.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister is coming to the key point. He referred to the expectation that the Disability Discrimination Act will be extended to cover local authority functions and, thus, local polls. Does the Act already cover elections and referendums? If not, does he expect it to be extended to cover those services?

Mr. Raynsford: My understanding is that the guidance issued by the Electoral Commission ensures that there are suitable arrangements that would comply with the requirements of the Act. I have said that there is some question as to whether the Act applies. We want to make sure that there is a consistency of approach between local polls, national elections and referendums

[Mr. Raynsford]

and that there should be an easy passage from where we are now to the future position if the Act is extended. I hope that that satisfies the hon. Gentleman.

Lords amendment agreed to.

After Clause 117

Lords amendment No. 27

8.15 pm

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, that the House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

The new clause tabled by the Government on Report gives the Secretary of State in England and the National Assembly for Wales power to amend or repeal by order any enactment relating to a local authority in the light of generally accepted accounting practice as it applies to local government. The new clause was tabled partly in response to the Liberal Democrat amendment to clause 18 tabled in the House of Lords Grand Committee.

Clause 18 concerns the definition of a local authority company and the Opposition amendment reflected the pressure from local government for a modern, all-purpose definition of such a company. In resisting the amendment, we acknowledged that it raised an important issue and we promised to bring forward our own measure. The new clause enables the definition of a local authority company to be brought into line with accounting practice at the earliest opportunity. The timetable for that will depend on the work being done by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. CIPFA is currently working on a revision to its standard local government accounting code to incorporate a group accountancy requirement for companies. As soon as the CIPFA code is ready, the new power will be used to substitute the accounting definition for the one now in clause 18.

The immediate need to update the definition arises from work being taken forward on the Treasury-led whole of Government accounts exercise, in which the Audit Commission and CIPFA are closely involved, along with officials from our Department and the Welsh Assembly. The aim of the initiative is to produce a consolidated set of accounts for the whole public sector. It must encompass all central and local government bodies, including not only local authorities but those companies in which authorities have a major interest.

The definition of a local authority company used in the Bill for the prudential borrowing system is not based directly on accounting principles. That means that it would not meet the needs of the whole of Government accounts exercise. Authorities would have to follow two different accounting procedures in relation to their companies. This would be onerous, unwelcome and confusing, so the new power will solve that problem. However, the new clause will also allow any other aspect of the local government finance system to be harmonised with accounting practices and to be adapted to reflect future developments without the need for primary legislation. Such a move would implement the Government's policy objective of bringing public sector accounting more into line with standard accounting practices.

In leaving the term "generally accepted accounting practice" undefined, we were aware of a precedent. The Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000 requires the Treasury to use its powers to ensure that departmental resource accounts comply with "generally accepted accounting practice" subject to adaptations that are necessary in the context but no definition is given. In fact, the expression has a well-established meaning. In the UK, it covers the aggregate of the accounting practices that companies are required to follow in preparing their accounts. It has as its principal source the practices recommended by the Accounting Standards Board, a body independent of Government. For local government, accounting practice is established by a code issued by CIPFA, which is recognised as a statement of recommended practice within the Accounting Standards Board framework.

It might be helpful if I explained the difference between the new power and the one already provided for under clause 21. The latter enables the Secretary of State to specify codes that are to count as proper practices. The two powers work in different ways. Clause 21 ensures that local government accounting practice is compliant with appropriate professional codes, namely those issued by CIPFA. However, the clause 21 power could not be used to amend existing legislation that might be acting as an obstacle to the adoption of proper practices.

In the next few years, there are likely to be major developments in national and international accounting practice to improve transparency and reduce the scope for the kind of "creative" accounting highlighted in the Enron affair. For example, there could be fundamental changes in the treatment of borrowing and investments, the full implications of which may not become clear for some time. The changes would need to be applied in local government. Clause 21 is unlikely to be adequate on its own for that purpose, but we are confident that the new clause would make it possible.

I should also like to comment on the breadth of the power, which can be used only to change legislation to which accounting practice is relevant. When the power is used, the Secretary of State gives up his own freedom to devise accounting practices and relies instead on standards imposed by the independent accounting bodies. In all cases, the relevant provisions of a published accounting code or standard that lie behind the order should be readily identifiable. However, since this is a power to amend primary legislation, we have recognised that orders exercising it should be subject to the approval of both Houses of Parliament. The approach was endorsed by the House of Lords Committee on Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform.

Mr. Hammond: I am grateful to the Minister for his full and explanatory s[illegible] and I congratulate his Department on its economy in the use of civil servants' time. Anyone who also sat through the debate in the Lords the other night will have noticed a marked similarity between his speech and that delivered by his colleague in the other place. One Government, one set of briefings, one speech template—that is commendable economy.

We Conservatives are generally wary of extending the powers of the Secretary of State to amend primary legislation by order, but in this case we can see the merit

of the Government's proposal. I understand—the Minister has confirmed this—that the original issue was specifically concerned with local authority companies: the possible need to produce consolidated accounts for local authorities and their companies, to avoid off-balance sheet scams of the type that we have become rather familiar with in the past few years; and the need to support the whole of Government accounts exercise. CIPFA, as the Minister said, identified the need possibly to amend definitions in clause 18(2) to deal specifically with local authority companies and preparing consolidated accounts for local authorities.

The Government went on to identify a possible broader need, and the Minister's speech dwelt greatly on local authority companies and the whole of Government accounts exercise. To my mind, the perhaps more important issue is the ongoing question of the rapid evolution of UK generally accepted accounting practice, partly in response to the demands of legislators and investors for greater transparency in the wake of Enron, WorldCom and other well-documented accounting scandals. We support moves to bring public sector accounting as far as possible into line with GAAP. For the record, the Committee that deals with matters relating to local government and the regions has also clearly endorsed that position. We therefore have to trade off the benefits of the rapid implementation of further moves in that direction. That necessarily means amending obstructing legislation, whereby procedures to be followed in local authority accounting have historically been prescribed in statute—against the objection in principle, which a diligent Parliament ought to start from, to granting the Government powers to amend primary legislation through secondary legislation.

The Government's amendment, which was accepted in the Lords, has been reviewed by the Lords Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee, which found it acceptable. Any orders made under it will be subject to affirmative resolution, as the Minister said, which always helps to reassure any sceptics in this place. However, as I have said the weakness in resorting to that procedure to tighten scrutiny is the feebleness of the scrutiny process itself. We are certain to reach a 90-minute Committee debate when we have an affirmative procedure, rather than a negative one. But as anyone who has taken part in such debates—as we all have—will agree, once we reach that stage we are a very long way away from really effective scrutiny of the Executive, because of the time limitations that such debates entail. But on balance, we believe that this is a justified measure and we will support it, particularly given that the power to amend is strictly limited to cases in which it is appropriate to do so in the light of the GAAP of the time.

It is important, however, that we recognise that we are agreeing to quite a wide power. It is not, as Lord Rooker appeared to suggest in Grand Committee, merely a power to alter definitions across a wider range than just clause 18(2). It is a power to amend any Act that requires amending in order to bring local authority accounting procedures into line with GAAP. So any statute that prescribes a different procedure, or which inhibits the adoption of GAAP, could be amended by this measure. This is an appropriate provision to include in the Bill, but the House should be in no doubt that it does give the Government significant powers—rather more significant ones that the Minister's colleague suggested during the Grand Committee debate. However, we will support this measure tonight.

Mr. Edward Davey: As the hon. Gentleman has just suggested, this is a significant power. It is interesting to see how the parliamentary process sometimes works. In Committee, we were unable properly to analyse the charging and trading provisions in chapter 1 of part 8 of the Bill because of lack of time. We wanted to make some of the points that were made in the other place in order to try to examine the framework around trading companies that the Government were introducing. I am delighted that Baroness Hamwee was able to make those very sensible points in Committee, and the Government have reacted to them by going much further.

The amendment certainly deals with some of our concerns about local authority trading by making sure that local authority companies will have to abide by proper accounting practices; indeed, the Government now have the power to ensure that they do so. That is important, because it will put to rest the concern of small businesses that such companies will be trading unfairly against the private sector. Some small businesses are still sceptical about what the practice will involve, but the provision does help them, because they can be reassured that the Government have the power to intervene if any local authority is trading unfairly through its trading arms. That point of detail has now been met, but it is interesting to note that the provision is wider and therefore affects the entire system.

Mr. Hammond: I am not sure that I understand that point. We are not talking about a provision that will give the Government the power to intervene if they thought that a local authority company was trading unfairly; rather, it will pave the way for consolidated accounts to be produced, which will prevent local authorities from using companies for inappropriate purposes. I doubt whether it will give the Government the power to intervene to prevent unfair trading.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman rightly picks me up—I think my use of language was slightly loose. There could be examples of unfair trading that are not covered by the new power. Some representations from small business organisations that I received related to how the accounts of these small companies will be drawn up, and how they will relate to local authority accounts; however, that concern appears to be covered. I can imagine contracts being given in an unfair way that is, however, completely unrelated to accountancy practices, so the hon. Gentleman makes a fair point.

On how this wide power will apply more generally, as a veteran of the Committee that considered the Government Resources and Accounts Bill—GRAB, as it was unfairly known—I can tell Members that this power was included then. The power was welcomed on both sides at the time as it applied to central Government Departments, so there is a corollary to read across—that it should now be applied to local government. I am sure that the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and other bodies will welcome it.

8.30 pm

Will the Government comment on a point of detail? When we debated the Government Resources and Accounts Bill in Committee in 1999, we obviously devoted time to the views of the Accounting Standards Board and its role in the UK's generally accepted accounting practice. We also talked about the Financial Reporting Council, an independent body set up to advise the Government on the adoption of resource accounting for all Departments. That relates to Government accounts, and the body has to take account of the special circumstances that apply in the public sector. Although GAAP is sensible for many aspects of public sector activities, some fall outside normal commercial pressures and considerations. That is why the body was set up—to ensure that public sector accounting standards and practices take into account the special aspects of the public sector.

We raised in Committee the classic example of how to value an account for nuclear weapons. Some assets belonging to local authorities would not be marketised, so GAAP would not necessarily apply. The private sector has never considered accountancy practices as they relate to such assets. Will the Government comment on that problem and explain the inter-relation between the amendment and clause 21, to which the Minister referred? Those parallel provisions are designed to achieve different objectives. They do not necessarily compete with each other, but it is important to be careful about how Governments use the two different powers, because one could envisage them coming into conflict in certain circumstances.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) raised some interesting questions relating to trading, but I have to say that I am advised that his concerns are unfounded because trading will have to be carried out through a company. As he knows, that is the provision in this part of the Bill, and anything done by a company will be caught by companies law, which provides the essential safeguard. The new clause will not change it. Group accounting comes in at a later stage when a local authority amalgamates its accounts.

I have explained that we originally believed that clause 21 would provide us with powers to achieve the wider aims that I mentioned in my opening statement on the amendment. I went on to explain that, in the context of the application of the whole of Government accounts exercise and other potential changes that might arise, we were conscious of potential needs that went beyond the powers contained in clause 21. That is why the additional powers in the amendment were necessary and why we want to include them in the Bill.

Lords amendment agreed to [Special entry].

After Clause 119

Lords amendment No. 28

Phil Hope: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): With this, we may discuss Lords amendment No. 44.

Phil Hope: The amendments meet a Government commitment to give local authorities outside London specific powers to regulate cosmetic body piercing and micro-pigmentation businesses. London local authorities already have such powers under private legislation.

The new clause would amend the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 to bring cosmetic body piercing and micro-pigmentation businesses under the regulatory framework of registration and byelaws that already applies to ear piercing, tattooing, acupuncture and electrolysis. Under that framework, local authorities would be able to require cosmetic body piercing and micro-pigmentation businesses to register with them and observe byelaws on hygiene and cleanliness in order to prevent the transmission of infection. For example, businesses would be required to use sterile instruments for each client. It would be an offence to trade without registration or to breach byelaws.

The term "cosmetic piercing" is used to include cosmetic body piercing and ear piercing, which are both forms of skin piercing to allow the insertion of jewellery into the skin. That is the approach taken in the London legislation. "Semi-permanent skin colouring", which means the insertion of semi-permanent colouring into a person's skin, is used to include micro-pigmentation and related activities such as semi-permanent make-up and temporary tattooing. The use of that umbrella term should stand the test of time if further activities of this type come into fashion.

The schedule will allow a smooth transition when local authorities adopt the new legislation. The transitional provisions provide that the amendment does not affect businesses already registered for activities covered by section 15 of the 1982 Act—tattooing, ear piercing and electrolysis. The amendment does not affect pending local authority resolutions to apply section 15 of the 1982 Act in its area. If a local authority has already resolved that section 15 of the 1982 Act should be brought into force in its area for tattooing, ear piercing and electrolysis, the local authority will be automatically enabled to apply the registration and byelaws regime to cosmetic piercing and semi-permanent skin colouring. A person and premises already registered for ear piercing shall be counted as registered for cosmetic piercing until cosmetic body piercing is subsequently provided, when a new registration would be required.

Mr. Hammond: I am grateful to the Government for eventually managing to introduce this provision, but I have some questions about the way in which it will work. I noted that the Minister referred to registration of persons and premises, and I may wish to probe him further on the distinction between the two.

I first raised the issue in Committee when I attempted to insert an admittedly clumsy new clause that sought to extend the London Local Authorities Act 2000, which was private legislation and not susceptible to such extension. I have been getting some strange looks from colleagues ever since, but I assure the House that I have nothing to hide and no personal direct interest in the matter. I regularly pass through airport metal detectors without any trouble.

I do not claim to be a great expert on the subject, but I was alarmed by the more revelatory nature of the remarks made by Lord Rooker in the other place last

week. He confirmed that he keeps a catalogue of body adornments, as he describes them, which he collected some years ago. Therefore, he said, the prices were out of date. While one can understand a passing interest in such an item, one is bound to say that keeping it on one's bookshelf for several years raises a few questions—certainly in my mind. Lord Rooker also told the other place that as it is a family place—I suppose it still is, in a sense, although it may not remain so much longer—he could not give their lordships full details of everything that was available in his catalogue.

The serious point is that whether we subscribe to body piercing and semi-permanent skin colouring or not, many people undergo it and it is an invasive procedure. It involves piercing the body and thus creates an obvious risk, at the least, of infection.

The matter first came to my attention through a constituency case, of which I became aware about this time last year. A constituent was concerned because her daughter, who was under 16, had been able to get her navel pierced without parental consent. After visiting the establishment that carried out the piercing, my constituent made some investigations and discovered that there was no system of control in place. She felt that that was wrong. Indeed, when I checked what Ministers had said, I discovered that Health Ministers—most recently, the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper)—had made clear statements on several occasions that the Government intended to legislate to allow regulation of such practices to be extended to local authorities outside London. The current state of the law is rather curious. In London, local authorities have that power, but local authorities in the rest of the country do not. All that we want to do is to create a level playing field and to address some of the concerns that have arisen.

After the case in my constituency was brought to my attention and I had already agreed with my colleagues that we would table an attempt at a new clause in Committee, a tragic case in Sheffield was reported. As a result of body piercing, a 17-year-old man died in unusual circumstances. He suffered from a congenital heart abnormality and was unaware that it made him especially vulnerable to septicaemia. He died over Christmas last year, which gave additional poignancy to the calls for new legislation.

I freely admit that our amendment was clumsy, but the Government were on record as saying that they intended to legislate on the matter as soon as a legislative opportunity arose. The Bill offers such an opportunity, yet I am bound to ask the Minister what arrangements exist for cross-departmental liaison when Bills such as this one are being drawn up. When Ministers—in this case, Health Ministers—give commitments that they will implement legislation of this nature when an opportunity arises, there needs to be a simple database recording such commitments so that they can be included when another Department draws up an appropriate measure. It should not be left to Opposition Members to draw the attention of Ministers in one Department to the fact that commitments given by Ministers in another Department can appropriately be incorporated in a measure. There needs to be some joined-up government. Indeed, the Minister is in an ideal position to spearhead such an initiative and ensure that his colleagues are properly up to speed as to their responsibilities.

When we raised the issue in the Standing Committee, and when it was raised in the House of Lords, I was slightly alarmed by the Minister's reluctance to commit the Government to the measure that they have now introduced. Indeed, we were kept on tenterhooks until Third Reading in the House of Lords, so I am delighted that the Government have taken action. However, it would have been a disgrace if they had not introduced the provision, given that the Bill offers a perfect vehicle for it and that Ministers have made commitments to do so on several occasions.

The new clause will provide a registration regime by including premises and people carrying out cosmetic body piercing and semi-permanent skin pigmentation under the provisions for tattooing and ear piercing in the 1982 legislation. The issues that most concern me are, first, hygiene standards, although I know that they fall within the scope of the legislation into which the provisions will be inserted; secondly, checks on health background, emphasised by the problems in the Daniel Hindle case; and, thirdly, consent.

I have seen various premises that operate with proper hygiene, follow-up procedures and consent forms. They have rules that require a parent to be present if the patient is under a certain age. However, many operators do not conform to such standards. The effectiveness of the new clause in achieving a resolution to the issues that I have raised, and to which other Members have subsequently drawn attention, will depend on the conditions that local authorities are able to impose prior to registration.

It seems to me, from my reading of the 1982 legislation, that local authorities can make byelaws only in respect of hygiene in registered premises. Of course, hygiene is very important and aseptic procedures are vital where such invasive procedures take place, but that is only one of the issues. I very much hope that the Minister can confirm that it will be possible for local authorities to introduce a requirement to adhere to some form of code of conduct before they are required to register premises to carry out such procedures; otherwise, the problems encountered by Daniel Hindle will not be addressed at all. A mechanism is needed to require people who submit themselves to such procedures to answer a basic set of health questions.

8.45 pm

I hope that the fact that the Under-Secretary, not the Minister of State, will reply does not mean that I will be disappointed by being told that those issues are not adequately covered. I hope that the Minister can explain how it will be possible for local authorities to ensure that premises will operate according to proper codes of conduct before they are registered, so that everyone entering them is warned of the specific health risks that people with certain conditions, such as congenital heart abnormalities, might face from undertaking such procedures.

I hope that the Minister will also tell us that local authorities will be able to put in place appropriate regimes to deal with consent. I am not about to say that everyone under the age of 18 must always have a

[Mr. Hammond]

completed parental consent form. I am not sure whether that is appropriate in all cases, but some sort of cut-off age is clearly needed.

Matthew Green: The hon. Gentleman is sitting on the fence.

Mr. Hammond: I am not going to take from a Liberal Democrat the accusation that I am trying to sit on the fence. That would be too much to bear. It is pretty clear to everyone that there must be an age—perhaps 16—below which parental consent is appropriate.

Lord Rooker raised in the other place a very interesting additional consent issue, which certainly had not occurred to me. He explained that, in some cases, the parents of very small children have their children pierced for their own gratification because they think that it is fashionable. Of course, those children have absolutely no opportunity to consent. Parental consent is clearly not an adequate safeguard in those circumstances. Perhaps an absolute prohibition on certain types of piercing is needed for very young children.

I do not claim to have precise answers. The intention is to give a power to local authorities—the proposal is permissive—so that they can establish a regime to regulate such premises. I want to be sure that local authorities can regulate those premises in relation to mandatory health questionnaires, appropriate procedures for obtaining consent and perhaps an absolute prohibition on performing piercing operations on children below a certain age.

If it is possible under the Bill for local authorities to require establishments to have regard to a code of practice, will the Minister tell the House whether he or his colleagues in the Department of Health are inclined to publish a standard draft code of practice, so that every local authority in the country does not have to start from scratch in trying to draft an appropriate code of practice?

The Minister will know that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) recently received leave from the House to introduce a private Member's Bill that appears to be redundant before it starts because of this Bill. I am one of the supporters of that Bill. I very much hope that it will not turn out to be the case that the concession that the Government have made does not enable local authorities to deal with the real issues of health warnings, health checks and parental consent, in which case that private Member's Bill would be needed to broaden local authorities' powers. I hope that the Minister will reassure us that following the tragic death of Daniel Hindle this Bill will enable Sheffield and other local authorities to introduce a registration regime that will prevent similar tragedies in the future and ensure that people who submit to these kinds of procedures are properly informed about the risks and know that the procedures are being undertaken in aseptic conditions by properly qualified people. I also hope that we will have an assurance that local authorities will be able to deal with the issue of parental consent.

Mr. Edward Davey: I welcome this amendment. It deals with an important public health issue, and I am glad that the Government have agreed to use the Bill to enable us to move forward. The House should be made aware, however, of the fact that the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) has been rather modest. He has been a prime mover behind this proposal. I witnessed in Committee how he engaged in debate, how thoroughly he had done his research and how he persuaded the Minister to talk to civil servants not just in his Department but in the Department of Health about the matter. The House should therefore pay tribute to him. He should also make sure that we all see copies of the press release that he sends to his constituents explaining how he has achieved this step forward. I am sure that the local papers in Surrey will be keen to hear about such a parliamentary success, of which he should be proud.

Mr. Hammond: In case the hon. Gentleman thinks that I am hiding any light under a bushel, I have put out press releases previously, I have visited local piercing establishments, and it was a leading light in the local Conservative association who first brought this matter to my attention.

Mr. Davey: Clearly, the Conservative party is modernising before our eyes. At one point in the hon. Gentleman's remarks, however, despite all his research, he was not quite capable of coming out completely on this issue. He was, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green) said, sitting on the fence. I would therefore like to put on record the fact that Liberal Democrats believe that parental consent should be needed for those under the age of 16. On this issue, as on all issues with respect to age, it seems to us that the House should see that people effectively become adults from the age of 16. That would be the appropriate age.

Mr. Hammond: I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would not want me to widen this discussion into a debate about the slightly strange views of the Liberal Democrats about what people should and should not be able to do at the age of 16. The hon. Gentleman is in danger, however, of tripping over his arguments in earlier debates this evening. What we are doing is empowering local authorities. If we mean what we say when we talk about empowering local authorities, it must be for individual local authorities, having regard to their individual circumstances, to make that decision. This is not prescriptive legislation; it is permissive legislation.

Mr. Davey: I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman's argument is terribly consistent. While we certainly want to empower local authorities to take control of their own areas and of their own communities, that does not apply to issues such as age. Age is an issue that we debate nationally, and the application of age limits should be a national issue. It is not suitable for devolution, as it is an issue of rights. I do not want to quibble too much with the hon. Gentleman, however, as he has made a serious contribution, and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) has real experience of this matter from his constituency.

Mr. Heath: I am not sure about the depth of my experience but, like the hon. Member for Runnymede

and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond), I have knowledge of a constituency case in which parents were distressed by the fact that their child had been to such an establishment without their knowledge and permission. When I undertook a little more research on the subject, I was astonished to find that no registration system existed outside London. Therefore, as the law stands, the local authority in Somerset is incapable of doing anything about the problem.

I welcome the Government's proposals for registration and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge for his response to the Minister's comments. However, unless I have missed the point – it is entirely possible that I have, so I look forward to the Minister's reply – what we have today is an extension of the registration scheme. It will allow those who visit the establishments that undertake this business to do so with a degree of confidence that the person operating on them knows what he is doing, is working with sterile equipment and has taken appropriate health precautions. That is welcome, and whether adults choose to have such operations is entirely their affair. I do not wish to take part in their decision-making process.

However, several points about minors remain to be answered. It is not clear from the Minister's comments whether the Government's proposal changes the position of minors in any way. I do not accept the argument that it should necessarily be a matter for local authorities to have individual registration arrangements. The House is usually clear that we decide on such matters and there is no logic in having variations in the arrangements around the country. The circumstances that apply to 12-year-olds in one part of the country apply to 12-year-olds in another part. If they require protection, they require protection. I understand that the code of practice makes provision for parental consent but if adherence to that code is not part of the registration process, it should be. I hope that local authorities will be empowered to make that a requirement.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge made another extremely important point. I am worried by cases in which there is parental consent but the child is below the age at which he or she can consent in any real way to a procedure that effectively involves their mutilation. In other circumstances and irrespective of the views of the parents, that might be treated as common assault. However, if there is specific legislation, it might be argued that the law's silence on such cases might mean that a common assault cannot be deemed to have occurred. The Government might like to do a little more thinking on the age limit for children who can be operated on in this way for purely cosmetic purposes and with no possible advantage to them. The Government should also consider the role of parental consent in the cases of slightly older children who may strongly support the idea of being pierced so that they conform to the latest fashion trends.

The provisions are silent on those two issues and I hope that the Minister will be able to elucidate the position. If there is no provision for minors, the issue will have to be revisited if the House is to do its job properly and the Government are to have the effective registration process that my constituents and those of other hon. Members want.

9 pm

Phil Hope: We have had an important debate. As the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) said, the existing registration scheme will be extended to local authorities outside London. I am happy to tell the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) that the behaviour of their lordships on body piercing is a matter for them rather than me.

I fail to understand the relevance of the criticism that we are not joined-up in our thinking because we are doing something that is clearly joined-up. In parliamentary terms, the question whether the measure fell within the ambit of the Bill was marginal, although we now know that it does. I am delighted that we are able to take the measure forward.

We are aware of the tragic case of Daniel Hindle, who died from septicaemia in December 2002 after having his lip pierced, which the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge mentioned. Sheffield city council is conducting a thorough and detailed investigation of the circumstances surrounding his death and I understand that there will be a coroner's inquest. It would therefore be premature for me to comment on the points that the hon. Gentleman raised but it will be important to consider whether there are general lessons to be learned in due course. I understand that the Department of Health is exploring the feasibility of conducting a study on the risks of infection that are associated with cosmetic body piercing in England and that it is requesting advice from the British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy and the British Cardiac Society on the health risks of cosmetic body piercing and other types of skin piercing for people with congenital heart disease.

The hon. Gentleman asked several other questions. He asked about the standards of body-piercing practice before, during and after piercing. We believe that such detailed information is best provided by guidelines and several publications already provide such advice. For example, the Health and Safety Executive produced updated guidelines for local authorities on skin-piercing activities and enforcement as recently as October 2001. The guidelines are designed to assist the local authorities to which we are now extending powers to advise businesses on such issues as hygiene practice, aftercare and how to adopt a reasonable approach to issues surrounding the age of consent – I shall say a little more about that in a moment. Additionally, local authorities such as Bury metropolitan borough council, Rochdale metropolitan borough council, Sheffield city council and Southampton city council have produced good practice guidelines.

Mr. Hammond: I am grateful to the Minister for that information. Will it be lawful for a local authority to withhold registration from an establishment because it does not adhere to the good practice guidelines?

Phil Hope: I made it clear earlier that if a business fails to take account of guidelines, such as those on using sterile instruments, it would be an offence for it to trade without registration, or if it were in breach of byelaws. The wider guidelines about which the hon. Gentleman talks do not exist in legislation – they have been developed by the HSE. Local authorities throughout the

[Phil Hope]

country have produced good practice guidelines and the European Professional Piercers Association and the Association of Professional Piercers have produced guidance on safe and hygienic body-piercing techniques. I understand that the hon. Gentleman is trying to press me to go further and suggest that the law should provide that local authorities could enforce such standards, but we are extending the registration scheme that applies in London, so that is not the case. However, we would expect local authorities to use good practice and apply the guidelines to the businesses that they register.

Mr. Hammond: If I have understood the relevant section in part VIII of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 correctly, the byelaw-making power relates only to hygiene, so the Minister is right to cite the example of sterile needles. However, a local authority has no power to withhold registration from somebody who is complying with the byelaws, which cover only hygiene, but failing to comply with any other codes that relate to parental consent and health warnings. Is that correct?

Phil Hope: We do not believe that pre-registration assessment of a practice is necessary. It would only add burdens to businesses and local authorities and extra costs to customers. Registration offers an opportunity for local authorities to establish a constructive relationship with businesses; that includes providing advice on hygienic practices. If a business refuses to heed that advice, the authority has the option of prosecuting it under the new legislation or using health and safety at work provisions such as improvement or prohibition notices and, ultimately, prosecution. There are measures that local authorities can take without amending the Bill as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. Hammond: I am sorry to have to proceed by intervention, but that is the only method that is open to us.

How does the Bill empower a local authority to prosecute a business for failure to comply with anything other than byelaws relating to hygienic practice? We are in danger of congratulating ourselves on having addressed the problem that was highlighted by the death of Daniel Hindle, while leaving local authorities utterly powerless to deny registration to an establishment that persistently refuses to give health warnings or to complete basic health questionnaires before carrying out piercing operations.

Phil Hope: The hon. Gentleman is labouring the point. The Bill allows local authorities to prosecute a business that fails to register with it or to operate in observance of byelaws on health and cleanliness. The job of local authorities, which the Bill will allow those outside London to do, is to build up their relationship with businesses. If a business continues to refuse to heed the advice given by the local authority, the authority can prosecute it under the new legislation—essentially on the key theme of failing to address hygiene and cleanliness as required. The local authority can also use the health and safety at work provisions if that is appropriate to the kind of offence that they believe the business to be committing. It is completely untrue to say that local authorities have no powers whatever to intervene. The Bill extends to local authorities outside London the ability to intervene when required.

Mr. Heath *rose—*

Phil Hope: If the hon. Gentleman wants to ask about consent, I am about to deal with that.

We have no plans to introduce a minimum age of consent for body piercing. However, the Health and Safety Executive has issued guidelines to local authorities to assist them in encouraging businesses to adopt a reasonable attitude to the age of consent. Although the Department of Health has not given a commitment to legislate, it has said that it will keep the matter under review with ministerial colleagues in the Home Office as the new measures take effect. Setting the age of consent at 16, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), could lead to children under that age piercing themselves or each other in an unsafe and unhygienic way, or even to their going to disreputable businesses. We prefer that businesses carrying out ear piercing and cosmetic body piercing should be subject to local authority control so that those activities can be undertaken in a safe and hygienic manner.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome raised the wider question of common assault. Body piercing, particularly for sexual gratification, is unlawful. Children under the age of 16 are unable to consent lawfully to what would be regarded as indecent assault and, as such, a matter for the courts. To that extent there is definite protection for children under the age of 16. The only other question is about the piercing of ear lobes—

Mr. Hammond: In the case of one of my constituents, which I quoted earlier, the person concerned was informed that she could bring a prosecution for common assault against the person who pierced her daughter, but that that would be a private prosecution because the police would not become involved. Does the Minister think that that is a satisfactory state of affairs?

Phil Hope: I do not know the details of the case that the hon. Gentleman is describing. However, I can understand his concern on behalf of his constituents to ensure that an improvement is made. I regret that I cannot comment on a case when I do not have any of the details.

Mr. Heath: I am sorry that we are delaying the Minister's progress.

I now understand that the registration scheme as it is framed does not provide for local authorities to do anything about these age-of-consent issues. Secondly, setting aside the sexual offence to which reference has been made, in the case of common assault—even on a toddler who was mutilated, and whether or not the parents consented—it would be unlikely that the police or the public prosecutor would bring a prosecution on that basis. That is not entirely satisfactory.

Phil Hope: I understand the concerns that the hon. Gentleman is raising. The guidelines issued to local

authorities to assist them refer to them adopting a reasonable attitude to the age of consent. I have listed the guidelines that already exist—they have been published by a number of authorities and agencies—on the specific point that the hon. Gentleman is making.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister says that the guidelines issued to local authorities talk about them adopting a reasonable attitude to the age of consent. That is great. They may adopt a reasonable attitude, but what is their sanction? What do they do with the business that complies with the hygiene byelaws, but does not comply with the local authority's reasonable attitude on age of consent? Can it deny registration or can it not?

Phil Hope: I might be going through a time loop when I return to a point that I have made already. I understand the hon. Gentleman's question. The answer is that the guidelines are not a matter of law. They are guidelines for local authorities to use. They apply them by building a relationship with businesses that come within the registration scheme. In building that relationship, they can make judgments about whether the businesses are operating hygienically with due regard to cleanliness, and conform with other guidelines. By building up good practice in that relationship, it can be ensured that the widest possible take-up of good standards beyond and above hygiene and cleanliness are in place. If a business then fails to conform with hygiene and cleanliness regulations, registration can be withdrawn. A prosecution could be brought if the business were to break any further byelaws that the local authority had put in place. By extending these powers to other local authorities outside London, we are extending protections.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome mentioned toddlers and abuse. If there are any grounds for believing that a child may be suffering or at risk of serious harm from ear piercing, for example, let alone other forms of piercing, the local authorities' social services department could be approached about the matter. The National Society for the Protection of Children also has powers to investigate and intervene in these circumstances. These points go way beyond the focus of the amendment, but I hope that they are responses to some of the key points that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

Matthew Green: In the case of a two or three-year-old child, surely the social services department should not be called in because someone thinks that a child's ear might be infected. Surely the simple approach is to introduce a minimum age below which body piercing should not take place. Perhaps that should be eight, nine or 10 years, something like that.

Phil Hope: Again, I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has been present throughout the debate, but we made the point earlier that we were not minded to introduce an age of consent. The guidelines to local authorities state that they must pay due regard to reasonable age of consent issues, including that which the hon. Gentleman described. Through those guidelines, local authorities build a relationship with their businesses. They have the power to deregister businesses that do not conform to basic standards of cleanliness and hygiene. They also have recourse to other measures such as the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974.

Without repeating myself for a third time, I hope that I have made the Government's position clear. Although questions about the extent to which the powers may affect hon. Members' constituents are right, I hope that the consensus in the House is that the provision is important and will provide added protection, help prevent the transmission of infection and raise standards of hygiene and cleanliness for such businesses throughout the country.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments 29 and 30 agreed to.

Clause 127

COMMENCEMENT

Lords amendment No. 31.

9.15 pm

Phil Hope: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 32, 38, 39 and 53.

Phil Hope: The group consists of miscellaneous commencement and drafting amendments. Lords amendments Nos. 31, 32 and 39 will enable clause 73, entitled "Provision of information" and clause 111, entitled "Financial year" to commence on Royal Assent. Lords amendment No. 53 simply tidies up a reference in schedule 7 to clause 70 and removes the power to prescribe rateable values. Lords amendment No. 38 relates to council tax and removes a reference in schedule 7 to a non-existent repeal.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments 32 to 39 agreed to.

Clause 127

COMMENCEMENT

Lords amendment No. 40.

Phil Hope: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendment would solve problems that the London Assembly has experienced with timetabling the 10 mayoral question time meetings that it must hold each year.

Matthew Green: We welcome the amendment because Baroness Hamwee raised the matter in another place through an amendment that she withdrew for technical reasons. However, it clearly brought the matter to the attention of Ministers, who subsequently moved to deal with the matter. We are glad that they have done so.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 41 and 42 agreed to.

Clause 127

COMMENCEMENT

Lords amendment No. 43.

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That the House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, we may discuss Lords amendment No. 51 and amendments (a) and (b) thereto.

Mr. Raynsford: Lords amendments Nos. 43 and 51 deal with sections 45A and 45B of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998, as amended by sections 41 and 42 of the Education Act 2002. Under these provisions, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills and the National Assembly for Wales have a reserve power to set a minimum schools budget for a local education authority when that authority's proposed schools budget is considered inadequate in all circumstances.

Lords amendment No. 43 is concerned with the commencement by the National Assembly for Wales of the amendments made to the Education Act 2002 by Lords amendment No. 51. Lords amendment No. 51 is concerned with two relatively minor changes to these provisions. First, it brings forward by one month to 31 December the schools budget deadline by which local education authorities in England are required to notify the Secretary of State for Education and Skills and their schools of their proposed schools budget for the following financial year.

In his statement to the House on 17 July, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills acknowledged that the changes in school and LEA funding arrangements introduced this year led to real difficulties for many schools. As he said, the difficulties have arisen from the coincidence of a number of significant changes to the local government and schools funding systems, and as a result of decisions made at both national and local levels. The House has, of course, discussed the issues in detail on a number of occasions. Everyone has agreed that the current timetable for setting individual schools' budgets simply does not allow head teachers enough time for sensible planning.

On 17 July, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out the measures that he proposed to take to ensure greater stability in school funding for 2004–05 and 2005–06. In doing so, he made it clear that one of the key principles underpinning that work is that central and local government should achieve earlier announcements of the financial allocations to schools, so that heads have greater certainty and more time to plan. As part of delivering that undertaking, my right hon. Friend has given a commitment that, well in advance of the announcement of the provisional local government finance settlement, his Department will provide local authorities with key information on the minimum increase in funding per pupil, on the floor increase in resources for local authorities that will underpin that guarantee, and on the distribution of standards fund grants.

The Government are also firmly committed to bringing forward the date of the provisional local government finance settlement as early as is practicable. We will do everything that we can to ensure that the announcement can be made by the middle of November this year. Such early announcements of key information will make it possible for local authorities to decide by the end of December what schools budget they are going to propose. The effect will be to give schools much greater certainty about their funding earlier in the year, so that they can plan more effectively for the following year. The deadline for authorities in Wales will remain 31 January.

The second effect of amendment No. 51 will be to change the deadline by which the Secretary of State for Education and Skills or the National Assembly for Wales must give notice of their intention to use reserve powers to 14 days from the schools budget deadline, instead of 14 days from the date of each individual authority's notification of its proposed school budget. That will ensure a common timetable for consideration of all authorities' proposed schools budgets, which I am sure Members will accept as a more sensible arrangement.

Although we appreciate the helpful intent behind amendments (a) and (b), we cannot support them. As I said, the Government are committed to bringing forward the date of the provisional local government finance settlement to mid-November. We will do everything possible to fulfil that commitment. It is vital that schools receive information about their budgets in good time, and delaying the determination of proposed schools budgets to 31 January would not be in the interest of schools or local authorities, not least because if it were necessary to decide to use the reserve power to set a minimum schools budget for an authority, that authority's actual schools budget might be determined only after the deadline for the authority to set its council tax for the following financial year. Amendment (b) is unnecessary, and would remove from the provisions helpful clarification about financial years. For those reasons, I urge the House to reject those two amendments.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): I come to the consideration of the Local Government Bill somewhat late in its passage, but I hope that hon. Members will forgive me, given that I have been dealing with the issue under discussion for a little longer, having served as a Back Bencher on the Committee for the Schools Standards and Framework Bill in 1998, and a Front Bencher on the Committee on the Education Bill last year.

This business is just another chapter in the sorry saga of the Government's mishandling of school funding this year. In spite of the Minister's emollient words—in his usual reasonable tone, he presented this as merely the product of coincidences of various changes in procedure—it is a great shame that hon. Members and schools in our various constituencies have little reason to be confident that this will be the final chapter in that sorry saga.

This year, the Department for Education and Skills guaranteed a minimum increase in education formula allocations for each local education authority area. None the less, we have seen the worst schools funding

crisis in decades. On 17 July, the Secretary of State sought a guarantee at the level of the individual school. He said:

"I will confirm the minimum percentage increases for 2004–05 and, provisionally, for 2005-06, by the time of the provisional local government finance settlement in November"—[*Official Report*, 17 July 2003; Vol. 409, c. 455.]

We must ask whether this year's guarantee will prove any more durable than that which went before it.

The crisis that has afflicted schools this year was all the worse because it was unnecessary. The Department for Education and Skills was warned in good time by heads and by hon. Members, but was too arrogant or too intransigent to act. Ministers ignored repeated warnings about the effect of increases in employers' national insurance contributions, increases in the superannuation contributions for teachers, and the removal of elements of the standards fund. They did nothing.

It is also true that the specific proposals in the amendment could have been dealt with much earlier. On 8 January 2002, in Standing Committee G on the Education Bill, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) and I moved amendments that sought to deal with this precise problem. The hon. Gentleman sought to fix a later end date for the budget round, and suggested that 15 February would be appropriate. I tried to fix the end date as a period of not more than 21 days after the teachers pay review had reported. Either arrangement might have helped had Ministers been prepared to listen to the arguments being advanced. The proposal was one of the unfortunate casualties of the heavy-handed, unnecessary timetabling of our considerations in Committee.

The perfectly sensible arguments that were advanced by members of the Committee on behalf of outside interest groups that had seen clearly what would happen as a result of the arrangements that the Government were implementing were not fully considered. Had they been, it might have obviated the need for these exchanges. Sadly, Ministers would not listen. As a consequence, they have presided over utter chaos in school funding this year.

This measure is a belated attempt to resolve a problem that we foresaw and about which we warned Ministers almost two years ago. The House should turn its attention to whether this belated attempt to solve the problem will work. On 17 July, the Secretary of State set out an approach that depends on a number of different strands: a two-year teachers' pay settlement, an earlier provisional local government settlement and how local authorities choose to fund their local schools. Even so, on 17 July, the Secretary of State accepted that there may be exceptional circumstances in which local education authorities would not be expected to—in the jargon—passport 100 per cent. of the increase in schools formula spending share to the schools budget. That was confirmed in a written answer to me on 8 September from the Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education. I asked for clarification of those exceptional circumstances. I received the following response:

"In considering whether or not to use his reserve power to set a minimum schools budget for the following financial year for any LEA proposing not to passport, the Secretary of State will consider all relevant circumstances including the reasons put forward by the LEA. He has made no pre-judgment on what would be considered exceptional."

So we already have from the Secretary of State an acceptance that there may be exceptional circumstances in which 100 per cent. passporting may not be appropriate or necessary, but no indication as yet of the circumstances in which that judgment would be made.

9.30 pm

What would happen in that event? Would the minimum percentage per pupil increase in the school budget be honoured if, it being considered an exceptional circumstance, the powers to require the 100 per cent. passporting were not implemented? If so, would it be done through direct payment? Is the Minister confident that the amendment would allow sufficient time for the school to be notified if such measures were taken?

On 8 January, I attempted to give Ministers powers to do precisely what they now say they want to do. My amendments would have allowed minimum per pupil funding to be specified for each school or category of schools. It is not clear to me how, without those powers, Ministers will fulfil the aspiration set out in the statement of 17 July of a minimum per pupil increase.

As can be seen from a written answer that I received last week, Ministers do not know how they will fulfil their aspirations either. When I asked the Secretary of State whether the guaranteed minimum per pupil increase would take account of the restoration of standards funds payments or would apply only to the age-weighted per pupil funding, I was told:

"The Department is working with local education authorities on the methodology for the guarantee, and aims to issue draft regulations and guidance during the autumn."

Ministers do not yet know how they will achieve their aim in procedural terms; nor do they even yet know on what baseline the guaranteed increased school funding figure will begin. Another written answer from the Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education stated:

"local education authorities and schools will work together through their Schools Forums to agree the funding baseline to which the guaranteed per pupil increase will be applied. We aim to issue guidance and draft regulations on this during the autumn."—[*Official Report*, 8 September 2003; Vol. 410, c. 132W, 140W.]

One would have thought it a fairly simple matter to look at a pledge to increase per pupil school funding from one year to the next, and that the baseline must necessarily be the sum per pupil spent the previous year. I have half the answer so far. I do not criticise the Department, because I think that it was impossible to print the other half of the figures that I asked for. I am talking about the per pupil expenditure figure for every school in the country for the current financial year. It is contained in a fairly substantial document, which is in the Library of the House. I am sure that Members on both sides of the House will want to hurry there to consult it. They will find interesting variations in not only the per pupil funding of schools in different parts of the country and different constituencies, but per pupil funding in different parts of the same LEA area.

[Mr. Graham Brady]

The remarkable thing is that those figures are not the baseline on which the pledge to increase per pupil funding is to be based. I do not understand how anything other than per pupil funding in the present year can be used as the baseline. We have the guarantee of 17 July but, as yet, no methodology, no regulations and no guidance. We do not even know the baseline funding figure on which a school's guaranteed increase will build.

The measures before us are a belated attempt to deal with the problems that have afflicted schools during the current financial year. If the Government had perhaps been a little more willing to listen to rational argument and to be open-minded in their consideration of previous legislation, the measures might already have been in place, or indeed been unnecessary because more effective measures could have been enacted already. We are left with an attempt to improve the position, which is an honest attempt that we welcome. I give full credit to the Minister for that but it leaves us with some serious questions.

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): The hon. Gentleman is still on the Committee of the 1998 Bill.

Mr. Brady: The Minister comments that he thinks that I am still on the Committee of the 1998 Bill. If Ministers at the time had got more right in the passage of the School Standards and Framework Bill and had listened to argument, schools would be the better for it and we would not be picking up the pieces many years on.

We have had an assurance from the Minister for Local Government, Regional Governance and Fire that everything possible will be done by the Government to ensure that the local government settlement will be brought forward by mid-November. That is extremely welcome. We will, of course, seek to hold the Government to that. I ask for further assurances or clarification on the exact status of the provisional settlement, and how certain schools can be that they are working from a solid foundation in looking at the provisional figures. Can he give the House a clearer idea of the status of negotiations regarding the teachers' pay settlement? I would welcome some further assurance on those points and look forward to the Minister's comments.

Mr. Edward Davey: The amendment, which we will not oppose, tries to deal with a problem that the Government have made for themselves in a number of areas, not only by taking the power to set minimum budgets but by the way in which they approached last year's local government finance settlement and failed to deal with the school funding crisis that we saw as a result of that settlement. What happened last year—I will not give a complete detailed account, as the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) has just done that—was that a number of Departments took different decisions that would affect schools' budgets and no one in this so-called joined-up government put them all together and worked out the net effect on different schools. That was the problem.

What we should be hearing from the Government is that they will not allow that situation to arise again—that Whitehall Departments will talk to each other and that a Minister's local government finance settlement announcement in which the Government praise themselves and say how they are going to give local authorities more flexibility will not again be followed the next day by a letter from the Minister for School Standards—who I am delighted to see on the Front Bench—telling local head teachers what they must expect their local education authority to pass to them. We had one Department saying that it was all about flexibilities and freedoms and that authorities would be able to make choices, and another saying that a large slug of the money that had just been announced was earmarked and had to be passported through and that head teachers should expect and demand it. That is not the sign of a Government who believe in localism, or of a joined-up Government in which Departments of State are talking to each other. That was the major problem with the local authority finance settlement last year, and that is why the Government got into such a mess.

The question is whether the amendment and some of the other measures announced by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills earlier this year are up to the job of putting the problems right. I remain unconvinced. The measure may be taking a small step forward; it is clear from what the Local Government Association and others have said that it may help. The question is whether the Government will be able to deliver on the rules that they are setting themselves, but the proposal does not deal with the underlying issues; for example, the balance of funding issue, where if there is a shortfall, the effect on the council tax or on spending on services is so great. Those issues have not been dealt with. I know that a review is on the way but clearly it will not inform this year's settlement. These are fundamental issues with which we must grapple, but what we have are very much sticking plasters and second-best solutions. The Government have not grappled with the fundamental problems.

I agreed with a lot of what the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West said in his castigation of the Government, but it was rich of him to say that this year's funding crisis was the worst for decades. Some of us can remember many funding crises in our schools under the Conservative Governments of the 1980s and 1990s, some of which were far worse than last year's. That does not excuse the Government and two wrongs do not make a right, but it ill behoves Conservative Front Benchers to make such remarks without apologising for their appalling record.

We will support the Government on the Lords amendment, which goes some way towards making a bad situation a little better, but we hope that the Government will learn the lessons from the chaos of last year. We look forward to seeing whether they learn the lessons in this year's local government finance settlement in terms of what it does for schools. Schools need that money, but the Government have to provide a framework and a joined-up approach to enable it to get through.

Mr. Raynsford: This has been a short but useful debate on an important subject. The hon. Member for

Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) stressed that he came late to the Bill; some would say that he comes at the eleventh hour. We welcome him none the less. He emphasised his involvement in earlier education issues, but I understand that he was not able to attend last week's debate on the very issues we are debating tonight.

I agree with the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) that those with longer experience of education will know of the considerable difference between the financial problems that have occurred in the course of the current year—about which we have been open—as against the position when the Conservatives were in government, when schools, local education authorities and teachers faced much larger genuine crises in terms of inadequate funding.

The huge increases in funding for education introduced by the Government have made a difference, and everyone in education knows that only too well. My wife, a teacher, has shown me her new laptop, provided as a result of a Government initiative. That is an interesting indication of the way in which new investment is creating new technology opportunities to improve the ability of, if I may say so, excellent teachers to deliver high standards of education to their pupils. *[Laughter.]* I will say no more than that.

This year's settlement ensured an overall increase of some £2.7 billion in education funding—far higher than the sums that used to be available in the years of the Conservative Government.

9.45 pm

Mr. Brady: But at this point in this year's funding crisis, the Minister must surely acknowledge that nearly all of that money was taken out again through increases in taxation, and through changes in the standards fund and in the pension arrangements.

Mr. Raynsford: None of that money was taken out by the Government through changes in the standards fund; that was the increase available. A range of factors led to difficulties in distribution, when the funds that were available to education authorities were then transmitted to schools. These issues have been debated in this House in the past few months, and we reached an understanding of what the changes were. They were the result of a number of different factors coming together to create what was clearly a period of turbulence.

I shall describe some of those factors, the first of which was the change to local authority distribution of grant. It had been promised for some time, and lengthy consultation had taken place on that complex issue. The change happened to be introduced last year, which created a degree of turbulence in the system. However, every local authority in the country received an above-inflation grant increase—not something that they used to experience when the Conservatives were in power.

Secondly, there were changes to the standards fund, and I should like to highlight some of the issues involved. The standards fund has been hugely important in helping to drive improvement in a range of areas in schools, but it has been ring-fenced. That has had specific advantages in terms of enabling funding to be targeted at individual schools, but ring-fencing does have a downside. When sums have to be earmarked for specific programmes, it creates inflexibility and difficulties for local authorities in managing their wider responsibilities. So it is this Government's policy objective to reduce the degree of ring-fencing, while recognising the importance of what it can achieve in certain circumstances. This involves a difficult balance. In the course of this year, we sought to reduce the overall amount of ring-fenced funding.

Mr. Edward Davey: I have never understood the difference between ring-fencing and passporting; can the Minister help me by explaining it?

Mr. Raynsford: Let me run through the various components. Ring-fencing involves a clear insistence that sums allocated by Government for a particular purpose are used solely for that purpose. The objective is to ensure that those funds are made available for the purpose for which they were granted, and cannot be used for any other purpose whatsoever. The benefit is that that ensures input control, whereby those funds will go to the designated purpose; the downside, as the hon. Gentleman knows well, is that local authorities' freedom to use their overall funds in the most flexible way, taking account of the many pressures that they face, is inhibited.

Passporting has been a mechanism through which the Department for Education and Skills has sought to indicate the funding that should be passed on from local authorities to schools in any one year. As the hon. Gentleman is an expert in local government finance, he will know that that sum is largely made up of Government grant, but that it also includes an amount assumed to be raised by local authorities through their own council tax. That is the basis on which the formula spending share, which used to be known as the standard spending assessment, was constituted. So the passporting figures for the current year included the assumption that authorities would pass on to education sums related to the FSS for education, which embraced both sums made available by the Government in grant and those that might be raised by authorities from their own council tax, according to the assumption.

The hon. Gentleman knows very well that the difficulties occurred, in the main, when the total sum of Government grant made available to local authorities was less than the sum that they expected to passport on in education. That is one of the tensions, which I have already exposed, in the relationship between specific funding for a particular subject—in this case, education—and the wider issue of local government finance. That is why tensions are inevitably associated with ring-fencing and passporting, and why it is necessary to approach these issues in a sensible and consultative way.

I was talking about some of the changes that occurred this year. We know about increases in teachers' pay, which had a differential impact, with some schools facing more significant burdens than others. There were increases in teachers' pensions and increased pressures on some local authorities for special needs obligations—for example, for children with special educational needs and pupil referral units. All of those had differential impacts and the combination of all those factors resulted in some schools not receiving the level of increase that they had anticipated and in some authorities finding it difficult to ensure that education

[Mr. Raynsford]

was funded to the extent that the Government wanted without a disproportionate impact on the council tax. We have been open about that and explored the issue in lengthy discussions with representatives of local government, head teachers, the unions and others to get to the bottom of what went wrong this year in order to ensure that it will be put right in future.

Matthew Green: With the benefit of hindsight—I acknowledge that the Minister did not set out to create this year's problems—would he say that making so many changes in one year should be avoided in future because of the problems that it has created now?

Mr. Raynsford: It has always been our objective to try to provide local government with as much certainty as possible. I am saying clearly to local government that we do not intend to make any changes to the methodology of the grant distribution formula—other than where it is absolutely necessary when a change of service occurs—for the next two years, which should provide a period of consistency and certainty. However, the hon. Gentleman will recall the strong calls to change the old standard spending assessment. The SSA was discredited; people knew that it was not an accurate reflection of the need to spend; there was a strong argument for a review. Such reviews are always difficult because of the different competing claims from different elements among the local government family. There is a huge amount of lobbying with all groups seeking their own advantage, and it is hard to find a way through. In fact, it is difficult to please anyone because almost everyone finds something wrong with what is finally proposed.

We do not relish making such changes often and I am pleased to say that there will not be another change of that nature for some time. I accept the hon. Gentleman's point that the change happened at the same time as the other changes that I have described and that it contributed to the turbulence that caused the difficulties. We are now trying to minimise the risk of it happening again.

Mr. Brady: One of the reasons that the Minister advanced to explain the difficulties in some local education authority areas was the above-inflation increase in the cost of special needs education, which is a significant problem. Are the Government proposing to ring-fence provision for special educational needs funding, given that measures are being taken to require a per pupil increase in mainstream schools? Is there a danger that it might squeeze special needs education?

Mr. Raynsford: No, the Government want to see funding for special educational needs, pupil referral units and so forth continue to grow where there is a demand for it. However, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills has made it absolutely clear that the increase in funding for that sector should not exceed the increase in funding for schools. That is a perfectly fair wish—to ensure that schools funding is not used to fund central services, but that there should be scope for both to continue to rise in line.

I was dealing with our attempts to tackle the problems of the current year and to ensure that next year's arrangements work much better and provide the greater certainty to schools—and, indeed, to local authorities—that we all want to see. One key element will flow from the lack of change to the local government formula, which I described in response to the question asked by the hon. Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green). That will help. Further certainty will be provided by the commitment of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to continue the standards fund. We have accepted that it will involve the continuation of a ring-fenced grant. That is a concession on our part, because our objective is to reduce the overall level of ring-fencing—*[Interruption.]* No, it is a pragmatic approach to deal with a problem that inevitably caused difficulty. A ring-fenced grant such as the standards fund is targeted specifically at a certain area. If it is rolled into the general grant, the distribution is inevitably different. That was one of the problems that caused last year's difficulties. Recognising that fact, we want to ensure that the problem is not replicated. That is why we are going to continue with the grant for the moment.

A third element is giving earlier indications of the minimum per-pupil increases. That is a clear commitment by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to ensure that schools have much greater certainty at an earlier stage, because last year the figures emerged relatively late in the budget-making process and that was a difficulty for schools. Of course, we also want to see earlier decisions on the local authority settlement. That is difficult, because—as with so many other issues, a tension exists.

Local authorities tell us repeatedly that they want the earliest possible indication of the provisional settlement. That is not surprising. They also tell us that they want us to use the latest available data. However, much of the data only becomes available late in the process. One of the key elements, from the education point of view, is the secondary school pupil numbers, which are being collated only now. By the time they are collected, checked and passed to us, it will be later in the process, and that is an inevitable constraint.

We could, of course, give earlier provisional settlement figures if we worked on figures that were a year out of date, but local government wants us to use up-to-date figures. I understand that. It is a reasonable request and we try to accommodate it. That is why our aim will be to produce the provisional settlement by the middle of November. We are working hard to make that possible. It will not be easy and it will require enormous hard work by my officials to achieve it, but we are committed to do it to help to provide greater certainty.

Additionally, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills has pledged additional funding and we have given a similar pledge to ensure that all authorities are able to passport 100 per cent. of the schools funding requirement without having to take funding from other areas or increase council tax disproportionately. Increases in council tax have been far too high in recent years and it is essential that councils moderate their demands in future. The public

are far from happy with the excessive increases, which came predominantly from Conservative authorities. We will watch very closely the average increase in council tax, which was significantly higher—by five or six percentage points—in Conservative areas than in Labour areas and, indeed, Liberal Democrat areas. It is Conservatives who have driven up the council tax, and we will watch that closely in the coming months.

Mr. Edward Davey: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Raynsford: I do not have time to give way.

All the issues that I have mentioned have involved detailed discussion with local education authorities, schools, local authorities and relevant Departments. For those reasons, we have not been able to make full announcements on all the points about which the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West asked me. We are discussing them with local authorities and schools. That is the right approach to ensure agreement and engagement, and to get the mechanisms right.

The hon. Gentleman acknowledged—I thank him for doing so—that we are making an honest attempt to ensure that the problems that occurred this year will not be repeated next year. That is what we are determined to do. He asked about the certainty of the provisional settlement. The answer is that we publish the provisional settlement and give local authorities a period of time to respond to it and make submissions. We will consider those and then confirm the final settlement. However, I can say that the practice in recent years has been that the final settlement has not differed from the provisional settlement to any marked degree. I hope that that provides some certainty.

We have also introduced a system of floors and ceilings to give local authorities confidence that they will not face a wide variation in the amount of funding with which they have to budget. All those changes are designed to improve the arrangements and give a better settlement in the coming year. The final question the hon. Gentleman asked was about the teachers' pay settlement. That is still in the hands of the School Teachers Review Body and we are awaiting the outcome.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton raised wider issues of local authority finance. He knows that we are conducting the balance of funding review, and that is the right formula to address those wider issues. This year, we are not concentrating on the longer term issues but on getting the mechanisms right to overcome the practical problems that occurred with the distribution of the 2003–04 settlement and the impact on schools. Getting that right for 2004–05 is our fundamental objective. We are working hard at it and we will continue to do so. Our aim is to achieve a proper framework that provides certainty for schools and ensures that the additional money that the Government are putting into education finds its way to the right places.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 44 to 56 agreed to [One with Special entry].

Committee appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendments Nos. 3, 6 and 19: Paul Clark, Mr. Edward Davey, Linda Gilroy, Mr. Philip Hammond and Phil Hope; Phil Hope to be the Chairman of the Committee; Three to be the quorum of the Committee.—*[Paul Clark.]*

To withdraw immediately.

Reasons for disagreeing to certain Lords amendments reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Northern Ireland Act 2000 (Modification) (No. 2) Order 2003, which was laid before this House on 3rd July, be approved.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

MARITIME TRANSPORT SECURITY

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 8566/03, Commission Communication on enhancing maritime transport security and draft Regulation on enhancing ship and port facility security; and supports the Government's continuing commitment to working with the European Union to that end.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Miss Anne McIntosh be discharged from the European Scrutiny Committee and Mr David Heathcoat-Amory be added.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE INTER-GOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE

Ordered,

That—

(1) There shall be a standing committee, called the Standing Committee on the Inter-Governmental Conference on the Future of Europe.

(2) At any sitting of the standing committee, the chairman may permit a Minister or Ministers to make statements on the Inter-Governmental Conference, and questions may then be put thereon by Members:

Provided that no proceedings under this paragraph may continue after the expiry of a period of one and a half hours from their commencement, except with the leave of the chairman.

(3) At the conclusion of proceedings under paragraph (2), the committee may consider either of the following—

(a) when a written report has been laid before Parliament by a Minister or Ministers, a Motion proposed from the chair 'That the committee has considered the report of [date] on the Inter-Governmental Conference'; or

[Mr. Raynsford]

(b) a Motion for the adjournment of the committee, provided that a Minister of the Crown has given notice of a subject relating to the Inter-Governmental Conference for the debate on the adjournment not later than five days before the sitting.

(4)(a) The chairman shall put any Questions necessary to dispose of the proceedings on any Motion under paragraph (3)(a), if not previously concluded, when the committee shall have sat for two and a half hours; and the chairman shall thereupon report that the committee has considered the report of [date] on the Inter-Governmental Conference, without putting any further Question;

(b) in case of a Motion under paragraph (3)(b), the chairman shall adjourn the committee without putting any question, not later than two and a half hours after the committee has begun sitting.

(5)(a) Notwithstanding Standing Order No. 86, the standing committee shall consist of those Members of the House nominated for the time being to the European Scrutiny Committee (appointed under Standing Order No. 143) and to the Foreign Affairs Committee (appointed under Standing Order No. 152); and

(b) any Member of the House, not being a member of the committee, may take part in the proceedings of the committee and be counted in the quorum, but shall not vote or make any motion, except that any member of the government may move a Motion under paragraph (3)(b).

(6) Members of the House of Lords may participate in the committee's proceedings, but no member of that House may vote or make any motion or be counted in the quorum.

That this Order be a Standing Order of the House until the end of the next Session of Parliament.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

WORKING TIME REGULATIONS

Ordered,

That the Working Time (Amendment) Regulations 2003 (S.I., 2003, No. 1684), be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

CARE STANDARDS

Ordered,

That the Care Standards Act 2000 (Domiciliary Care Agencies and Nurses Agencies) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2003 (S.I., 2003, No. 2323), be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

PETITION

New Town

10.3 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): In 1997, I gave evidence at the examination in public in the city of Exeter on behalf of my constituents opposed to the building of a new town in the east Devon part of my constituency.

Since that time, the district council and many constituents have tried to make their views known. Although they agree that there should be some building—perhaps a small settlement—a whole new town is not in the local interest.

I am pleased that at the recent, new examination in public the chairman revisited the question of whether such a town was needed at all—something that we all welcome. I am pleased to present to the House the petition of Councillor Ruth Burrow and more than 15,000 residents of east Devon.

The petition declares:

We object to a new town being built in East Devon and therefore request that the House of Commons recognises the view of local residents that new development should be proportionate to identified local need, should provide a mix of housing and that new build should not just be concentrated in one location but should be spread throughout the County to ensure future viability of village and market town communities.

And the Petitioners remain etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Probate Services

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

10.5 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): I raise an issue this evening about what I admit I thought was an entirely natural view of one of my constituents. As he had been appointed with enduring power of attorney over his aunt's financial affairs, he thought he would automatically become the administrator of the estate when she died, as there was no will. He found that he did not have that right, so I should like to consider that issue, as well as how the probate office deals with approaches for the administration of estates. I have already corresponded with the then Lord Chancellor's Department about the issue.

The story starts on 24 February 2000, when one of my constituents, John Weaver, was appointed with enduring power of attorney for his aunt, Enid Jenkins. In September 2000, Enid Jenkins was admitted from hospital to Darren Court residential home in Baglan, Port Talbot, run by David Weaver, her nephew, and an elder cousin of John Weaver. Within weeks, on 19 November 2000, a letter, purportedly signed by Enid Jenkins, claimed that she had never asked anyone to look after her financial affairs and did not want John Weaver to look after them. On 10 January 2002, she had purportedly signed another letter, claiming that John Weaver had got her to sign a form when she was most unwell—in fact, so unwell that she could not remember being in hospital, let alone signing his form. It was her intention to attend the Court of Protection hearing in February.

On 8 February 2001, the Court of Protection hearing took place. By 1 March, the Court of Protection confirmed that John Weaver was the person who had enduring power of attorney and that everything had been done properly. Unfortunately and sadly, a couple of days later, on 3 March, Enid Jenkins died. On 6 March, John Weaver registered her death and went about arranging the funeral. On 14 March, he received a letter from another relative informing him that David Weaver had become the administrator of their aunt's estate after applying to the probate office. David Weaver was not the closest relative of Enid Jenkins, and I should like to know whether it is on record that the eldest cousin ceded his right to be the administrator of the estate.

Two years and six months later, despite the house of the late Enid Jenkins being sold more than 14 months ago, the accounts of the estate have not been settled and published. Moreover, the house was sold by the administrator, David Weaver, to the eldest cousin who had given up his right to be administrator, either officially or otherwise: he certainly did not take up that right. In January and February of this year, I wrote to David Weaver on behalf of John Weaver, seeking information about the estate, but I did not even get the courtesy of an acknowledgement, let alone an answer to any of the questions.

John Weaver feels very strongly that, as his aunt, Enid Jenkins, had given him the power to look after her financial affairs when she was alive, it would have been natural for him to become the administrator of her estate when a will could not be found. It is particularly galling to my constituent that the person who was the prime mover in the effort to get him removed from his power of attorney on behalf of Enid Jenkins should, in effect, have taken over that role on her death by becoming the administrator of the estate.

The issue is simple. I share my constituent's concern about these issues, and I look forward to my hon. Friend's response as to why the apparently natural move from power of attorney to administrator of the estate does not take place. I would also be interested to know exactly what steps were taken to make sure that David Weaver was in fact the proper person to be the administrator of the estate, given that he was not the closest relative of Enid Jenkins. I look forward to my hon. Friend's reply.

10.10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. David Lammy): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this short debate.

I thank my hon. Friend for raising issues surrounding the granting of letters of administration to Mr. David Weaver. Mr. David Weaver wished to administer the estate on behalf of his aunt, Miss Enid Jenkins. In essence, my hon. Friend raises matters of principle relating, first, to enduring powers of attorney and, secondly, to the administration of intestate estates. Perhaps he will therefore excuse me if I outline briefly what those two things are.

A power of attorney is a power to act on behalf of someone else. The person may be temporarily physically incapacitated and need someone to conduct business on their behalf, or they may be due to go abroad for a long period and need someone to collect rents, pay taxes and so on. It is entirely a matter for the individual to decide to whom to give power and what powers the attorney can have. That sort of power of attorney ceases to have effect if the person who made it dies or loses mental capacity. An enduring power of attorney differs from an ordinary power, as it can survive the loss of an individual's mental capacity provided that it is registered with the Court of Protection.

When a person dies intestate—without leaving a will—his or her estate is distributed according to a scheme laid down by the section 26 of the Administration of Estates Act 1925, as amended. Entitlement under this scheme, which is designed to reflect the wishes of the average person, varies according to which relatives, if any, survive the deceased. The estate is distributed in a strict order of priority: to the spouse; to children of the deceased and the issue of any who has predeceased that person; if none, to the parents of the deceased; if none, to the brothers or sisters of the deceased; if none, to the grandparents; and if none, to uncles or aunts. When there are no relatives, or none can be found, the estate passes to the Crown, the Duchy of Lancaster or the Duchy of Cornwall.

There is a distinction between attorneys and the administrator of an estate. The attorney acts on behalf of the person who chooses them. The administrator must act according to a set of rules, because the deceased person did not make a will.

As I said, my hon. Friend raises these issues on behalf of his constituent, Mr. John Weaver. Mr. John Weaver is a relative of Miss Jenkins. Miss Jenkins appointed him

[Mr. David Lammy]

to act for her, as her attorney, by an enduring power of attorney in February 2000, which allowed him to deal with her assets during her lifetime. That is very important.

In order for an enduring power to be used during the mental incapacity of the person, it must be registered with the Court of Protection. The attorney applied to the Court of Protection to register the enduring power of attorney in July 2000. As part of the process, he had to give notice of the application to certain relatives. Mr. David Weaver and most of the other nieces and nephews objected to the application on various grounds.

The objections were considered by the master of the Court of Protection at a hearing on 8 February 2001. John Weaver, David Weaver and other relatives attended the hearing. The court carefully considered all the evidence, but it decided to dismiss the objections and ordered that the enduring power of attorney be registered. The attorney was also ordered to account to solicitors annually.

As I have said, an enduring power—like any power of attorney—lasts only for the lifetime of the person who made it. It is automatically revoked on death, and the Court of Protection cancels a registered power when the person has died. The estate of the deceased is then dealt with under probate law in the way that any other person's estate is dealt with.

A few weeks after the hearing about the enduring power, Miss Jenkins passed away. This ended the Court of Protection's jurisdiction over her affairs. As no will was found, Miss Jenkins died intestate. Mr. John Weaver, as her former attorney, felt that it would have been appropriate that he be granted letters of administration so that he could administer her estate. He was entitled to apply; he did not apply. Mr. David Weaver applied and obtained them.

I come now to the issue of the letters of administration in this case. Miss Jenkins died on 3 March 2001 and on 12 March of that year, David Victor Weaver applied to the Probate Registry of Wales for a grant of letters of administration of Miss Jenkins's estate. Mr. Weaver applied personally, without the assistance of a solicitor. In his application, David Weaver swore upon oath that Miss Jenkins died without leaving a will, and that she was a spinster whose closest living relatives were the seven children of her five half brothers and sisters. All her half brothers and sisters had predeceased her.

In these circumstances, any of Miss Jenkins's half-nieces and nephews are entitled to apply for letters of administration of her estate. When there is any dispute between persons interested in an estate, the issue of probate or letters of administration may be delayed until those disputes are resolved, by any of the parties entering a caveat. No caveat was entered in Miss Jenkins's estate.

On 29 March 2001, letters of administration of Miss Jenkins's estate were granted to David Victor Weaver on the basis that he was the son of Ivor Weaver, one of Miss Jenkins's half-brothers, who had died in her lifetime. His entitlement to take letters of administration was equal to that of Miss Jenkins's other half-nieces and nephews and there was no need for him to notify or obtain the agreement of any of the others. If my hon. Friend is suggesting that there are closer relatives to the deceased than the half-nephews and nieces, it is a serious matter about which the probate registrar should be notified. However, he should be clear that age is not a criteria for the order in which the hierarchy should work.

As the administrator of Miss Jenkins's estate, David Weaver is required by the Administration of Estates Act 1925 to collect her assets, pay her debts and distribute the remainder of her estate among those entitled to it. In these circumstances, the estate falls to be divided equally among her half-nephews and nieces. David Weaver gave a sworn undertaking to administer the estate according to the law and, when required, to supply a full inventory of the estate and give an account of that to the court.

On 8 April 2001, John Weaver, who had been Miss Jenkins's attorney under an enduring power of attorney, as my hon. Friend said, entered into correspondence with the Probate Registry of Wales and expressed concerns that he had not received his proper share of Miss Jenkins's estate. If a beneficiary has concerns about the administration of an estate, he may issue a summons requesting an order that requires the administrator to file in court an inventory and account of his administration of the estate. That will usually provide sufficient information to the beneficiary either to set his mind at rest or to suggest that further action should be taken. On four occasions, the deputy district probate registrar of Wales suggested to John Weaver that he should consider issuing a summons for an inventory and account of the estate, but he has not, as yet, done so.

As far as the administration of an estate is concerned, it is assumed that those who stand to inherit from an estate should have a vested interest in seeing that it is promptly and properly distributed. The law therefore provides that the order of priority for those eligible to make an application for letters of administration is the same as for those who benefit. The law also provides that if there are no surviving relatives or if surviving relatives do not wish to take out a grant, a grant may be issued to the Treasury Solicitor on behalf of the Crown. The present law therefore provides adequately for the issue of a grant and for the estate to be administered. The process is clear, tried and tested and works well. It is our view that it is unnecessary to change it.

It is difficult to understand what purpose would be served by joining holders of an enduring power of attorney to the eligible class of those who may apply to administer an intestate estate. A person with an EPA could bring nothing extra to the administration that the present class cannot provide, especially because he might not be a relative of the deceased. Unless there is agreement to the contrary from beneficiaries, there is no room for discretion when administering the estate—it must be administered as set out in the intestacy rules. In addition, if the EPA holder were not a beneficiary, it would produce a situation in which a person from outside the family administered the estate for family members. That would be against the whole policy intention behind the intestacy rules, which limit involvement in administration to the family of the deceased who are beneficiaries. In addition, the only logical place to put attorneys is between family members and the Crown. However, their function would then be only to distribute the estate to the family or simply to pass the estate to the Crown.

Finally, as I have already said, the purpose of an EPA and that of a grant of representation are quite different. The first is used to look after the affairs of people during their lifetime in such a way as to benefit them most. The purpose of letters of administration is to distribute the deceased's estate among the beneficiaries in accordance with rules laid down by law. They are separate functions; it does not follow that because a person holds an enduring power of attorney they are automatically suitable to be granted letters of administration.

The review of probate services that was conducted in 2001 made recommendations for the modernisation of certain aspects of the service, including the conduct of personal applications such as Mr. Weaver's. A public consultation on the main recommendations concluded on 28 February 2003; officials are analysing the responses.

The whole thrust of Government policy in this area is, properly, to encourage people to make wills—to set out their precise intent during their lifetime to avoid family disputes. Where disputes arise, family members must make their application for the grant on the basis of the intestacy laws.

I hope that I have explained to my hon. Friend why there is a clear distinction between having an enduring power of attorney during someone's lifetime—whereby one is clearly aware of that person's intent, having been asked to do a job of work for them—and a situation in which someone dies having failed to make a will, whereupon the state takes over and the estate is administered under the intestacy laws.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 16 September 2003

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND TRANSPORT FOR LONDON BILL *[LORDS]*

Considered; amendments agreed to.

MERSEY TUNNELS BILL *(By Order)*

Order for consideration, as amended, read.

To be considered on Tuesday 14 October.

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

The Secretary of State was asked—

Foundation Hospitals

1. **Mr. David Cameron** (Witney): What recent representations he has received from NHS trusts about the Government's plan for foundation hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [129948]

The Secretary of State for Health (Dr. John Reid): My ministerial colleagues and I have had a number of discussions with the chairs and chief executives of NHS trusts, and this dialogue will continue.

Mr. Cameron: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. If foundation status is really about giving hospitals greater freedom, will he look again at the strict rule under which no hospital can increase its income from private patients? Is he aware that Nuffield Orthopaedic hospital in Oxford, where NHS patients will always come first, has used private income to subsidise the NHS and help to pay for investment? It wants to continue to do so, but the base year is very restrictive. Will the Secretary of State ensure that foundation status will not make things worse in that regard?

Dr. Reid: I know that the hon. Gentleman takes a deep interest in health care and the health service. He will understand that we are trying to achieve a balance between the power that we decentralise and the maintenance of a balanced benefit for all the people of this country through the national health service. The cap that has been put on the proportion of patients who can be treated privately in the new foundation hospitals is intentionally set to be fair to the vast majority who rely on the NHS. It will be fixed as a percentage of the income derived from private patient activity that applied to each NHS foundation trust in the financial year ending April 2003. That will ensure that the cap applies fairly to all trusts, irrespective of when they make the transition to NHS foundation trust status.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): What representations has the Secretary of State received about the Government's proposals, which I think are very opaque? Will people be able to vote if they have paid £1, or if they have pledged to pay £1? What estimates have NHS trusts made about the likely turn-out in the elections?

Dr. Reid: Discussions are under way in this House and in another place about the exact details, but let me make it clear that it is a good thing that we should reduce the amount of diktats from the centre and pass more control to people in local areas. If we are truly going to have a national health service capable of meeting the differentiated needs, ambitions and expectations of 60 million of our fellow citizens today, we shall have to decentralise. I commend to my hon. Friend the authority on these matters who said that he was deeply conscious that one of the great dangers of a Government health service was over-centralisation, and that the wider the decentralisation that could be achieved, the better it would be for everyone. That authority was, of course, the founder of the national health service, Nye Bevan, speaking in 1946.

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle): Does the Secretary of State intend to ensure that the regulator gives precise instructions about the cap? Clause 15 of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill, which is currently going through the other place, has confused people with regard to the capping of private health care. As it stands, the clause does not insist that the regulator should cap private health care.

Dr. Reid: I think that this issue is pretty clear to everyone, whatever opinion they may hold, except the Liberal Democrats. If the hon. Lady can show me anyone outside the Liberal Democrats who is confused about it, I will certainly consider their case. This is, however, a refreshing change for me. Having listened all week to objections from the trade unions, the producers organised, it is nice to hear the comments of the Lib Dems—the producers disorganised.

Elderly Care

2. **Jeff Ennis** (Barnsley, East and Mexborough): What steps he is taking to increase support available for older people to stay in their own homes. [129949]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Dr. Stephen Ladyman): Our published priorities set attainable but challenging targets for health and social care bodies to increase the support available for older people living in their own homes. We are

supporting that with an average 6 per cent. annual increase in real terms in resources for personal social services between 2003 and 2006.

Jeff Ennis: What steps could the Government take for people suffering from dementia and other long-term illnesses who are occupying hospital beds to help them to move back into their own homes rather than into a nursing home, if that is what they wish? There is definitely a demand from elderly people to stay in their own homes for as long as possible.

Dr. Ladyman: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. We are getting the message loud and clear from older people that they want to have the choice of staying in their own homes. When people are awaiting discharge, a package of care should be put together that is based on their choices and their needs. The delayed discharge grants that we have made available are for improving services in a person's home. Discharge into their home should be every bit as real a choice as discharge into a nursing home.

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): Sir Nigel Crisp recently acknowledged before the Public Accounts Committee that planning for the discharge of older patients from NHS acute hospitals, which is related to the support available for older people in their own homes, is now worse than it was four years ago. Why is that?

Dr. Ladyman: If Sir Nigel Crisp said that, he is wrong. Delayed discharge grants have given resources to local councils and local health authorities to put in place a mechanism by which delayed discharges can be eradicated from our hospital system. Any local council that has been doing a reasonable job of planning for this eventuality will make a profit from the delayed discharge grants, because it will receive more in grant than it is having to pay in fines.

Andy King (Rugby and Kenilworth): I welcome what my hon. Friend has said about extra resources for this purpose. In the past, people's perception has all too often been that they have been forced to remain in their own homes. Will he assure us that people will have real choice, and that it will be based on sound assessments of their needs?

Dr. Ladyman: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. He is right that in the past it was assumed that people would go into nursing homes or residential care. We are getting away from that. It is sad that the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives are devising policies to return to a system whereby people are forced into nursing homes instead of being given the choice of care in their own homes.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): Why will domiciliary care workers in this sector from 1 October face an increase since July of 142 per cent. in the fees they have to pay for their Criminal Records Bureau check?

Dr. Ladyman: They will have to pay an increase because we intend to ensure that those who care for old and vulnerable people are of suitable character and reputation. Surely that is something with which the Conservative party would agree. We intend the CRB checks on care workers to be self-funding, but the employers will pay the bills for them.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): I noted the reply that the Minister gave my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, East and Mexborough (Jeff Ennis) on support for people in their own homes. Will he comment on the divide between medical and social care? Strategic regional health authorities have set up a matrix to guide people, because that division causes problems and has an impact on the care of people in their own homes and in nursing homes.

Dr. Ladyman: I think that the issue to which my hon. Friend refers—if I am wrong I would welcome a meeting with him afterwards—is the dispute that arose because the ombudsman discovered that certain people were not being properly assessed for NHS continuing care. The Government have acknowledged that there were some failures in some areas. Different criteria were being used and were not being properly applied. We have instructed all the strategic health authorities to come up with consistent criteria, and to review the cases of those who may not have been properly assessed for continuing care. Those people will be fully compensated for any financial losses that they incurred as a result of any decision.

Long-term Care

3. **Sir Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): If he will take steps to increase funding for the provision of long-term care. [129950]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Dr. Stephen Ladyman): The Government are committed to providing the investment that is needed to secure real improvements in long-term care. We are determined to see that older people get the support that they need to lead life with respect and dignity. We have announced an overall real-terms increase of £1 billion for older people's social services by 2006.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: Does the Minister not accept that capacity across all sectors is approximately 74,000 places lower than it was at the peak of provision in 1996, and that in the 15 months leading up to April this year 13,400 elderly persons' places have been lost in residential homes—primarily independent and private homes? While the new minimum standards have clearly made a contribution to that by placing substantial burdens on small homes, the Minister must surely admit that underfunding is part of the problem. Will he please direct further attention to the situation, and try to ensure that the places that are required are provided?

Dr. Ladyman: I can give the hon. Gentleman an absolute assurance that we will look at the issues carefully; but the market contains 10,000 more care home places than there are people waiting for them, according to Laing and Buisson's figures.

As the hon. Gentleman says, there has been a contraction of the care home market since 1996. The implementation in the early 1990s of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 created a change in the market, which has continued to contract at a fairly steady pace ever since.

If the hon. Gentleman would like some advice, let me refer him to the Minister who oversaw the start of the contraction—the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns).

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): Aston Hall hospital in my constituency provides long-term care for people with learning disabilities. I have corresponded with my hon. Friend about delays in its reprovisioning programme. Will he ask his officials to turn their minds again to the need for urgent solutions and assistance for a reprovisioning process that, although tortuously and complexly designed, has won the support of all concerned?

Dr. Ladyman: I will certainly undertake to look again at the details of that case. Support for learning-disabled people is one of my highest priorities in my new portfolio, and I intend to ensure that the substantial extra resources made available by the Government for their care will indeed go to them.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): Does the Minister think it right for Birmingham city council to pay twice as much for places in its own residential homes as it pays for places in the private sector? Is that not a massive abuse of the taxpayer, as well as an abuse of the hard-working small business people employed in that sector?

Dr. Ladyman: We trust local authorities to make decisions about their areas. It is they who are in a position to assess the needs of their local care home markets, and they will pay the price set by those markets for the services that they require. They will tender for places, the marketplace will offer a price, and they will deal at that price. Why should they be expected to pay more than the market is asking them to pay?

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Will my hon. Friend ensure that any increased funding that finds its way into private care homes leads to extra controls and regulations governing the standards operating in those homes? Is he happy that we are currently receiving value for money?

Dr. Ladyman: If my hon. Friend can give specific examples of our not receiving value for money, I shall be pleased if he brings them to me and I shall take them up with him. I am happy that in general we are receiving value for money. I think that the new standards we have set are a vital resource, ensuring that we drive up the quality of care for older people and for anyone who must live in a care home or nursing home. They are, I believe, an essential tool in the Government's armoury, enabling us to improve services for everyone everywhere.

Paddington Health Campus

4. **Mr. John Randall** (Uxbridge): What the latest estimate is of the costs of the Paddington Health Campus. [129951]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): £800 million.

Mr. Randall: The Minister will be aware that three years ago the estimated cost was £360 million. Three years later, when we have still not even seen outlined planning permission, why have the costs spiralled out of control?

Mr. Hutton: Costs have risen because the new development at Paddington Health Campus will be bigger than the one originally proposed in 2000, so that we can provide more treatment for NHS patients in London—including in the hon. Gentleman's own constituency—better facilities and expanded research facilities. Most people in London will surely regard an £800 million investment in the NHS as good news.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Does the Minister realise that this is the most grotesque waste of public money, inasmuch as facilities of outstanding excellence exist at Harefield hospital, which the local community continues to support? As my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) knows, only yesterday the Moor Park Lions gave £37,000 of their own money to the Heart Science Foundation. It would cost only £18 million fully to modernise Harefield hospital; is that not what the people want and deserve?

Mr. Hutton: I genuinely understand the concern of the hon. Gentleman and of the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) about Harefield hospital; indeed, all hon. Members will have some sympathy with the points made. However, the Government have to decide what is best for the NHS across the capital as a whole, and I have absolutely no doubt whatsoever that the investment in the Paddington Health Campus will produce for the NHS in London some of the best facilities to be found anywhere in the world. That is money well spent.

Ambulatory Care Units

5. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff, West): If he will make a statement on the development of ambulatory care units in the NHS. [129952]

The Secretary of State for Health (Dr. John Reid): The prevention of preventable pain for patients will always be this Government's top priority. That is why the national health service is developing a large number of new treatment centres, which will enable more patients to receive more operations more quickly. Some will be run by NHS providers and others by independent sector providers under contract with the NHS, but all will contribute to the relief of preventable pain.

Kevin Brennan: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that answer. In developing his plans for England, will he look at the example of the ambulatory care centre in the University hospital of Wales, in Cardiff, which is providing excellent, state-of-the-art treatment for patients very quickly? That is an example of the treatment that all of us would like to see from a world-class national health service. If the centres that he is developing in England are of the same standard as the one serving my Cardiff constituents, I am sure that hon. Members throughout the House will welcome this development.

Dr. Reid: I am grateful for those comments. What my hon. Friend says is true, and I have seen with my own eyes the results that treatment centres can produce. A centre in Bradford—it is part of the NHS; it is not in the independent sector—has reduced the waiting time for minor operations from about 12 months to six weeks. If we consider the vast reduction in the time that 22,000 patients in the Thames valley needing cataract operations will have to wait in pain, we can see the real benefits.

All these new systems are being introduced on top of the huge investment in resources that we are making in the NHS itself, which is already producing more doctors, more nurses and more staff. I am delighted to tell the House that, according to figures released this morning, in the past three months the number of GPs increased by another 293, and the number of consultants rose by 321. We still have a long way to go, but we are getting there.

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest): Will the Secretary of State explain the dual tariff, whereby the NHS pays more for operations and procedures in privately run treatment centres than in NHS treatment centres?

Dr. Reid: If such an unfair tariff existed, I would explain it; it does not, but I shall explain the mechanism, which has perhaps confused the hon. Gentleman. The tariff that will be paid to treatment centres, whether they are NHS treatment centres or centres in the independent sector, will be exactly the same as that paid by primary care trusts to normal, traditional hospitals inside the NHS. It is true that in the case of NHS establishments, we also pay other costs, including building costs; but we will pay the independent sector an additional premium from the centre, in order that it can set up quickly, acquire staff and maintain the buildings.

So the tariff is exactly the same, and the important point that I ask the hon. Gentleman to stress is this. In the past week, I have heard the views of consultants, some of whom appear not to want us to reduce waiting lists. I can understand why, because doing so reduces the demand for private care. I have heard some trade union leaders standing up against these changes and I have heard a range of producers and providers doing the same. For goodness sake, could we for once think of the people whom the health service exists to serve—the patients? About 250,000 of them will have extra operations from the new treatment centres, in addition to the 300,000 more operations that the NHS is already providing, so many people are suffering much less pain as a result of our changes.

NHS Services

6. **Mr. Nicholas Brown** (Newcastle upon Tyne, East and Wallsend): What plans the Department has to extend the private sector's role in the provision of NHS services in the coming year. [129953]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): We will use independent providers where it represents good value for money, increases NHS capacity and reduces the amount of time that NHS patients would otherwise have to wait for their treatment. In line with our manifesto commitments, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced last week the preferred providers who will operate 26 new treatment centres for NHS patients, some of which will begin to operate later this year.

Mr. Brown: The national health service has entered into a contract with the American company, UnitedHealthcare, to pilot its Evercare system of care for the elderly in 10 pilot areas. Now that the pilots have been up and running for a while, will my right hon. Friend tell the House whether the Americans are achieving the substantial growth that they forecast in the annual report, and whether the NHS is achieving the 50 per cent. reductions and consequent savings in the pilot areas?

Mr. Hutton: I am afraid that I do not have that information to give to my right hon. Friend, but I shall certainly arrange to send it to him. On the Evercare arrangements, the American company is providing primary care trusts with a consultancy—a service and systems redesign service—to allow NHS staff to improve the care that they provide to NHS patients. It is a sensible and useful arrangement that has been entered into at a local level. All the research data in the US show the success of the Evercare model and I am confident that it will have a similar effect in England.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): The Minister said that good value for money was a necessary factor for private sector operations, so does he accept that the cost per case at the Oxford eye hospital is less than £400 per cataract, whereas purchasers who want to buy services for patients at the best possible value are being forced to pay more than £750 per case under the private sector scheme, not counting the market forces premium? Why did the Secretary of State say that 20,000 people in the Thames valley were waiting for cataract operations when the Department's own website says that it is only 6,000? Is it not the case that only the dodgy figures make the position anything like value for money, and is not the proposal ideological rather than one that gives quality, value-for-money care for patients?

Mr. Hutton: No. I have had many questions from the hon. Gentleman, but I have yet to hear him put one sensible question to any Minister in the Department of Health. He is in the unique position of agreeing with everything in principle, but opposing everything in practice. Labour Members have one simple word to characterise that—opportunism.

On the specific example that the hon. Gentleman provided, if 6,000 people are waiting for their operation, that is 6,000 too many. By getting additional capacity into Oxfordshire, we are freeing the other capacity of the Oxford eye hospital so that it can concentrate on more specific procedures. The hon. Gentleman needs to get his act—and his figures—together, because he is talking complete and utter cobblers.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): Will the Government undertake a review of the concordat with the private sector and examine the extent to which NHS consultants who have private practices are seeing NHS patients in those practices and are being paid substantial amounts to do so? Some of my constituents have raised concerns about how they have had to wait to see an NHS consultant. They find it bizarre then to see them in private hospitals and private clinics paid for by the NHS, especially when many of the NHS waiting list problems arise as a direct consequence of consultants' private practice.

Mr. Hutton: We keep all those systems and arrangements under careful and close review. It might also be of some help to hon. Members, especially my hon. Friends, if I draw their attention to the new arrangements that I hope will apply in the new consultants contract, should consultants agree it, which would try to provide a better way to regulate the relationship between private and NHS practice. That is an important development that the NHS should seek to bring to a closure.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): In a debate just before the recess, the Chancellor positively frothed at the mouth at the thought of moving patients into the private sector and he brandished a price list that claimed that operations by independent sector providers typically cost twice as much as in the NHS. If so, why have the Minister and the Chancellor already signed a concordat for 100,000 operations with private providers such as BUPA this year? Why are they now accelerating that process by signing up mostly foreign providers to perform an additional 250,000 operations in the new diagnostic and treatment centres? Or were the Chancellor's figures completely misleading? Will the Minister now publish the real comparable cost of all operations in the NHS, those purchased by the NHS from the independent sector in DTCs, and those performed on those NHS escapees sent to hospitals on the continent?

Mr. Hutton: The hon. Gentleman has moved from using the language of total politics last week to talking complete rubbish this week. The treatment centre programme will introduce significant additional capacity into the NHS at good value for money prices—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman does not want to listen, and for good reason, because I will put him right on those matters. The big difference that he should recognise—the Opposition like to think of themselves as people of business—is that the NHS obtains a better price for the operations if they are bought in bulk, instead of being purchased on the spot market. The prices will be significantly lower. The final prices have still to be agreed, but my right hon. Friend and I are of the one view that this approach represents a sensible direction for the NHS that will provide value for money for NHS patients.

Private Health Insurance

7. **Shona McIsaac** (Cleethorpes): What plans he has to introduce private health insurance for non-emergency health care; and if he will make a statement. [129954]

The Secretary of State for Health (Dr. John Reid): I have no plans to introduce private health insurance for non-emergency health care as it would be inefficient and unfair, and would prolong pain for many people who could not afford it. The Government stand by the founding principle of the national health service of providing equal access to health care, free at the point of need.

Shona McIsaac: I am glad that my right hon. Friend has put it on the record that the Government have no plans to introduce such a grossly unfair system into our NHS, or to introduce any barmy ideas such as the patient passport, which would destroy the NHS. Apart from being philosophically flawed, are not such plans financially flawed, because they would put an extra burden on the taxpayer to the tune of millions of pounds?

Dr. Reid: Indeed, my hon. Friend is right. Those plans would divert up to £2 billion from the NHS to subsidise those who, in many cases, are already paying for private health care. The difference between what we are doing by using the spare capacity of the private sector to supplement the big increases in capacity in the NHS, and what the Opposition would do, is that we are buying in bulk at a price that is near, at or below the NHS tariff and we are providing the service free to everyone. The Opposition would create a position—*[Interruption.]* Let us ask the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox). Why should old-age pensioners have to pay £5,300 for a hip operation, which is what they would have to pay if the patient passport were introduced? Perhaps he could tell us why someone should have to pay £6,700—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could tell us another time.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Does the Secretary of State now regret scrapping, in 1997, the tax rebate on private insurance—taken out voluntarily in many cases—for those over 65, and thus placing a huge burden on the NHS and adding to the increase in waiting lists when the Government came to power?

Dr. Reid: No, I do not. I have cited previously the US example, where 40 per cent. of all personal bankruptcies are related to the inability to pay medical costs. That reinforces my point. I repeat: this Government will not charge up to £1,700 for a cataract operation, or £9,000 for a heart bypass. People in this country should have their health care provided free at the point of need. This Government will provide that.

NHS Recruitment

8. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): What his strategy is for recruiting professionals in the NHS. [129955]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Miss Melanie Johnson): The Government are implementing a range of measures to recruit more health care professionals. They include improving pay and conditions, encouraging the NHS to become a better, more flexible and more diverse employer, increasing training, investing in child care, and attracting back returners.

Sir Sydney Chapman: May I direct the Minister's attention to the serious shortage of midwives in the NHS? Will she confirm that today there are 5,000 fewer midwives than there were 10 years ago? That has led the prestigious Royal College of Midwives to say, with typical professional restraint, that that is putting mothers at unnecessary risk. Will she describe the Government's strategy for overcoming this undoubted crisis?

Miss Johnson: Our target is to take on an extra 5,000 midwives, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be pleased to learn that so far we have taken on an additional 3,000 towards that target.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Will my hon. Friend support the work being done by the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, which is training medically qualified refugees and asylum seekers to enable them to work in our health service?

Miss Johnson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the information about that training programme. It is important to get new input into the NHS from people from diverse backgrounds. They will bring new ideas into the NHS, and some of them will be able to return to their own countries and take some of our best practice back with them. We welcome a diverse work force, and we are working to encourage that. I congratulate Liverpool on the scheme being run there.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): In an earlier answer, the Secretary of State said that consultants do not want the Government's diagnostic and treatment centres because they will reduce their private practice income. Does the Minister really believe that that is consultants' main objection to the scheme? Is such rhetoric likely to help or hinder acceptance of the consultant contract, which is so crucial to the Government's delivery of their health plans?

Miss Johnson: My right hon. Friend did not say that. He made a comment about some consultants, and the hon. Gentleman is seriously distorting that remark. The hon. Gentleman does not mention patients in this matter. We believe that we need to nurture staff in the NHS, but most of all we need to ensure that the service provides the best treatment for patients, free at the point of need. The needs, pain and conditions of those patients are our first and foremost concerns. We are meeting that target. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman may have difficulty with that, as neither he nor his party supported the investment that makes many of those developments possible.

Dr. Fox: One difference is that I have worked in the NHS and treated NHS patients. That is a lot more than any member of the Government Front Bench has done. The Government's attempt to characterise the medical profession in the way that they do is deeply disturbing. They lack understanding of the motivation of many staff. For example, I draw the Minister's attention to the proposed ophthalmology DTC in Thames valley. Nine consultants have written to say that the Thames Valley health authority assessment

"shows that there is no mismatch between capacity and demand for cataract surgery"

in Buckinghamshire. They add:

"Nevertheless managers in Wycombe PCT . . . have taken the lead in discussions with the Department . . . about a cataract surgery private DTC, based on information"

that is erroneous. They say:

"Throughout these discussions there has been no reference to the Buckinghamshire Hospitals NHS Trust ophthalmic department".

The consultants in that department were clearly not consulted, and they say—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are going a long way from recruitment. If the hon. Gentleman can mention recruitment, that might help me.

Dr. Fox: The essential point is that, without professional satisfaction, there will be no further recruitment of any staff. When consultants, talking about their patients, say:

"Our ability to manage chronic ocular disease, provide sub-specialty care and an ophthalmic casualty will be severely curtailed".

that is not improving patient care—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the Minister might manage an answer.

Miss Johnson: First, the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) is completely wrong in his first assertion. I have worked in the national health service—not treating patients, it is true, but I have worked in the NHS. Perhaps he would like to research a few more of his facts so that he gets something right.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman's preoccupation with what is happening in Thames valley only highlights the fact that the area has some of the longest waiting lists in the specialties that he is talking about. Patients are experiencing the problem, not consultants. It is the experience of patients, the fact that they need treatment and that we want them to have that treatment as soon as possible that drive the sensible changes and developments that we are undertaking. I remind him that we have more consultants in the NHS, which is something that his party could not afford to do. We have had over 4,500 more between September 1999 and March of this year, and many more are in training. We have 55,000 more nurses since 1997 and more of many of the other professions and therapists who work in the NHS. The overall picture is focused on the needs of

patients and actually delivering for those patients. The hon. Gentleman and his team seem to have entirely lost sight of that objective.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): What work has been done regarding the accreditation of health service professionals who gained their qualifications in European Union applicant countries, especially, but not exclusively, in relation to dentistry and stomatology? Is there not a chance that some of the UK royal colleges will drag their feet and not facilitate things so that such people can work in this country from 1 May to our benefit and theirs? What is the position for professionals from EU applicant countries?

Miss Johnson: We need to make sure that the quality of people coming to work in our NHS is up to our standards. I am sure that my hon. Friend entirely shares that view. We also need to ensure that recruitment of professionals from elsewhere is not to the detriment of countries that are experiencing difficulties, which is why we have agreements, for example, with the Governments of the Philippines, Spain and India on those issues.

Andrew Mackinlay: What about the European Union?

Miss Johnson: I was just coming to that. Within the EU, we are recruiting a lot of general practitioners and other doctors, but that tends to be where there are surpluses. My understanding is that there is no major difficulty, but if my hon. Friend has evidence of difficulties we shall, of course, look into them, to cut them down and make things easier.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): How will the Minister encourage GP recruitment in outer-London boroughs such as Havering, where the primary care trust has found that newly qualified GPs are attracted either to inner cities or to rural areas but not to suburban areas? In Upminster, in particular, GP practices offer salaries well in excess of the average yet still cannot recruit.

Miss Johnson: Over the past few months, we have recruited another 300 GPs. We recognise that there is an issue in London. For the first time, we are improving the standard of primary care right across the capital in a marked and systematic way. A lot of investment is going in. For example, there are golden hellos for GPs returning to or coming into the NHS. There is also the LIFT—local improvement finance trust—scheme, which is especially designed to improve recruitment and retention in the London area.

NHS Dentistry

9. **Mr. Peter Pike** (Burnley): What progress his Department is making with improving NHS dental service provision. [129956]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Ms Rosie Winterton): The Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill will give new duties for primary care trusts to secure primary dental services using the £1.2 billion currently held centrally. In the meantime, an NHS support team has started work with primary care trusts to overcome problems in areas where it is hardest to find an NHS dentist.

Mr. Pike: My hon. Friend will know that two additional NHS funded dentists' posts were announced for Burnley last month, but that is just one small step in dealing with a major serious problem in Burnley. Does she recognise that 20 per cent. of calls to NHS Direct in Lancashire are about dental health problems? Where are those people who are entitled to free dental treatment supposed to get the care that maintains their dental health, rather than emergency care, which they can get when it is absolutely essential?

Ms Winterton: I am very much aware of the problems that my hon. Friend mentions. I think that the new support team has already been once to Burnley, but it will return there with an action plan to look at how the situation can be improved. There are short-term measures, but, as I say, in the longer term we have a comprehensive programme in place to ensure that local commissioning of dental services can take place and that the £1.2 billion can be used locally, rather than centrally.

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): The Minister will be aware from recent figures that 1.5 million fewer people are registered for NHS dental treatment than in 1998. Only last month, the British Dental Association said that

"millions of people are unable to register with an NHS dentist."

Last year, the Audit Commission stated that

"40 per cent. of dental practices do not accept children or adults for continuing care."

The Prime Minister pledged in his 1999 party conference speech that everyone would be able to see an NHS dentist within two years. Four years later, it is obvious to everyone that that is not happening. I ask the Minister one question: why have the Government so disastrously failed to fulfil their promise to dental patients?

Ms Winterton: One of the problems that we face is clearing up the mess left by the previous Tory Government. Conservative spokesmen should know very well that the contract that they introduced, and the way in which they implemented it, led NHS dentists to walk away. We are putting that right. We recognise that there is a short-term problem and we are backing that up with proper resources, while in the longer term we have a comprehensive plan to provide proper primary care dental services, commissioned locally.

Diana Organ (Forest of Dean): Is the Minister aware that it is impossible for a new patient in the Forest of Dean to find an NHS dentist? That problem has been exacerbated recently by the fact that two very good NHS dentists have transferred to the private sector because they say that they cannot cope on their fee level. Is she aware that that is a particular problem for the disabled, the unemployed, children and people on low incomes? If we believe, as we do, that health care should

be free at the point of need and that we should build capacity in that NHS service, why are we not doing so in dentistry?

Ms Winterton: If my hon. Friend's constituents are facing problems with NHS dentists, she might like to consider whether emergency facilities and dental access services are available, and I certainly undertake to write to her about that. She is right to suggest that, of course, we want a proper system of dental care provision in the longer term. One of the other problems that we have to consider is the number of dentists who are being trained. We have undertaken a dental work force review, so that, in the longer term, working with the professions and the British Dental Association, we can ensure that we improve the number of dentists who come forward in the first place.

Health Care Assistants

10. **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): What progress has been made in encouraging health care assistants to retrain as nurses; and if he will make a statement. [129957]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Ms Rosie Winterton): We have increased the training commissions for health care assistants to retrain as nurses from 1,249 in 1999, to a planned 3,340, starting training this year. That will be matched by an increase in salary support from £11.8 million in 1999 to £122.9 million this year.

Helen Jones: That is very encouraging news and an excellent Government policy initiative. However, may I point out to the Minister that my local trust has simply stopped all secondments for health care assistants to train as nurses without any negotiation or proper communication with its staff? What would she say to the women in my constituency who have paid for their access to higher education courses, got themselves places [redacted] nurse training and then found themselves blocked? Are not those exactly the kind of dedicated people whom we want to encourage into nursing? Is it not a short-sighted policy for a trust to be doing that when it is having to recruit nurses from abroad?

Ms Winterton: I can well understand my hon. Friend's concern about this matter. I understand that the trust is reviewing the current situation following the appointment of a new chief executive and a new finance director—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Opposition Front-Bench Members are being very rough in not allowing the Minister to address the House.

Ms Winterton: I also understand that the idea is to start the secondments again from next year. The strategic health authority is working with the trust to try to resolve the problem. In the meantime, I will certainly ask the local work force confederation development group to keep in touch with my hon. Friend about the situation.

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): Will the Minister tell the House what action the children's national service framework care group work force team is taking to address the current and projected deficiency in the children's nursing work force, and what measures are being taken to address the retention of specialised nurses in areas such as neonatal and children's intensive care?

Ms Winterton: The hon. Lady is right to raise the issue of specialist nurses, what more we can do to encourage those specialisms, and ensuring a career development path so that when shortages exist we can look at constructive ways of filling them. With regard to the point about the national service framework, I undertake to write to her about the details of the question that she asked.

Nurse Practitioners/Community Pharmacists

11. **Dr. Doug Naysmith** (Bristol, North-West): If he will make a statement on the enhanced role that he plans for *(a)* nurse practitioners and *(b)* community pharmacists in the provision of health care. [129958]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Ms Rosie Winterton): Nurses and community pharmacists are central to our plans to modernise and improve access to high-quality NHS services. We have a comprehensive strategy to increase the numbers and skills of nurses, developing new roles such as nurse consultants, extending prescribing responsibilities for both professions and expanding the services that pharmacies provide.

Dr. Naysmith: I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of using the skills of those two professions much more effectively in the national health service. In the case of community pharmacy in particular, what plans does she have to encourage pharmacists to provide places for confidential consultations on their premises, which will go a long way to ensuring that patients are willing to seek the excellent advice that is available and that is currently underused?

Ms Winterton: My hon. Friend is right to raise that issue. There are a number of ways in which pharmacists can play a greater role in primary health care. In our vision for pharmacy, in the new contractual framework that we are designing and in our response to the recent Office of Fair Trading report, we are putting together a series of measures to give primary care trusts, too, the ability to talk with local pharmacists about commissioning services so that exactly that kind of project can be undertaken.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): May I ask the Minister to add optometrists to the list of professions that she uses in that way? Is it not sensible not only to use the skills of those professionals both pre-operatively and post-operatively in the management of

patients, but to extend the use of those professionals, and particularly their high-street facilities, for minor diagnostic tests and screening?

Ms Winterton: There are a number of ways in which we can examine the roles of such professionals, especially through the delivery of primary and preventive health care. Obviously, we are considering closely how that may be done through community pharmacists, but the opportunity to consider other areas that could make exactly such a contribution is always open.

General Practitioners

12. **Mr. Eric Illsley** (Barnsley, Central): If he will make a statement on the measures taken by the Government to reduce shortages of general practitioners. [129959]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): As part of our commitment to increase the number of GPs, a range of measures have been implemented including financial incentives, extended opportunities for flexible working and improved family-friendly working practices. The latest figures show that the total number of GPs working in the NHS has increased by 1,500 in the past three years. In addition, we have met our target of recruiting an extra 550 GP registrars a year ahead of schedule.

Mr. Illsley: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply. May I recommend to him a report that has been compiled by Barnsley council on the acute GP shortage there, which is one of the worst in the country? The report draws attention to an ageing population of GPs and list sizes that border on the excessive. It makes several recommendations including a mixture of independent and salaried GPs, golden hellos, retention bursaries, training and recruitment and assistance with administration and premises. Will he work with Barnsley council to try to address the shortage as soon as possible?

Mr. Hutton: Yes. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing the House's attention to that piece of work by Barnsley council, which is a model of the contribution that local authority scrutiny committees may make. He is right in his analysis—the council's view is right, too—that there is a specific problem in Barnsley, which the primary care trusts and the strategic health authority are trying to resolve. The report to which he draws attention points in the right direction. Additional resources have been made available this year to try to improve GP recruitment. We are recruiting more GP registrars—GPs in training—this year in Barnsley than we have been able to do in the past. I think that investment in the local LIFT scheme will help to improve premises and the infrastructure of primary care, which will all help the recruitment and retention efforts that are necessary.

Finally, the new GMS—general medical services—contract will especially address what I am sure that my hon. Friend considers an anomaly in the present funding arrangements: money flows to primary care depending on the number of GPs employed locally. If there is a shortage of GPs in Barnsley and other parts of country, clearly the money does not flow in the way in which he and I would like. That will change under the GMS contract and the additional investment will significantly benefit Barnsley primary care trust.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): What estimate has the Minister made of the additional number of GPs who will have to be recruited to meet the requirements of the working time directive? If those doctors are not available because there has not been long-term planning, does he expect that the shortage will result in cuts to patient provision or that the directive might not be implemented in some instances?

Mr. Hutton: I do not think that there will be a particular problem with primary care and the working time directive. Obviously, we talk closely with the British Medical Association and the NHS locally to resolve those issues; I do not underestimate the fact that they are serious for the NHS. The principal concern about the working time directive is focused on emergency out-of-hours care, maternity and paediatrics, which is where the bulk of the work is being done. The growth in the GP work force will help to ease the pressure. I am sure that all hon. Members share our desire to ensure that GPs work fewer hours in a more family-friendly environment. That would be good for doctors and, certainly, for NHS patients.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I welcome the work that the Government are doing to train more people and I am sure that it will reap benefits. However, as in Barnsley, there is an acute shortage of GPs in Stoke-on-Trent, North. It is a short-term problem because so many GPs are retiring at the same time. Will my right hon. Friend visit us to discuss specific things that could add to schemes such as the LIFT project and others because we cannot tolerate the present situation?

Mr. Hutton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As I said, I do not underestimate the issues that must be addressed. There is a shortage of GPs and we are actively trying to recruit more, with some success. I hear what she says about Stoke and I am happy to discuss her worries further. However, we should not lose sight of the important fact that more GPs are working in the NHS than at any time in its history.

Contaminated Blood Products

13. **Mr. Michael Connarty** (Falkirk, East): If he will meet the Haemophilia Society to discuss the proposed financial compensation scheme for those who contracted hepatitis C from contaminated blood products. [129960]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Miss Melanie Johnson): I am meeting my hon. Friend and the Haemophilia Society on 29 October when the ex-gratia payment scheme announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 29 August will be discussed.

Mr. Connarty: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. I put on record what I said when the Secretary of State announced the scheme—that it was a marvellous step forward and a very compassionate move by this Government after 20 years of campaigning. She will recall that we met her predecessor to present the Haemophilia Society's expert working group's analysis of a proper compensation scheme for the harm that is caused by hepatitis C to people with haemophilia. Can she assure me that the structure of any payments will be based not just on a token payment, but on a logical analysis of the loss that is suffered by people, in order to ensure that we do not draw negative comment from the haemophiliac community regarding what should be a very welcome scheme?

Miss Johnson: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments about the scheme and recognise in return his contribution, along with those of several other hon. Members, to recent campaigns on this front. It is an ex gratia scheme, and we shall work out the details in relation to eligibility, size of awards, payments and so forth. I look forward to a dialogue with my hon. Friend and others on how it should proceed.

Transport (Concessionary Fares)

12.30 pm

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to allow pensioners and disabled persons in England to benefit from free travel on buses in current travel concession authority areas and in the vicinity of those areas; and for connected purposes.

The lobby of Parliament by the National Pensioners Convention last week will, I am sure, have focused the minds of hon. Members on many of the issues that are currently of concern to pensioners. I welcome the new measures that have helped pensioners over recent years—the winter fuel allowance, the increase in pensions, the reduction of VAT on domestic heating, TV licence concessions, and so on. However, one issue on which older people consistently place importance is that of the cost, availability and accessibility of public transport and the link between the affordability of such transport and their quality of life. Indeed, that was recognised in a Government publication stating that

"transport for older people provides an essential link to friends, family and the wider community—a vital lifeline to maintaining independence."

The situation in England regarding travel concessions for pensioners and the disabled remains far from satisfactory. The concessions that a person enjoys depend very much on the area in which they live. Unfortunately, England has what amounts to a postcode lottery, with some areas offering free bus and other local travel, some charging a flat rate, some charging a half fare and some applying other arrangements. The Government's approach is to achieve a system of half fares as a minimum throughout England. By contrast, the purpose of the Bill is to achieve the goal of free bus passes throughout England, as is the case in Wales. So far, the devolved territories have a much better record than does England. In addition to the national free bus system in Wales for all pensioners over 60, more generous schemes exist in Scotland and in Northern Ireland than in England. Although it is right that Scotland and Wales can decide such issues for themselves under the devolution settlement, I do not want England to end up as the least enlightened part of the United Kingdom in this respect.

The ultimate aim of my Bill is nationwide free bus travel for pensioners, but it is worded so as to allow the Government to reach that goal by stages. In the first stage, the travel concession authorities would need to provide free bus travel within their areas. The Bill would provide the framework for those authorities to reach agreement with neighbouring authorities on cross-border travel, with the clear aim of extending the scheme more widely until universal coverage is achieved. My Bill would allow the Government, working with the relevant authorities, to assume the cost of the scheme gradually—although the overall cost of moving towards full coverage straight away is far from inordinate at some £300 million, according to the calculations of Help the Aged.

The Bill would also, while fully respecting the devolution settlement that the House has approved, enable co-ordination between the national authorities and, indeed, local and regional authorities, if established, to facilitate cross-border arrangements. It is based on concessions being available to pensioners of both sexes at age 60 and would have many benefits additional to those that I described earlier. There would be environmental benefits in encouraging car-owning pensioners to use public transport in preference to private transport, thereby easing congestion and pollution. It would also particularly benefit large numbers of women pensioners who, according to the statistics, are less likely to be car owners and therefore especially dependent on public transport.

In short, I believe that what I am proposing is a sensible yet radical measure that can bring immediate practical benefits. I am grateful for the assistance in introducing these proposals that I have received from Help the Aged, which, this summer, produced an excellent report on the subject entitled "Fair Fares" in which it called for freedom of travel for older people in the UK. I am also pleased to have the support of pensioners in my own area, particularly from the North East Pensioners Association, who feel strongly that sufficient funding for full fare freedom passes in their area should be provided. This Bill has the important aim of improving the quality of life of some of the least well-off people in our society. It aims to tackle the inequality of provision and the patchiness of current transport concessions that characterise the situation at present. For all those reasons, I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Joyce Quin, Valerie Davey, Mr. Jim Cousins, Mr. Chris Smith, Lynne Jones, Angela Eagle, Mr. Win Griffiths, Mrs. Jackie Lawrence, Mr. Ian Davidson, Alan Keen, Mr. Parmjit Dhanda and Vera Baird.

TRANSPORT (CONCESSIONARY FARES)

Joyce Quin accordingly presented a Bill to allow pensioners and disabled persons in England to benefit from free travel on buses in current travel concession authority areas and in the vicinity of those areas; and for connected purposes.: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 21 November, and to be printed [Bill 159].

Opposition Day

[17TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Electricity Supply

Mr. Speaker: We now come to the main business. I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

12.38 pm

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I beg to move

That this House is greatly concerned about the security of the electricity supply; recognises the crucial importance of reliable supplies to every aspect of domestic and business life, including transport; believes that the Government is neglecting the risk of power cuts this winter and in the longer term; condemns the Government's Energy White Paper for planning to make Britain dependent on gas imports from unreliable sources and for not balancing the need for secure supplies with environmental responsibilities; notes that the consequences of the recent power cut on the London Underground may have been worsened by the inadequacies of the Public Private Partnership negotiated and imposed by the Government; and calls for urgent action to ensure no repetition of the alarming experiences endured by hundreds of thousands of people in London and the South East.

Nineteen days ago, the first that I knew of the chaos that was about to strike London was when the lights flickered in my office here in Westminster—in the middle of the recess, I should add. Over the next hour or so, hundreds of thousands of Londoners and their neighbours in Kent received an unpleasant reminder that the electricity supply, which we have come to regard in the past 20 years as extremely reliable, is prone to failure. Just eight days later, hundreds of thousands of people in the midlands were similarly warned of the fallibility of the system. Last month, New York and much of north-east America were plunged into total chaos as power failed across a wide area. Last autumn, my constituency and other parts of East Anglia suffered power cuts following storms that brought down power lines and left some homes without electricity for over a week. Disgracefully, on that occasion, the then Minister for Energy and Construction refused to act to help many of the victims of that crisis, leaving them without compensation.

Only in the past month has the company concerned—EDF—made a belated gesture in the form of payments to the customers that it let down so badly.

Even though the causes of each failure appear to have been different, this pattern of events is very disturbing, because a continuous, reliable and uninterrupted supply of electricity is essential for domestic and business life. Ensuring that the lights stay on and that power is available to every home and every business is an important duty of Government, alongside defending the borders, policing the streets and ensuring that health care and education are available to all. It is a duty that the Government show every sign of shirking, as Ministers bury their heads firmly in the sand, determined to ignore the problems that loom this winter and beyond, hoping against hope that no major crisis will occur before the next election or, in the case of the Secretary of State, before her free transfer from the Department of Trade and Industry to the Ministry of Defence.

Even more irresponsible than the Government's attitude to these immediate risks is their approach to Britain's long-term energy needs. No wonder they have been so reluctant to debate the vacuous White Paper. Seldom has a document that was so eagerly anticipated delivered so little and disappeared so quickly—a document notable for its wishful thinking on renewable energy and for its utter disregard of the national interest, as Ministers prepare to make Britain dependent on gas imported from Russia, Algeria and Iran—

The Minister for Energy, E-Commerce and Postal Services (Mr. Stephen Timms): And Norway.

Mr. Yeo: Indeed.

Let us consider the short-term problem first. There are growing concerns about the risk of power cuts in the next year or two. Professor Ian Fells of the New and Renewable Energy Centre at Newcastle university said:

"A black-out could happen here ... I have come to the conclusion that there is a 20 per cent. chance of power cuts this winter ... In January and February, there are vulnerable weeks when they"—

the National Grid—

"might not be able to meet their obligations ... The amount of spare capacity has been cut back dangerously."

Generating capacity, according to figures from the House of Commons Library, is almost 15 per cent. less than it was two years ago. The Ofgem fact sheet 31 published last week confirms that the margin of spare capacity is now only 16 per cent., though that will rise to 18 per cent. when the Isle of Grain comes back on stream. Ofgem itself admits that this margin is lower than it has been in the past and a margin of 20 per cent. has previously been considered the minimum acceptable. No wonder the well-respected Dieter Helm, director of Oxford Economic Research Associates and an adviser to the DTI, earlier this month commented:

"I have always been much more concerned about the conventional bad scenario—when there is a cold spell in winter, and there is a failure at a nuclear power station. Suddenly, there is a shortage and you're getting within capacity boundaries you shouldn't get inside. The risk of an outage is very great indeed."

David Porter, chief executive of the Association of Electricity Producers, warned just after the London power failure what might happen if there was a cold snap and a couple of power stations broke down. He stated:

"If something like that happened this winter, the prospects would look considerably blacker ... I don't think you'll find many people in the industry who will tell you now—at the end of August—that they can guarantee there won't be blackouts this winter."

Jonathan Stern, director at the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, points out:

"Equipment is just getting old and is getting less reliable."

Despite all these warnings from a variety of authoritative sources, the Government's attitude continues to veer between complacency and carelessness. In the section of the DTI departmental report for 2003 entitled, encouragingly, "Security of Supply", we read:

"Emergency arrangements for the energy sector continue to be reviewed and updated in the light of lessons learnt from the fuel crisis of 2000 and the events of 11 September 2001."

Those lessons are being learned somewhat slowly, as the document was published in May 2003. It adds that:

"the Joint DTI and Ofgem Energy Security of Supply Working Group . . . was established to assess risks to Britain's future gas and electricity supplies: specifically developing indicators for energy security to make information more widely available."

I am not sure how comforting it is to all the customers who may be horrendously inconvenienced to know that the Government are developing indicators to make information more available. For this Government, indicators seem even lower down the pecking order than the targets to which many Ministers are addicted.

The report goes on to state that, after the October 2002 storms, the DTI "launched an investigation"—

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Oh good.

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend will like this one. The investigation

"confirmed that companies which had carried out effective network maintenance and had anticipated the storms well suffered fewer incidents and got customers back on supply more quickly."

Well, there is a bit of rocket science. The Minister might want to step ahead of his civil servants in taking credit for that. The report goes on to assure us that Ministers are not considering undertaking any activity, but

"considering along with Ofgem and the industry the best means of ensuring that the resultant recommendations are implemented."

We do not quite know what those recommendations are.

Of course, the report was published when Britain still had a full-time Energy Minister. Now, the Minister of State, whom I welcome to his place, has to double up as the Minister for Energy, E-Commerce, and Postal Services. The latter is another area that may be claiming some of his attention right now.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): He has to triple up.

Mr. Yeo: Exactly.

As the Minister has so many duties to perform, perhaps it is not so surprising that the written statement about London power cuts that he gave to the House last Monday was pretty thin gruel. However, he said that he was

"determined to ensure that the necessary lessons are learned."—[*Official Report*, 8 September 2003; Vol. 410, c. 10WS.]

As an action plan for one of the world's greatest capital cities, more than half of whose underground network had to be closed down and where 410,000 electricity customers suffered a power cut, his response fell some way short of what the situation demands. Anxious consumers, and especially those with elderly or disabled people in their families, wonder how they would survive as some of my constituents had to survive last year in coping for eight days without electricity. Single parents out at work wonder what will happen if their children are sent home from schools that are forced to close because of power cuts. No doubt, the Minister's office at the DTI has an emergency generator. Even if it does not, he can always rely on the plentiful supply of hot air from the energy White Paper.

Mr. McLoughlin: Is not my hon. Friend being a little too harsh on the Government? Is he aware that I received from the Minister and the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Nigel Griffiths), an unusual letter informing me that an energy Bill would be introduced next year and that they were in consultation with the Chief Whip as to whether it would be introduced in January? I thought that that was unusual, as I did not realise that junior Ministers were supposed to tell us what the Queen's Speech would contain. However, we have been told by those Ministers that there will be an energy Bill. The Government are obviously waiting until January as that is when they expect problems to arise. Presumably, that Bill will address all the problems that we are facing.

Mr. Yeo: The House and the nation have cause to be grateful to my hon. Friend for revealing that information, of which I was aware. I dare say that the Minister will rely heavily on the forthcoming Bill, just as Ministers relied heavily last winter on the forthcoming energy White Paper as the fount of all future wisdom. No doubt, the Bill will contain the solution to all the problems that I have mentioned.

I think that we should draw some reassurance from the fact that the Minister, with his triple responsibilities, is sufficiently on the case to make such an announcement. Those of us who can recall the battles for parliamentary time that occur inside government may also wonder whether he is trying to pre-empt some disagreement in the Cabinet about which Bills are included in the Queen's Speech. Perhaps the Minister will enlighten us later.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): I am glad that my hon. Friend has broadened the subject of security of supply to cover the regular shortages of power that rural parts of the country, including my constituency, suffer. Will he take the opportunity to remind the Government that the problem must be better controlled, and that that applies not only to the impact on residential customers that he has already rightly highlighted but to the serious impact on the rural economy? Significant firms are often located in remote rural locations and they must have security of supply.

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend is right. The issue is extremely serious, especially for smaller businesses, which will not normally have the opportunity to invest in back-up generating capacity. Businesses can suffer not only great inconvenience but harm and severe financial loss when power is cut off. The experience in East Anglia last year was devastating, and my hon. Friend's constituency obviously suffered a similar experience.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): The problem does not apply only to rural areas. In Narborough on the edge of Leicester in my constituency, there is a marked deterioration in service. I received a letter last week that complained about the number of power cuts and pointed out that Britain was not Iraq. What responsibilities do the Government have for the deterioration of service and the failure of power supply?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point, to which I hope that the Minister will respond. Perhaps it

[Mr. Yeo]

would not be out of order if I referred to my hon. Friend's close interest in the energy industry. When I visited his constituency earlier this year, I had the opportunity of inspecting a possible site for a wind farm, to which, I believe, my hon. Friend is sympathetic.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): Will the hon. Gentleman answer a question about privatisation? He is right that our generation capacity is becoming aged, but it is not surprising that private companies are unwilling to invest heavily in replacing it. Did the Conservative party consider that when it privatised the generating industry? It is an important point.

Mr. Yeo: I thought that it would not be long before the hoary old chestnut of privatisation was mentioned. It would have happened previously had not the Labour Benches been so thinly populated for a debate on an extremely important subject. The disregard of London Labour Members for the devastating effects of last month's power cuts is clearly reflected in the absence of the majority of them. [HON. MEMBERS: "Harry's here."] Of course, there are honourable exceptions. The hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) is in his place; as he is frequently. However, other London Labour Members are absent and the only explanation I can devise is that the Labour party is in a panic about the Brent, East by-election and that Members have been drafted there.

Let me deal with the point about privatisation. For almost all industries, privatisation gave us the opportunity to set in law requirements for higher environmental and safety standards than those that existed when they were in public ownership. All the privatised industries yield example after example of higher standards as a direct result of the transfer of enterprises from public to private ownership. Of course, the issues to which the hon. Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) referred were considered when the electricity industry was privatised. Evidence clearly shows that, for example, investment in the national grid has increased substantially following privatisation. In the past, successive Chancellors of the Exchequer were keen to find public expenditure savings. The easy way to do that was through axing the capital programmes for public sector industries. That happily no longer happens. However, the Government's ambivalence about specific energy decisions is having an effect in deterring investment.

When the Minister replies, he will doubtless point out that a contraction in generating capacity has occurred through the operation of the market in the form of the new electricity trading arrangements. Of course, NETA has achieved a reduction in the prices that are paid to generators. However, it is worth pointing out that consumers have not enjoyed such a big cut in the prices that they pay. Nevertheless, as NETA metamorphoses next year into something that we may call "better" rather than "BETA", that will provide us with an opportunity to examine Ofgem's remit. In the light of the concerns about security of supply that are now more widely expressed than ever, it is not clear that the current remit gives a sufficiently strong market signal to ensure that long-term investment in, for example, gas storage capacity, will happen.

The Government's inaction in the face of short-term risks is matched by their refusal to rise to the medium and longer-term challenge. We have reached an historic moment in energy policy. For the first time in a generation, Britain faces the prospect of becoming a net importer of gas. In less than a decade, our ability to generate enough electricity to meet the nation's needs will depend on imports. The change is occurring at the very moment when international environmental commitments start to bite more sharply. Given the accumulating evidence of climate change, we should set an example by honouring those commitments. In seven years, half our gas may be imported. By 2020, 90 per cent. is likely to come from abroad, as North sea reserves dwindle.

Increasing amounts of gas will come from Russia, which has an even bigger customer on its doorstep: Germany. The gas that Russia sends to Britain may travel through a pipeline that runs across Germany. There are no prizes for guessing the country that will have priority if there are problems with supply. The Minister will say, "Never mind. There are other countries that can meet any shortfall." Indeed, there are: pillars of political stability such as Algeria and Iran. I suppose that Ministers have cynically calculated that they will have long left office and that the risks that they run with the security of the British economy and the safety and convenience of the British people do not matter a damn because they will not be around to be held accountable.

Mr. Timms: The hon. Gentleman overlooks the fact that Norway will supply gas to the United Kingdom. I hope that he will not describe Norway as an unstable source. However, the wording of the motion and his point suggest that he believes that there are other sources that we do not propose to access. What are they?

Mr. Yeo: I shall deal with the solutions shortly. The arrangements that could make it possible for us to import more gas from Norway are not fully in place, although I hope that they will be. Even when they are, the need to import substantial amounts of gas from other countries will remain.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: I accept the hon. Gentleman's comments about our future gas supply, but does he agree that it is time to stop wasting natural gas through using it to generate electricity? We do not need to do that and we should deploy it for domestic use.

Mr. Yeo: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman's view reflects the Minister's, but I perceive that the point is probably about coal. The dash for gas was driven significantly by environmental considerations. Britain has important commitments, which it needs to honour.

The irresponsibility of the current generation of Ministers may be cursed by the next generation of citizens. As the Institution of Civil Engineers, in its recent, rather damning report, pointed out:

> "If future gas supplies were interrupted, this country would have major difficulty in keeping the lights on."

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is also a political risk? He drew attention to the fact that we would depend on gas that

originated from Russia. As he knows, Russia is a member of the United Nations Security Council and was deeply opposed to the war in Iraq. It would be conceivable for Russia to say that if we went ahead with an invasion, it would cut off our gas supply. Does he therefore acknowledge the political as well as the practical risk of interruption of supply?

Mr. Yeo: I absolutely acknowledge that. My hon. Friend is quite right to point out that exposing Britain's future energy capability to the whim of Governments in countries such as Russia, with whom we might have profound disagreements about foreign policy in relation to different parts of the world, is a reckless policy that only a grossly irresponsible Government would even contemplate.

The environmental picture is also worrying. Britain is already in danger of missing the target of cutting carbon dioxide emissions to 1990 levels by 2010. Under Labour, carbon dioxide emissions are now actually increasing. The energy industry is central to our progress in honouring this important commitment, but the nuclear power stations—the biggest source of non-carbon-dioxide-emitting electricity generation—are due to be phased out over the next few years. Most will have been decommissioned within a decade, and the Government do not have a clue what to do about this. Their White Paper completely ducked the question of whether the nuclear energy industry should have a future. This indecision means that Britain is likely to lose much of its nuclear expertise quite soon. It also means that meeting our Kyoto targets will become very hard indeed.

Instead, the Government plan a massive expansion of the electricity to be generated from renewable sources. I must stress that I wholly share the view that every possible effort should be made to promote greater use of renewable energy. At a time when the need for sustainability is widely recognised, the importance of exercising great care over how the world consumes finite resources, including fossil fuels, is obvious. But that need should not involve the unquestioning assumption that renewable energy is always and automatically environmentally superior.

Wind power is a technology particularly favoured by the Government and, in theory, by the Liberal Democrats. I say "in theory" because, in spite of their slavish endorsement of more wind farms in general, it is almost impossible to find a specific proposal for an onshore wind farm that the Liberal Democrats locally are prepared to support. Furthermore, wind power's lack of reliability means that it will usually require back-up generating capacity, and the remoteness of many offshore wind farms from where the electricity is to be consumed will involve very high transmission costs. The case for renewables must therefore be backed by an honest, hard-headed appraisal of their merits and a careful analysis of their total environmental impact, as well as their effect on electricity prices.

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): A large wind farm is about to be sited just offshore near my constituency, and the only people who have opposed that development are the Conservatives. Access to the grid will be approximately half a mile from it. I cannot imagine a more effective use of renewable energy, and I am delighted that the Government have announced an extension of the scheme right along the north-west coast.

Mr. Yeo: Our position on renewables is exactly as I have stated. We would like to see greater use of renewables, but we do not approach this in some kind of dreamy fashion, imagining that they will always deliver environmental benefits. In some cases, they will not do so. I am not familiar with the proposal that the hon. Lady mentioned, but I have no doubt that the Conservatives who opposed it locally did so for very good reasons, and could not be accused of hypocrisy in the way that Liberals who oppose wind farms locally can, because their whole energy policy is based on a massive and unquestioned expansion of wind power.

We have called this debate for two reasons. The first is to highlight the need for action now, to reduce the risk of repeated power failures in the coming winters. The second is to expose the risks that Ministers are running with Britain's longer-term energy policy. We want to find out what the Minister intends to do about these issues.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Did I understand the hon. Gentleman to be giving an undertaking that local Conservatives will not oppose nuclear power generators when they are proposed in their areas? That seemed to be the logic behind the point that he was making.

Mr. Yeo: I am grateful to be given the opportunity to repeat for the third time our position on these issues. It obviously requires quite a lot of repetition for the Liberal Democrats to understand it. When a party says that the energy problems of Britain can be solved only by a massive expansion of wind power, but opposes every single measure designed to achieve that national objective, that party is not fit to be considered seriously as a political organisation. That is the position of the Liberal Democrats on energy.

The Conservatives believe in diverse sources of energy supply. We believe that there is a role for renewables, but that it needs to be justified on environmental and economic grounds. We also believe that there is a role for gas, and that it will involve some imports. There is a role for coal, and, in my view, almost certainly a role for nuclear power. We are not slavishly saying that all energy has to be generated from a single source. Because of that, there will be some areas in which it is suitable to invest in new power stations—of whatever sort—and some in which it is not. I am confident that the attitude of Conservatives in those areas, whether they are for or against the proposals, will be honest, will respect local concerns and will be entirely consistent—unlike that of the Liberal Democrats—with the position that their party takes from the Front Bench in the House.

Mr. Robathan: My hon. Friend has already referred to my enthusiasm for renewable energy. Does he agree that the Government's target of 10 per cent. of electricity generation from renewable sources by 2010, as stated in their manifesto in 2001, is almost impossible to meet?

Mr. Yeo: That is certainly my view, and the view of almost any objective analyst with a serious record of

[Mr. Yeo]

studying the industry. The Government go further than that target, however. They also want 20 per cent. of electricity generation to come from renewable sources by 2020. In case the Minister does not wish to refer to this later, I should like to point out that he recently said of the 20 per cent. figure that it was not some pie-in-the-sky figure, but a realistic expectation.

Mr. Forth: Or target.

Mr. Yeo: Indeed.

I hope that the Minister will now explain to the House what practical steps the Government are proposing to address the risk of repeated power failures. Will he increase the mandatory compensation payable by the industry to the victims of power cuts? Will he tighten up the conditions under which such compensation becomes payable? Does he agree that energy efficiency could still make a much bigger contribution to alleviating the security problems that we have been debating? Will he review the remit of Ofgem to see whether changes are needed to give greater emphasis to ensuring security of supply? Does he recognise that there are serious flaws in the Government's White Paper? Will he remedy them by publishing as soon as possible—ahead of the Bill that we have been promised in the next parliamentary Session—a revised version of that White Paper that addresses the issues of excessive dependence on gas imports, unrealistic expectations for renewables and the damaging indecision over the future of nuclear power?

By their nature, decisions about electricity generation are very long term. Enormous lead times are involved in planning, building and bringing on stream new capacity of any kind. It is not good enough to say that these decisions can be put off until the next Parliament. Dither and delay put British consumers at risk, harm the environment and increase the cost of the measures that will eventually have to be taken. That is a particular anxiety in the light of reports this week that more and more consumers are having trouble paying their bills.

The Minister must know that the figures are not going to change. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is not going to return from her fruitless sojourn in the sun like a fairy godmother with a magic wand. The Minister should face up to his responsibilities even if his colleagues are unable to do so. Families, businesses and commuters are all looking to him for answers. Every man, woman and child is a consumer of electricity every day of their lives. What the Minister tells the House today, and what he decides to do or not to do tomorrow, will affect the comfort and safety of every citizen. I commend this motion to the House.

1.9 pm

The Minister for Energy, E-Commerce and Postal Services (Mr. Stephen Timms): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"regrets the problems that have recently occurred on the National Grid and the disruption that was caused particularly to transport services; further notes that the report published by the National Grid last Wednesday shows that the problem was not caused by under-investment on the network, shortage of capacity or its contractual relationship with any of its customers but rather by a local transmission failure; notes that security of supply is one of the key responsibilities of the regulator, that Ofgem is considering the incident in the light of the National Grid's licence obligations and will be reporting at the end of September; and further notes that the Government's engineering inspectorate will also be conducting its own investigation."

I welcome the opportunity that this debate gives us. As the House will know, on 14 August a large area of eastern Canada and the north-east United States, including New York, was hit by cascading power cuts. Sixty million people were affected, trains and subways in New York ground to a halt, thousands were left stranded, and some people slept in the streets. No one expected that to happen here, but in the early evening on 28 August electricity supply was lost to parts of south-east London and Kent. What followed was not comparable with the failures in the United States. Here, power was restored everywhere within 41 minutes, but there were serious consequences: disruption to overground and underground rail in particular, but other disruption as well. I agree that it was a powerful reminder of how dependent we all are on electricity. That is why we placed maintaining the reliability of energy supplies at the heart of the energy White Paper in February. The hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) made some disparaging comments about the White Paper, but people in the energy industry to whom I have spoken have warmly welcomed it, not least for the coherence of its analysis and the fact that it has provided us with a coherent energy policy, which the party that he represented in government never did.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am disturbed by the Minister's comment that there was no comparison with what happened in the United States. He went on to say that power was restored within 41 minutes. Does he accept that 41 minutes was a long time for people who were travelling on the underground? The power was not returned to the underground within 41 minutes, because the emergency procedures had to be carried out. The Minister's complacent attitude is not acceptable.

Mr. Timms: There will be no complacency in what I have to say to the House. Like the Minister of State, Department for Transport, I shall deal in particular with what happened to the underground. However, to begin with it is important that we focus on the energy issues—specifically electricity.

Supplies were restored within 41 minutes. Nevertheless, it is essential that maintaining the reliability of energy supplies be at the heart of our energy policy. It was one of the four key goals at the heart of the White Paper published in February. The other goals were: promoting competitive markets; ensuring that every home is adequately and affordably heated; and putting the United Kingdom on a path towards a reduction in CO_2 emissions of 60 per cent. below current levels by 2050.

Since the publication of the White Paper, much attention has understandably been placed on the fourth of those goals. However, all four of them need to be achieved in order to deliver our aims. I welcome the opportunity that this debate gives us to focus specifically on electricity reliability and supply security.

Competitive and transparent markets are best for maintaining security. We need diversity across the energy supply chain, a mix of fuel types at the generation

end of the chain, and diversity in terms of where fuels come from and how they are transported. We need a robust infrastructure. One of the few points that the hon. Member for South Suffolk made with which I agreed was about the need to reduce overall demand for energy through increased energy efficiency, which is another important part of the strategy. We need short-term contingency plans to protect against unforeseen events, and long-term plans to cope with the challenges presented by the change in our fuel mix in the years ahead and to meet our environmental objectives.

Our role is to establish a competitive marketplace, including through good international relations within which liberalised markets will deliver energy reliability. When short-term problems arise, we will, with the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets where appropriate, evaluate what has happened and take action accordingly. At the moment, about 38 per cent. of our electricity is produced from gas. We need flexibility in the gas system to cope with shocks. That is true today while we produce more gas than we consume, and it will be true in the future as we import gas.

Gas storage can help, and so will importing and storing liquefied natural gas and increasing our connections with north-west Europe, where there are large gas storage facilities. There is an encouraging list of major infrastructure projects being implemented by the industry. Growing interdependence means that reliable energy supplies will become an important part of our foreign policy. We need to have diverse sources of supply and a diversity of fuels.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: I agree and accept what the Minister says about diversity of supply, because it is good sense. This island is built on coal and surrounded by natural gas and oil, so why does the White Paper take us towards being a net importer of energy? That bit of the White Paper puzzled me and makes no sense to me at all.

Mr. Timms: Gas and oil production from the North sea is reaching a plateau, and it will not grow in the future at the rate at which demand will grow, so we will need to import those fuels. I can see where my hon. Friend's argument is going. I think there is a role for coal in the future, and I shall refer to some of the issues that we need to address to ensure that coal can play its role. As he well knows, there are some big, technological challenges ahead. For the medium term at least, gas will be dominant in electricity generation.

The White Paper set out a vision of a future in which renewables will contribute 20 per cent. to our energy mix by 2020. That is our aim, and the hon. Member for South Suffolk referred to that. Some renewables, such as wind power, will be intermittent, but not all of them. Diversity in renewable fuel sources, such as in the location of wind farms, will allow us to manage the risk of intermittency—for example, when the wind does not blow. Technological developments make it likely that the costs of managing that intermittency will fall substantially by 2020. There needs to be a major programme between now and then to achieve the aspiration that we have set.

The hon. Member for South Suffolk referred to the decline of nuclear power. His argument was that if we really want low carbon emissions and security of supply, new nuclear capacity is the only solution. I am not sure that that is the official policy of his party, but I think that it was at least his own position. The truth is that at the moment new nuclear build is uneconomic, and the vital issue of nuclear waste still needs to be resolved. As we set out in the White Paper, it is right to concentrate our efforts on energy efficiency and renewables for the next few years while ensuring—as we are doing—that we keep the nuclear option open for the period beyond that.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): The Minister made the sweeping statement that new investment in nuclear energy is uneconomic. How can anyone proposing to make that investment possibly know what the cost will be when the Government have not even begun to put a price on the pollution that comes from nuclear-generated electricity set alongside the benefits that should come from electricity that is carbon- free? Until the Government establish that framework, his remark is not testable, and he could not expect anyone to invest in the industry.

Mr. Timms: The hon. Gentleman has helpfully set out the difficulties and uncertainties, not about Government policy but about the issues around nuclear waste that still have to be resolved. For that reason and others, this is not a good climate for people proposing to invest in nuclear energy. Our view is that we need to keep that option open for the longer term, because at some stage it may become clear that we need new nuclear capacity, but that is not the position at the moment.

Richard Ottaway: The Minister referred to the uneconomic nature of the nuclear industry. How does he know whether it is economic or uneconomic? In 10, 15 or 20 years, the price levels could be very different. He must have some projections of prices in the future. All the nuclear options could turn out to be economic in the long term.

Mr. Timms: Those are precisely the uncertainties that face anyone with a proposal for investment in new nuclear capacity at this stage. Some investment is being made, but there is still a great deal of uncertainty about the economics of nuclear energy, particularly given the nuclear waste issue. I therefore do not consider this a good time to look seriously at such investments, although the position may change.

Many people are concerned about the decline in coal-fired generation. As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes), there can be no doubt of the importance of coal in the generation mix, but I know my hon. Friend will agree that coal generation must be low-carbon if it is to have a long-term future. That is why we are investigating in depth the feasibility of carbon capture and storage, and considering the possibilities of international collaboration to support the substantial investment that it will require.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: Does my hon. Friend agree that the new integrated gasification combined cycle technology—as he knows, there is a proposal for the building of a power plant of that type in my

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constituency—provides the best way of using coal to generate electricity without the toxic emissions normally associated with that process?

Mr. Timms: I know of my hon. Friend's interest in that project and that technology, and I agree that there is some promising technology ahead of us, but I think it will be some time before we can say that we have the necessary means to deliver the low-carbon coal-fired generation that will in due course be part of our mix.

Forecasts for generating capacity margins are lower for the coming winter. Total generating capacity is currently expected to exceed forecast peak demand by about 18 per cent. this year—as the hon. Member for South Suffolk said—compared with figures in the low 20s in recent years. There is already evidence, however, that, as would be expected, the markets are responding to the higher price signals. That, and the signals themselves, is why the indicators from the joint energy security of supply working group are so important.

Forward prices for peak power this winter are 60 per cent. higher than they were in early August last year. Higher prices may well encourage some currently mothballed plants to return to the system, and there is plenty of time for that. As the hon. Gentleman said, one generator has already announced the return of a mothballed plant on the Isle of Grain for the coming winter, and there may well be more. I expect the market to deliver adequate generating capacity this winter. With Ofgem we will continue to monitor the situation closely through the joint energy security of supply working group. The group will ensure that the information is disseminated to the market so that participants can respond appropriately. The hon. Gentleman did not seem to understand the role of the group, but markets need information to function well.

Both the Secretary of State and the regulator, Ofgem, have duties in law to ensure that reasonable demands for electricity and gas are met. Those duties are carried forward into conditions in the licences held by energy providers, and we look to Ofgem to enforce the conditions consistent with its duties. We also need the right regulatory environment to encourage the market to invest in the right infrastructure. The infrastructure will have to change in the years ahead.

National Grid Transco already has an incentive, through its licence conditions, to invest in the transmission network. It has assured me firmly that under-investment was not a cause of the recent power cut, and its report seems to confirm that. Ofgem will work with National Grid and the distribution companies through the forthcoming price control reviews to ensure that companies are given incentives to invest appropriately in our networks, and to invest in a way that will specifically support the more decentralised generation patterns of coming decades.

The industry has a good record. We are committed to maintaining energy security. The failure of 28 August, however, serves as a reminder that risks to such complex systems cannot be entirely eliminated. On 10 September, National Grid Transco published its report on what happened. I am grateful for its speed, and the report is in the Library of the House.

Normal demands of about 1,100 MW are drawn from the national grid by EDF Energy in south London to supply domestic customers, the underground and other large users, including Network Rail. Four national grid sub-stations were involved. On 28 August scheduled maintenance was under way on one circuit between two of them, Wimbledon and New Cross, and on another between the other two, Littlebrook and Hurst. That level of maintenance is usual during the summer, when demand for electricity is generally lower, and the arrangement had been agreed with EDF Energy well in advance, in July last year.

The sequence of events began at 6.11 pm. Engineers at the electricity national control centre received an alarm indicating that a transformer at the Hurst sub-station was in distress and could fail, potentially with significant safety and environmental impacts. It was what is known as a Buchholz alarm, showing that gas had accumulated in the oil inside the equipment, causing the risk of a major failure. National Grid has some 1,000 transformers with associated equipment, and an average of 13 Buchholz alarms are received each year.

The control centre contacted EDF Energy and asked it to disconnect the distribution system from the transformer. As is normal practice, national control initiated a switching sequence to disconnect the transformer from the system. That left supplies temporarily dependent on a single transmission circuit from Wimbledon to New Cross and Hurst. Under national grid procedures, a Buchholz alarm is serious enough to warrant the isolation of equipment, and reduced security is acceptable for what is known as switching time—a period of five to 10 minutes during which the transmission system is rearranged by the connection and disconnection of circuits so that the affected equipment can be taken out of service.

The switching sequence to remove the transformer began at 6.20 pm, disconnecting Hurst sub-station from Littlebrook. That enabled the transformer to be shut down safely with the alarm, but left Hurst supplied only from Wimbledon via New Cross. Unexpectedly, a few seconds after the switching, the automatic protection equipment on the number two circuit from Wimbledon to New Cross operated, interpreting the change of power flows due to the switching as a fault.

On the national grid there are some 43,000 pieces of automatic protection equipment, each with its individual settings to meet local requirements. The automatic protection relay disconnected the circuit from Wimbledon to New Cross. That disconnected New Cross, Hurst and part of Wimbledon from the rest of the transmission system, causing the loss of supply. Some 724 MW were lost, about 20 per cent. of London's supplies at the time, and 410,000 of EDF Energy's customers were affected.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): There was a good deal of distress among Londoners caught up in the power cut. The Minister will know that the London underground had its own generating supply at Lots road for 100 years. When it was closed, assurances were given that the underground's supply would be secure. The Minister tells us that some 43,000 automatic mechanisms could turn off the secondary supply on which the underground now relies. Is there not a case for returning to the argument that the underground should

have its own back-up supply in case the national grid fails? If that is deemed necessary, will the Government invest in it?

Mr. Timms: I agree about the distress and, at the least, great inconvenience caused to a large number of Londoners that night. If my hon. Friend will bear with me, I will deal shortly with the question of the resilience of the underground's power supply.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: Will my hon. Friend take this opportunity to confirm that some emergency capacity is still retained at Lots road for running the underground in the event of a failure, which would allow the escalators and lights to work and the trains to move rather slowly, and that this capacity continues to be maintained?

Mr. Timms: I shall talk more about that in a moment. The back-up supply is now at Greenwich, not Lots road, but my hon. Friend is right to point out that some back-up for the underground is available.

Returning to the night of 28 August, an incorrect protection relay—1-amp rated, rather than 5-amp rated—had been installed at Wimbledon when the old equipment was replaced in 2001, which was the immediate cause of the loss of supply. Although all supplies were restored in 41 minutes, the consequences, as a number of Members have rightly pointed out, lasted a great deal longer. In particular, there was an immediate loss of supply to some 60 per cent. of the underground, which in effect brought the whole system to a halt. Each London Underground control centre lost the ability to see diagrams of the position of trains for the duration of the failure, so they began to speak to train operators in order to collate positions manually. Some 57 trains had stopped inside tunnels, eight of which—carrying 1,200 passengers between them—were evacuated via the tracks.

Each evacuation, I am pleased to say, was carried out according to standard arrangements, but that of course meant that the underground network could not be switched back on until it was absolutely certain that all passengers and staff were safely away from the tracks. There was no risk to passenger safety, and the whole House will want to express thanks to all those involved for their calm and safe response. Although the emergency back-up power supply available to the underground, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) has just referred, is not of a sufficiently high capacity to keep the trains moving, it did ensure that emergency lighting was available at all the affected stations, and that the evacuation could be carried out safely.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: I acknowledge what my hon. Friend says about the safe execution of the procedures provided by London Underground, but surely one of the main issues is the time that it took to bring the service up to speed. Is he satisfied that the procedures provided by London Underground are effective, as well as efficient?

Mr. Timms: They were certainly safe, which was the overriding priority. I shall discuss in a moment the wider question of whether they were necessarily the most appropriate action to take on the day, but we need to pay tribute to the fact that the operation was conducted safely, and that the procedures worked well in terms of protecting passenger safety.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: I will give way in a moment, if the hon. Gentleman will just bear with me. I should make it clear that the failure in London had nothing to do with any lack of generation capacity. The National Grid Company pointed out that since 1990 it has invested more than £3.5 billion in nominal terms in the system—a significantly higher rate than before. Its performance, measured against the security and quality standards required by its licence, is reported annually to Ofgem and made public. Performance has improved since 1990, and the level of customer demand lost has been extremely low. It can justly point to a good record in terms of meeting the demands made of it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) asked a question that many people ask: why does the London underground no longer have its own power supply, following the closure of Lots road last year? The underground consumes half of 1 per cent. of total UK power consumption. In fact, before Lots road was closed last November, it had been supplying no more that 60 per cent. of the underground's power for some time. Power for the underground has been bought in from the national grid for 20 years or more.

The Lots road power station opened in 1905. At the time, it was the biggest in the world, and when it closed it was the oldest working power station in the world—reflecting the previous Government's woeful failure in terms of investing in the London underground. London Underground had considered options for upgrading it or replacing it since the mid-1980s. It was finally decided—before 1997, in fact—to close Lots road and buy in power from the national grid through the private finance initiative deal. It is worth noting that between 1969 and 2002, Lots road failed 13 times, and the national grid supply to the underground just twice.

London Underground will of course be looking very carefully at how its power PFI worked and what lessons need to be learned. In addition, as part of the investigation that I have announced, the Department of Trade and Industry's engineering inspectorate will look at the London underground's power supplies, and may make recommendations if that seems appropriate in the light of that investigation.

The incident was the biggest loss of supply from the national grid for more than 10 years. I announced on 10 September that the Government and Ofgem will undertake further investigations into the failure's causes and impact. We are determined to learn any lessons that might help us to prevent such distress in future. The joint Ofgem-DTI investigation and the engineering inspectorate's investigation will also look into the power cuts that took place in the west midlands on 5 September, when a loss of power occurred at 10.10 am at the national grid's Hams Hall sub-station, in Coleshill. On that occasion, full power was restored by 10.52, but some 200,000 customers were affected. On that day, I registered my deep concern with the National

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Grid Company at this second power cut, coming as it did so shortly after the power cuts in London. I am expecting a report from it on that incident shortly.

Patrick Mercer: The Minister will be aware that during the weekend before last, the Osiris II exercise, in which a terrorist strike on the Bank tube was simulated, took place. That happened only a few days after the incident that the Minister describes, yet very little reference was made to that real incident that occurred on 28 August; indeed, such reference was passing and jocular. Can the Minister confirm that lessons from that real incident were passed on to inform the exercise? I saw very little sign of that.

Mr. Timms: Some of those lessons will take time to crystallise, but it is clear that we will learn all the lessons from what happened on 28 August, for the future of the underground. It is right to draw attention to some of the questions that need to be answered. For example—this question has already been hinted at—was evacuation the right decision for some trains? Were the drivers kept sufficiently well informed? Was there adequate communication between staff and passengers? All of those questions need to be asked and answered. As I said, we need to look at whether the underground has adequate power security, but the Government's London resilience team, working closely with the office of the London Mayor and others, will consider all those issues. Indeed, the London resilience forum deals with all these matters, including the simulated terrorist attack to which the hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) referred. It has carried out a lot of work on contingency planning for London, and that work will continue.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): As the Minister knows, the question of whether it was appropriate to evacuate some of the trains has attracted enormous interest in London, given the resulting delays in restoring the service, to which the hon. Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) referred. Will he make it clear whether, under the new arrangements, the final decision on such matters rests with the Government or with the London Mayor?

Mr. Timms: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Mayor now has responsibility for the underground. As I understand the procedure, however, it is possible for individual drivers to decide whether evacuation is necessary, in the interests of the passengers of the train concerned; indeed, it is right that drivers be able to make that decision. Whether everything worked exactly as it should have on 28 August is a question that needs to be addressed.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: My hon. Friend referred to the national grid and the failings in the west midlands, but does he agree that one significant problem is that that national grid interfaces with an enormous number of electricity suppliers? There is a desperate need to ensure that the standards set by each of those suppliers are commensurate with the standards of the national grid. Sometimes it is labelled as the bad party, but in fact it is generating the supply and passing it on to people who are not capable of managing it adequately.

Mr. Timms: By and large they are capable of that, but I agree with my hon. Friend that the investigations conducted by Ofgem, the Department of Trade and Industry and the engineering inspectorate need to examine the whole system, including the distribution systems as well as the national grid. The engineering inspectorate investigation will take account of other transmission failures over the last five years as well, and will examine precisely the point that my hon. Friend has made—how the national grid interacted with its customers and what lessons need to be learned.

Ofgem will formally decide by the end of the year whether any of the companies were in breach of their licence obligations and, if they were, what action should be taken. I welcome the assurance that the national grid will further review its systems and procedures, and will work closely with other operators to improve overall supply, particularly to city centres and transport systems. It is right to highlight the importance of that. I am pleased that the Trade and Industry Committee will investigate the resilience of the national grid, and my Department looks forward to contributing to that work. Quite rightly, therefore, there will be a good deal of follow-up to ensure that lessons are learned from what happened.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate our central White Paper commitment to maintaining the reliability of our energy supplies. That is an absolutely central priority for the Government and central to our energy policy. Together with the work that we are undertaking in the immediate aftermath of the recent failures, I am confident that we shall be able to minimise the risk of similar future failures.

1.42 pm

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): We certainly welcome the debate, but the motion before us is rather rambling and some of the presentations that we have heard were rather dramatically over the top. It is an extraordinary leap from an undersized fuse in Wimbledon to the end of civilisation as we know it, which is pretty much what Opposition Front Benchers have put to us today. There are some important issues and I hope that, despite the soothing and comforting words of the Minister, his Department will take some important questions away after the debate and take any necessary action that is required.

On security of supply, there are questions about generating capacity, about transmission distribution capacity and about supply capacity. I was a bit surprised that the Conservatives confined themselves to the case of the underground because, during the last major international at Twickenham, the overground suffered parallel failures on account of underinvestment in the electricity supply to the rail network in the south-west of London. Ensuring that investment keeps pace with demand becomes a more serious problem the further down the pyramid one goes from generation to supply.

I hope that we can examine the problems more rationally than the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) did. The Ofgem briefing paper, which hon.

Members have received, is clear and straightforward, so it is sensible to pay some attention to it. It makes the point that the predicted surplus over peak demand of 16 per cent. will rise to 18 per cent. when the Isle of Grain comes on stream later this year. That estimate does not take account of the interconnector with France, from which another 2,000 MW can be expected, or of plant that is more deeply mothballed, which can come on stream comparatively easily to the tune of another 7,500 MW.

I wonder whether Conservative Front Benchers have been taken in on the generation issue by their own spin doctor, because the leading exponent of the view that we are about to run out of generating capacity is Sir Bernard Ingham and his nuclear power forum. Just because they were taken in once when he was operating for Mrs. Thatcher, the Conservatives should not be taken in twice now that he is working for the nuclear industry.

On transmission capacity, the Minister has quite properly drawn attention to the fact that National Grid Transco has a very good record of meeting demand. I believe that the figure is 99.995 per cent. or better each year, so it seems unnecessary to spend too much time worrying about transmission security of supply.

That brings us to the bottom level and final stage of supply to individual users and consumers. We have heard about the dodgy fuse and I guess that, when the final report is produced, we will know more about it. We have heard a little about the London underground back-up system, which was recently handed over to the private sector and did not kick in as planned. One of the companies mentioned is Electricité de France, which is a supplier and distributor of electricity in London. I wonder once again about the wisdom of the Conservatives complaining about the system, when EDF is wholly owned by the French Government and operates as a result of the privatisation of the electricity industry that they commissioned. It is one of the paradoxes of energy debates in the House that we can hold our debates only because the lights are on, and the profits from the lights running in the House go straight to the French Ministry of Finance as a direct result of the Conservative privatisation of the industry.

Richard Ottaway: Can the hon. Gentleman confirm that the Liberal Democrat party policy is to nationalise the electricity sector?

Mr. Stunell: No, I cannot confirm that. The Conservatives have already produced several non-sequiturs in the debate, one of which I have already illustrated and another of which is illustrated by that intervention. I would simply describe the Conservative approach to the electricity industry as bonkers.

Let us reflect on the serious question about security of supply, which is what happens in the long term. Conservative Front Benchers mentioned the risk of power cuts this winter and in the longer term, so we need to consider the broader issues of substance. One important argument is that the UK economy and its energy industry will be weak in future because we will have to import energy, but that rather overlooks the fact that there are currently only two economies in the world that do not—the United Kingdom and Canada. All the others are net importers of energy, in some cases—the United States and Japan, for instance—on a huge scale. We have a diversity of markets from which to buy.

I was interested to hear the argument that the Russians might seek to blackmail us over Iraq. Of course, the country with the largest dependence of all on Russian supply of energy is Poland, yet Poland willingly and freely joined in the Iraq adventure. Incidentally, I would not have done so, but there is no evidence that any political pressure was imposed. Indeed, the Russians greatly want the money. The idea that Norway is some sort of rogue state that might hold us to ransom is fanciful beyond belief. It also completely overlooks the possibility of liquid natural gas supplies coming to this country from west Africa, south America and a wide range of other international sources.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): As this seems to be a day for non-sequiturs, could the hon. Gentleman make the Liberal Democrats' position clear? He seemed to suggest that it was all right to have the National Grid generating electricity as a private company, but not all right for that to happen lower down the chain of suppliers. Are the Liberal Democrats in favour of private companies being in control of generation or against? Are they in favour of the French being able to control our major system or against the French having control of the movement of gas throughout their company's territory? I am not clear on those points.

Mr. Stunell: The hon. Lady would be much clearer if she read my book on the topic or if she tuned into the debate on energy policy at our conference next week. I do not wish to be ruled out of order, so I shall just say that we accept the realities of a national and international liberalised energy market. I simply point out to the House that it is extraordinary that the Conservatives are expressing doubts about the ability of that liberalised market to deliver a sustainable energy policy for this country. The hon. Lady may take a different view, and I am sure that she will discuss that with her Front-Bench colleagues in due course.

As for prices, we are all quietly admitting that energy prices will increase in this country over the next decade or two. If we are to achieve our aims, especially in conservation and efficiency, those price signals are important. However, the suggestion that we might be held to ransom by outside suppliers is clearly not tenable. One need only consider the 30 or 40-year history of OPEC to see that stability is likely to be achieved in the longer term. I also refer the House to Ofgem's view, which is that there is no problem with supply of fuel to the UK energy market.

At first, we wondered why the Conservatives had chosen to focus on the issues in their motion rather than on what we saw as some of the more fundamental questions—such as the delay in the Government introducing its policy, as opposed to a White Paper. Where is the legislation? I was pleased to hear the Conservatives' spokesman say that they wanted to see legislation in the Queen's Speech and that is a rare point on which I can agree with them.

We thought that the Conservatives would raise the fact that the Government are now struggling along with their fifth part-time energy Minister, which shows a lack

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[Mr. Stunell]

of commitment to this important area. Indeed, I hope that the Minister will take away from the debate a request that he be divested of some of his other arduous duties, so that he may focus effectively on these matters. Or perhaps the Conservatives might have addressed the lack of evidence that the UK is making progress towards its Kyoto targets—emissions of greenhouse gases are rising again—and the fact that we still have no clear long-term plans for the 60 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2050. However, then we realised that the Tories have no energy policy and have undergone an even more rapid rotation of energy spokesmen.

The Conservatives claimed that they still regard the environment as important. If that is the case, I hope that they will take a second look at what they are saying about the ability of renewables to deliver and the impact that conservation and efficiency can make on meeting demand in the future. We are clear that we need a diversity of fuels, including renewables. We are also clear that an improvement in security is obtained from dispersed sources and comparatively smaller generation sources. One should not have all one's eggs in one basket. Conservatives ask how we can tell whether investment in gas or in nuclear is best, but it is not for this House to decide that. It is for investors and the promoters of projects to decide that, and they have decided it. They have decided that gas is a more profitable and certain vehicle for investment than nuclear power.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The hon. Gentleman has said that he would like to see a greater diversity of supply, and we agree. He also said that he would like to see small suppliers generating electricity, but that would of course result in price rises. To what extent would the Liberal Democrats be prepared to tolerate price rises?

Mr. Stunell: The words "of course" are the give-away in that question. Smaller does not always mean more expensive. Indeed, in the case of wind generation, which is now competitive on the market with its 3 MW units, it is not the case that smaller means more expensive. People are investing in those technologies because they can now compete in the market.

Mr. Blunt: Wind energy is only competitive now because of the existence of the renewables obligation, which provides some 70 per cent. of its income as subsidy, with only 30 per cent. coming from the price of the electricity generated. That cannot be the hon. Gentleman's definition of economic.

Mr. Stunell: If we were in a completely deregulated market, we would have 100 per cent. gas generation. But we are not, and no one in the House believes that we should be. In a regulated market, it is appropriate that regulation should relate primarily to the need to meet environmental guidelines. I do not have a problem with a regulated energy market, and I did not think that the Conservatives did either. Throughout the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, they supported a regulated market that favoured the nuclear industry, so it should not be too much of a problem for me to support one that favours renewables.

If we want 2,000 MW of electricity generating capacity in this country, the cheapest way to provide it is by saving that energy through conservation and efficiency. That is cheaper than gas, nuclear power or renewables. The problem is that in a market environment it is difficult to trigger investment in those areas, because conservation means using less product and therefore provides less cash for those who make the investment. The Minister needs to invest much thinking time and some real policy development in ensuring that conservation and efficiency play a full part, as they can, in a regulated market. It is also necessary to check the maintenance and manpower shortcuts that may be the result of a privatised process. Again, the role of the regulator is vital.

The Liberal Democrats want the Minister to say clearly that the Queen's Speech will contain an energy Bill that goes beyond waste disposal for nuclear power; to give a full-time commitment to this important topic; and to do more long-term thinking, with less short-term panic.

1.59 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I am thoroughly enjoying this debate because it puts me in a unique position. I have been a Member of Parliament for a long time and this is the first time that I have been in total agreement with Opposition Front Benchers. Today, comprehensively, exhaustively and—presumably—after much work, the Conservatives have rubbished the private electricity industry. They have made it clear that that industry has failed in its duty to the nation and is incapable of carrying out the job that it was privatised to do. That seems a very interesting argument, and one with which I rather agree. I hardly like to say this in public, as I know that it will embarrass the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), but I am at one with him when he argues that privatisation of electricity generation has led to a total failure of efficiency. I hope that it will not damage the hon. Gentleman's career if I say that I parted from him only when he appeared to suggest that we should nevertheless continue along that line of confusion.

I was only slightly more pleased with the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell), who seemed to be even more confused than me. Even so, it is important that contributions be made to the debate not only by those of my colleagues who, through training, background and effort, have become experts in electricity generation, but by people who, like me, know a little about the use of public services and who are worried about the future of the London underground.

It may come as a shock to Members of Parliament, who like to demonstrate expertise in esoteric and important matters, but the general public are singularly uninterested in the question of who generates electricity. People are interested in what causes them to have to use a form of public transport that broke down on one of the hottest days of the year. The underground system is more than 100 years old, and it can cause considerable discomfort for those trapped in it. As a child, I was trapped in an underground train during an air raid. I have never forgotten the experience. In fact, I suspect that it engendered in me a mild form of claustrophobia, which I never accept or admit.

Our nation sits on a very efficient and basic form of fuel, and seeks to develop industry at every level. How can such a nation find itself in a position where a resource as important and basic as electricity can fail? When that happens, many people are inconvenienced, and it costs industry and individuals a very great deal of money.

I was glad to hear my hon. Friend the Minister say that the Government are investigating the matter. He said that a working party had been set up, that the engineers will be called in, and that different aspects of the problem will be examined. However, I want him to give clearer support for a number of difficult propositions. The phrase "non-sequitur" has been used generously today, and I shall continue that happy trend. I believe that the electricity generation industry in this country, even though it generates more electricity than in the period after the war, is not capable of leaving itself a sufficient cushion of safety so that it can support essential systems.

I see no reason to doubt the accuracy of the account given by my hon. Friend the Minister, but how is it that the failure of a small part of the system—perhaps even something as simple as the use of the wrong fuse—can generate total chaos? In the past, the underground system accepted the need for a back-up system, so how is it possible that only a very tiny part of an alternative is now provided for? Hospitals in the national health service accept their responsibility to provide alternative forms of electricity generation if the main systems fail. Why should not the same obligation be clear in respect of the underground?

When the Lots road facility closed, did the underground management give generalised assurances that all would be well in the future, secure in the knowledge that the national grid very rarely failed? The last really bad series of power cuts happened just after the war, when there was considerable difficulty in generating sufficient supplies. This country needed a co-ordinated and nationalised—as it was called—industry precisely because the private sector was not capable of doing the job. As far as I can see, the private sector has given no indication that it is capable of doing the job now. We need more answers.

The Minister has been very open and straightforward this afternoon. He has told us what he is trying to do, how he is trying to do it and where the information will come from. It is unfair to ask him more questions, but this summer's incident was so major that it must give us pause. Large numbers of people were being carried on the underground system at the time in question. I am worried that many passengers were not evacuated for some time and that they were not given the information that they needed. Many staff had no idea what managers were doing to provide emergency organisation, and it seems that the underground's information about its own system was insufficient.

No one doubts the commitment of railway personnel in an emergency, or the adequacy of their training. Without the staff's discipline and common sense, what happened could have been much worse. The fact that so many people were evacuated safely and in such a disciplined manner is a great tribute to the sense of the general public and to the way in which railway men and women respond under pressure of an emergency.

However, when the trains stopped, operating room staff could no longer see where the trains were. It seems that no alternative system exists to allow them to identify the location of the trains effectively and quickly. When the power came back, they were not able to determine whether people were still in the tunnels—whether they were being evacuated quickly or were still moving down the side of the track. In the latter case, it would have been impossible to restart the system. As a result, the delay was much longer than it need have been.

London Underground must be asked several questions. Why does it not have a back-up system that would allow it to assume, automatically, that trains could remain in operation? Such a system would mean that no interruption would last long, and that trains could at the very least move safely out of the tunnels.

Drivers have responsibility for the safety of passengers on the train. Why were they not speedily given sufficient accurate information about the other decisions that were being taken? Why was it not possible for control room staff to see easily what was happening in the tunnels? Is there no automatic emergency lighting system? That would at least have given some indication of where people were moving and of the dangers that could have arisen had the electricity system been switched back on.

Why did it take so long for the management of the underground to take back complete control of the system? If the problem arises again, what sense of urgency is being engendered to ensure that, between them, the privatised companies and London Underground will be able to know with accuracy where people are, how they can be evacuated, and how long such an action will take?

With so many people being taken off trains in the dark, it is a minor miracle that no one suffered an accident. When large numbers of people are being moved around underground, there is no guarantee that all will be safe. For example, the step down from a train to the level of the rails is a considerable one. The evacuation could have been very dangerous. That is unacceptable: as I said, it is a minor miracle that no one was hurt.

A number of questions have been thrown up by this debate, but the problems go further, as the overground rail system was also disrupted. I sometimes admire the phlegm and self-control of the general public in this country. If people stampeded every time they were inconvenienced by a major incident, we should be in considerable difficulty, but there are so many problems with the railway system that people are in a miasma, almost accepting that such things are sent to try us and that eventually we shall survive them. However, that is not an attitude that the House should find acceptable and nor, certainly, should Ministers of the Crown.

That railway incident was a microcosm of the problems that face us throughout our national systems. I do not want to embarrass the Government by suggesting that the fact that we have not pulled many of those major systems into the state means that we are dependent on private companies; I realise that my colleagues have enormous faith in the efficiency of the management of private companies, although I do not necessarily share it. However, the Government must accept the fact that electricity generation is so

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

fundamental to our economy that any interruption in supply not only destroys work on a particular day but may have a direct and vital impact on the economies of our cities and towns.

That incident gave us a nasty warning. It told us, in effect, that we are dependent on fragile systems. There may be marvellous explanations—that the system is properly controlled and that there are alternative forms of generation—but when it came to the crunch none of those systems worked. It seems that the reason was simple and straightforward, which should give us considerable pause.

I want the London underground to be able to respond not only to that kind of incident but to any emergency with tightly drawn and clearly understood procedures that are openly available to the general public and can be put into operation at extremely short notice. I believe that London Underground has that intent; my remarks are not made as a criticism of the present management, but as a warning to the House that acceptance of inadequate provision is never suitable.

That brings me, finally, to the point that concerns me most. During my lifetime, I have seen changes in electricity generation. Many years ago, as a junior Minister, I had the privilege of sitting on an imaginative committee, run by the chief scientific officer. It dealt with planning for the UK's future fuel needs and considered the forms and use of various alternative fuels. That is where we must show real imagination and ability.

The present system does not work. Whatever the reason and whatever the divisions between us—whether enough electricity is generated or whether the price is reduced—any nation that depends on the workings of the market for the generation of its most important fuel will get into the sort of difficulties that we experienced recently.

We have been given a clear warning and we should heed it. Our entire system is so ramshackle—to put it kindly—that it should concern us. I rely on my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy, E-Commerce and Postal Services and his fellow Ministers to talk to London Underground so that we use our response to that unexpected situation to ensure that we can deal with any future difficulty that arises. First, London Underground should immediately be capable of switching to alternative sources. Secondly, training and controls should be adequate to deal with an emergency. Thirdly, we should tell the various companies that it is not enough to talk about corporate responsibility if, when there is an emergency, they are unable to fulfil the tasks that they have been given by the state.

If the operators, the regulators and the managers of the various companies cannot do their job efficiently, the House must demand that they change their ways and change them with considerable speed.

2.15 pm

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): We all listen to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) with respect. I admire the way in which she conducts herself. Although I often disagree with her, I agreed with every word that she said on this occasion. She made important points—I shall talk about the underground later—and I acknowledge the strength of her contribution.

The debate is timely; it is the first time that we have discussed the subject since the publication of the White Paper. Of course, it has fallen to the Opposition to introduce the matter, as the Government, having got it out of the way, seem keen to avoid it.

I am sorry that the Minister for Energy, E-Commerce and Postal Services is no longer in the Chamber as he gave a good reply to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), although it was tragically deficient in answers to the questions posed so admirably by my hon. Friend. The questions were fundamental and went to the heart of the way in which we run our society and our country. The Minister gave constructive replies to those questions that he actually answered, but all my hon. Friend's questions were serious and constructive, as was our motion, so I hope that the Minister of State, Department for Transport, who has a good track record, will respond equally positively in his reply to the debate.

The Opposition and Government opening speeches were in stark contrast to the contribution from the Liberal Democrat energy spokesman, the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell). I confess that although I listened to the hon. Gentleman carefully and he generously gave way a few times—once to me—I still have no idea what his policy is and how he would implement it if ever he had the chance to do so.

The Liberal Democrat amendment, apart from being unnecessarily personal about a competent Minister, is wholly contradictory. It states that the Queen's Speech should announce

"a full-time Minister who is charged with mitigating the negative impacts of privatisation",

yet the hon. Member for Hazel Grove has just told us that he agrees with that policy. That Minister should implement

"an integrated UK Energy Policy",

whatever that means. I think that we already have one. The amendment concludes that the policy should include

"the protection of the security of electricity supply",

yet the hon. Member for Hazel Grove spent a large part of his speech telling us that that was not a problem. It was a most confusing contribution, but when the hon. Gentleman's book is reduced in price we can have a look it and then we may be a little wiser.

Mr. Stunell: I enjoyed that passage of the hon. Gentleman's speech. It was our wish that our amendment be the motion that the House debated; had that been so, I would have spoken in more detail on those points. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the book is relatively modestly priced and I shall put him in touch with the publisher after the debate.

Richard Ottaway *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I think that there should be an end to advertising. May I also mention that the Library is usually well stocked?

Richard Ottaway: You make a valid point, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It would be a tragedy to have to pay for such a contribution.

The hon. Member for Hazel Grove said that he wished that the debate could have been conducted according to the terms of the Liberal Democrat amendment. It was certainly all things to all people, so anything that he said would have been both in order and in line with his policy. Such is the nature of most Liberal Democrat policies.

Returning to the core of the debate, there were tragic, difficult circumstances on the underground. I am heartened by a letter that I received from London Underground—I am sure that other hon. Members will have also received a copy—saying that it is taking the matter very seriously, reviewing the situation and looking into how such things can be avoided in the future. I wish London Underground well in that endeavour, but the answer is not clear to me. In confirming something said in an intervention by the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen), the Minister said that there was a back-up supply in Greenwich, but what happened to that back-up supply?

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Dr. Kim Howells): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I, too, await the inquiry's results, but I believe that the management considered that there was no need to use the back-up supply at Greenwich when they discovered that they could get electricity supplies from the grid rather more quickly and that sufficient reserves were left in the batteries on vehicles and in stations to ensure that the most basic safety levels, such as providing lighting, were maintained.

Richard Ottaway: I am grateful to the Minister for that response, but it sounds as though the back-up is of an emergency nature, designed just to get through the day, rather than to restore supplies, which was the impression given previously. None the less, London Underground is considering the back-up safety systems, and I am comforted by its letter in which it says that only eight trains had to be evacuated via the tracks—as was confirmed by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich—and that all the evacuation procedures worked.

For many years, London Underground has been treated as a political football—in some cases, justifiably so—but everyone would wish it now to have a period of stability, so that the new senior management have a chance to get to grips with the public-private partnership, even though we may disagree with it, and we wish them well in their review and in the future conduct of their operations.

On the security of supply, the central question is whether we have enough supplies in this country now and in the future. What is the problem that we are facing? Why are we concerned about supplies? One of the fundamental and radical changes that the Government made after taking office in 1997 was to introduce a pure market in the electricity generating sector, but, having introduced it, they immediately started to distort it to the extent that it is not a true market. They distorted it by effectively subsidising the nuclear industry, partly through their ownership of BNFL, which contains the most inefficient and ageing parts of the electricity generating sector that are hopelessly uneconomic, and their continued support for British Energy, despite many of us saying that such support probably contravened European Union rules. That subsidy means that the market is not operating properly. Under any normal circumstance, the most inefficient plant would have been shut down, prices would then have risen and the remaining plants could have operated economically.

The result is that, notwithstanding the price rises of the past few months, prices have been at absolute rock bottom for the past several years. There has been no scope for investment. Most generators have operated on a break-even basis. Those operators with large debts have shut down or been sold at heavily discounted prices. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk said in his opening remarks, the fall in the price of electricity from the generators has not been wholly passed on to the public. Prices paid by consumers have fallen, but there is no comparison with the generators' receipts. In truth, the Government have to explain why. Several rules and the operation of the competition policy are relevant, and there may be cross-subsidies for those companies that are distributors as well as generators.

We have to consider whether it is satisfactory for supplies to be wholly dependent on gas alone. The Government's policies clash. They want to introduce lower prices through market forces, but that desire clashes with their environmental targets, and the Government are storing up trouble for the future. We have never had a genuine, true market in energy, except in the past five years. Previous Government's have always maintained close control over energy, with close intervention, but we now have a free market that has long-term consequences, particularly for future investment—something to which I shall return.

The situation has been transformed over the past 12 years. In 1990, just three companies produced 80 per cent. of this country's electricity. Today, a significant number of companies do so, all of which introduce fresh problems. The heart of any good energy policy should be diversity of supply, and coal cannot be totally ignored in the way that the Government have intended. They have protected the nuclear industry, but coal-fired plants are the next most inefficient, and they have been struggling of late to make ends meet.

The Government want to phase out coal as it is currently used—I am not talking about clean coal—because it represents a challenge to the environment. CO_2 emissions from coal-fired generators are unacceptable in a modern society. However, introducing a free market policy clashes with such environmental objectives. That is undermining the energy policy, and it is why we are beginning to experience price shocks and interruptions in supply. I am talking not about the events of 28 August, but about the regular price spikes that are occurring as we get perilously close to capacity.

A great deal of the generating plant is not economic, so many of the maintenance schedules have been reduced and many plants are becoming increasingly unreliable. However, like my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk, I welcome the introduction of NETA and the liberalisation of the markets that that has

[Richard Ottaway]

produced. NETA quickly produced falls in prices but, as with any volatile market, it has overshot its target. The Government set a target that represented an aspiration for the level to which they hoped prices would fall, but I understand that prices have fallen considerably below that level and, as a result, the industry is in crisis—instead of investment, there are closures and cuts in maintenance.

Of course, we have to consider what to do with British Energy. I recognise the difficulties that the Government will face in trying to close the nuclear plants if they run the company on an economic basis. I also recognise the difficulties that they have with the European Union, but many of us warned the Government that those difficulties would arise. The Government claimed that they had the answers to those questions, but many of us are still waiting to hear them.

Dr. Howells: I am very much enjoying the hon. Gentleman's challenging speech. As he will know, I was involved with the legislation that introduced NETA. Does he recall that hon. Members on both sides of the House expressed worries about the fact that, under the old pool arrangements, there were serious allegations of high price setting, especially by major generators, and that there was general agreement that something had to be done to try to introduce some fairness and transparency for customers, including industrial customers and the public sector, as well as domestic consumers? Fine judgments have to be made, but the current system at least has greater transparency and even some predictability in some cases than what preceded it.

Richard Ottaway: The Minister is spot on. The pool arrangements came in after privatisation, and, after moving from a state-owned monolith, liquidity was needed in the sector. The previous Government should not therefore apologise for that. We did not quarrel with the introduction of NETA, however, which seemed to be at the right stage having introduced liquidity into the market. What has gone wrong is that it has overshot, and there is now not enough liquidity in the market. I was comforted that, in the Minister's opening speech, he said that Ofgem's price review will look at ways to encourage investment. I thought that that was probably the most important part of the speech, because without it there will be insufficient funding for investment. Currently, NETA is not producing sufficient liquidity for investment. Building a new power station has a lead-up of three to five years just for implementation, and a payback period of 20 to 30 years. No one in the private sector will invest £1 billion to build a new power station if they do not have some idea of what the price curve will look like during that 10, 20 or 30-year payback period. That is the problem, which is why I welcome the Minister's point about looking at ways to bring in extra investment. That will result in a reform of NETA in a way that I and, I suspect, most people would welcome.

The performance and innovation unit report and the energy White Paper were very important in talking about the trade-offs that had to be made. The bombshell, however, was that there was no commitment whatever in relation to the nuclear industry. How can a White Paper be published that says that it is a blueprint for the next 50 years but leave open the question of the most important part of energy policy? That is beyond me. In truth, the White Paper is already beginning to look dated after just a few months, let alone in the first of its 50 years.

A decision must be made about nuclear energy. If we want to have clean energy in this country, the country may have to be prepared to pay for it. In the long term, looking hundreds of years ahead, we will run out of fossil fuels, gas and oil, and the future will be nuclear energy. The challenge must be how to make it safe so that we do not have another Chernobyl, which I am sure can be done through modern technology and efficient regulation—and we will have to bite the bullet to a degree on cost. Nuclear energy has been a bedrock of the post-war years in this country and I think that it will be the bedrock in the years to come. The White Paper put heavy emphasis on the future of renewable energy. My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk spoke about the scepticism as to whether those targets can be achieved. They are dramatic targets and I am sceptical about whether they can be met. Without nuclear energy, the mind boggles as to how the environmental targets that the Government have bravely set will ever be achieved in the long term.

That, of course, brings me to the ugly duckling of the sector—coal-fired generation. The Government have consistently supported coal production because, as the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich said, we are sitting on the most tremendous natural resource, which would in one stroke remove the questions that are being posed to the Government about security of supply. There is no question, however, of having coal in its present form. It must be clean coal, and I welcome the clean coal technology papers that the Government have published. I know that they are looking at how to introduce more investment in clean coal technology, but more must be done. Much bigger investment and commitment from the Government to clean coal technology is required if we are to produce the sort of reductions that we need. The Minister will know that the large combustion plant directive starts to bite in 2006, and the present generation of coal-fired generators will have to start shutting down between 2006 and 2015. Unless he has the answers to clean coal technology he will very quickly have a large gap in his diversified energy supplies, which will make the Opposition resolution pertinent, not in the long term but in the medium term.

In my intervention, I raised the diplomatic and political risks involved in making our energy policy totally dependent on imports from Russia, which was described by Churchill as, I think, an enigma wrapped in a riddle. We have no idea of the political future in Russia or of how stable a country it is. President Putin seems to be a solid guy who is building up a coalition around him, and democracy seems to be catching on big time. The Liberal Democrat spokesman said that there was not a problem because Russia needs the money. However, I do not think that we can put our trust in that—we must have alternative, back-up supplies.

We can all remember the pressure and concern in the run-up to the debate on Iraq. Russia and France were being very difficult in the United Nations Security Council and refused to give their support. Tremendous

leverage could have been used with the United Kingdom if Russia could say that it was free to turn off our energy supply overnight. We saw that in the oil crisis of the early 1970s. Russia might not cut us off completely, but it might gently reduce supply by 10 per cent., which would push up prices and start to hurt the British economy. It could be a very powerful tool, so it would be folly to be dependent for 70 per cent. of our gas supply on Russia.

Dr. Howells: I have an interesting question for the hon. Gentleman—*[Interruption.]* His Whip is now telling him off for speaking for too long.

The difference between this country's ability to react in the 1970s to the oil price shocks and the more limited choice that we have now is that, in the 1970s, we still had a considerable coal industry. In the late 1970s and 1980s, it disappeared. A lot of the coal reserves to which the hon. Gentleman refers, and about which he knows a great deal, are now effectively sterilised—we cannot get at them—and trying to access an opencast coal mine is a planning nightmare. From where does he think we will get this coal? I agree that far more diversified coal supplies are available in terms of world trade than gas supplies, but it will still not be easy and the coal will still come from some very politically unstable areas in the world.

Richard Ottaway: The Minister makes a good point. I remember that when I was Parliamentary Private Secretary to Lord Heseltine—when he was, I think, energy spokesman during debates on the coal industry in the early 1990s—those were just the points being made when we were sitting on the other side of the Chamber. I do not think that we can depend totally on the UK. Most of the coal mines in the UK are uneconomic, but a huge variety of coal is available for import. As most people will know, coal can be imported from, say, South Africa more cheaply than it can be extracted from the coal mines of this country. That was the problem that we had in those debates in the 1990s.

I have made my points. I conclude by recommending to the Minister the NERA economic consulting paper, entitled, "Persuading the Private Sector to Meet the Aims of Energy Policy". It calls for a strategy to introduce more investment in the energy sector. If there were more investment in electricity generation in this country, the questions that we are discussing could be addressed provided that we do not remain wholly dependent on supplies from foreign countries.

2.40 pm

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): In addition to being the proud Member for Crosby, I am also a chartered engineer. I am a fellow of both the Institution of Electrical Engineers and the Institution of Mechanical Engineers and I have produced some of the information that I shall provide today in conjunction with my colleagues from those institutions.

The Minister for Energy, E-Commerce and Postal Services talked about the history of the power supply for London Underground. The history is important because it demonstrates clearly some of the problems that have faced this country's large electricity consumers during the past century. A legal requirement was placed on London Underground to provide its own electrical supply, but that choice became less attractive as the industry developed. The necessary equipment was introduced at Lots road in Chelsea and Greenwich in the 1970s but it became more expensive to maintain. The start of the discussion about electricity privatisation caused London Underground to look again at its capacity and make decisions about whether it wished to retain it. As the Minister said, the capacity had failed on numerous occasions for several minutes at a time, although I stress that there had not been a catastrophic failure such as that on 28 August.

At the time of privatisation of the electrical supply, the great cost benefit of switching from self-generation to using a local energy supplier could not be ignored. London Electricity approached London Underground with a deal that it could not resist. The deal was to provide London Underground with its electrical supplies at half the cost of generating its own capacity, so it was a lucrative option. It decided to take advantage of services supplied by London Electricity but retained the capacity to produce some 40 MW of energy itself. I am acutely conscious that 300 or 400 MW does not mean much to a layperson, but the energy that London Underground consumes each day is the amount required to power 200,000 homes or a small city. It is a huge amount of energy and that fact allows us to understand the complex and intensive structure that is required to underpin such capacity.

When London Underground chose to opt out of supplying its own energy, it entered a world in which it would be only one part of a chain that invariably started with National Grid Transco, which supplied power to local electricity companies that supplied it to the end market. It has been established today, although it needs repeating, that the failure in London had nothing to do with lack of capacity. There was sufficient capacity in the grid but the transmission of the capacity to the end user failed.

National Grid has a regular maintenance programme, which is undertaken during the summer because the demand on the system is less than at any other time of the year. The system is already geared to accommodate two major failures such as a complete transformer going down and a pylon falling over. Such huge failures have been planned for and considered but have never arisen thus far. However, the failure of a contractor had not been planned for. We have heard that London's catastrophic power failure happened because a contractor who was working for an opted-out company had installed the wrong fuse.

The failure of the system was one thing, but I shall now talk about the relevant parties' response to it. London Underground put in place its emergency plan. I am not terribly sure about the plan—I have not seen it—but I assume that it includes a scenario in which there was a complete power failure to the underground. Although I have made that assumption, I want reassurances that such a plan has been developed. How was the plan disseminated and communicated to the operatives in London Underground?

I worked for Shell Chemicals for several years and was responsible for the transport of all its products throughout the UK. The products included some pretty

[Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas]

awful stuff. We discussed what would happen if one of our tankers fell over at the junction of the M6 and M5 in Birmingham because we would have had to notify the emergency authorities that the evacuation area had to be 12 miles. Hon. Members can imagine that we were talking about a pretty serious product and a serious emergency incident if a tanker containing 20 tonnes of product required an evacuation area of 12 miles.

We had difficulty mocking up such a huge exercise because it required turning a tanker on its side, bringing all emergency services into play at the same time to get the tanker back up and getting the place managed in a safe and orderly fashion. The hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) asked whether the lessons learned from 28 August had been incorporated into the recent emergency planning exercise in London. I must ask a similar question. When does London Underground have the opportunity to instigate such an emergency exercise? We can all appreciate that it would be highly desirable for such time to be available but the exercise would be conducted at substantial cost. The problem for London Underground and suppliers of energy to the arena is how to accommodate such an exercise without huge disruption and cost.

Patrick Mercer: The hon. Lady makes a good point. If she had been at the exercise 10 days or so ago, she would have seen that it was wholly unrealistic. How does one plan such an exercise without providing financial compensation for ruining the City's trade for at least a day? If we are ever to get our heads around the problem, however, such a thing must be done. I hope to ask later whether such an exercise will be held realistically.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: The hon. Gentleman clearly illustrates the problem at hand but there are solutions. The whole transport system would not have to be taken down because one could choose to fail aspects of the system to discover the readiness of a working unit to deal with it. Many different industries use such a system and, although I am not an expert, I do not understand why it could not be used for the underground. I am worried about London Underground's response because although it was safe, it was not especially effective. I do not understand what the company will gain from the learning exercise.

I also have real worries about London Electricity. When London Underground was operating its power supply, it had its own staff, which was absolutely essential. They were highly qualified and experts in delivering power to the system. They knew that system intimately because engineers know the systems with which they are involved and can usually pinpoint a problem within minutes of it arising before taking appropriate action. But when power provision was transferred to London Electricity, one of the first problems that arose was that of communication between London Underground, as the users of the electricity, and London Electricity, as its suppliers. As we know from the significant arguments that took place here about the privatisation of electricity, inadequate communication between party A and party B can be a significant problem following the fragmentation of an industry. I do not know what London Electricity has done to plan for disasters and emergencies and what correspondence and joint planning exercises it has conducted with London Underground, one of its major customers. Did they sit around a table together and say, "How do we plan for catastrophic failure of the underground? What is going to be our response and what is going to be your response?" My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) alluded to the failure of various parties to talk among themselves and to agree coherent plans. In this case, there is little evidence of the existence of a co-ordinated plan.

The other element is the national grid. We have a three-party supply line consisting of the national grid, the local supplier and the end user. National Grid has developed a significant number of scenarios for power failure. That is impressive, and it is evidenced not least by the fact that per head of the population we have fewer power failures than any other country. That is an extraordinary position to find ourselves in: we should be grateful.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): Like my hon. Friend, I, too, am a chartered electrical engineer. What is her opinion on the recent power failures in the United States? I was in the US when the power failure occurred in London. There is still great debate over there about that failure and the qualities of a system that is even more fragmented than that of the UK.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: If anything should happen to my hon. Friend and me with regard to employment in this place, we will be safe in America, which has a desperate shortage of appropriately qualified staff to manage not only transmission, but integration. Two factors in the US failures were states failing to pay bills to providers and lack of capacity. I am pleased to say that capacity is not an issue in this country; it was certainly not a factor in the failure on the London underground. In fact, it was caused by human failure—the whole system was brought to its knees by the failure of one contractor. It is not the first disaster to be caused by the failure of a contractor: Hatfield was an example that had not only economic consequences, but caused devastating loss of life.

Speaking as a member of the engineering community, we have huge concerns about the shortage of adequately trained staff. The incident on the underground could have been caused either by an inadequately trained individual who simply made a mistake—human error is perfectly admissible and permissible—or by an individual who had received very little training in a very important system. That is not unusual. I started my engineering career in the 1970s; the world of the next 20 years was one of reduction, not expansion, in the UK's engineering capacity. When I was the dean of an engineering department, I had to preside over the closure of parts of it. I became increasingly concerned that, as a nation, we were not producing sufficient skilled tradespeople, incorporated engineers or chartered engineers to be able adequately to manage the infrastructure that exists today. There is an acute shortage of power engineers and heavy electrical

engineers. Those are not glamorous professions, but we desperately need such individuals, who are essential to companies' safe operation.

Following the Hatfield disaster, there was much discussion about whether the rail industry would be able to hang on to its professional engineers, who were desperately worried about the lack of investment and the possibility that they would ultimately be left carrying the can. We now have massive expansion in public sector investment, but that cannot be sustained without adequately trained staff. I hope that the review will reinforce what came out of the Hatfield review – namely, that in order to continue to provide safe systems we need adequately trained staff. That means that we have to assess our capacity to produce those people and to make engineering and the activities of engineers attractive to a population of young people who are not interested in that enormously rewarding and exciting work.

That concludes my comments; I look forward to the Minister's response.

2.56 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): It is always a pleasure to listen to an authoritative speech from a Member who is very well informed; I congratulate the hon. Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) on her contribution. It is extremely important that she drew to the House's attention, in relation to the London underground incident, the importance of differentiating the issue of capacity and the way in which the power shortage occurred in the transmission system. Her discussion of engineering capacity in the United Kingdom could have been delivered so effectively only by the former dean of an engineering department. That issue must be addressed through the reward structure and the way in which we view engineers in our society. Our engineering capacity has been central to our economic success for a matter of centuries.

The hon. Lady's point about the resilience of the national grid was also well made. If her figures are correct, the national grid is delivering electricity for the United Kingdom with the greatest degree of reliability in the world – although one or two tiny little countries may well seek to challenge that.

I congratulate my Front-Bench colleagues on raising the subject for debate. Security of the electricity supply is an immensely important issue. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said that the general public are interested only in the consequences when things go wrong—and, boy, is that right! It is our duty as elected representatives to ensure that we do not put the general public in a position where they have to endure the consequences of our failure to look ahead. The greatest problem, which the Government still have to confront, is the failure of the energy White Paper to deliver a proper framework for energy policy.

This is the first opportunity that I have had to speak on the subject from the Back Benches since I ceased to be the Conservative party spokesman on energy in May. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) on taking on those responsibilities. I hope that he finds them equally stimulating and that he finds working for the shadow Secretary of State just as enjoyable. We agreed about many things and I very much appreciated the partnership. However, having departed the scene, there are one or two lines in the motion tabled by my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State to which I take slight exception.

The Minister for Energy, E-Commerce and Postal Services replied to my hon. Friend and, outstanding as he is, it is too much of a burden for him to look after e-commerce and the Post Office as well as energy. It was not very long ago that energy had its own Department, with a Secretary of State in Cabinet. Given the challenge that the security of electricity supply will pose to the United Kingdom over the next few decades as we become a net importer of fuel again, it is important that we should have a Minister as talented as the Minister for Energy, E-Commerce and Postal Services but whose sole responsibility focuses on energy matters. The Government face serious challenges because of the sad lack of framework in the energy White Paper.

As for the security of supply and the Conservative motion, like the hon. Member for Crosby, I am reasonably reassured by briefings and information from the National Grid that any short-term problems in supply and capacity can be tackled, as it has 18 per cent. overcapacity, enabling it to meet the point of highest demand. Even in difficult circumstances, it has further tools available to it – for example, asking major electricity consumers such as aluminium factories and so on not to use electricity at certain times and to reduce their output by 10 per cent. In the short term, that gives the national grid the capacity to establish the required safety margin.

The Minister also drew attention to the fact that the price mechanism is now starting to operate. However, my thesis is that it must operate within a framework. It is our job as parliamentarians to examine the Government's framework and make sure that it is robust. Having studied these matters for nearly a year as my party's spokesman, I wish to elaborate on my proposals for that framework. In the motion, my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) draws attention to concern about the Government's plans

"to make Britain dependent on gas imports from unreliable sources".

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) also drew attention to his concerns in that area. Problems are unavoidable, as gas is used to generate 38 per cent. of the electricity that we consume and is the fuel supplied to the vast majority of the domestic sector. We will continue to rely on it in one form or another for the foreseeable future – indeed that trend will continue upwards. Gas will constitute an increasing share of the fuel that we require. From 2005 to 2006, we will no longer be self-sufficient in natural gas and, as has been pointed out, from 2020 we may be importing up to 90 per cent. of our gas.

When I became shadow energy spokesman, one of the first issues on which I wanted to satisfy myself was the question of how much gas there is in the world and the security of supply risk to our major fuel. The simple answer was present in the Government's own analysis, initially from the performance and innovation unit and then in the energy White Paper. There is lots of gas out there – the Russians have about 30 per cent. of the world's supply and so far 100 years' worth of gas

[Mr. Crispin Blunt]

supplies around the world have been identified. As we become a gas importer, we will have to address the issue of security of supply by having as many different sources of natural gas as we can reasonably achieve.

That is why, in the wake of the White Paper, I watched with approbation the journeys made by the former energy Minister, the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), around the world as he tried to secure the gas supplies that are vital to our future interests. He was in continual negotiations with Norway over the delivery of gas from the north Norwegian sea, and went to Moscow, Algeria and Iran. I do not know whether he went to Qatar, but it is thought to have 8 per cent. of the world's gas supplies, so it may be another important gas source for us. I very much welcome proposals to create a Northern Natural Gas terminal to bring liquefied natural gas into the United Kingdom from areas where it is uneconomic to pump compressed gas.

I particularly welcome proposals for pipelines direct from Russia, thus avoiding the concern expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk that supplies from Russia will have to go through Germany before reaching the United Kingdom. The Government have made all the right noises about policy on the supply of fuel, particularly gas, being part of our European and diplomatic policy, and it is necessary that they keep up the pressure on that issue. It must be a high priority for everyone up to and including the Prime Minister whenever he is in discussion with Heads of Government, particularly President Putin of Russia, which has a large share of gas supplies, and other Heads of Government in the region. That priority is also central to our wider security and foreign policy in Iran and the middle east. It is important to ensure that the new Saudi gas deals—the Saudis have hitherto ignored their substantial natural gas resources, which are about four times as large as the North sea's—are concluded successfully so that western oil and gas companies can translate those deals into production and widen the sources of gas available to the UK.

Our energy shop is based on gas, whether we like it or not, so for the foreseeable future—certainly for at least the next two or three decades—we have no choice but to deal with the issue of getting gas from what the motion calls "unreliable sources". I am not convinced that we can be quite as complacent as the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell), who said that there is no risk to our security of supply. These matters must be kept under review, and that is properly the function of the review set up by the Government. However, we must also consider the national security aspects of the issue—ensuring the security of fuel supply will be an important part of our defence policy. The threat may be limited, but if it becomes a reality it would be catastrophic for the United Kingdom. These matters must therefore be kept under permanent and constant review. All the signs are that the world is becoming a more interdependent place. Using the interdependence of Russia and the United Kingdom as an example, that country needs our money as much as, if not more than, we need its gas. The lessons that we can learn from the oil price shocks of 1974 and 1980 and the way in which the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries has since managed its policies are that it suits countries with natural gas to ensure that the world is reliant on a constant supply of natural gas. If our industries become reliant on cheap and constant supplies of gas we will not start looking around for other fuels. The oil price shocks stimulated huge investment in the search for alternatives to oil, and in the end that did not do the oil producers themselves any favours. I believe that they have learned that particular lesson

The reference in the motion to the concern about gas imports from unreliable sources is intended to draw the Government into a debate about the fuel mix, which they have previously resisted. It is clear from the energy White Paper that they do not believe that that is a proper decision for government, and I agree with them. If we start going down that road, we are obliged to consider the alternatives to gas. The main source of fuel for electricity generation is coal, but the future of that is not frightfully bright—indeed, it is bleak. The large-scale plant combustion directive will make uneconomic a large proportion of the electricity supplied from coal-fired power stations, and once the emissions trading regime comes into operation and proper pricing of carbon dioxide emissions begins, it is hard to see how almost any form of coal-fired electricity production will be economic, compared with gas or alternative sources.

The Government are investing in carbon sequestration and trying to find a way of rescuing what is left of the electricity generating industry. We must consider carefully the scale of investment that might be required to keep coal-fired electricity generation staggering on. The investment may not be worth the candle. Any Government dealing with energy policy must recognise that the No. 1 requirement is to go on delivering secure and economic electricity supplies, because the wealth of our industry and our quality of life depend on that achievement. Privatisation has contributed greatly to the economic supply of electricity in the United Kingdom, as well as an extremely reliable source of supply in normal circumstances.

The saddest thing about the White Paper was its failure to address the future of the nuclear-generated electricity industry. The Government are doing the country a huge disservice by delaying a decision about that. They must put in place a framework within which future investors will be able to decide whether to invest in new nuclear power stations. Plainly, the Government will not build new nuclear power stations. I believe there is a way to achieve that, as part of an overall energy policy.

We need to create a proper free market in energy within environmental constraints. The vast majority of scientific opinion is agreed that the greatest threat to the planet is atmospheric pollution and climate change. The Government and the European Union are moving towards emissions trading for carbon dioxide. Sadly, that scheme will apply only to large-scale emitters. It will not be comprehensive and will cover only about 30 per cent. of carbon dioxide emissions. I hope to publish in the near future my detailed proposals for an energy policy for the United Kingdom that would provide a comprehensive environmental framework and would, as far as possible, price all greenhouse gas emissions associated with electricity production, transport and domestic use of power. We could then begin to price the comprehensive environmental consequences of what we do.

We have failed to produce a system that does that. The result is that the Government are giving huge support to renewable electricity generation, for example, although its cost is astronomic. The wind farms that are now attracting investment in order for investors to take advantage of the subsidy available from the Government are hopelessly uneconomic. They will be a huge cost to the country. There will be far better ways to achieve the environmental objectives associated with reducing greenhouse gas emission than the production of electricity from wind power.

Mr. Hendrick: The hon. Gentleman referred to the Government's White Paper and their position on nuclear power. Will he tell us his party's position on the future of nuclear power?

Mr. Blunt: I am grateful for the invitation. I shall not trespass too long on the time of the House, even though the subject of energy is vast and all-consuming. I hope that we will have more time to debate it in the House. Briefly, in the same way as we should find a mechanism to price the atmospheric pollution caused by carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, we should price the future pollution that will be associated with nuclear production. It is not unreasonable to expect new designs of nuclear power stations to allow an estimate of the cost of dealing with the fuel that will come out of those power stations, and the final cost of decommissioning them. Then one can impose an environmental charge against those power stations, in accordance with their expected lifespan.

On top of that cash stream, which in the United States has been set at 0.1 cent for the past couple of decades, which has produced the money that is now paying for the disposal of spent nuclear fuel in the US, some form of insurance premium could also be charged in case those calculations turned out to be hopelessly wrong, as was the case with the first generation of nuclear power stations, which turned out to be vastly more expensive to clean up than anyone ever anticipated. That would also produce the funds to deal with the problem that we face now—the problem of the environmental pollution created by radioactivity. The Government cannot escape their responsibilities in that regard.

There is a way for those costs to be priced in, and if that is done for each design of nuclear power station, and if the costs associated with carbon dioxide and greenhouse gases are also priced in as far as possible, investors will be able to decide whether to invest in wind farms, gas-fired electricity stations or clean coal technology. That is the way forward. It provides investors with a framework in which to make decisions and will then allow the market to operate. It will also be possible to price in factors such as security of supply. As soon as it becomes clear that the supply is under threat, the price of electricity will be almost infinite. People will pay an enormous amount if they think they will be denied supplies of electricity. That is a commodity for which an effective market can work. The challenge facing us and the Government is to create the framework that will enable that market to function and to produce clean, cheap electricity on which we can all rely.

3.17 pm

Patrick Mercer (Newark): It is a privilege to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt). I am grateful to the hon. Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) for making one or two points on which I hope to expand. I shall confine my remarks to the security aspects of the London underground, with particular reference to the exercise that took place about 10 days ago.

I shall pose a number of questions. I apologise in advance to the Minister if that causes him confusion. I realise that most of the questions could be answered by various Ministers—the Home Secretary, the Minister with responsibility for the Cabinet Office, the Minister for Local Government, Regional Governance and Fire, or the Secretary of State for Transport. Who knows who will answer the questions? The Government do not have one central point to which to address questions relating to homeland security. If they did, perhaps some of my questions might receive a proper and coherent answer.

Almost 10 years ago, there was a sarin attack on the Tokyo underground. I do not need to remind the House of its effect. Since then, every terrorist group worth its salt has promised a similar attack somewhere in the world. Even before 11 September, there was the threat of an attack on the British underground. Most recently, a home-grown bunch of terrorists told us that that would happen. We had a warning from the head of MI5, as well as a warning about suicide bombers from one of the Metropolitan police's most senior officers.

Despite all those events, it has taken more than two years since 11 September for such an emergency to be practised in any realistic way. While I am grateful that there has been a practical exercise rather than a table-top, procedural, telephone or computer exercise, my first question to the Minister is: why has it taken so long? Where is the energy and the determination to protect not only our underground travellers, but the people of London? Where is the drive to ensure that the threat is being taken seriously?

For instance, why was the exercise planned and conducted on a Sunday, when there was no traffic and few people, few trains were running and it was easy to close the affected part of the underground system? I understand the points made about the financial implications for the City, but why was the scenario practised in such an easy way? Two thirds of the problem relates to other traffic and congestion, but that element did not arise. Why were the emergency services in position before the exercise? Why were the police and the fire and ambulance services in place? Why was the civil contingencies reaction force not present? Why were the armed forces not involved?

Why was the whole exercise so mechanistic and procedural, two years after 11 September and almost 10 years after the Tokyo attacks? It was good to see policemen, firemen and others donning those ghastly and uncomfortable suits and masks and getting down into the underground, but it was clear to me, as it would have been to the Minister if he had been present, that they were wholly unfamiliar with what they were doing. I could have understood that unfamiliarity if the exercise had been conducted in the weeks following 11 September, but I could not do so two years afterwards.

[Patrick Mercer]

When will such an emergency be practised outside London? When will such problems be physically rehearsed on other rail networks and in other tunnels? When will we next see such an exercise in London? More to the point, when will it be practised at a realistic time of day and with all the associated problems? That prompts the question of why so little account was taken of what happened on 28 August. Why were not the lessons carried forward immediately, clearly and with the energy and impetus that I would have expected? Surely, every sort of chance disaster, if that is the right phrase, must be used to teach lessons. The lessons must be implemented quickly and effectively; otherwise we will not be bothering or taking the matter seriously.

I have already asked about the next practical exercise—in the armed forces, it would be called a field training exercise—and asked when one is next planned for London, but answer comes there none. When will the emergency services be given a run in proper conditions, so that they can improve their reactions and so that London and the rest of the country get a proper crack of the whip? There is little doubt that such an emergency is coming. People far more knowledgeable than me have already warned that that is the case.

Some very fine words about the exercise were broadcast by the Liberal party. It was highly critical and made some suggestions and observations. Yet as far as I could see, not a single Liberal spokesperson or Member of Parliament was present. It is interesting that the Liberal Benches are so empty today. I say to the Liberal party that if it wants to comment, it should put its money where its mouth is by getting on the ground and seeing what the problems are.

In summary, valuable lessons were learned a couple of weekends ago that may help with the London underground if and when an emergency arises. However, I say to the Minister that if what happened in Tokyo happens in London, the Government will never be forgiven, and any of us with half a conscience will never forgive ourselves. I urge him to act and to do so in a realistic rather than a wholly unrealistic manner.

3.24 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I welcome the opportunity to contribute briefly to this debate.

Like other hon. Members, I wish to focus on electricity supply and the London underground. We understood from the Minister that evacuation procedures were carried out according to standard arrangements during recent events. That may well have been the case, but, if so, one wonders why it took up to 90 minutes to evacuate some people. He also said that there was no room for complacency. I think that we need to look back at some of the problems that arose during evacuation of the Central line in January to see whether the lessons have been applied.

For instance, problems arose in respect of emergency lighting on the train and mayday calls being broadcast on the intercom, which meant that passengers could hear them. There was a potential problem with regard to passengers descending an escalator into Chancery lane station while the emergency was under way. Problems also arose when passengers involved in the incident did not receive counselling. A large number of issues arose from the Chancery lane incident, and I should like some reassurances that they will be considered, that the lessons have been learned and that the evacuation following the recent interruption to power supply went smoothly.

Communications also need further investigation and were a significant problem at Chancery lane station. It appears they were also a problem in relation to the more recent incident. I understand that the National Grid Company knew that there was no terrorist cause and immediately advised EDF to that effect, but that there was a delay in passing on the information. Presumably the Minister may be able to clarify this point—the information would have had to go through Seeboard Powerlink before it arrived on the desk of London Underground Ltd. If the need for different organisations to be contacted sequentially is a problem, it must be addressed.

Similarly, the issue of communications outside London Underground must also be addressed. That involves what commuters knew about the incident. Furthermore, after the incident, broadcasters were unable to provide much information about the reasons for the problems that commuters were experiencing. There was almost a communications blackout in terms of people travelling on the tube, and that issue must be looked at.

Other hon. Members have mentioned the back-up power supply. I shall not go into the history of Lots road, but the Minister must reassure us that commuters are not in a worse position now than they were previously with regard to a back-up power supply that could provide traction for the tube. I hope that the Minister can explain what consideration was given to a back-up power supply when the closure of Lots road was examined and why it was eventually decided not to pursue the option. I also hope that he can say whether it is intended to hold discussions involving the Government, Transport for London, the Mayor and the national grid about the potential need for such a supply.

If action is taken on the key issues—communications, ascertaining whether evacuation procedures for the London underground worked as effectively as they could, implementing the lessons from Chancery lane, conducting a review of back-up power supply arrangements—something positive will emerge from a disaster that affected hundreds of thousands of Londoners.

3.29 pm

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): It is a well worn cliché on such occasions that those who make the wind-up speeches say how excellent and informative the debate has been. However, I genuinely believe that that applies today. As a humble transport spokesman, I have learned more about energy supply this afternoon than I ever expected I would.

I pay special tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway), who spoke with a depth of understanding about and interest in NETA, and to the hon. Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas), who spoke, as a former dean of an engineering department, with great knowledge of the technical background to events on 28 August. She also made some wider points that I hope the Government will take on board in the longer term.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) made an interesting contribution. He has studied energy supply in great depth in recent months. I shall revert shortly to the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer), who speaks for our party on homeland security and posed the Government some important challenges.

I make it clear at the outset to both Ministers that no one believes that the issues that they confront and that we have been debating are easy to resolve or require the mere waving of a magic wand or the exercise of political will to cause all difficulties to disappear. Of course, that is not the case. We are dealing with challenges that have built up over many years. The decisions that we make will have consequences for many more years and decades.

I shall begin with some comments about our general energy debate before concluding with a few specific questions to the Minister for Transport on transport matters. Although I look forward to his response because he is one of the most entertaining speakers on the Government Front Bench, I regret the absence of the Secretary of State for Transport. We understand the absence of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—she is returning from the Cancun deliberations, which it was perfectly appropriate that she should attend. However, the Transport Secretary is absent because he has been attending a party to celebrate the first stage of the channel tunnel rail link. Some would say that it was a little premature to celebrate any part of our transport infrastructure, but we shall await the Minister's comments.

Many speeches paid tribute to the skill and ability of the Minister for Energy. We find it curious that he is also Minister for E-Commerce and Postal Services, just as it is curious that the Secretary of State for Transport doubles as Secretary of State for Scotland.

Events in London and the south-east on 28 August and in the west midlands on 5 September—and in many parts of East Anglia last year, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) pointed out—harked back to the past. In an entertaining speech, which I shall shortly consider in greater detail, the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said that the last time we had serious power failures was shortly after the second world war. She may be right about the scale but, as someone who grew up in the 1970s under Governments of both parties, the events to which I referred were reminiscent of the period when many of us enjoyed our childhood. There were repeated power failures and power cuts. Eighteen years of Conservative government consigned them to memory and perhaps it is not coincidental that, after six years of a Labour Government, we appear to be reverting to some unfortunate old patterns.

The hon. Member for Crosby rightly set out in almost as much detail as the Minister—who reads a brief that is put in front of him—the exact technical nature of the failure on 28 August. I am not qualified to challenge her and I am sure that her description of what happened practically is accurate. However, what occurred was described by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich as a clear warning of what might happen if we do not have security of supply in the future. That is the context in which the wider points about the Government's energy policy and the sad deficiencies of their energy White Paper were made by a number of speakers, not only on this side of the House.

There is a general sense of disappointment that the Government, who had placed such great stress on the quality of their energy White Paper, its all-embracing nature and the courage with which various options were going to be assessed and decided in it, have none the less come up with a document in which, in the view of many experts, they have ducked more decisions than they have made. That point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk, but was not adequately addressed by the Minister, who made the best of a rather sticky wicket. I do not blame him for the difficulties in which he finds himself, but many people seriously question what the status of energy supply will be in 2020 and whether it is credible to believe, as the Government do, that by then 20 per cent. of our energy will come from renewable sources. Very few people dispute the desirability of that outcome, if it is deliverable, but many have reservations about whether it can be done.

It seems curious, given that the Government have chosen to produce this White Paper, that it should be in Opposition time that the House first gets the opportunity to debate the issues arising from it. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) pointed out, it also seems extraordinary that it should be through private correspondence that we receive a commitment from the Government to place an energy Bill in the next Queen's Speech. It would be helpful to find out whether the Minister is prepared to say on the Floor of the House what we understand a couple of Ministers have said in correspondence: namely, that there will definitely be an energy Bill in the Queen's Speech. If so, what areas it will cover?

The hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell), speaking for the Liberal Democrats, rather unfairly attacked the splendid speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk, who spoke with characteristic panache. The hon. Gentleman accused him of over-reacting and of warning that the whole world was going to come to an end. I would point out to the hon. Gentleman that it is his party's amendment that says that Government policy has

"left the electricity generation industry in crisis",

and that it was his speech, not that of my hon. Friend, that ended by accusing the Government of acting in panic.

Some of us also found it curious that the hon. Gentleman spent some time saying how wicked and evil it was that the Conservative Government had created a relationship between the power driving the lights in the House and the French Government, given that his party believes that our European neighbours should rule every aspect of our domestic lives. It was even more curious that he thought it a problem to have an energy relationship with the French Government, but perfectly all right to be dependent for large parts of our future energy supply on the Russian Government. That seemed an odd position to take. He did, however, tell the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich and my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South that all problems would be solved if we were to purchase a copy of his book. All I would say, in the kindest possible way, is that if he writes as well as he speaks in the House, I do not think that J. K. Rowling will have any real competition or difficulties with her sales figures.

[Mr. Tim Collins]

The priority that has emerged from many of today's speeches is that we must ensure that lessons are learned from what happened on 28 August and subsequently. In that context, I would like to press the Transport Minister on a matter that I raised earlier with the Minister for Energy, E-Commerce and Postal Services. Who, precisely, will be responsible for learning the lessons, particularly about evacuation procedures—a point also raised by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) and others—and about the general handling by London Underground of incidents relating to power cuts? Who will be in charge of implementing any ensuing recommendations?

As a result of the £500 million that the Treasury spent on the negotiations over the public-private partnership for the London underground, we now have an extremely complicated and long series of contracts, but it is still not clear to many London commuters who will be responsible for implementing any recommendations on these issues. Will it be the Government, Transport for London, the Mayor of London or the individual train companies? Or will it, as the Minister appeared to suggest earlier, be up to individual drivers to decide what to do in particular circumstances?

Dr. Howells: My hon. Friend the Minister for Energy, E-Commerce and Postal Services was right to say that the practitioners, whether on the trains or in the underground stations, will have to take those decisions in the light of all the circumstances. Ultimately, the Mayor of London takes responsibility for the conduct of the underground.

Mr. Collins: That was a helpful reply as far as it went, but the Minister will know that, although responsibility for London underground has, rather belatedly, been devolved to the Mayor of London, responsibility for health and safety legislation, security and a range of associated issues have not been devolved. They remain the Government's responsibility. What about issues relating to what happened on 28 August? The Minister said that 57 tube trains were stuck in tunnels—passengers were kept on 49 of them, but 1,200 passengers were taken out of the carriages of eight trains and put on to the surface of the tunnel, where they walked along beside the rails. As a result, the problems took longer to resolve than they otherwise would have done.

I am not expecting the Minister to have a definitive answer this afternoon, but Londoners expect greater clarity about the overlap, especially between the homeland security issues to which my hon. Friend the Member for Newark referred and the responsibilities of the Mayor of London and others.

Understandably, there has been huge publicity in the London and national media, as a result of what happened on 28 August, about which precise electricity substations in which precise geographical locations provide power to the primary transport mechanism for the capital city of the fourth largest economy in the world. It is not being unduly paranoid to say that among those who will have read those details are people who do not bear this country and its citizens any good will. What additional steps have been taken to protect those electricity substations to ensure that, now that it has become more obvious how fragile some of these arrangements are, people will be deterred and detected should they attempt to threaten them? Many of us share the view expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Newark. Like others, I was making that point two years ago when I was shadowing the Cabinet Office. We need a homeland security Department, like that in the United States, to provide a single focus, so that someone can be answerable to the House for questions on these matters.

We do not for a moment believe that it is easy or simple to provide energy security for the future of this country but, in the words of my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk, we believe that that is one of the first duties of Government. We hope and expect that the Government will introduce legislation on this matter in the Queen's Speech, that they will provide answers to some of the issues that they ducked in their energy White Paper, that they will accept that this matter is of supreme national significance—not just in London but especially in London—and that they will give us a sense that they recognise that fudge and delay in this area can no longer be tolerated. Clear decisions, clearly announced and clearly implemented, will alone meet the demands of this hour.

3.43 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Dr. Kim Howells): May I echo the words of the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins)? This has been an excellent and challenging debate. Like him, I was particularly impressed by the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas), and by those of his hon. Friends the Members for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) and for Reigate (Mr. Blunt). In fact, we have not heard a speech that has been less than interesting. I shall not join in the cracks about the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell)—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale has nicked my line. I was about to say that when it is remaindered, I may have a look at his book.

The Government share the concerns expressed by hon. Members about the temporary loss of power in south London and Kent on 28 August, and the subsequent impact on and disruption to travellers. When I heard about it, I immediately thought of the confident statements made in the aftermath of the blackout in north-east America by our own energy regulator and many others, who said that it could never happen here because our system was too robust.

As my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy, E-Commerce and Postal Services explained, some 410,000 customers in south London and parts of Kent lost electricity. Power was restored through the transmission system within 30 minutes, and within another 11 minutes the local distribution system was re-energised and normal power was restored in all areas. As at least one Member has said, however, there is no room for complacency. Our aim must be to ensure that there are no interruptions to such a vital system. We should also bear in mind the potential danger of conveying people through what may be long and deep tunnels in London.

The power failure did, of course, have far-reaching consequences. The hon. Member for Hazel Grove mentioned the heavy rail network. We must draw lessons from the extent to which that network was affected, and I shall ensure that the investigations take it into account—along with the fact, not mentioned so far, that hundreds of traffic lights went out in London. We should bear it in mind that only 6 per cent. of journeys in this country are made by rail. A huge number of vehicles were held up in traffic jams. As was pointed out by the hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer), we have many lessons to learn. Security involves a range of aspects of our lives, not just the economic aspect. Being able to negotiate the streets is certainly one of the most important.

The power cut caused disruption to surface rail services, the underground, street lights and traffic systems, as well as electricity users in homes and workplaces. Although London's critical infrastructure has back-up arrangements, there was significant and worrying disruption to the transport service in general. All the agencies involved are reviewing their back-up plans in the light of difficulties caused to passengers after the power cut. Following the publication of National Grid's report on 10 September, my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy, E-Commerce and Postal Services announced that the Department of Trade and Industry and Ofgem would conduct their own inquiries, and we hope that the results will be published by mid-November. The DTI's engineering inspectorate will conduct its own detailed investigation of all the technical and operational issues involved in the security of our electricity supply.

As my hon. Friend explained at the beginning, the cause of the power cut has now been traced to two faults that affected the same section of the network at almost the same time; but we will not hear this Minister blame some individual for putting a fuse with the wrong ampage into a box. As Members on both sides of the House have said, there are lessons to be learned and serious investigations to be conducted, involving the whole range of electricity generation and supply. The hon. Member for Reigate and others have reminded us of the seriousness of these issues, and they will be taken fully into account.

Mr. McLoughlin: Will the Minister give way?

Dr. Howells: I hope the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not. I have very little time left.

Risks to complex systems such as the energy supply cannot be eliminated, but we are determined to use this experience in a way that will enable us—along with other agencies, the regulator and the companies involved—to minimise and, where necessary, manage those risks. The Secretaries of State for Trade and Industry and for Transport are also determined to ensure that the necessary lessons are learned, because the Government share the House's feeling that what happened on 28 August must not happen again. Our transport providers need secure, reliable supplies and an effective and appropriate means of handling disruption, if and when it should occur.

In answer to a point raised by the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale, London Underground draws its power from the national grid under a private finance initiative deal—it was finalised in 1998 but began long before then— with Seeboard Powerlink, which manages, maintains, develops and finances the London underground power supply system. The PFI deal stems from a decision first taken by London Underground in 1985: that the Lots road power station, which was by then 100 years old and reaching the end of its life, should be closed in favour of supply from the national grid. I understand from London Underground that that decision was reviewed several times before finally being confirmed through the award of the PFI contract in 1998. During that period, consideration was given to several options, including refurbishing the Lots road station.

There seems to be consensus among experts that resilience is better secured by having access to the wider supply possibilities of the grid, rather than through over-reliance on an individual power plant such as that at Lots road. Well, we may yet have that debate, as a consequence of the investigations that will take place.

I want now to deal with some of the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who has looked at these issues particularly closely. I never thought that I would live to hear her say that she associates herself completely—completely—with the comments of Conservative Front Benchers. It was a wonderful moment, but I should warn the House that she can be more than a little mischievous from time to time. I suspect that she was seeking to tease out of the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) some firmer statements on Tory policy on electricity generation supply and demand. She is one of the House's most accomplished performers, and I want strongly to commend to some of the younger Members—on both sides of the House—the hon. Gentleman's decision not to take her on. I certainly would not do so.

Mr. McLoughlin: Stop grovelling!

Dr. Howells: I am trying to answer the questions. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich concentrated, quite properly, on crucial issues such as passenger safety and the provision of constant electricity supplies to the underground.

The PFI power contract was put out to tender in 1996 and was signed in 1998 with Seeboard Powerlink, which is owned primarily by Seeboard. The contract has been subject to safety and risk analysis. The PFI covers four main features: the provision of back-up supplies from a gas turbine generator at Greenwich; the provision of emergency battery lighting at stations; the purchase and supply of power from the national grid; and the operation, maintenance and renewal of London underground's high-voltage network.

The PFI contract is drawn so as to incentivise Seeboard Powerlink's maintaining a high level of resilience and security of power supply. The PFI will provide a new control system, known as SPIDER—I do not know why—for London underground's power network. I am told that it will enable faster high-voltage system reconfiguration in the event of loss of supply from the grid.

I want to reassure the House and the hon. Member for Croydon, South in particular that as part of its review of the handling of the power failure, London Underground

[Dr. Howells]

will examine how its power PFI worked, and identify improvements that can be made to communication between it and Seeboard Powerlink, and between the latter and EDF Energy, which is the local distribution supplier. Indeed, that issue was also of concern to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake). London Underground will particularly investigate its operational and customer service response to the power supply problems of 28 August—especially internal communications and the CCTV network, which the hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) rightly noted was important. The evacuation protocol, which seems to have worked well on this occasion, will also be assessed.

As the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale reminded us, people got out safely and no one was hurt. We need to learn from what went well as well as from the difficulties. The reopening of stations and the restoration of services is also important. The electricity may be brought back on supply, but we have to ensure that no one is on the lines and that no part of the system will be damaged as a consequence of turning the juice back on. Communications with the world beyond the underground system will also be examined. We must ensure that everyone knows exactly what is happening to prevent crushes from crowds of people trying to enter stations on the underground when they should stay well out of them. Those are serious issues.

London Underground's key problem, as several hon. Members have pointed out, is decades of under-investment. I want to assure my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich that the public-private partnership is delivering unprecedented levels of long-term stable funding to enable the tube to be brought up to modern standards. The Government are providing £1 billion a year for the next seven years. In all, the PPP will save more than £1 billion a year spent on maintenance and upgrades over the next 15 years. That will give the tube a chance to recover and to become a much better system. The underground, of course, remains publicly owned and is publicly accountable to the Mayor of London, and the private sector consortiums that are contracted to deliver the improvements face heavy penalties if they fail to do so.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Energy, E-Commerce and Postal Services openly and candidly dealt with the hugely important issues that the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale focused on about the future of electricity generation and supply in this country.

Before I reach the requisite part of the winding-up speech, I want to add my praises—my hon. Friend would have done so if he had had time—for the hard work of London Underground staff—drivers, the station staff, the controllers and so forth—in handling such a difficult event. They did it very well indeed, particularly evacuating passengers from stations so quickly, and later getting the trains into the right positions to resume services as efficiently as possible.

We should not forget the bus drivers and conductors who had to deal with the influx of passengers, nor the managers of the bus companies who instructed their drivers and conductors to accept tickets in order to help the thousands of people denied access to the tube to reach their destinations. It was a major exercise and it was done very well. The people working on the railways, who worked hard to ensure that services ran once the power was restored, should also be thanked. We often knock the transportation services in this country, but they are staffed by extremely professional and excellent men and women. In this instance, under exceptionally difficult circumstances, they did a tremendous job of ensuring that services continued.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and I will take great interest in the lessons that emerge from the various reviews and will ensure that they are acted on. In the unlikely event of a repetition, we trust that London Underground will respond even better and restore services more effectively.

In the few moments remaining, may I turn to the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby? It is extremely important that the appropriate skills exist to ensure that the tasks can be carried out. Those skills are held by the existing highly knowledgeable and good work force, but my hon. Friend is right that we must incentivise young people to work in the sector. If we do not, many of the predictions of doom that we have heard in today's debate will certainly come to pass. That is a primary responsibility of Government and I assure my hon. Friend that I will talk to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to ensure that measures are taken to try to provide incentives for people to enter such employment.

We have had an excellent debate today and I assure the House that we will learn the lessons of the outage that occurred on 28 August.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 124, Noes 332.

Division No. 312] **[4:00 pm**

AYES

Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, rh David
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Heald, Oliver

Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Trend, Michael
Trimble, rh David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Syms and
Mr. Mark Francois

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beith, rh A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chidgey, David
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Heath, David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*

Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(CIwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Gillian Merron and
Joan Ryan

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House regrets the problems that have recently occurred on the National Grid and the disruption that was caused particularly to transport services; further notes that the report published by the National Grid last Wednesday shows that the problem was not caused by under-investment on the network, shortage of capacity or its contractual relationship with any of its customers but rather by a local transmission failure; notes that security of supply is one of the key responsibilities of the regulator, that Ofgem is considering the incident in the light of the National Grid's licence obligations and will be reporting at the end of September; and further notes that the Government's engineering inspectorate will also be conducting its own investigation.

EU Constitution

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I have to advise the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

4.15 pm

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I beg to move,

That this House believes that the draft Constitution, presented by the Convention on the Future of Europe to the Inter-Governmental Conference on 20th June at Thessalonica, constitutes a fundamental change to the relationship between the European Union and the Member States and should therefore only be implemented if the British people have freely consented to it in a referendum.

This debate is essentially about trusting the British people. It is about letting the British people decide, and Sunday's euro referendum in Sweden was a healthy and welcome example of the pitfalls facing Governments who think that they know better than the people. I regret the bullying way in which the Eurocrats in Brussels have responded to that decision.

Ian Stewart (Eccles): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ancram: No, I shall make a little progress first.

The Government's ruling out of a referendum on the proposed constitution displays a similar hectoring disregard for the deeply held views of the British people, and I therefore make no apology for returning to this subject today. Hon. Members on both sides of the House, as we know, support a referendum; serious commentators argue for a referendum; and the people demand a referendum. Ironically, it was the Government who created that demand. They introduced referendums to our constitutional diet and gave the British people a taste for them. Even before they took office, they were promoting referendums as a central part of new Labour's political culture. Since then, they have held 34 referendums—on devolution, on mayors and now on regionalisation, not to speak of the yet again, if not permanently, postponed referendum on scrapping the pound.

In 1996, the Labour party was promoting the idea of referendums. As the then shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, now Lord Robertson, pithily put it while arguing for a referendum on devolution:

"Politicians should trust the people."

The Government trust the people on devolution. They trust the people on London. They trust the people on mayors. They trust the people on regional assemblies. They trust the people—until this one, the big one, the one that really matters. The Government then suddenly stop trusting the people and say no; but the British people will not take no for an answer, and nor will we.

The case for a referendum on the proposed European constitution is overwhelming. The principle behind holding a referendum is very simple: the draft constitution sets out to transfer sovereignty, both generally and specifically, from our national Parliament to the emerging political entity, which, in the Prime Minister's words, will be a European superpower.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Rubbish.

Mr. Ancram: Those were the Prime Minister's words, not mine. The hon. Gentleman should perhaps read the speeches that the Prime Minister made in Warsaw in 2000 and in Cardiff last November, where he explicitly set out his desire to create what he called a European superpower.

Sovereignty does not belong to Parliament or to the Government. Sovereignty belongs to the people. Parliament holds sovereignty in trust. Parliament can exercise sovereignty, but it should not on its own authority alienate it. If sovereignty is to be transferred, alienated or surrendered, it should be done only with the consent of the British people, democratically and freely given, arguably in the context of a general election, but ideally in a referendum. There will be many arguments as to what constitutes such alienation in the context of the coming intergovernmental conference. I believe that anything that reduces the powers of domestic national Governments, and thereby strengthens the powers at the centre, constitutes alienation. The draft constitution before us is full of such instances.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Does the right hon. Gentleman recollect that the powers of central Government of this country were significantly reduced under the Single European Act and other measures introduced in the past, and that there was no referendum at that time? Given the logic of his position, however, would it not be more honest to talk not about a referendum on a constitution but about a referendum on allowing the Conservative party to campaign, as most of its members seem to want, to get out of the European Union completely?

Mr. Ancram: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman reads the brief that his party produces for him. Helpfully, I also have a copy. It reads:

"Clear dividing line between a Tory party determined to take Britain to the exit door of Europe and a Labour Government working in Europe".

I say "well done" to the hon. Gentleman. He will get brownie points from the Whips for that. This document is wonderful. It says:

"The Convention of Europe was set up to propose changes in the way the EU works with the expansion of the EU to 25 members from May 2004."

If the Convention were only doing that, it would have done it very quickly. There is a lot more in the Convention report than that. The document continues:

"No precedent for a referendum on EU treaty change".

Even the Government, in the document that they produced as a White Paper the other day, accept that it is not a treaty but a constitution. That is the basic difference. Lastly—I will then finish with this document, as I would not want to steal all the lines of Labour Members—the document says surprisingly:

"The Government believes there is a strong case for a single, coherent constitution for the EU."

What happened to the Prime Minister's comments in Warsaw, I think it was, in 2000, when he said that there was no necessity for a single constitution or a single document? This document is a piece of propaganda, and I congratulate all hon. Members who are brave enough to try to make use of it.

We were told last year that a referendum would be unjustified because the treaty would contain nothing of constitutional importance. I repeat: nothing of

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constitutional importance. It is only a written constitution, which for the first time explicitly enshrines the primacy of EU law. It is a constitution that sets up a European Presidency for the first time, a European diplomatic service for the first time, and a European Foreign Secretary to oversee it. If those are not constitutionally significant, heaven knows what is. Even the right hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain), who I am pleased to see in his place today, apparently agrees. On 1 April this year, he told the Foreign Affairs Committee that he was not saying that the European constitution

"has got no substantial constitutional significance, of course it will have".

For once he was right. Can we therefore now have the referendum that we were told we could have if there was anything of constitutional significance? Apparently, we cannot, because now that the constitutional significance criterion has been met, another hurdle has been quickly slipped into its place. The truth is that those criteria are cosmetic. The Government have set their face against a referendum not because the draft constitution does not merit one but simply because they do not trust the people. As a result, their defence of their anti-referendum position becomes more and more frayed with every passing week.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Is it not even worse than that? The Government will not hold a referendum on the pound and the euro because they know that they would lose it, as the British people do not want to give up that amount of power. They are therefore prepared to give up all the rest in this constitution, without a referendum, knowing that the British people do not want it. It would be the first case in history of there being a currency with no country to go with it.

Mr. Ancram: My right hon. Friend makes a powerful point. He points out that this Government, who talk so much about trusting the people, when it comes to the crunch do not believe that the people trust them, and are not prepared to put that to the test. He makes his point very well.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): Is the point made by the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) also the right hon. Gentleman's point? Does he believe that it would be a currency without a country?

Mr. Ancram: I believe that there is no country called Europe at present, and if Conservative Members have anything to do with it, there never will be a country called Europe. At the moment, we are talking about a currency that does not have a country. The Swedes, in their wisdom, decided that that was not a game in which they wished to play a part, and if the Government were brave enough to hold a referendum on the same issue here, the British people would give them the same verdict.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): The right hon. Gentleman, Malcolm Rifkind and I used to agree entirely on Europe—so much so that we wrote a letter to a newspaper together—but he has changed while I am consistent. He has not mentioned the other referendum, which was held in Estonia on Sunday. I was planning to ask him to condemn the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), Lord Lamont and all those MEPs for interfering in the affairs of another state. However, given that there was a resounding yes vote on joining Europe, will he send them to Latvia as well?

Mr. Ancram: The right hon. Gentleman has a selective memory. The letter that he, Sir Malcolm Rifkind and I wrote, against the advice of the Whips on both sides of the House, called for a free vote because a referendum was not available and we believed that the representatives of the people of this country should have as much free judgment as possible. I still take that view even if he does not. We have talked about the views of certain Conservatives on Estonia. It is strange that I am instructed that the views of people such as those whom he mentioned represent our party's policy. I could start suggesting that the views of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on Iraq are suddenly the Labour party's policy. Members of the Conservative party are free to express their opinions and I am here to explain the Opposition's official line.

Mr. Foulkes *rose*—

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston) *rose*

Mr. Ancram: I shall not give way because I want to make progress.

The criteria that the Government have set are cosmetic. We were told in June that there was no need for a referendum because, according to the right hon. Member for Neath, who has sadly left the Chamber, the treaty was largely a "tidying-up exercise" and according to the Foreign Secretary, it was a "streamlining process". They were trying to get across the message that the constitution was not important and that it did not really matter. How may the incorporation of the charter of fundamental rights in the constitution or turning justice and home affairs into a supranational rather than an intergovernmental matter be described as mere tidying-up or streamlining? That defence was ludicrous, and as the details of the draft constitution became clearer the idiocy of the defence became clearer and even now it has been dropped.

Last Tuesday, the Foreign Secretary told the House that:

"the proposals in the current draft treaty do not change the fundamental relationship between the EU and its member states".—[*Official Report*, 9 September 2003; Vol. 410, c. 174.]

He said that there was therefore no justification for granting a referendum. The new test was a fundamental change to the relationship between the EU and its member states. However, at the same time, we learned from an interview published by the right hon. Member for Neath that behind the closed doors of the Cabinet room, the Prime Minister told his colleagues that:

"the outcome of the Convention is absolutely fundamental. It will define the relationship between Britain and the rest of Europe, the prospects for the euro, and it would last for generations."

If that is not a declaration that the constitution will fundamentally change relations between the European Union and its member states, I do not know what is.

I thought that the right hon. Member for Neath might have been mistaken or that his memory was at fault, but the Prime Minister did not deny saying that when he was challenged in the Chamber last Wednesday. He was not being helpful to the Foreign Secretary when he said:

"Of course the outcome of the convention is absolutely fundamental". [*Official Report*, 10 September 2003; Vol. 410, c. 324.]

He used the word "fundamental" in the Chamber and when talking to his Cabinet colleagues. The last line of defence against the referendum has been washed away and the journey from "tidying-up" the ludicrous first line of defence to "fundamental" has been completed.

The proposed constitution is on any view a step change away from a Europe of nations to a European political entity or, to use the Prime Minister's word, a superpower. The EU will have a written constitution, a legally binding charter of fundamental rights, a single legal personality and a five-year presidency. There will be explicit primacy of EU law, an EU Foreign Minister who is allowed to represent member states at the United Nations, a currency, a flag, an anthem and, eventually, an army.

Mr. Straw: Of the many misconceptions that the right hon. Gentleman has uttered, one is completely and utterly untrue. A European Foreign Minister would not be allowed to represent the European Union member states at the United Nations, yet the right hon. Gentleman implied that France and the United Kingdom would lose their permanent seats as a result. That is simply not correct.

Mr. Ancram: If the right hon. Gentleman would listen, he would know that I did not say that: I said that the European Foreign Minister would be able to represent the European Union at the United Nations. That is what the words in the constitution say; all the Foreign Secretary's wriggling cannot disguise that fact. I say to him again: if all this does not change the fundamental relationship between the EU and its member states, what on earth does?

More important, the constitution is, on its own terms, irreversible. Once one is in it, one cannot change it back again—it can be amended only in an integrationist direction. Uniquely among constitutions, it can be fundamentally amended by the executive decision of the Council of Ministers without further approval from national Parliaments or any need for new treaties. It has none of the checks and balances or restraints that one would normally expect to find in a constitution. I ask once again: if this is not a fundamental change, what on earth is?

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): I fear that the right hon. Gentleman may have misrepresented the Prime Minister's views when he quoted from his speech in Cardiff last year. He said, more than once, that the Prime Minister described Europe as a superpower. In fact, the Prime Minister said:

"We fear

he was talking about British fears—

"that the driving ideology behind European integration is a move to a European superstate, in which power is sucked into an unaccountable centre."

Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman should also have quoted what the Prime Minister said a few minutes later—that

"we should understand that our opposition to Europe as some federal superstate is not a British obsession. It is in fact the reasonably settled view of most members of the EU".

Mr. Ancram: I can tell the hon. Gentleman what the Prime Minister said later in that speech: "We are trying to create a European superpower, not a European superstate." He made that distinction. Yet every time that I have mentioned the word "superpower" over the past six months, Labour Members have shaken their heads and said, "Not true." It is about time they started studying the speeches of their Prime Minister a little more carefully; otherwise, their chances of promotion will be severely damaged.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Ancram: I want to make progress, if I may. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh, go on."] I shall give way.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I am grateful. We must get this clear. Is my right hon. Friend saying that if the Government, as they seem to want to, intend to force through this new constitution against the wishes of the British people, and without seeking their support in a referendum, there is no way in which future elected Parliaments or Governments will be able to do anything about it? We should not play at party politics, but realise that we are discussing a very serious situation.

Mr. Ancram: My hon. Friend makes an absolutely essential point. This is a one-way street. When one signs up to such a constitution, there is no way back. That is why it is such a fundamental question that must be put to the British people.

The best way of assessing fundamental change in the relationship between the member states of the Union is to examine the effects that it would have in practice. First, it is worth considering what we would not be able to decide for ourselves any more. We would no longer be able to decide on our own immigration and asylum policy; and we are to have our economic and employment policies co-ordinated whatever that may mean. Secondly, we need to consider what we will, or can, be made to do against our will. Thirty-two vetoes are being given up, including those on judicial co-operation in criminal matters, establishing offences and penalties for serious crime, crime prevention, civil protection, intellectual property, and rules covering the self-employed. Those are all areas in which we are giving away and ceding our responsibility in the House to the European Union. The Government had better face up to that, as it is the reality of the situation.

Thirdly, we need to look at rights that we have retained but which can be eroded without further reference to treaties or the consent of national Parliaments in future. Under article I-17, the European Union may endow itself with the necessary powers to deal with any area touched by EU power, from defence

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policy to border controls. We could have the imposition of a common foreign and security policy, the creation of a European army, economic co-ordination leading to fiscal harmonisation, all without the agreement of Parliaments or peoples or even the usual treaty-making process.

All of those, whatever gloss is put on them by the Government, fundamentally change the relationship between the EU and its member states. We might have hoped that that would change during the forthcoming intergovernmental conference negotiations, but that is a false hope. Last week's White Paper clearly indicated that the Government have effectively swallowed the draft constitution hook, line and sinker, and that its reservations are cosmetic. There is no real threat of a British veto—the one negotiating weapon with which the Government should have gone into the IGC—either explicit or implicit if the so-called red lines are not met. We see that in the Government's new-found ambivalence about the legal enforcement of the charter of fundamental rights. Previously, we were told that that was a red line that they would not concede, but now we are told, "We will see what happens in the IGC and make our mind up at the end."

One of the major lines of defence of British interests—the Government amendments tabled by the right hon. Member for Neath at the Convention—have simply disappeared off the table. There was a Government amendment dealing with asylum, which the right hon. Member for Neath described as fundamentally important, but it has been dropped. The Government said that they "did not accept" the title of "EU foreign Minister" because it was misleading, but that objection too has been dropped, along with the bulk of the 200 amendments that were tabled at the time.

When the right hon. Member for Neath said that there was no constitutional significance in the draft constitution, he was talking a language quite different from that of his colleagues in Europe. The German Minister of Foreign Affairs said:

"We have a draft constitution that is worthy of the word historic."

He went on to say:

"It is the most important treaty since the formation of the European economic community."

The Danish Prime Minister put it crisply:

"What is at stake is so new and big that it is right to hold a referendum."

Valery Giscard d'Estaing, when asked about the question of a referendum on "Breakfast with Frost" on 25 May, said:

"For France, we normally have a referendum when we change the constitution."

When asked about a British referendum, he said that

"we are not demanding a referendum, but we will be very pleased if there is."

He obviously regarded the draft as a change in the constitution.

Given all the evidence that there is a significant change in our fundamental relationship with Europe, will we get our referendum? All the qualifications set by the Government in their own words been met, but a last desperate defence has been concocted. According to the Prime Minister last Wednesday, those

"who call for a referendum want it as the first step in a two-step process to get us out of Europe".—[*Official Report*, 10 September 2003; Vol. 410, c. 327.]

I remind Labour Members that that is simply untrue. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) said in Prague on 10 July,

"The Conservative Party does not want Britain to leave the European Union. We want to make it work."

Indeed, the logic of the Prime Minister's attack is mind-boggling—*[Interruption.]* The Foreign Secretary would do well to listen because he will have to explain this to his colleagues abroad. The logic of the Prime Minister's attack is mind-boggling, and suggests that withdrawal is the agenda of all those who seek referendums on the draft constitution. Does he really believe that that is the reason why more than 80 per cent. of the British people want a referendum? Does he really think that 87 per cent. of his own constituents who want a referendum are part of some anti-European conspiracy? Is he saying that the Spanish Government, who are voluntarily to hold a referendum, are suddenly motivated by anti-Europeanism? Or that the Netherlands and Italy, in considering referendums, are somehow involved in a two-step process to get themselves out of Europe? Was President Chirac seeking to take France out of Europe when he said,

"I am logically in favour of a referendum. It would be the only legitimate way".

Those Governments know what the constitution is about, and they are facing up to the need to consult their own people about it.

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane) *rose*—

Mr. Ancram: I am coming to the end of my remarks.

The Prime Minister's attack on those who call for a referendum is laughable. It is an insult to the British people, it mocks their genuine desire to have a say and it trivialises what, in the rest of Europe, is a serious debate. That debate is about reforming Europe with the consent of its peoples. It is about involving people in decisions about their own future. Substituting puerile accusations for genuine argument indicates only fear of what the people might decide.

That is the real key. Unlike us, and unlike the Liberal Democrats, the Prime Minister and the Government do not trust the British people. They are prepared to ride roughshod over the views of the voters, and to drive through fundamental and irreversible reforms of the EU without seeking the consent of the British people. That is simply wrong. In their hearts and even, reportedly, in the Cabinet, according to one newspaper yesterday, the Government know that that is wrong.

The right hon. Member for Neath almost offered a referendum next June by way of the European parliamentary elections. In June this year he told the BBC that

"if people don't like what they get, they can vote against the Government in the European elections next year."

He went on to say:

"Then the people will decide."

He knows, and the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary know, that none of the arguments against a referendum holds water any more. The British people will not forgive a bullying rejection of their right to decide on something so fundamental, so irreversible and so far-reaching. The message of the motion is clear and simple: let the people decide.

4.41 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes the Government's commitment to keeping Parliament fully informed of the progress of the IGC negotiations, including through the publication of a White Paper, and to continued intense Parliamentary scrutiny of the draft Constitutional Treaty; believes the proposals from the Convention on the Future of Europe are a good starting point for discussions between the elected governments of the EU's member states; further believes that, as the proposals do not alter the fundamental constitutional relationship between the EU and its Member States, and the role of national parliaments is strengthened, there is no reason to depart from the precedent set by previous governments, which rejected referendums on previous constitutional treaties; and notes that it will be for Parliament to decide on whether it should become part of UK law."

With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, before I proceed to deal with the debate, I should like to pay a brief tribute to Anna Lindh as this is the first opportunity that I have had to do so in the House.

As the House knows, Anna Lindh was murdered in a Stockholm department store last Thursday, 11 September. For all of us who knew her, Anna was an exceptional individual. She earned huge respect in Sweden and well beyond its shores for her commitment to her principles, for her great skills and for the transparent honesty with which she pursued her cause. Her death is a tragedy, above all for her family, for she leaves a husband and two children of school age. I shall attend the memorial service in Stockholm this Friday, and I know that I will carry with me the sentiments of the whole House in conveying our grief and our condolences to her family, her friends and the people of Sweden.

The heart of the case presented by the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), as we heard, is that the changes proposed in the current draft of the European Union's constitutional treaty are of such a scale that a referendum to endorse them is necessary. We take a different view, and I want to use the opportunity this afternoon to explain why.

What the Convention proposes in its draft treaty does not represent a radical break with the past. It emphatically does not take us down the road to a European superstate. As I will explain—and nothing that the right hon. Gentleman said a moment ago suggests otherwise—the text does not alter the fundamental constitutional relationship between member states and the Union. If anything, the draft tilts the balance towards the European Council and national Governments.

The European Union Committee of the House of Lords has been assiduous in its examination of the draft proposals, producing 14 reports. Its report in May examined texts to give national Parliaments an effective role for the first time in European Union draft legislation. In commenting on those texts, which were very similar to the final treaty, the Committee concluded:

"it is clear that the balance of power in the European Union is going to shift from the Commission in favour of the Member States if the proposals . . . are adopted".

[Interruption.] The hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) mutters that the Committee members are unelected, with the implication that they know absolutely nothing about these matters. Some of them have never served in an elected position, but they have something to say and understand about the European Union. That includes Lord Williamson, former secretary-general of the European Commission, and Lord Hannay, the former British Government permanent representative in Brussels. The list of members—there is no sign of any minority report—also includes the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, an individual not known as a raving Euro-fanatic, formerly Mr. Norman Lamont and now Lord Lamont. Evidently, having at least examined the text with care, he concluded that the proposals in the draft Convention will, if they are adopted, shift the balance of power from the Commission in favour of member states.

The purpose of the treaty is much more prosaic than the confection that the right hon. Member for Devizes has whipped up this afternoon. It seeks to consolidate much of the European Union's existing constitutional framework, which extends over at least four separate and overlapping treaties, and introduces new measures that aim to equip the Union with the institutions and decision-making processes that are needed to cope with the demands of 25 members. As I explained to the House last Tuesday—he refuses to face up to this point—the enlargement of the European Union is the engine of these changes. It should be as plain as a pikestaff that a Union whose institutions were designed to operate with six members has been creaking in trying to operate with 15, and would find it very difficult to operate practically with 25.

I shall deal in a moment with some of the key arguments that the right hon. Gentleman advanced in pursuit of his claim, but I should like first to pick him up on one comment, which, if it were true, would certainly be an argument for a referendum. We all heard him say that the treaty is irreversible. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] "Irreversible" was the word that he used, and there is approbation from Opposition Members. However, that is simply not the case. It is untrue and shows that he has not applied himself to the texts. Article IV-7 of the draft treaty, as reproduced on page 148 of the Command Paper, sets out very clearly procedure for revising the treaty establishing the constitution and spells out that amendments can enter into force only after being ratified by all the member states in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements.

Moreover—I shall return to this point later—there is one measure that has not featured in previous treaties and that will be of huge importance to members of the true faith of the Tory party: explicit provision allowing for the first time a member state to withdraw from the European Union if it so wishes. In the past, there was an objection to the fact that the method for withdrawing

[Mr. Jack Straw]

was unclear, albeit that the document is a treaty among member states. There is now the most explicit provision through which, over a two-year period, if the British Parliament decided to withdraw from the European Union—in my judgment, it would certainly need a referendum to do so—it would serve notice and withdraw.

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to the Foreign Secretary for giving way. When there is an EU Foreign Minister under the constitution, will not he or she be the boss and the British Foreign Secretary the office boy? Will not the important people around the world want to see the EU Foreign Minister, knowing that the British Foreign Secretary has to go along with anything agreed by consensus in Brussels and initiated by that Minister, who will be the man or woman with the power?

Mr. Straw: It comforts me that the Opposition have to invent arguments about the nature of the text to oppose our actions. Shortly, I shall deal in some detail with the contents of the draft constitution and compare them with those of draft constitutions or constitutions on which the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) voted 13 years ago. He voted against a referendum on a specific draft constitution.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Does not my right hon. Friend have the slightest anxiety that every time we take a step towards European integration without the British people's understanding or consent, we may unwittingly be preparing the ground for what he fears most: a British public who would ultimately be amenable to withdrawal?

Mr. Straw: If I believed that my hon. Friend's supposition was correct and that we were moving further towards European integration, I would accept the burden of his argument. However, if he examines the draft treaty and the likely amendments, I do not believe that it is possible to argue that it takes us towards European integration.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): What about President Chirac?

Mr. Straw: The idea that President Chirac of France would relinquish control of his foreign and defence policy is ludicrous and gives the lie to the nonsense from the right hon. Member for Wokingham.

Mr. Jenkin: The President of France wants to eclipse NATO and establish an autonomous foreign and defence policy in Europe. The Foreign Secretary told the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs that he wanted NATO to remain pre-eminent in European security. Where is that written in the European constitution?

Mr. Straw: I shall happily turn up the reference. Conservative Members display much defeatism, as if they have no idea that a European Union of 25 members contains many more active supporters of NATO than people who do not want to be involved in it or its Defence and Security Committee.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Was it right for the President of the Commission to say yesterday that because Sweden had the cheek to reject the euro, it would have less power in the councils of Europe? Is it right for an unelected official to tell an elected Government that a country that has made a specific decision will have less influence in Europe?

Mr. Straw: I do not believe that it is right and I disagree with President Prodi, as I am entitled to do. I agree with the burden of the hon. Gentleman's comments. Although it is obvious that countries that have not joined the euro cannot be members of the euro group, I resist the idea that they lose influence over every aspect of EU policy. That is palpably not the case. I spoke earlier of my good friend, the late Anna Lindh. Sweden could exercise considerable influence in Europe's councils, and not only on my subjects of justice, home affairs and economic policy, because of the strength of its case and the allies that it was able build up. I believe that we can do that, too.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I shall do so later.

Let me deal with some of the specific objections raised by the right hon. Member for Devizes. He recently said that the draft treaty would lead to the creation of a "political union" because it was based on plans for a five-year presidency; that it would impose legally binding rights on all European citizens; that it would make European laws superior to national laws—he added today, "for the first time"—and that it would lead to the creation of a fully fledged diplomatic service.

In voicing his concerns about the creation of a political union, the right hon. Gentleman is fighting the battles of the past, because that term does not appear anywhere in the current draft. Nor, indeed, has it appeared in any of the European Union's constitutional treaties dating back to the 1957 treaty of Rome. But it was through Maastricht—the treaty for which he voted and on which he spoke so eloquently—that the European Community decided to turn itself into the European Union and to create the concept of European citizenship. Even on the most malign reading of the new treaty, all that it does in that respect is to replicate Maastricht's language. A fair reading of it, however, shows that the overall balance tilts more positively towards the member states.

It is worth recalling that the right hon. Gentleman gave the Bill to ratify Maastricht his resolute support when it passed through the House more than a decade ago. Furthermore, at that stage, he was not a pressed man but a Back Bencher. He therefore volunteered to do so out of a sense of conviction. In telling the House at the time that he feared the drastic consequences of rejection, he said,

> "I fear that those who say that we should turn our backs on Maastricht are taking a tremendous risk—the black risk of a centralised Europe, the risk that Europe will go on without us if necessary, and even if we are part of it, our colleagues will say, 'You've had your chance. In future you can take it or leave it.'"

His commitment to Maastricht was so absolute that he was prepared, if necessary, to sacrifice British sovereignty—something that I would never do. He was willing to contemplate what he termed a country called Europe. I ask my hon. Friends to weigh his words.

although the speech that he made is quite difficult to follow. Each sentence seems to be being weighed with care, especially by the hon. Member for Stone . In that same debate, the right hon. Gentleman said:

"I said at the beginning that I did not want to be part of a European superstate."

Fine. He went on:

"Equally, I do not want to find myself in a country that is outside a European superstate, with our industries unable to penetrate it." — [*Official Report*, 4 November 1992; Vol. 213, c. 343.]

Mr. Ancram: We have been through this before. What I was saying then is what I am saying now: I do not want to see a European superstate. I do not want us to be in one—which I would hate—or outside one, because I believe that such a superstate would be highly damaging to the interests of all the countries of Europe. That was the position that I held then, and it is the one that I hold now. That is why I want to stop a European superstate. The right hon. Gentleman keeps digging up quotations from the past, but in 1983 he was doing something that I have never done. He was arguing that we should withdraw from the European Union. He has changed his mind, has he not?

Mr. Straw: I am perfectly happy to deal with that point; I have done so in the past. What we have not heard from the right hon. Gentleman— [HON. MEMBERS: "Deal with it!"] Yes, I supported a manifesto that proposed that we should withdraw from the European Union, and we got the answer that we deserved at that election. I also supported a manifesto at the last election that spelled out our negotiating mandate for the inter-governmental conference, and did not promise a referendum. It did, however, say that we would stand up for Britain. Our policies in that manifesto were supported, and we are implementing them.

I shall go on quoting what the right hon. Gentleman said at the time of Maastricht, because he has never stood up and said that what he was saying then was wrong. The truth is that, on any analysis, he knows that Maastricht represented a more significant change to the powers of the Union and its institutions than does the current draft treaty. Maastricht enshrined commitments to a single European currency and to a common foreign and security policy. It also introduced many new treaty provisions, subject to qualified majority voting. Yet, despite the contents of Maastricht, the right hon. Gentleman opposed calls from within his own party for a referendum. He voted against such a referendum, as did the right hon. Member for Wokingham.

By contrast, the draft constitutional treaty drawn up by the Convention is much less far-reaching. Indeed, the House of Lords European Union Committee has recognised that the text seeks to strengthen the role of member nations. It states explicitly for the first time that competences not conferred on the Union by member states remain with them. Article 1.5.1 of the draft specifies that the

"Union shall respect the national identities of the Member States, inherent in their fundamental structures, political and constitutional, inclusive of regional and self-government."

That is hardly the language of political union.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): As there as so many scrutiny reports from the European Scrutiny Committee in the House of Commons, will the Foreign Secretary be good enough to point to any statements such as he has referred to in the House of Lords that have come from the European Scrutiny Committee in this House?

Mr. Straw: As a matter of fact, I cannot. That does not mean that the view of the European Union Committee in the House of Lords is wrong. It produced many more reports scrutinising different parts of the text than did the equivalent Committee in this place. It is uncomfortable for the hon. Gentleman, because the facts are getting in the way of his prejudices, but the reason it came to that view is that within the draft constitution, in an article and a protocol, there is provision by which national Parliaments, including this House and the House of Lords, will for the first time be able to play an effective role in studying draft legislation—

Mr. Cash: Very minor legislation.

Mr. Straw: I do not believe that it is minor, because if a third of national Parliaments decide that they do not like a proposed draft law on the basis that it offends principles of subsidiarity, they will refer it back to the Commission.

Mr. Cash: And it will not do anything.

Mr. Straw: That is not true. That is linked with the necessity for there to be at least 60 per cent. by population of votes in favour of a proposal, so if a third of national Parliaments object to a draft law it is likely to be revised or rejected.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wilkinson *rose*

Mr. Straw: No, I will not give way. [HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] I shall give way in a moment.

I shall deal with the first specific claim made by the right hon. Member for Devizes, which was that the draft treaty will result in the creation of a five-year presidency of the European Council. That is one of his central objections, and one of the things that he says will lead to a European superstate. It is true that the draft constitution would create a five-year presidency of the European Council, but I presume that he is suggesting that the post is tantamount to the establishment of an EU Head of State.

It is bizarre that a party, which has raised no objection to the principle of a presidency of the European Council during 18 years in government, now sees it as a threat to British sovereignty. There has always been a presidency, and this proposal is not about the further accretion of powers at the centre. Quite the opposite. There is now a problem with a rotating presidency. A senior political figure serving a term of two and a half or five years as Chairman of the European Council and responsible to Heads of State and Government—not to the Commission—would bring much needed coherence and continuity to the very body that, above all others, serves the interests of the nation states.

[Mr. Straw]

The right hon. Gentleman is not thinking through his position. The current system of a six-monthly rotating presidency is a recipe for discontinuity, and in practice it weakens the Council of Heads of State and Government and it strengthens the Commission, which is exactly the opposite of that which he seeks. The result of that is to weaken the role of member states in the Council, which is why the opposition to the proposal for a full-time president has produced some weird bedfellows. On one side of the bed are the right hon. Gentleman and the Conservative party, and under the same duvet are the European Commission, President Prodi, the Liberal Democrats and every barking mad federalist across Europe, all of whom oppose this policy. I know that the Conservative party is now thinking about being more inclusive and caring, but I did not realise that it went this far. Conservatives should think about the company they keep before they come up with such ludicrous propositions.

Mr. Ancram: Does the Foreign Secretary agree that among those whom he describes as our bedfellows are many of the smaller nations that are joining the European Union for the first time? They believe that the five-year presidency will undermine intergovernmentalism and be damaging to them.

Mr. Straw: That is not what they believe.

Mr. Ancram: It is what they say.

Mr. Straw: It is not what they say either. I have had the benefit of listening to them. What they believe is that a full-time presidency might undermine the position of the Commission, which they see—wrongly, in my view—as a protector of small member states. Some, though by no means all, of those smaller states believe in the Commission and would like to be part of a European superstate. That is the opposite of what the right hon. Gentleman is saying.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): I, too, listened for 18 months to what those countries were saying, and my right hon. Friend is entirely right. Their point is that a rotating presidency makes the European Union more in touch with the people of individual countries. It does not accomplish that completely, but it goes some way towards it. A permanent five-year presidency—the addition of another presidency in Brussels—will, on the other hand, make the EU even more remote from the people of Europe, and do the opposite of creating a more democratic Union that is in touch with the people. That is why the smaller countries, and my right hon. Friend, oppose the absurd proposal to create yet another presidency in Europe.

Mr. Straw: There is already a presidency. It is called the presidency of the Council. The question is, how do we make it effective on behalf of member states?

The logical conclusion of what the right hon. Gentleman and the rest of the Conservative Front Bench are saying is that member states will be weakened within Europe and the Commission strengthened. That is why the European Commission—of fantastical proportions, in the mind of the right hon. Gentleman—is most vocal in opposing a full-time presidency. It is not possible for a single presidency serving for six months to co-ordinate effectively the policies of 25 member states—which, yes, will sometimes be opposed to those pursued by the Commission.

Mr. Bercow: Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: Yes, for the last time.

Mr. Bercow: Never have I heard so many words provide so little justification over such a long period for denying the people of this country the right to make a decision on this matter. Why does the Foreign Secretary not just admit that he opposes a referendum not on ground of constitutional principle, but because he thinks the British people do not understand the issues, or thinks they might reach a different decision from him—or both?

Mr. Straw: That does not happen to be my view.

The right hon. Gentleman's second claim was that the draft treaty would impose "legally binding rights" in relation to the charter of fundamental rights. If the Opposition are to be believed, here and elsewhere, that document will impose a heavy burden on British business and provoke chaos in our judicial system. It will not do that, however. For one thing, those who read the charter will see that it is a straightforward statement of British and, dare I say, conservative values, including such astonishing propositions as the right to a fair trial. Its legal implications are also much more prosaic—thanks to the changes that we negotiated in the Convention—than the right hon. Gentleman would have us believe.

The most important changes that we have secured are in title VII,

"the general provisions governing the interpretation and application of this Charter".

Article II-51 makes it clear that the charter

"does not extend the field of application of Union law beyond the powers of the Union or establish any new power or task for the Union, or modify powers and tasks defined in the other parts of the Constitution".

It does not, therefore, grant any new powers to the constitution.

Like the rest of the draft treaty, the section on the charter may be revised further in the intergovernmental conference. As I spelt out to the House this time last week, we reserve the right to make a final decision on the incorporation of the charter in the light of the overall picture that emerges.

The right hon. Gentleman's third claim is that the draft treaty will lead to a political union because it is based on—I am quoting what he has said outside the House—

"an EU law superior to national laws".

Using the most awful weasel words, the right hon. Gentleman said that this would for the first time set out the primacy of European law.

The right hon. Gentleman is sufficient of a lawyer to know that that is simply not the case. It is totally untrue, and frankly he ought to be ashamed of making such

claims. We can argue about other aspects of what is in the draft constitution, but for him to stand at the Dispatch Box and claim that it will assert for the first time the primacy of European law, thereby clearly implying that no such primacy currently exists, is frankly a deceit.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Straw: No, I will not.

The right hon. Member for Devizes knows very well that the whole argument 31 years ago as to whether we should join the then Common Market concerned the fact that this House would have to cede the primacy of our law to that of the European Union.

Mr. Ancram *rose*—

Mr. Straw: I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman in a moment.

For that reason, section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972 was passed, establishing that primacy. It states:

"All such rights, powers, liabilities, obligations and restrictions from time to time created or arising by or under the Treaties, and all such remedies and procedures from time to time provided for by or under the Treaties, as in accordance with the Treaties are without further enactment"—

by this House

"to be given legal effect".

The right hon. Gentleman knows that to be the case.

Mr. Ancram: The Foreign Secretary has raised this important point on several different occasions. I just want to remind him of the case of Macarthys *v.* Smith, in 1980, of which, as a lawyer, he will doubtless know. Lord Denning said:

"If the time should come when our Parliament deliberately passes an Act with the intention of repudiating the Treaty or any provision in it"—

he was talking about the European treaty—

"then I should have thought that it would be the duty of our courts to follow the statute of our Parliament."

Lord Denning was actually saying—this is a distinction that the right hon. Gentleman must appreciate—that the EU treaties signed in 1972 created a limited primacy because of the jurisprudence of the European Court of Justice and of our own courts, and because of the 1972 Act. What this document proposes is making European law's primacy explicit and enshrining it in a constitution in full for the first time. At the moment, Parliament has what could be described as a residual sovereignty. The provision in the constitution would abolish it.

Mr. Straw: That is completely not so, and the right hon. Gentleman knows it. In the small print of his comments, he actually admitted that the primacy of European law was enshrined by section 2(2) of the 1972 Act, and by a number of leading cases involving the European Court of Justice—with which he is very familiar—including Costa *v.* ENEL, and that of Simmenthal. Such cases established clear primacy. What the constitution is doing—it is doing no more than this—is to replicate within the draft treaty what is contained in case law and in section 2(2) of the 1972 Act.

On the right hon. Gentleman's point about repudiating a treaty, under the terms of this treaty the House can of course repudiate a treaty whenever it wants. Under this treaty—not Maastricht, the Single European Act or the treaty of Rome, but this treaty—for the first time explicit provision is made whereby this Parliament can legislate to repudiate a treaty. He needs to understand the consequences of his argument. Is he now saying that European Union law should not have primacy over British law in areas of European legal competence? Let us be clear: if he is saying that, whether he likes it or not Britain would have to withdraw from the European Union, because it would be impossible for any British Government to operate within the European Union.

The fact is that all international treaties take primacy over national laws—the system of international law could not function otherwise. For example, how could the European Union single market—a creation of the Conservative party when it had a bit of sense—work if each member state could take its own decisions on the rules of the game, regardless of the rules to which it had already signed up? How could we guarantee British business a level playing field if other member states had the right to erect national tariff and non-tariff barriers, without any redress for British business? That is the natural consequence of what the right hon. Member for Devizes is suggesting.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): British statute takes precedence over treaties. That is established in our own courts and asserted by them. Where there is an explicit declaration by the House and Parliament through statute, it takes precedence over treaties, which are based on merely prerogative power.

Mr. Straw: I am sorry to disabuse the hon. Gentleman, but that is simply not true.

Mr. Shepherd: It is what is important.

Mr. Straw: If the hon. Gentleman reads the leading case of Shah and Islam, which is connected with the interpretation of the UN convention on refugees of 1951, he will see the argument set out in every detail. It provides a clear exposition of the fact that, when a country signs up to an international treaty, that treaty takes precedence over national law, as long as a national Parliament decides to remain a member of the treaty organisation. Conservative Front Benchers simply misunderstand the point and I am waiting for the right hon. Member for Devizes to answer my question about whether the Conservatives are now asserting—

Mr. Cash *rose*—

Mr. Straw: I shall give way to the organ grinder in a moment.

Is the right hon. Member for Devizes asserting that, if the Conservatives were in government, they would not accept the primacy of European law in respect of European competences?

Mr. Cash: The Foreign Secretary has to answer the question that he posed. What is the purpose of implementation of a treaty through an Act of Parliament if it is not, in the European context, to turn European treaties into domestic law?

Mr. Straw: The purpose of the Act of Parliament through which we joined the European Union was to say—with respect to the 1972 Act—that all future legal decisions of the European Union—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) needs to listen to what I am saying. All future enactments were given legal effect and recognised accordingly without further enactment by the House. *[Interruption.]* I find the degree of ignorance exhibited by Conservative Front Benchers astonishing.

Mr. Cash: Let us examine what appears in the Foreign Secretary's own White Paper. Paragraph 104 states:

"When the IGC starts in October, it will cover . . . the way we govern ourselves."

How does the Foreign Secretary answer that?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman is confused, and I am not surprised that the Conservatives are in such a mess when they lack even a basic understanding. An initial Act of Parliament ratifies a treaty. That happened in the accession treaty of 1972, in the Single European Act, the Maastricht, Nice and Amsterdam treaties, and it will happen again if we recommend the current draft EU constitution.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *rose—*

Mr. Straw: No, I will not give way.

Under various Acts, and particularly the European Communities Act 1972, we accepted the primacy of European Union law. I note that the right hon. Member for Devizes has still not explained the Conservative position. He made a point about primacy, so is he saying that the Conservative party is now opposed to the position that it has supported for 30 years—the primacy of the EU in respect of EU law? Is that the right hon. Gentleman's point? He has no answer.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is evident that the Foreign Secretary is not giving way.

Mr. Straw: Let me return to another issue raised by the right hon. Member for Devizes—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Article 10 is not just about the primacy of EU law, but the primacy of the constitution. The right hon. Gentleman cannot pretend that the problem is inherited from a previous treaty, because we have not hitherto—before what is currently proposed—had a constitution. How does the Foreign Secretary square the expressed and asserted primacy of the constitution over member state law with the supremacy of the House?

Mr. Straw: It is because it is inherent in our membership of the European Union. I gather that the right hon. Gentleman wishes to withdraw from membership, and that is a natural consequence of the petition being advanced by many Opposition Members. I square my position by going back to the central issue of our membership of international organisations. The House decided—

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: But this is a constitution.

Mr. Straw: The constitution is no more than a treaty labelled "constitution". It is a treaty that we shall ratify in the same way as any other treaty.

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: No, I am answering the point made by the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory).

This House, along with the other place, decides to enact legislation through which we join an international organisation. In doing so, we accept key obligations for as long as we remain in membership. If we decide to withdraw, by statute, we withdraw from those obligations. While we are members of the organisation, we accept the obligations.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: No, I will not give way because others wish to speak in this debate.

Another of the Opposition's invented concerns relates to the alleged extent of the Union's common foreign and security policy. Last week, the hon. Member for Stone thought that he had discovered the Achilles heel of the Government's case, when he alighted on a reference in the draft treaty, in article 15.2, that calls on member states "actively and unreservedly" to support the Union's common foreign and security policy and

"to refrain from action contrary to the Union's interests."

When he confronted me with that during a hearing before the European Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday, I suggested that he reacquaint himself with the language that his party had signed up to at Maastricht. The then Government agreed that:

"The Member States support the Union's external and security policy actively and unreservedly in a spirit of loyalty and mutual solidarity."

The former Government also agreed to

"refrain from any action which is contrary to the interests of the Union."

In article 15 of the same treaty, member states agreed that they would

"ensure that their national policies conform to the common positions."

There is nothing new in the text on the common foreign and security policy that was not in the Maastricht treaty.

Indeed, as Lord Howe pointed out in a debate in the other place last week, the original proposition that members of the European Union should

"endeavour jointly to formulate and implement a common foreign policy"

was a British product. Lord Howe said that it was

"handed by my noble friend Lady Thatcher to Chancellor Kohl in my presence on 18th May 1985".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 September 2003; Vol. 652, c. 1795.]

Baroness Thatcher also said later that year that it is

"in the interests of all member states to act together if we can on certain matters because we are very much stronger by so doing."—[*Official Report*, 5 December 1985; Vol. 88, c. 439.]

That is the principle behind the common foreign and security policy and I fail to understand why the right hon. Member for Devizes and his party now object to it.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): The Foreign Secretary is making a fine speech scoring points off the Tories, but does he accept that that is too easy and certainly is not sufficient to justify the Government's refusal of a referendum to the British people? He mentioned earlier his condemnation of barking mad federalists, but that is ironic, given that many sit both alongside and behind him. Why are the Government afraid of giving the people of Britain a referendum?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the wholehearted support that he has just offered me and I cherish the compliment with which he began his intervention. If we felt that the draft constitution represented a fundamental change in the nature of the relationship between ourselves and the other member states, we would of course put forward the case for a referendum.

Mr. Bercow: The right hon. Gentleman is afraid of losing.

Mr. Straw: It is not about fearing something. I have nothing to fear, let alone from the Conservatives. It is an issue of principle. We have had, and will continue to have, referendums when we join or leave—the issue in 1975 was whether we should leave—an institution or when we seek to create a new institution. We have never held a referendum to change the powers of institutions to which we belong. The previous Conservative Government consistently refused to do so—for very good reasons, in my judgment. I voted with the right hon. Member for Devizes and 12 other members of the present shadow Cabinet against a referendum on Maastricht. On any analysis, the arguments then used against a referendum apply still more strongly against the current set of propositions.

In view of the time, I shall begin my closing remarks. I accept that there is one area of change in the draft treaty, and that is in respect of justice and home affairs. However, that is very much a British agenda, and the Government have long advocated better co-ordinated action against organised crime, terrorism and illegal immigration. These are shared problems that require shared solutions—as I proposed, for example, at a conference in Avignon in October 1998.

The draft treaty would help us to achieve that, for example by speeding up decisions through greater use of qualified majority voting. However, we are not talking of grand new areas of Union activity. The Union already acts in these fields. That decision was made at Maastricht, which brought co-operation on justice and home affairs within the Union. The treaty of Amsterdam then extended co-operation on immigration and asylum issues.

Some of the Convention's proposals in the area of criminal procedural law could result in more significant change, but I have made it clear—in this House and in the White Paper—that these proposals would not be acceptable to us. We support the provision of minimum standards at EU level in some areas, such as access to an interpreter to protect British citizens facing criminal proceedings in other member states. However, we will oppose in the IGC any measures that would undermine our system of common law and criminal law.

It would be rash to predict the outcome of the negotiation in the IGC. What I can say, however, based on lengthy discussion with my EU counterparts in Italy 10 days ago, is that no member state will be seeking to surrender its national sovereignty.

As the IGC gets under way, there will no doubt be new ideas coming forward, some of which we will want to resist. Tomorrow, the European Commission will publish a white paper on its proposals. The Commission shared some of its suggestions with Foreign Ministers at our informal meeting 10 days ago. Let me make it clear that some of those ideas are not acceptable to us, nor to many others, not least any proposal that would remove Parliament's final authority over changes to international treaties. We are opposed to that, and we shall make that clear.

Sir Teddy Taylor *rose*—

Mr. Straw: For all the froth and fury, what we are witnessing today is a Conservative party not so much raging against the proposed constitutional treaty before us but against the EU—and, more particularly, Britain's place within it. The most impassioned comments of the right hon. Member for Devizes—complaints about the primacy of EU law, a common foreign and security policy, and many other matters—dealt with proposals that were not dreamed up for the future by the Convention. Those matters are existing elements of the EU and were signed up to by Conservative Governments—in 1972, 1986 and at Maastricht in 1992.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: No, as I am coming to a close.

Those were the issues that were before the House in 1992, and the House came to the decisions that we know about. The difference today is that the small group of zealots—I remember them very well— who did their best to bring down the previous Conservative Government in 1993 are now in charge of the party. And the greatest zealot of them all—the hon. Member for Stone—is now writing the script for the right hon. Member for Devizes.

I listened with great care to the right hon. Member for Devizes, who denied that the Conservative party was intent on a policy that would withdraw a Conservative Government from Europe. He should have seen the face

[Mr. Straw]

of the hon. Member for Stone as he tried to assert that the Conservative party remains actively committed to Europe. We know that the hon. Gentleman would like Britain to be outside Europe. We also know that the leader of the Conservative party said, not many years ago, that the public was ready to go for Britain repatriating its powers from the EU, and that that could eventually mean pulling out. The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) also went on to say:

"I welcome everything that moves us closer to the point where we can say 'No' on Europe.

The truth is that the Conservative party today—and it should have the honesty to spell this out—is aiming to dismantle the existing EU and to undermine Britain's place in it, irrespective of the damage that would be done to Britain's interests, jobs and influence.

In his heart of hearts, I suspect that the right hon. Member for Devizes recognises the hopelessness of that cause. He knows that none of the 24 other countries that will be attending the IGC over the next few months remotely supports what he says; nor do they recognise the illusory utopia of "associate membership" to which his party is increasingly attached.

Sir Teddy Taylor *rose—*

Mr. Straw: There is a clear divide: between a party determined to take Britain out of Europe, undermining our living standards and our position in the world, and a Government who are working for Britain in Europe, to deliver peace and prosperity. I urge the House to oppose the motion and to support the amendment.

5.30 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): The Foreign Secretary was visibly moved a little while ago when he paid tribute to Anna Lindh. He can most certainly be assured that when he attends her memorial service he takes with him the sympathy of the whole House and the sense of horror that some feel that such an event should have taken place in a society that prides itself on openness, tolerance and accessibility to politicians.

The right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), who spoke on behalf of the Conservative party, sought to introduce a Scottish constitutional concept to the debate. He argued that sovereignty rested with the people. That is an entirely Scottish constitutional concept, as set out—as he will be well aware—in the case of MacCormick *v.* the Lord Advocate. However, it is not a British, or United Kingdom, constitutional doctrine, at least not since the Union of the Parliaments in 1707. Furthermore, I am not sure that the concept assists the right hon. Gentleman in the case that he wants to make today. If Parliament is sovereign, it is entitled to repeal the 1972 Act and, as a consequence, the results of the passing of that Act would be rendered nugatory.

That was always the answer to those who said that there was no mechanism for withdrawal from either the European Economic Community or the European Union. If Parliament, which cannot by the constitutional tradition that applies here bind itself for the future, were to choose to repeal that Act, the obligations contained in it and the treaty on which it was based would simply fly off. Despite his determination to try to import a Scottish concept, about which I am pretty sympathetic, the right hon. Gentleman may care to consider whether it sits entirely favourably with the general position that he seeks to adopt on sovereignty.

There is a distinction in that the Convention proposals provide for an express right of withdrawal, but my view has always been that there was at least an implied right of withdrawal, because of the doctrine of Parliament's constitutional supremacy.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his courtesy. Unlike the Foreign Secretary, he has given way.

Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that the provision allows for withdrawal only if the majority of member states in the European Parliament agree and if there is an acceptance of all the conditions laid down over two years of negotiations? The idea that there is an open exit clause is absolute rubbish. One can only get out if the others agree and if one accepts all the conditions.

Mr. Campbell: I would read the provisions in the Convention proposals along with the principle upon which I have spent a little time addressing the House. Taking the two together, there is a right of withdrawal and, in my view, sovereignty is not irreversibly prejudiced.

We have discussed this topic on a number of occasions recently, to the extent that I cannot help but believe that a whole industry may grow up dedicated to an exegesis of the speeches made in this and previous debates. In my case, I hope that it will be found that there is little of academic interest as I intend, as far as I can, to say what I have said on at least three previous occasions in the past two or three months.

First, I believe, as does my party, that the United Kingdom should be at the heart of Europe. In that regard, I pray in aid the Prime Minister and his predecessor. I believe, notwithstanding the events of the weekend, that it is in the long-term interests of the UK to be a member of the single currency. I also believe that the current Convention proposals do indeed raise issues of constitutional significance in relation to the charter of fundamental rights, the passerelle clause and, indeed, the right to withdraw, about which we have just heard some exchanges.

I further believe that, if the Convention proposals survive the IGC in their present form, there ought to be a referendum of the British people.

Mr. Cash: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell: I want to finish this part of my speech, if the hon. Gentleman will allow me.

It is my belief that, as a matter of principle, a referendum is necessary when a Government bring before the House proposals that involve a major shift in control, any transfer of significant powers from member

states to European institutions or any alteration to the existing balance between member states and those institutions.

I give way to the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash). *[Interruption.]* For the first time in my political life, I appear to have satisfied the hon. Gentleman, but I am not banking on it.

Mr. Tom Harris: The right hon. and learned Gentleman says that the case for a referendum would be undeniable if the current draft made it past the IGC without amendment. Given that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has clearly stated the Government's red lines, if the Government were successful in preventing us from going over those red lines, would the Liberal Democrats agree that there is no case for a referendum?

Mr. Campbell: If the hon. Gentleman had listened carefully, he would have observed that I chose the charter of fundamental rights, the passerelle clause and the right to withdraw, none of which, I understand, will be subject to Government objection. Indeed, when the Foreign Secretary introduced the White Paper just a few days ago, I said that I thought that the so-called red lines drawn by the Government were entirely right and apposite and that defence, foreign affairs, social security and our own resources should remain the exclusive responsibility of the House.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell: I wish to make some progress if the hon. Gentleman will allow me.

On this occasion, therefore, we shall support the motion, not because I wish to be part of some outer Europe or, indeed, to renegotiate in its entirety the European settlement, but because I want the United Kingdom's role in Europe to have the endorsement of the people of the United Kingdom. In particular, I want to re-energise the support of those generations who have no knowledge, even at second hand, of the carnage of the two world wars, which so disfigured Europe and which were an overwhelmingly powerful motive in the minds of those who began with the fledgling European Coal and Steel Community. I also want to inform better those who fail to understand the enormous political significance of enlargement, accomplished in 14 brief years since 1989, with the collapse of the Berlin wall and the subsequent collapse of the Warsaw pact.

Mr. Straw: I simply want to make it clear, as we do at paragraph 62 of the White Paper, that we intend to seek changes to the passerelle clause. I have made that clear before.

Mr. Campbell: I shall wait to see what those changes amount to. I shall now refer to the charter of fundamental rights because the Government have been rather coy about that issue, and it might be helpful to the House to know precisely what is the meaning of the final paragraph of that section of the White Paper.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: On a point of information, the Government, who tabled more than 200 amendments to the draft constitution in the Convention, did not table an amendment to the passerelle clause, so, yet again, the Foreign Secretary is saying one thing here, but he did not follow it up with trying to amend the draft constitution when he had the opportunity to do so. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is absolutely right in saying that, by implication, the Government have accepted that damaging part of the draft constitution.

Mr. Campbell: It might be said to be my night, because I have satisfied the hon. Member for Stone and now the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory).

Mr. Bercow: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell: No, I will not give way. *[Interruption.]* No, I do not believe in the principle of third time lucky.

It is essential that we have some stability in Europe. We had the treaty of Maastricht in 1992. Before that, we had the Single European Act. We had the treaty of Amsterdam in 1997 and the treaty of Nice in 2001. It is as though Europe has been living through a permanent cultural revolution. There really ought to be some stability both in the institutions and the arrangements that are made for the regulation of European Union activities.

The enlargement to which I referred a moment or two ago is, as the Foreign Secretary rightly says, the stimulus for the Convention and its proposals. It is technically true that we could have enlargement without a fresh treaty. It would be a pretty peculiar union if we did, however, and it would essentially be a recipe for sclerosis, obstructionism and, ultimately, instability. Furthermore, those who see conspiracy at every turn—perhaps that has not been evident in this debate, although it features from time to time in the other place—should ask themselves whether it is conceivable that Estonia, which endorsed the principle of EU membership at the weekend, having broken out of the bonds and the yoke of communism, would voluntarily enter a conspiracy that would have the effect of denying it the freedom that has been so hard won.

Is the draft perfect? Of course it is not. On subsidiarity and proportionality, it is too weak and requires strengthening. There ought to be a red card rather than a yellow card, if I may use the colloquialism of the time. On freedom of information, I still do not believe that the Convention proposals go far enough.

Mr. Bercow: Notwithstanding the Foreign Secretary's assurances about his future good intentions in relation to the passerelle clause, does the right hon. and learned Gentleman think it significant that the Foreign Secretary made no such commitment to seek improvement in the subsidiarity and proportionality protocol, even though that protocol imposes no obligation whatever on the European Commission to scrap inappropriate legislative proposals?

Mr. Campbell: The Foreign Secretary did not mention that topic today, but I have at the back of my mind that

[Mr. Campbell]

there may be provision in the White Paper. Certainly, on many other occasions when we have discussed this topic, I believe that the Foreign Secretary has dealt with the question of subsidiarity and proportionality, but, as I believe that the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) and I have agreed in the past, talking about it is not enough. Measures must be found that ensure that the principle of subsidiarity and proportionality is applied and, in particular, applied rigorously. I have said already that in so far as the Government make no concession on defence, tax, social security or own resources that is entirely appropriate.

At least some of the debate has centred on the White Paper. I hope that it will not be thought churlish if I say to the Government that it is a great pity that we have not had a full-scale debate on it in Government time. I detect a certain amount of coyness in the Government's position as reflected in the White Paper, as I think that only 12 pages out of 60 deal with detailed consideration of the text. That coyness is particularly evident in paragraph 103 on page 39, which I raised with the Foreign Secretary during his statement following the publication of the document. It states:

"The Government will make a final decision on incorporation of the Charter into the draft Constitutional Treaty only in the light of the overall picture at the IGC."

When I described that language as delphic, the Foreign Secretary was unwilling to agree. Perhaps he might agree, however, with the description "elliptical". It is by no means clear what the Government's position is on the matter. The fundamental question—the word "fundamental" gets thrown about on these occasions—is whether the Government would be willing to veto the ultimate product of the IGC if they did not receive some kind of satisfaction with regard to that particular provision. For my part, I have no quarrel or difficulty with the rights that are contained within the charter. They mirror to a large extent, but not entirely, those provisions contained in the European convention on human rights. The distinction, as I have said previously in the House, is that the Government went to the country on a manifesto in which they said that they would repatriate into domestic law the right to vindicate rights under that convention, so that people would no longer need to go to Strasbourg but could seek to raise human rights issues in United Kingdom courts. On that, it is reasonable to say that the Government had a popular mandate, but they have no such mandate on the charter of fundamental rights. Given that that raises constitutional issues, it is one of the reasons why a referendum is important.

I confess to some difficulty understanding the Government's attitude to a referendum in general. There is no doubt that the process has gone beyond the tidying-up to which Ministers made reference earlier.

Mr. Leigh: On the wider political point, it is quite interesting that the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats agree. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman speculate on whether there is concern in the Government about what happened in Sweden and the fact that the European public are apparently increasingly convinced that Europe is run by business and political elites? Whether one is a Eurosceptic or a European enthusiast, surely there is a strong case for a referendum to overcome those doubts and give the Government an opportunity to make their case.

Mr. Campbell: The hon. Gentleman would find careful scrutiny of the Swedish campaign and the decision that was taken in Sweden rewarding, because much evidence suggests that many people who voted against the proposal were worried because they thought that the European Union provided far too much opportunity for the operation of the market. They were worried about the social standards in Sweden that are paid for by substantial tax rates—they are higher than those in this country—numbers of public sector jobs and that the role of the state would be substantially curtailed if the country became part of the single currency.

Mr. MacShane: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell: In a moment.

Of course, that position would be somewhat inimical to the one that the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) and his party would prefer to adopt and indeed that of which the Prime Minister tried to persuade the European Union as a result of the Lisbon summit. Does the Minister for Europe wish to intervene? I appear to have satisfied him, so perhaps I should quit while I am ahead.

If the Government are not moved by principle, how about being motivated by pragmatism? Can you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, imagine the disappointment in the editorial suites of certain newspapers if the Government announced that they were willing to hold a referendum, or the deep depression that would centre over Smith square? The Government should think again. They have been prepared to change their mind on the question of a referendum. Without prior warning or consultation, they determined, on a referendum, devolution to Scotland, which John Smith had described as unfinished business. There is still time for the Government to recant, but in the meantime we shall support the motion.

5.48 pm

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I suppose that one's approach to the debate and the motion on the referendum will be affected by whether one believes that the draft constitution and the intergovernmental conference are simply tidying-up exercises and nothing to worry about because much has been agreed prior to the IGC and the constitution will simplify matters, or whether one believes those who say that the IGC and the treaty are of fundamental importance. I say at the outset that I take the latter view, not because I believe that it is impossible to make the argument that the process is a tidying-up exercise but because we are dealing with a treaty yet missing a fundamental issue: the European Union is a process. Events within the process determine the way in which the EU will move on in the next generation and, in my humble opinion, this is one such event.

A single currency is not needed for a single market—I have never believed that, and we have proved it—but it is needed for a united states of Europe. Why do we need a constitution? A treaty similar to those of the past could have dealt with matters such as enlargement, changes to the Commission and the five-year presidency of the Council. We do not need a constitution for that, but we need one for a united states of Europe.

Those are the fundamental flaws in this afternoon's debate. Understandably, we are concentrating on the constitution, but, with respect, the Government are making a mistake in ignoring what has happened in the past. The Single European Act and Maastricht were the most important milestones in the development of the European Union. It is rather strange for Ministers to try to destroy Conservative arguments by saying, "We don't need a referendum on the constitution because the Single European Act and Maastricht were much worse, and the Conservatives did not have referendums on those." I do not follow that logic. We should look to consult the British people on the constitution because it is a milestone in the development of the European Union, and if we are prepared to face up to the compelling logic of that process it is clear that it has only one objective—a state of Europe. It is no good having a policy in the Labour party of saying that we are opposed to such a state, given that every step of the way we are bit by bit, piece by piece, putting in place the building blocks for it.

That is what we should be discussing today. I do not diminish the importance of the subject of the debate, but I fear that we are missing the target by a mile, as I suspect that the British people are beginning to understand. In view of that, how can we sustain the idea of a referendum on a single currency, which I support, yet not have a referendum on the other building blocks that are necessary to create a state of Europe? We are not being honest with ourselves or with the British people, and it is about time we were.

As far as I am aware, this situation is a first. I have been a Member of the European Parliament, as have hon. Friends sitting next to me, but I cannot remember a European constitution having been presented before. The Government clearly understand the importance of this IGC, because they say in the White Paper that it will affect all our lives and the way in which we govern ourselves. I cannot identify issues that are much more serious than that; the British people should therefore be consulted.

Mr. Hendrick: Does my hon. Friend not accept the words of our Foreign Secretary today that the constitution is effectively all the previous treaties rolled into one and that that constitutes about 80 per cent. of the text? The word "constitution" is just a label put on those treaties.

Mr. Stevenson: I have the greatest respect for my hon. Friend, who has served in the European Parliament. I do not have to answer that question, because he knows the process that is going on better than I do—he served in the European Parliament more recently than me. One of the first things with which we were presented in 1984 when I became a Member of the European Parliament was a draft constitution of the European Union, by Altiero Spinelli. The arguments and objectives that we are now considering are not new. If Spinelli were alive today, he would be rubbing his hands with glee because his dream of 1984, which was too far reaching for us then, is now becoming a reality. It is not all being realised, not by a wide margin, but the constitution is an important step in the process.

I shall move on to another concern that I tried to raise the other day in my question to the Prime Minister—public perception. For years, we have tried as politicians to generate interest among the electorate in the European project. No matter what our perspective, we have all agreed that the turn-out at European parliamentary elections is abysmally low. We have failed to generate that interest, most importantly because the British people feel that these matters are the fiefdom of the political elite. I fully accept the results of the Swedish and Estonian referendums on Sunday, which demonstrate that while the people of Europe, particularly the British, are prepared to accept criticisms of apathy or lack of interest, they are no longer prepared to be ignored. If we ignore them on these vital issues I must tell the Government whom I support and whom I am, in the main, proud of, that we shall suffer. The gulf between the political elite—the people driving the agenda forward, whether nationally or internationally—and the people whom we serve is widening at a rate of knots, and that frightens me to death.

We can lose all sorts of things. We can lose elections because of sleaze and spin, but if we start to lose the faith and trust of the people whom we represent nationally and internationally, that is a recipe for a disaster. If we are serious about moving the European project forward and debating that in the House, a failure to hold a referendum now will alienate our people even more. In many ways, we should not be looking at the draft constitution, but should be considering what will come next. As night follows day, there will be another treaty, which will build on the constitution. We should consider what will happen in three or four years' time when another treaty comes along. As surely as night follows day, however, if we do not consult the British people now, they are not likely to trust us ever again when we do go to them on something like the euro. Not holding a referendum is therefore not in the Government's interest.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful speech. I am sure that he agrees that every time we get to one of these milestones and do not achieve the informed consent of the British people we lose their trust. The worst enemies of the European Union are those who claim to support it but who are not prepared to consult the people whom we are here to serve.

Mr. Stevenson: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point. We got away with not holding a referendum in 1986 and in 1992. I am arguing as strongly as I can that we will not get away with it again. We have been rumbled—*[Interruption.]* I hear my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe mumbling. I said "rumble", not "mumble". There is a widespread feeling in my constituency—I am not saying that it is true—that the Government want a referendum only when they can win it. That may or may not be true; only the Government know. But that is

[Mr. Stevenson]

people's perception, and in politics, as every right hon. and hon. Member knows, perception is an extremely powerful force.

I hope my contribution has been of some interest to my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe. I have tried to express my views as positively as I can, though not uncritically. If we do not bite the bullet, we shall suffer as a result. I wonder whether we shall ever regain the trust of the British people so that we can move forward as we all want, not only in terms of national policy, but as regards the European Union, which is so important to us.

6.1 pm

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood): The House listened with considerable sympathy to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson). It will not surprise him to know that I approach the subject from a rather different starting point, but I arrive at a similar set of conclusions to those that he has just enunciated to the House.

I am an unapologetic pro-European. I believe that the United Kingdom was right to join the European Union, that our future is intrinsically tied up with the future of our partner countries in the EU, and that John Major was right when he said that Britain should aim to be at the heart of Europe. So far, for those who have followed my views on these subjects over the years, no surprises, but I think that those of my closest political friends who argue against a referendum now are profoundly wrong. If we are to proceed with the kind of changes envisaged in the draft constitution, it is essential that we first secure the support of the electorate, not just of this country, but of other countries in the EU—support expressed in a referendum. I shall set out the reasons why.

The first is the simplest one to explain. It seems likely that before we get to the end of the process, the majority of other EU member states will put the proposal to their electorates in a referendum. I do not know what language I shall use in Charnwood to explain why France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands will have referendums, yet my constituents, who put me in Parliament to represent their interests, will be denied the opportunity to vote on the proposals—an opportunity that is likely to be granted to the majority of other citizens of the European Union.

Mr. MacShane: On what authority does the right hon. Gentleman say that France has decided to hold a referendum?

Mr. Dorrell: I base my assertion on the words quoted earlier in the debate, the prediction of President Chirac, and the fact that when they introduced the euro, the French Government had a referendum—

Mr. MacShane *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Dorrell: I am sorry, but they did. The Maastricht treaty was endorsed by referendum in France by a very tiny majority. Given that history and the French tradition of referendums, in particular under the Gaullist party, it would be a brave Government in France who sought to carry the proposals through against the advice of a Gaullist President, without a referendum.

Mr. Tom Harris: The right hon. Gentleman mentioned that he did not know how he would explain to his constituents why this country is not having a referendum, whereas other EU countries are. What excuse did he give to his constituents back in 1992 for the fact that there was no referendum on the Maastricht treaty, whereas France did have one?

Mr. Dorrell: It might not come as a surprise to the hon. Gentleman that I want to develop the argument addressing precisely that point. However, I wanted to begin with the simplest point—it seems likely that, whether or not a referendum occurs in France, there will be a substantial number elsewhere in Europe.

Mr. Hendrick: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dorrell: I should like to make progress.

This is not just a matter of saying "me too", as there is an important issue of principle in saying that the member states choosing to take the referendum route are wrong. The traditional view of British Governments—from Ted Heath onwards—of opposition to referendums is wrong, and I want to explain why. I believe that referendums have an increasingly important part to play in modern democracies. In every western democracy, we face an increasing problem of divorce between our voters and the political elite—exactly the point that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South made.

Voters increasingly feel that the political elite do not take them seriously and that they think that democracy is about one collective act every four or five years, after which they should be left to get on with it. Increasingly, they are rebelling against that interpretation of how democracy should work. If we insist on maintaining our traditional commitment to a Burkeian representative democracy with only very occasional reference to the electorate through general elections, I believe that, as increasingly important decisions are taken by that route, we shall undermine the legitimacy of those decisions and ultimately put at risk the stability of our institutions.

I think that referendums will, and should increasingly be seen, as the means by which voters are engaged directly in decisions that affect them, but from which they currently feel increasingly divorced. That principle is most simple to apply in dealing with what are avowedly constitutional questions. It is one type of issue when a controversial decision is taken within a constitutional settlement, but a different one entirely when the question is not how constitutional powers are used, but who should have those powers. That is why, when a document described as a constitution is presented to me in a political climate that should increasingly embrace the principle of referendums, I find it easy to say that it should be the subject of a referendum.

That general principle is particularly apposite in the context of the current European debate in this and other European countries. Every observer of the European

Union recognises that there is what is referred to in Euro-jargon as a democratic deficit. Anyone who is concerned about the operation of the European institutions must recognise that there is not only a divorce between voters and political institutions and politicians in general, but an especially acute version of that divorce between voters and institutions in Brussels. The tendency among some of my European friends is to say that that problem is easy to solve and can be dealt with by introducing enhanced powers for the European Parliament, but that is to avoid the subject, not address it.

The problem is that voters do not feel engaged with the institutions that have been set up to exercise power on their behalf in Brussels. The divorce that is a general problem with modern politics is a particular problem when applied to the institutions of the European Union. It is for that reason that, even if the Foreign Secretary's argument that there is nothing new in the treaty were true—I do not think that it is—it would not be a sufficient answer to the case for a referendum, as there is an urgent need to re-engage voters in what is happening in their name in the institutions of the European Union.

I have made the case thus far on the ground of principle, for which I make no apology. However, anyone who is engaged in practical politics should assert a principle and consider the practical consequences. It is blindingly obvious that if the constitution were subject to approval by referendum, it would be less likely to pass in its current form. I want to make a couple of comments about that.

First, it is a genuine mystery why people appear to expect the constitution to pass in its current form, given the sense of increasing willingness in the rest of Europe to contemplate subjecting it to a referendum. The history of getting electorates elsewhere in Europe to approve such documents by referendum does not support the view that the constitution is likely to pass unchallenged. It would therefore be doubly absurd for the British electorate to witness the fall of a constitution that we did not like at referendums elsewhere in Europe that we were denied.

The proposition that the constitution would be less likely to pass if we introduced the hurdle of a referendum is hardly a reason to draw back. Surely if we are interested in re-engaging the British electorate with the European process, acknowledging that the constitution would be likely to fall at the referendum hurdle should redouble our determination to tackle the reason for that. We should deal with such questions seriously rather than simply saying, "It's all frightfully difficult and we'll avoid the questions altogether."

Surely if we are to continue to develop Britain's role as an active member of the European Union we need to re-engage the public in the form of European Union that we want to create. It is instructive to consider what we would have to do to set out down that road. It is sad that the short answer is probably that if we achieved the purpose of the new constitutional framework—I should prefer to call it a new treaty for the European Union—as approved by referendum, we would have to start again.

We would have to start again the process on which my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) was engaged on the Convention. We would need to produce a document that more closely reflected the rhetoric about a union of states rather than the continued development of a set of institutions that were born in the political culture of the 1960s. The document would need to be focused much more sharply and demonstrate to the voters of this and other countries in Europe a clear-sighted commitment to providing added value on trade, the single market and the environment. European co-operation on such matters has a serious purpose. We would need an equally clear determination to withdraw the developing tentacles of the European Union from subjects on which its legitimacy is increasingly challenged by me as well as my constituents.

In the context of the modern, decentralised Europe, I do not understand the necessity for European legislation that aspires to tell me that I cannot work for more than 56 hours a week. That is an absurd extension that goes way beyond the common agenda that should be the shared purpose of all European Union member states. More important, a redrafted document should include a genuine commitment to make accountable the power of the institutions in Brussels to the voters to whom they should be responsible. Accountability in the political cultures of all European Union member states can be realised only if it is exercised overwhelmingly through their institutions. That is how political power in Europe is currently held accountable.

It is profoundly unlikely that such a document could be written by a Convention chaired by an octogenarian former French President whose political instincts were formed in the 1960s. What is needed is a new view of the institutions required for a new, more consumerist, more individualist, and more market-oriented Europe. That is the kind of document that would sail through a referendum in this country and others in Europe, too.

I favour a referendum, first, because other countries are holding them; secondly, because it is right in principle to hold them; and thirdly—and probably most importantly—because a referendum would be the best way to reverse Europe out of a cul de sac and force on the political elites a requirement to move in a more benign direction.

6.15 pm

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I am glad that the Government have rejected the calls for a referendum on this issue; they were absolutely right to do so. It has already been pointed out by Labour Members that the previous treaties into which this country has entered were put through without any proposals for referendums by the then Conservative Government. One can only conclude, therefore, that the present calls for a referendum by the Conservatives are nothing less than opportunistic. At least the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) had the grace to look a tad embarrassed when some of his previous statements were read out to highlight the change in his position in so few years.

We must also remember that it was not only the amending treaties that were not subjected to referendums at the instigation of the Conservative party when it had the chance to do so. The actual decision to join the European Union was not initially the subject of a referendum either. It was, of course, the then Labour Government who allowed the voters a referendum on that issue when they came to power.

[Mr. Mark Lazarowicz]

What is particularly staggering about the present Conservative approach is that the treaty of Rome, to which we signed up in 1972, contained a commitment to moving towards an ever-closer union, and every amending treaty since then has reiterated that commitment, yet now that we have a treaty that replaces that commitment with a different formulation that strengthens subsidiarity and gives member states more rights and the ability to have a greater say in the European process, the Conservatives want to oppose that reform.

The member states will gain from the current proposals, and the larger member states in particular are likely to gain. I know that my hon. Friends the Ministers could not possibly say that, but hon. Members will know that criticisms of the Convention have come not only from the federalist wing but from the smaller states in the European Union. I welcome the fact that the member states, particularly the larger ones, will have the ability to express their views more strongly and effectively through the European Union mechanisms.

When I see the opportunism of the Conservative party on this issue, I am convinced that its strategy is now motivated—at least for a significant number of its Members in this House—by a desire to block the reforms of the European Union and an attempt to prevent changes that would allow it to work more effectively. The objective of that strategy, in some quarters of the party, would be to lead us to total withdrawal from the Union, or at least to a redefining of the Union so that Britain became part of an outer circle of member states.

That is precisely the kind of development about which the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) expressed concern. I believe, however, that he and his colleagues are playing into the Conservatives' hands by supporting the undermining of the European Union in the way that he has done today.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: The hon. Gentleman was not in the House during the long and lengthy progress of the legislation on the Maastricht treaty, but Mr. Brian Gould MP, as he then was, introduced new clause 57, which sought a referendum. The Liberal Democrats supported that new clause.

Mr. Lazarowicz: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is right to refer to what happened in the past, but now he is playing into the hands of the Conservatives, who are seeking to diminish the role of Britain in the European Union. That was not the position of the majority of Members previously.

Voices from the Labour Benches have been calling for a referendum. I accept that those Labour Members and the Liberal Democrats are not motivated by a wish to undermine the European Union, but the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) showed the danger of the position that he is taking. As he said, in two, three or four years there may be another amending treaty. Does he believe that every time there is even the slightest change in the European treaties there will have to be a referendum? He may not take that position, but if we went down that road it would be impossible to avoid the argument for a referendum every time there was even the slightest change to one of the European treaties.

Mr. Stevenson: The answer to my hon. Friend's question is no. I can think of occasions since we joined the Common Market when referendums should have been held: the European Single Act, the Maastricht treaty and this proposal. I referred to building blocks and milestones. There will be another treaty, and we will have to examine it to see what effect it may have. I do not accept that every small change should necessarily be subject to a referendum, and I have never argued for that.

Mr. Lazarowicz: The problem with my hon. Friend's formulation of the argument is that he may not see a minor change as a milestone, but others may see it as such or, more likely, represent it as a fundamental constitutional change. The entire British political debate on European Union membership would end up being dominated by a never-ending series of referendums, pre-referendums and post-referendums, which would have the precise effect of making our participation in the European Union an impossibility and would lead to the ungovernability of the EU, which I am sure is the motivation of at least some Conservative Members.

I agree with my hon. Friend and other hon. Members that a dangerous gulf is developing between the European elites and the peoples of Europe. Every politician in every Parliament in Europe must recognise that, and must draw conclusions for the operation of our political systems. This problem is not unique to European politics: it is a feature of politics even at local level, as turnouts in local elections frequently prove. There is undoubtedly disenchantment with the European political process. There are many reasons for that. I am not one of those who always blame the media for problems when politicians are not very popular. However, when it comes to the issue of Europe, the diet in some parts of the media of continual Europhobia and of refighting the battles of the second world war is hardly conducive to mature and sensible political debate.

Much more significant than the role of some sections of the media is the fact that we are now living in a dangerous world. Many people are fearful for the future, and worry about the direction of their own country and the wider world. It is not surprising that in such a climate there is a tendency in some quarters to go for the tried and trusted political solutions rather than to take new directions and find new ways of organising international relations. That tendency is more likely to develop, given that many international organisations—not just the EU, but the World Trade Organisation and the United Nations as well—are seen to be failing to meet many of the challenges that they face.

In my view, however, the way to overcome the alienation of the European peoples from the European elite is not to unleash the never-ending series of referendums implied by the approach of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South. We need a twofold approach. First, it is for those of us who support active participation by this country in Europe and European institutions to get out there again and sell the benefits of EU membership—the jobs, trade

opportunities and rights for consumers and workers that it has brought us. We must send that message more strongly, emphasising the gains from membership and the dangers that would result from the withdrawal or disengagement favoured by the Conservatives.

Above all, we need a European Union that works more effectively and meets the challenges of the time. Following the changes in eastern Europe in the 1990s, many Members will have been struck by the fact that the banner displayed by demonstrators in those towns and cities as they moved towards democracy was most commonly the flag of the European Union rather than their own traditional national flags. That was because they saw the EU as the hope for the future of not just Europe as a whole, but their individual countries.

As we all know, the hopes placed in Europe by many of those peoples in the 1990s were dashed. The failure of the European institutions vis-à-vis the former Yugoslavia highlights the inability of European structures to deal with the challenges of that time. We can trace much of the disenchantment with the current European arrangements to that failure of the European Union and European bodies to respond to the challenges posed by civil war in the former Yugoslavia, and to the changing political and economic structure of Europe from the 1990s onwards.

Given all that, it is more important than ever for the European Union to be made to work more effectively. The changes proposed by the Convention are necessary for that to happen. It is because so many Conservatives do not want the EU to work effectively and to succeed that they oppose those changes. The issue today, therefore, is not just our continuing membership of the EU; it is whether we stay in the EU or travel down a road that would lead inexorably to our withdrawal in the not-too-distant future.

6.28 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): I do not think most Members who oppose the Government's present policy of not holding a referendum are interested in slight changes. We are interested in a fundamental change.

I remind the House that deceptions have come from Europe time and again. I have no problem with my European seat, as I received the most votes ever cast for an MEP in my area, so it is possible for me to engage in a real debate about this issue. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) said that we wanted the slightest changes to be subject to a referendum. The constitutional charter of fundamental rights, which in the past had no legal force, will now have full legal effect. When this proposal was first mentioned, however, the Prime Minister told us that it would have no binding force of that kind – that it was only a declaration. Some declaration, today! That is how the ordinary people have been deceived.

Mr. Hendrick: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Rev. Ian Paisley: I promised not to use too much time, so the hon. Gentleman will have to be quick.

Mr. Hendrick: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. How many people in North Antrim have said to him, "Well, I'm not very happy about this charter of fundamental rights"? How many have said, "We don't need a constitution", or, "We should at least have a referendum on a constitution"? How many people know what is in the constitution? How many people care?

Rev. Ian Paisley: They do care, because I keep them informed. As the Member for that constituency, I tell them what Europe is up to. We need to feed people the facts, and the fact is that this issue is fundamental. It is not a petty matter to tell the people in one breath that this is only a declaration, and then to enter into a thorough programme to turn it into a law that will be applied by a court that is entirely outside this country. The time has come for this Parliament to say, "We are appointed to rule the United Kingdom, and before we can part with any authority we must know how we can deal with wrong decisions coming from Europe." We do have wrong decisions coming from Europe, and everybody knows it.

In order to become part of the new constitution, we are going to duplicate the European convention on human rights. The matter will go the European Court of Justice, and there will be an overspill of much legislation and much argument. How will that benefit the people of this country?

In the past week, we have had an argument about Sweden. Some were saying that the unfortunate murder of the Swedish Foreign Minister would change the people of Sweden, but they had an issue to deal with and their minds were not to be changed. That issue was concern about their country, regardless of the pressures that were applied. Mr. Prodi had the cheek to say, "What has Sweden done! It has put itself outside the heart of Europe." What right has he, an Italian, to tell another country that it has put itself outside the heart of Europe? The Swedish people exercised their democratic rights. People are entitled to those rights, and they must be contested for.

Certain issues – I raised them in a previous debate – are conveniently forgotten, namely the constitutional and religious issues at the heart of each nation. We have heard not a word about them. They have been glossed over because they lead to controversy, and the Europe of today does not want to talk about controversial issues. So we need to have this debate. If the people of these islands want this new constitution, why do we not seek their support for it? Certain Members of this House say that the people want it, so let us find out whether they actually do. If the Prime Minister were convinced that he could win such a referendum, we would have it, but he is not.

The euro gives rise to problems far worse and more dangerous than just the single coinage, which I am against. We are dealing with matters that are at the heart of centuries of development of democracy in this country. We have to take a stand, and the day to do that is when we say, "Let us put the question to the people." As democrats, we will have to accept it if the people vote for it. However, I have learned that, in Europe, we always get rigging. The British public are being refused a say in their own political destiny. The Government of our country are still resisting a referendum on the constitution, and it seems that thousands of citizens from continental Europe may get the chance to vote on whether we in this country should have the single currency. According to the *Financial Times* of 3 August,

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

725,000 EU citizens are being negotiated with, so that they can vote on an issue that has nothing to do with them. If they belong to Sweden, let them vote in Sweden, but why should we add to our numbers on the electorate almost a million voters to swing it against what many of the people of this country want? That is not democracy at all; it is rigging the answers. The House should be aware of that and take a stand.

Let us see the negotiations. Let us hear what the country and the Government are going to do. The Government have asked the questions, so how are they going to answer them? If the Government say, "We want this" and Europe says, "Well, you are not having it", will the Government cave in? That is what we want to know. Will they make a stand anywhere along the line on that issue? I say to the Government that they need to take a stand on this issue and they need to make it speedily, because we are drifting into a position in which ordinary people do not want to talk about it because they do not trust us. When trust between Parliament and the people disappears, the result will be anarchy.

6.36 pm

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): Time is short, but I should like to add a few remarks to this important debate. I should like to quote a former Prime Minister who said:

"I am the first to say that on many great issues the countries of Europe should try to speak with a single voice. I want to see us work more closely on the things we can do better together than alone. Europe is stronger when we do so, whether it be in trade, in defence or in our relations with the rest of the World."

That Prime Minister was, of course, Margaret Thatcher, now Baroness Thatcher, and the speech was the one she made in Bruges. It is highly relevant to our debate today. On great issues, the countries of Europe should speak with one voice. That is particularly important when we reflect on why we are debating the draft constitution and why a draft constitution or treaty exists at all.

Next year the 15 members of the European Union become 25. A Europe that was divided in 1988 will now come together again at last. The countries of central Europe will come back into the heart of the European family. That is a historic change, which is why we are having today's debate. As hon. Members have said, the rules and treaties agreed when there were six, nine or 12 member states have been difficult to make work when we are 15, and they will not work with 25. That is why we, as Europeans, have had to return to the treaties and associated issues. That explains the draft constitution and the draft treaty. We are not changing our constitution or our nation. There is no proposal to do that, so there is no need for a referendum. It is unnecessary.

What has been the response of Margaret Thatcher's party to the changes? Have they joined all good Europeans in welcoming the historic event of the coming together of Europe? Are they pleased that Europe is one again? No. Their response to one of the most important events in European history is to carp and to nitpick. They have opposed referendums in the past and their natural position is to continue to oppose them. I find their stance today to be in bad faith, which is what we Europeans must not have. We must have good faith and work together.

6.38 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): May I first associate my colleagues and myself with the remarks made by the Foreign Secretary and the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) about Anna Lindh? It was indeed a terrible tragedy for a remarkable politician and a personal tragedy for her family. We all feel powerfully moved at this time.

At the heart of this debate is the issue frequently raised by the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and, indeed, the current Leader of the House: how do we reconnect the peoples of Europe with the EU, how do we return to them a sense of ownership, and how do we rid them of the sense that the European project is being driven inexorably and undemocratically by the elites of Europe? Indeed, on the Foreign Office website we are reminded that at the heart of the Convention's considerations was the reconnection process, to make the EU's institutions more effective, efficient and democratically accountable, thus increasing transparency and simplification.

Well, we know what has emerged. The question is how what is proposed achieves those key objectives. How will that sense of ownership be returned to the citizens of the member states? Most importantly, can the draft constitutional proposals be significantly amended to achieve that? How can the public express their legitimate views?

In the foreword to the IGC White Paper, "A Constitutional Treaty for the EU", the Prime Minister confirmed that Governments had said that the treaty

"will be the starting point for negotiations."

However, the Foreign Secretary appeared to suggest that the essential text had been agreed. At the IGC, many European leaders certainly do not expect or favour substantial changes. It is worth remembering that the Prime Minister, in his Warsaw speech, originally rejected calls for a single, legally binding document called a constitution, and called instead for a charter of competences. In an excellent speech, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) recalled that sentiment.

So the Government's difficulty is now simply one of trust. As the former Italian Prime Minister and Convention delegate, Lamberto Dini, has observed,

"Anyone in Britain who claims the Constitution will not change things is trying to sweeten the pill for those who don't want to see a bigger role for Europe. The Constitution is not just an intellectual exercise. It will quickly change people's lives, beginning with the Human Rights Charter . . . After that it will bring changes in many other areas. Eventually the Union will be able to make legislation of its own. It will become an institution and organisation in its own right."

Joschka Fischer made a similar comment, when he said

"We have a draft constitution that is worthy of the name historic."

That is indeed the case.

So we have a problem. There is absolutely nobody of any consequence who agrees with the Government's interpretation of the impact of the constitutional treaty. The simple starting point to remedy the sense of

alienation that so many British people have from the EU and its powers is to tell the truth, and thus give the debate true legitimacy. If people believe that they are being told lies, invariably some will simply switch off or, more disastrously, take on extreme postures.

For example, let us look at the charter of fundamental rights. We heard that it would not be incorporated into the treaty, that it involved no new set of enforceable rights, and that it was not legally binding. It is now in the treaty, game, set and match. All the way through, other European leaders have made it clear that it would be incorporated and have powerful legal resonance, but the British repeatedly said that the reverse was the case. There is a legitimate argument about all this, but the starting point must be honesty. The idea that what is now before us at the IGC is of no constitutional significance is just untrue, and it ill serves the Government to say otherwise.

At the heart of the problem in the relationship between this country and the EU has been our almost total lack of influence under this Government. It would be inconceivable that the substantial budgetary rebate, the creation and driving forward of the single market and the opt-out on the single currency—so welcome to our people—could ever have happened under this Government, whose policy on Europe appears to be no policy at all. They are just carried along in the slipstream of others. What really significant part of the constitutional package before the IGC was driven by the British Government? It was not the written constitution, which they originally opposed. Nor was it the incorporation of the charter of fundamental rights, the EU diplomatic service or the collapsing of the three pillars.

Before the Convention, European leaders and Governments clearly set out their stall—their vision and view—about what an enlarged Europe should look like. It was others who drove this agenda, certainly not us. It has been a cataclysmic failure of British nerve and influence that Britain has been on the sidelines of the debate. The right hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain), the former Minister for Europe, proposed amendments to the Convention that were thrown out with monotonous regularity.

At Nice, a campaign should have been started to see off the important constitutional changes. Similarly, in six years not one power has been returned to the member states and our national Parliament in the name of subsidiarity—a principle instigated and fought for by a British Government who talk so freely about the democratic deficit.

However, we are where we are, and the policy of denial continues. I echo the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), who spoke so tellingly. We know that Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg and Spain will hold referendums, and that Portugal, Italy, France and the Netherlands may follow suit. The matter is now also being examined in Austria and Germany. Only the British Government deny the importance of this constitutional architecture, and they also want to deny the British people the chance to express their view, whether for or against. The idea that the matter is somehow of less significance than the mayoralty of Hartlepool is beyond parody.

Opposition Members have been scouring the media for a rational explanation from Government Front Bench Members, to give us an insight into their thinking. At a time when the Prime Minister has admitted that the matter is of fundamental importance, the Minister for Europe gave us an entirely risible insight into this debate in an article in the *New Statesman* dated 25 August.

There is no time for me to quote from the article, but I invite hon. Members to read it. It is incredible that this should be the justification—the background, the mood music—for the huge constitutional change that is before us. His notion that cultural identities have not been undermined by the EU has nothing to do with the constitutional problems that beset us. If the Minister for Europe is so confident about his assertions, I invite him to let the people decide.

Additionally, there is a functional flaw in the Government's position. The Foreign Secretary has spelled out a series of red lines, or "insistences", that he will put before the IGC. Of course, our Government have the right of veto but I simply put to the Minister for Europe the very obvious point that, in the inevitable discussion and horse-trading at the IGC, we have already effectively sold the pass. How much better would it be if the Foreign Secretary were able to say that he could not accept a particular proposal because it has to go before the British people to seek their approval? Even the Adrian Mole school of diplomacy might suggest to the Foreign Secretary that that would greatly strengthen his hand. It might, for example, enable him to win much clearer rights for national Parliaments, including a power of referral back to the Commission and real powers of rejection that would give real meaning to the principle of subsidiarity.

Finally, let us remind ourselves of how this Constitution opens. It says:

"Reflecting the will of the citizens and states of Europe to build a common future . . . "

How can the Minister for Europe explain how it does that if the people have not been asked? How have the Government divined the citizens' will? They have certainly not done that through their website on the draft constitutional treaty, and the matter was not even in the Labour party's manifesto. They cannot have made the divination from opinion polls, because the polls' message is clear, or from talking to constituents, because we know that constituents do not want the constitution. There is some sort of Mystic Meg influence guiding the Government's thinking.

We believe that the constitution takes the EU in the wrong direction. Others certainly disagree with that point of view, but no rational and honest individual can deny that the matter has immense constitutional significance for a country that has never had a written constitution before. It will be to this Government's unending shame, when history makes its judgment, if the people of this country are denied the opportunity to express a view. To deny them that is a dereliction of the Government's obligations to the people of this country.

6.49 pm

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): This has been a good debate. We have just heard a fine speech from the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring),

[Mr. Denis MacShane]

the shadow Minister for Europe, although I think that I may have read it in the *Daily Mail* about nine months ago; apart from the invitation to read the *New Statesman*, which I thoroughly endorse, he read it out with considerable vim and vigour. I shall not read from a prepared text, but will try to reply to the debate itself.

The hon. Member for West Suffolk yet again made the point that this matter was not included in the Labour manifesto, but we actually put it to the British people:

"Labour wants the next Inter-governmental Conference in 2004 to address public concerns about the way the EU works, spelling out in a clear statement of principles what should and should not be done at European level."

That is precisely what we shall now begin to do.

Occasionally, it is important to read the motions before the House. The Opposition motion refers to the constitutional draft presented by Mr. Giscard d'Estaing as though it were a given—a settled end text—but it is not.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire) *rose*

Mr. Francois *rose*

Mr. MacShane: The hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Sir Michael Spicer) should have done the House the courtesy of being in the Chamber for more than two minutes of the Rothermere speech that we have just heard. The hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) has been here for the debate so I willingly give way to him.

Mr. Francois: I thank the Minister for giving way.

The Government's position, with which I disagree, is that they will not grant a referendum on the current draft of the treaty. However, may I ask the Minister a question about principle? Because of the nature of the IGC there are bound to be some changes in the draft before it finally emerges as a definitive text. When the Government have the definitive text, post-IGC, will they at least reserve the possibility of granting a referendum after the IGC process?

Mr. MacShane: Both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have made it clear that if in the Government's opinion there are such fundamental changes in the relationship between the UK and its European partners as a result of the end text from the IGC, Parliament can clearly take a view of how it then wants to discuss or ratify the matter.

May I return to the points made by hon. Members who gave considered speeches? I do so as someone who, like most Members, actually loves being a Member of this place, who likes the House of Commons, enjoys sitting on these green Benches and thinks of all the other right hon. and hon. Ladies and Gentlemen who have sat here over the decades and centuries. When I do not have a final text to consider or to discuss with the House, I am honestly reluctant to accept that several hundred years of parliamentary tradition should be thrown out of the window by conceding the cause for a Rothermere referendum—a plebiscite—that will hand most power to the press.

The Opposition have been clear from day one that the campaign was launched by the anti-European press; they said that they wanted a referendum to say no to Europe, not to test the will of the British people. The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), who spoke after the two main introductory speeches, called for a referendum as a matter in principle, but in another place his colleague, the Liberal Democrat peer Lord Thomson of Monifieth, said:

"I am bound to say that I remain rather an old fogey regarding national referendums. I prefer to see parliamentary democracy work if it possibly can."

The right hon. and learned Gentleman is obviously a young fogey, as he wants to throw away parliamentary democracy and sign up for a referendum.

Another of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's colleagues, the Liberal Democrat peer Lord Dahrendorf, said that

"this is not a constitution, and no national referendum will change the fact that it is an international treaty to set up a limited number of supranational procedures and institutions."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 September 2003; Vol. 652, c. 180–204.]

I invite the right hon. and learned Gentleman to consider that point. What will be brought back to the House will be a treaty, which the Government will seek to sign, and its translation into law in this place.

If we believe in parliamentary democracy, we should wait and see what is in that treaty. The former Prime Minister, Mr. Major, put that point well when he spoke on the "Today" programme. He said that he was in favour of a referendum if the treaty so changes our relationship with the EU, but he said that we should wait and see. I invite the House to be a little patient.

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacShane: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, as he has been in the Chamber throughout the debate.

Mr. Walter: I thank the Minister for giving way and for his references to centuries of parliamentary democracy, but perhaps he can tell the House what the point was of the referendum in 1975, proposed by a Labour Government who had renegotiated the treaty. They were not proposing to leave the EU; they were seeking affirmation of their renegotiation.

Mr. MacShane: Of course if people had voted no, we would have left. Frankly, the 1975 referendum should be examined, as it relates to the point made so strongly by the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), who argued that the process of holding referendums somehow reconnected people to their elected political representatives. Well, I wish I could tell the House that I was persuaded by that argument. I have some experience because I worked in Geneva for some years—as hon. Members used to remind me—where referendums are held on every subject at national, cantonal and city level. I have to say that the turnout at elections and the standing of political leaders in Switzerland is—believe it or not—lower than in this country, so I fear that the notion that a referendum is somehow a magic key, a Harry Potter spell, to reconnect politicians and the people cannot be sustained.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) argued very strongly that we were going towards a state called Europe. I think that I quote him accurately. With all due respect to my hon. Friend—we have been friends for many years—I have to say that I am not sure that people could make that speech in almost any other European country and have their argument taken seriously. The notion that the eastern European countries that have voted so overwhelmingly to join the EU have done so because they are joining a state that somehow replaces their own is simply not a receivable argument. It is receivable in the Rothermere press and on the Conservative Benches, but it could not be made in Paris, Ireland or Spain, or in any other EU country.

Mr. Bacon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacShane: The hon. Gentleman has been here as well, so I shall give way.

Mr. Bacon: The first sensible thing that I have heard the Minister say is that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) made a fine speech, as many people would agree. Will the Minister clarify the position on the passerelle clause, because the Foreign Secretary told the European Scrutiny Committee the other day that the Government would seek to get it changed? Did any member of the British Government seek to table an amendment to the passerelle clause in the Convention on the Future of Europe?

Mr. MacShane: The clause in question was inserted very late in the day. It was not introduced during the flow of things, as the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory)—who is not here, alas—would acknowledge. That is exactly what we shall have to discuss on 4 October, and those in other European capitals all want changes, as I know from my all my contacts with them.

Many institutions and individuals want changes. I have here a letter to sign off tonight to the Royal National Institution of the Blind, which wants more QMV in EU anti-discrimination legislation. We are saying that that should stay a question of unanimity, so I will have to disappoint the RNIB, but I expect that, as it represents the blind people of Britain, it would rather have more authority at European level to produce Europe-wide legislation, covering the problems that blind people face. The right hon. Member for Charnwood would say, "Oh well, that isn't really a European competence." He should discuss that with the RNIB.

The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) insisted on the sovereignty of Parliament. I think that I quote him correctly, so I am not quite sure, because I did not quite follow the thread of his argument, why he is proposing to transfer that sovereignty to a referendum. My hon. Friends the Members for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) and for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) made the good point that we, as Members of Parliament, need to discuss—

Mr. McLoughlin *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 177, Noes 250.

Division No. 313] **[6:59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, rh Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Portillo, rh Michael

Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Trend, Michael
Trimble, rh David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mark Francois and Mr. Robert Syms

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Bryant, Chris
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lammy, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, rh Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Short, rh Clare
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dan *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*

Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Charlotte Atkins and Derek Twigg

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments)*:—

The House divided: Ayes 241, Noes 165.

Division No. 314] **[7:13 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Bryant, Chris
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lammy, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, rh Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael

Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Derek Twigg and Charlotte Atkins

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, rh Francis
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Randall, John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Trend, Michael
Trimble, rh David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mark Francois and Mr. Robert Syms

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

"That this House welcomes the Government's commitment to keeping Parliament fully informed of the progress of the IGC negotiations, including through the publication of a White Paper, and to continued intense Parliamentary scrutiny of the draft Constitutional Treaty; believes the proposals from the Convention on the Future of Europe are a good starting point for discussions between the elected governments of the EU's member states; further believes that, as the proposals do not alter the fundamental constitutional relationship between the EU and its Member States, and the role of national parliaments is strengthened, there is no reason to depart from the precedent set by previous governments, which rejected referendums on previous constitutional treaties; and notes that it will be for Parliament to decide on whether it should become part of UK law."

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

IMPLEMENTATION AND COMPLIANCE OF THE COMMON FISHERIES POLICY

That this House takes note of European Union Documents No. 7623/03, Commission Communication towards uniform and effective implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy, and No. 10509/03, Commission Communication on compliance with the rules of the Common Fisheries Policy: 'Compliance work plan and scoreboard'; takes note of the Government's support for the work plan; and supports the Government's objective of playing a constructive part in detailed discussion of the proposals to improve co-operation between enforcement agencies and of the feasibility study on the proposed Community Fisheries Control Agency.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I think the Ayes have it.

Hon. Members: No.

Division deferred till Wednesday 17 September, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 29 October 2002].

PETITION

Bicester Community Hospital

7.26 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury): I am glad that the Minister of State, Department of Health, the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), is in his place to listen to this petition.

I am proud to present a petition signed by more than 7,000 of my constituents, mainly from the town of Bicester and numbering more than half the population of that town. The petition expresses concern about Bicester community hospital.

The petition declares

that the right hon. Member for Darlington announced in 1999 that Bicester Community Hospital would be extended from a 12-bed hospital to a 30-bed hospital following an extensive consultation on community hospitals in Oxfordshire;

that The Secretary of State further asserted that an expanded Bicester Community Hospital was "important to developing modern, effective and dependable services alongside improved fairness" in Oxfordshire's health service;

that NHS Officials have stated that funds intended for the new Bicester Community Hospital, following the closure of Burford and Watlington community hospitals, "have been invested in the system" already; that this "will not be affected even if the Bicester development does not go ahead"; and that there now appears to be no provision either for the building or the running of a Community Hospital in Bicester;

that there is a sense of betrayal in Bicester and the surrounding areas with the Department of Health and NHS officials on the building of a new Community Hospital in Bicester.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Department of Health to honour its clear commitment to provide a new expanded Community Hospital for Bicester.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Royal Hospital Haslar

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn. — *[Mr. Heppell.]*

7.28 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Some of my parliamentary friends and colleagues have expressed mock surprise at my raising this issue in the House as the subject of an Adjournment debate, as I have raised it so many times before. However, I would certainly claim not to be a one-club golfer. I spoke in the House last Thursday about defence and I spoke and answered questions yesterday on behalf of the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission. Nevertheless, it is true that, according to the ever-efficient Library, I have raised the issue of Haslar 63 times, and I shall continue to do so until the Government see sense and act to ensure that these facilities are used properly.

The Royal hospital Haslar was originally a naval hospital that opened on 23 October 1753, so its 250th anniversary will occur shortly. However, I put the case for the hospital not because of its history but because of its superb facilities. Some £35 million has been spent on it in the past 10 years and it has outstanding operating suites and facilities.

The problem arises because the Royal hospital Haslar is the only services hospital that the Ministry of Defence owns and controls. In 1988, a Ministry of Defence committee, which was chaired by Commodore Lawrence and comprised no medical personnel, decided that the best future for service medicine was to proceed with dramatic reconstruction. The committee was facing a significant shortfall of 50 per cent. to 90 per cent. in the key specialties. Recruitment to the armed forces medical services has traditionally been good, but recently retention has been bad. In the important faculties, such as general surgery, orthopaedic surgery, anaesthetics and general medicine, there is approximately a 75 per cent. shortfall. The Ministry of Defence has therefore only a quarter of the personnel that it needs.

The Lawrence committee recommended that there should be a new centre of defence medicine. The Government accepted the recommendation, but after it was touted around various places where they would have liked it to be located, it ended up at Birmingham, which is not a popular centre.

Recruitment to the Defence Medical Services is currently good, but retention remains bad. That is why it has been necessary in Iraq to use reservists, some of whom are charging approximately £1,000 a day in compensation for their loss of earnings. I have read press reports of some doctors being paid £180,000 or £250,000 a year in compensation for loss of civilian earnings to make up for the lack of service personnel. There was a serious problem and the solution that the Ministry of Defence proposed was the closure of the Royal hospital Haslar. The original statement made it clear that it would not close before 2002. There was local uproar and a march of 22,000 people who expressed their deep concern at the loss of the local facility.

There are several concerns, not only in services medicine, but I shall give one more example of the latter. The Ministry of Defence has decided to cut the umbilical

[Mr. Peter Viggers]

cord between medical staff and service patients at the same time as the closure programme. Until fairly recently, service doctors gave preference to service personnel, but that is no longer the case. There is no fast-tracking and 18,338 service personnel are currently medically downgraded. That means that, for example, a paratrooper with a back problem has to queue for treatment with an elderly lady who needs a hip replacement. That is a serious disadvantage from a services point of view. Defence Medical Services has not prospered by the decision.

Let me deal with the sphere of activity for which the Minister of State, Department of Health, the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) is responsible. I am pleased and grateful that he is responding to the debate. Although we have a Ministry of Defence health problem, it is also a specific problem for the civilian population of the Gosport-south Hampshire area.

The facilities at Haslar are outstanding. It has 280 beds, nine exceptional operating theatres and a range of other facilities, including radiological equipment and magnetic resonance imaging equipment. Its telemedical equipment is as good as that anywhere in the world. Indeed, it is a world leader in telemedicine. The local community needs the facility. The next piece of the jigsaw puzzle is that the national health service has decided that the Queen Alexandra hospital at Cosham, which is eight to 12 miles away from my constituency, needs to be renewed. A private finance initiative has been proposed for it. The plan is to complete the PFI in 2007, though no one is putting money on that happening. Like most programmes, it might creep to the right and be delayed. Anyway, let us take 2007 as the relevant date.

The original plan was to close the outstandingly good facilities at Royal hospital Haslar in 2002. The subsequent plan was that they would close in 2007. There has, however, been a development since then. I raised the issue on the Floor of the House in the Christmas Adjournment debate, and subsequently received a letter, dated 29 January 2003, from the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), who was then the Under-Secretary of State for Public Health. She pointed out that, following a consultation by the local authority

"a commitment was made to the people of Gosport to develop a substantial facility at RH Haslar (subject to Ministry of Defence agreement on the use of the site), with day case surgery, diagnostic services, outpatient clinics and the Haslar Accident Treatment Centre. The local NHS remains committed to this vision, and are working closely with the Ministry of Defence to take it forward."

The problem is that the caveat

"subject to Ministry of Defence agreement on the use of the site"

is proving quite significant because some people in the Ministry appear to be dragging their heels in regard to the concept of effecting the necessary transfer of premises from the Ministry to the NHS and the local hospitals trust. I have heard it said that the commitment is not the one that I have just read to the House, but one to develop facilities on the Gosport peninsula. That is not what the Minister said, however. She said that the facilities would be retained at Haslar, and that is what we want to hear. If it is indeed the case that they will be retained at Haslar, it is important that all those involved should come together to discuss the manner in which the transfer will be carried out.

I am grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the hon. Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin), who wrote to me about the transfer of authority and responsibility, and about the proposed MOD attitude after 2007. He kindly invited me to go and see him, which I look forward to doing on the morning of Wednesday 15 October. What we need now is an absolute commitment from the NHS that it understands the need for the Haslar facilities, and that it is committed to an orderly transfer of the premises there from the Ministry of Defence to the national health service.

A few months ago, before the summer recess, there was a fear—indeed, it was a stated intention—that the King Edward VII hospital at Midhurst would need to close. It is a charitable structure. That caused concern locally, because it was widely accepted that the facilities in Hampshire were not sufficient for us to manage without that hospital. Haslar hospital is quite different, however. It is much more substantial, much more important, and much more geared to the Minister's and the Government's initiatives.

The Government have recently introduced significant initiatives, one of which involves diagnostic and treatment centres. In these centres, there is virtually a production line of operations, which can take place in specially allocated premises. Such a production line of hip replacements, cataracts and the like—procedures known as cold surgery—can take place in a dedicated hospital, without the disruptions that can be caused by major accidents and emergencies. Treating the victims of major road accidents would normally take priority over cold surgery. Cold surgery therefore needs facilities that can be used on a regular, structured basis so that it can be carried out in a well-organised way. That is exactly the kind of facility that Haslar can offer.

There is also an accident treatment centre at Haslar, which is ideally suitable for treating the victims of minor accidents who do not need to go to the accident and emergency unit at Queen Alexandra hospital in Cosham. I believe that the number of accident treatment centre cases is about 8,000 a year, and a study has shown that some 6,000 additional cases could be taken away from the accident and emergency unit in Cosham by treating them in Haslar. Clearly, that initiative would take some pressure off the district general hospital at Cosham.

I am pleading for an understanding by Government at the highest level that we cannot do without Haslar hospital. The primary care trust has taken an initiative, and has asked the strategic health authority to consider the future of the Haslar site. We need to bring all the major actors into this dialogue: the Ministry of Defence, which is the current owner of the site, the national health service, which is the holder of the purse strings through the PCT, the ambulance trust, which has a heavy burden because of the extra carriage of patients between Gosport and the Queen Alexandra hospital, Gosport borough council, which is the planning authority, the hospitals trust and all the other participants—stakeholders, as the Government like to call them—in the health scene in south Hampshire. That is urgently

needed, because we cannot manage without the facilities at Haslar hospital. I urge the Minister to respond to this debate, and to agree that he will participate in this initiative and ensure that those facilities are not lost.

The Ministry of Defence has said that it wishes to get out of the business of hospital management. I hold my own view on that. The Defence Medical Services has not only surgical and medical skills, but administrative skills. I maintain that it would be helpful to the Defence Medical Services to have a facility at which defence medical personnel could train in administration as well as in medical matters. Haslar, which has superb facilities and is highly regarded, could be a centre for an esprit de corps in the Portsmouth and south Hampshire area. The Defence Medical Services would appreciate that.

Once the premises are transferred to the hospitals trust, the Ministry of Defence, having achieved its primary objective of getting out of hospital management, may well reconsider the facilities and realise that a combination of Queen Alexandra hospital and Haslar hospital would provide an excellent training ground for its own personnel. The Ministry of Defence may come back on side and realise that it has that opportunity.

My plea is for the Minister to recognise the problems, and to undertake to involve himself in the transfer of premises at Haslar hospital to the national health service.

7.42 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) on securing this debate. I assure him that I will draw his comments on the Defence Medical Services to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I am here to answer the hon. Gentleman's questions about the national health service. I am sure that he will appreciate that I must confine my remarks to that subject.

All right hon. and hon. Members naturally and rightly attach the highest importance to developments in the NHS in their constituencies, because access to good quality, convenient health care services is an essential ingredient in the life of any community. That is true in Gosport, and it is certainly true in Barrow and Furness. I fully understand the concerns that have been raised in Gosport by the hon. Gentleman's constituents over the provision of local NHS services, especially the future of the Royal hospital Haslar.

As the hon. Gentleman said, for many years the Royal hospital has played a central role in the provision of NHS services in his constituency. I pay tribute, as I am sure he would, to the professionalism and dedication of all the staff at the hospital. Any fundamental change along the lines that he has talked about is bound to raise concerns and anxieties locally. It is clear to him—it is clear to me, too—that decisions concerning the configuration of local services need to be made. We need to get on and make them in order to allay legitimate concerns and lay the foundations for the growth and expansion in services that he and I want to see.

It was clear from the hon. Gentleman's remarks that he appreciates the fact that these decisions are first and foremost the responsibility of the local primary care trust, the NHS trusts and the strategic health authority. Any decision should be made after the fullest possible local consultation and involvement. People's concerns should always be responded to fully and fairly. They should have the full facts before them, and they need to be aware of all the available options.

I know that the NHS in the hon. Gentleman's constituency is committed to those principles as it takes forward work on the best pattern of local services. If he has any concerns to the contrary, he should raise them with me and I will pursue them vigorously on his behalf.

I also agree that there is a challenging agenda for local NHS organisations, but I believe that the Portsmouth Hospitals NHS trust is responding vigorously. As one of the largest trusts in England, providing acute health care services for nearly 1 million people covering Portsmouth, the Isle of Wight and the surrounding region, it is already planning for the future. As the hon. Gentleman said, central to its plans is the new private finance initiative scheme for the redevelopment of hospital services in Portsmouth, focusing on the current Queen Alexandra site in Cosham. As he knows, the plan is to develop a high quality centre for acute services, which will serve as the hub of a network of services for outpatients, rehabilitation, preoperative assessment and much more, available in local communities for local communities throughout south-east Hampshire. I understand that the plans are strongly supported by local clinicians.

In summer 2002, a review of the proposals was conducted to ensure that the objectives still met the needs of the local health system. Clinical staff from both the NHS trust and the primary care trust confirmed their original view that the integration of acute care on a single site was the most clinically sustainable and effective model, complemented by a variety of local services. Plans for the new hospital are well under way. The Portsmouth NHS trust has recently announced the name of its preferred bidder, the Hospital Company, and is now developing a full business case for approval. It is envisaged that work will start on the site in February next year, and that the new hospital will open in 2007. Once the work is completed, in-patient services currently at Haslar will move to the new site. In the meantime, they will remain at Haslar.

To address short-term capacity problems, the Portsmouth trust is working in partnership with the independent sector on a separate project to shorten the time for which local patients wait for orthopaedic surgery. The idea is to commission an overseas clinical team of surgeons, nurses and allied health professionals who specialise in the delivery of orthopaedic services. A team from the Portsmouth trust and the Plymouth NHS trust is currently in South Africa to assess and select clinical staff and finalise the appropriate contract negotiations. The project will then begin next month, continuing until 2004. I should make clear that the focus for providing the long-term capacity needed in the local NHS to reduce waiting times for patients in south-east Hampshire will be based on the redeveloped Queen Alexandra hospital site in Cosham.

Both projects are major new developments for the local health community which form part of a wider strategic vision for the future of local health services throughout Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. The strategic health authority is currently steering a process known as Healthfit, the aim being to develop a strategic

[Mr. John Hutton]

framework for local health services that will be safe, sustainable, affordable—which is important—and fit for the future. A key priority now is to identify the pattern of local health services, and Fareham and Gosport primary care trust is leading a project to consider that. The PCT will ensure that the process fully involves health professionals, local patients and communities, as well as elected representatives. As the right pattern of services becomes clearer, the local NHS will be able to match those services with the most appropriate premises.

The hon. Gentleman rightly said much about the future of the Haslar hospital. It has been a subject of local discussion for many years, particularly since 1998 when the Ministry of Defence first announced its intention of withdrawing from the site in 2007. The commitments made in 2000—confirmed by the Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing, and Community Safety, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), when she wrote to the hon. Gentleman in January—still stand. The NHS in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight remain committed to the pattern of services for the population on the Gosport peninsula that were agreed following the consultation in 2000.

As I have said, however, the future of the Haslar hospital cannot be seen in isolation. The NHS has a responsibility to examine a range of options to ensure that primary and secondary services are meeting the needs of local patients, and conform to wider plans for modernisation. The precise configuration of the services is being discussed locally, as the hon. Gentleman will know. Following confirmation they can be matched with the right premises, at the right price, to ensure that resources are used effectively and efficiently to provide the range of services needed by the local population. As part of that process, the NHS continues to engage in discussions with the MOD so that the Haslar hospital can be considered a possible option for the location of future services. However, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman would be the first to acknowledge, the NHS has a duty to use public money wisely, and must therefore consider other options.

The hon. Gentleman again referred to the need for joint working between the NHS and the Ministry of Defence on this issue, and he said that there are no clear arrangements for the transfer of services. I am particularly concerned about this issue and the suggestions that he has made this evening, but I am advised that what he said is not the case. In fact, both sectors continue to work closely not only on the future of the Royal hospital Haslar site, but to confirm the provision of NHS and defence medical services in the local area.

The MOD has confirmed its intention to withdraw from the site in 2007, and that confirmation provides a firm foundation through which the NHS and especially the MOD can ensure continuity of NHS services for local people. It is clear that services will need to be provided from the Royal hospital site until such time as the new hospital is ready to receive admissions.

Work is being taken forward through a local partnership board, which meets quarterly, and through a high level strategic partnership that provides an overview of all aspects of partnership work between the NHS and the MOD. The priority is to ensure a robust and practical way forward that is sustainable for the NHS, and which will meet the needs of local people. However, any decision taken by the NHS on the future use of the Royal hospital Haslar site will clearly need to take into account the MOD's own plans for the rest of the Haslar site. The MOD and the Defence Medical Education and Training Agency take the lead on this issue, and I understand that, as the hon. Gentleman said, the MOD will meet him next month to discuss arrangements for withdrawing from the management of the hospital. Any decisions on the use of the site will clearly be subject to the necessary local planning approval processes.

The future of the Royal hospital Haslar is obviously of great concern to the hon. Gentleman and I genuinely understand the worries that he expressed this evening. It is our policy that primary care trusts, in partnership with local trusts and the strategic health authority, and in the light of their specific local knowledge and expertise, should decide the priorities for the NHS locally, including the location of any eventual services. This is an opportunity to plan for growth and expansion in NHS services locally; we are not talking about contracting the range of services available to the hon. Gentleman's constituents. That is the context in which, I hope, he and his constituents will see these developments.

I conclude by reassuring the hon. Gentleman that every effort is being made by the local NHS to plan ahead for the future. It will continue to work with the MOD, and with him, to ensure a model of care that best meets the needs of the people whom he represents.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes to Eight o'clock.

CORRECTION

Official Report, 15 September 2003: in col. 595, after "*The House divided:* Ayes 237, Noes 140." insert

"Division No. 309] **[3:46 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bell, Stuart
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*

Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Doran, Frank
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Iranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pound, Stephen
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Vernon Coaker and
Ms Bridget Prentice

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heath, David
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui

Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Wishart, Pete
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mark Francois and
Mr. John Randall

Question accordingly agreed to."

House of Commons

Wednesday 17 September 2003

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

The Secretary of State was asked—

Contaminated Phurnacite Land

1. **Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley): What recent discussions he has had with the First Minister of the National Assembly for Wales about contaminated phurnacite land in the Cynon valley. [129536]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have regular discussions with the First Minister. I share my hon. Friend's concern about the site in her constituency, and I am pleased that a taskforce involving all the relevant stakeholders is now up and running. It is moving things forward, and I hope that there will be progress shortly.

Ann Clwyd: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's answer, but that is hardly progress. The site closed in 1990, and for the last 13 years the residents of Abercwmboi have lived next to 28 acres of highly contaminated land – some of the worst toxic waste left anywhere in the United Kingdom. It is high time we saw action rather this snail's-pace progress, if it can be described as progress at all.

Mr. Touhig: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's tireless work on this matter. Trawling through *Hansard*, I noted that she had asked questions about it back in the 1980s. I too am concerned about the time that it has been taking to overcome the problem, but the taskforce is now minded to move some of the waste from the site, which I know is what she and the residents want. I shall endeavour to keep her fully informed of anything I discover about progress, and I hope that all interested parties will work together to clean the site and make it available for a much better use than that to which it has been put for the past 20-odd years.

A483

2. **Mr. Martyn Jones** (Clwyd, South): What recent discussions he has had with his ministerial and National Assembly for Wales colleagues concerning improvements to the A483 south of Wrexham. [129537]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): My right hon. Friend and I have regular discussions with ministerial and Assembly colleagues. The Highways Agency and the Assembly have recently carried out public consultation on a route management strategy for the A5/A483 trunk roads south of Wrexham. I hope that the results will be published later in the year.

Mr. Jones: Does my hon. Friend recall that in the late 1980s, when the road was improved by the Tories, they penny-pinched on the viaduct at Chirk and Acrefair? We ended up with a 10-metre carriageway which is both dangerous and, now, inadequate for the traffic that it is taking. Will my hon. Friend get together with his colleagues as soon as possible to ensure that the road is put right at the earliest opportunity?

Mr. Touhig: I understand my hon. Friend's frustration. The Tory years were characterised by a lack of funds for major projects of this kind and, given their current proposal for a 20 per cent. public expenditure cut, the road will soon be down to a grass track.

There are no plans for further dualling beyond Ruabon. The existing road is modern, and of a relatively high standard. Early indications from the public consultation suggest that more acceptable solutions are being considered. My colleagues in the Assembly recently undertook major resurfacing of the Newbridge bypass, and further discussions will take place about how we can make the route safer for all users.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): The Minister's travels through Wales will have been delayed by the traffic lights between Llandrindod Wells and Newtown on the A483. Temporary traffic lights have been in place for 15 years. Will the Minister rejoice with me that the Assembly has got round to carrying out roadworks? I wonder, though, why the work was done in August, when people wanted to travel to the Eisteddfod in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik), causing disruption to the tourist trade.

Mr. Touhig: I am glad that the traffic lights have been removed, because I shall be travelling along the road next week. There is probably a gap in people's lives now that the lights have gone, but I welcome what has happened.

National Health Service

3. **Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell): What recent discussions he has had with the Minister for Health in the National Assembly for Wales regarding the national health service in Wales. [129538]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Hain): I have regular meetings with Assembly Ministers when the Wales NHS is discussed.

Chris Grayling: What progress is the Secretary of State making in pursuing discussions with the National Assembly and the Department of Health to ensure that England and Wales do not end up with two inspection regimes for health, with all the extra bureaucracy and the additional work for hospitals that that will cause, particularly in border areas?

Mr. Hain: Discussions are continuing. Obviously the Wales NHS is separate from the English NHS, but the two are linked and co-operation is important, especially in the cross-border areas to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Will the Secretary of State initiate discussions with the First Minister to establish whether comparative studies can be conducted by the National Audit Offices for Wales and England on performance in the health service, especially relating to orthopaedics, hip operations and cataract operations?

Mr. Hain: That is an important issue. The fact is that performance in Wales has been much better than performance in England in respect of emergency admissions, but worse in respect of elective surgery. That applies to some of the areas mentioned by my right hon. Friend. The Wanless report, which constituted a pretty robust analysis of the situation, has been welcomed by the Health and First Ministers, who are taking action. I think that that will lead to the necessary improvements in performance, although we should not doubt the improvements that have already occurred. For instance, 200,000 more new patients are being seen than were being seen in 1997.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): The part-time Secretary of State for Wales cannot abdicate responsibility for the severe problems that patients now face in the national health service in Wales. In-patient and day-case waiting lists continue to deteriorate, despite the fact that the Government have massively increased taxation on the people, including the 1 per cent. increase in national insurance contributions. On 12 September, *The Western Mail* pointed out that Welsh patients can wait four times longer to be seen than patients in England. In England, the out-patient first appointment target is 17 weeks; in Wales, it is 18 months. Is that acceptable?

Mr. Hain: Of course, we want to improve performance all the time, and I am discussing these matters with Ministers in Cardiff bay to achieve that objective. The hon. Gentleman continually runs down the health service in Wales, yet 200,000 additional patients are being seen, compared with the record when the Tories lost office. How can he make such accusations, given that under the Tories, training places for nurses were cut by 25 per cent., and under Labour such places are already up by 30 per cent.? The truth is that the Tories would wreak havoc on the Wales health service, as they did when they were in power.

Mr. Evans: I am not talking down the national health service, but it is only right that, as an Opposition, we point out the realities of the NHS in Wales. Yesterday, the right hon. Gentleman talked about having citizens' contracts with the public in respect of public services. Citizens are fully delivering on their side of the bargain through massive extra taxation; it is the Government who are not delivering on theirs. Where were the citizens' rights for the 93-year-old lady who ended up breaking both hips last week when she was released from hospital and taken to somebody else's home, five miles away from her own? Where were the citizens' rights for the 26-year-old Caerphilly man who reported to his hospital that he had taken an overdose of 70 tablets, was left on a trolley for hours and then died? That was an absolute tragedy. The right hon. Gentleman's contract with the people is nothing more than a con trick. People will continue to mistrust this Government until they simply deliver the national health service that the people of Wales are paying for.

Mr. Hain: Let us look at the facts. In their 18 years in power, the Tories closed 70 hospitals in Wales; we are in the process of building, or have built, 10 new ones. We are recruiting more nurses, more doctors and more consultants, after the long years of Tory cuts.

The hon. Gentleman rightly describes as tragic the two incidents to which he refers. An inquest is obviously being held into the death of the Caerphilly man who, I understand, took an overdose and died while in hospital. The appalling incident in which the 93-year-old was delivered to the wrong address is the subject of a formal investigation, and as soon as I know its outcome, I shall obviously let the hon. Gentleman know.

Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the massive extra capital investment in the NHS in north Wales, and in the Ysbyty Glan Clwyd hospital in Bodelwyddan in particular? That includes the cancer treatment centre, which cost £20 million, and new procedures to improve emergency admissions. Does he accept that that represents a huge contrast with the under-investment in the health service that occurred under the Tories?

Mr. Hain: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. This is another example of the progress that is being made in the Wales health service. The staff of the excellent and well-managed Ysbyty Glan Clwyd hospital deserve the House's congratulations on their performance. An increasing number of patients are being seen, and the hospital is a beacon for health service provision in the area. That contrasts with the hospital closures that regularly occurred the length and breadth

of Wales under the Tories, and which would be repeated if they got into power and implemented their 20 per cent. cuts.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): We owe a great debt of gratitude to those working in the NHS. My constituents tell me that when they do eventually get treatment, it is first class, and I am sure that that is right. When the right hon. Gentleman next speaks to the Minister for Health in Cardiff, will he congratulate her on getting the waiting list for those waiting for in-patient treatment for more than one year down to 12,641, compared with a figure of 37 in England?

Mr. Hain: It is good to hear from the leader of Plaid Cymru in Parliament. Of course he competes for that position with two other leaders of Plaid Cymru, both of whom hate each other and did not vote for each other, revealing a party that is leaderless and schizophrenic about its leadership—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] Yes, I will answer the question. If the hon. Gentleman's disastrous policies for an independent Wales were implemented, health services and school services would be cut; whereas we now have record investment going in, more patients being seen and waiting times coming down. Patients who use the health service in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and elsewhere know that the service is going from strength to strength under Labour.

Manufacturing Industry

4. **Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): What recent discussions he has had with *(a)* ministerial colleagues and *(b)* Welsh Assembly Ministers on assistance for manufacturing industry in Wales. [129539]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Hain): Regular ones. The Government are supporting manufacturing investment through structural funds, regional selective assistance, the research and development tax credit, regional venture capital funds and the small firms loan guarantee scheme, as well as reforming corporation and capital gains tax to encourage investment.

Paul Flynn: Does the Minister agree—I think that he well might—that the Government have done a magnificent job in Wales by creating 78,000 jobs in the last 12 months and halving unemployment since we were elected in 1997? However, there is the one worry about manufacturing jobs, which have long been the backbone of the Welsh economy. Those jobs are going, particularly in Newport, where a third of employment is in the manufacturing sector. They were well paid, highly skilled, long-term jobs, but they have been replaced with jobs in call centres, for example—that are none of those things: they are teflon jobs that may be in Wales today, but in Bangladesh tomorrow.

Mr. Hain: We are competing in a very competitive world economy against countries, including Bangladesh, where wages are a fraction of what they are in Wales. The Welsh Assembly Government's and the Labour Government's policy of value-added investment to increase the capacity of our manufacturing centre at the top end of the markets is the crucial policy to adopt. I am sure that my hon. Friend would welcome the fact that Interbrew, a Belgian company, has recently invested in Newport and created 40 new jobs. There are other stories and reports of massive investment across Wales from foreign and domestic companies, all contributing to the record increase of 78,000 jobs over the last year.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Now that we know that the Under-Secretary will be driving through my constituency next week, would he be willing to use the time he saves from the road works to visit the town of Llanidloes, which has lost 250 manufacturing jobs as a result of the closure of KTH? What feasible support can the Wales Office give, notwithstanding the support of the National Assembly, to ensure that we avoid an economic catastrophe in the Llanidloes area?

Mr. Hain: I was privileged to attend the national Eisteddfod in the hon. Gentleman's constituency—a marvellous occasion in a beautiful part of Wales. The position of KTH was obviously desperate. We worked together to try to save it and provide an alternative. The hon. Gentleman knows that I will do everything that I can—and I am sure that the First Minister will do the same—to provide a decent future for the town.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Is the Secretary of State aware of the vast number of jobs in the manufacturing industry that have been lost in my constituency? He will know that many of the jobs that have replaced them have too often been low-paid, non-union jobs. Does he accept that one way of overcoming the problem of low wages would be to increase the minimum wage in October not to £4.50, but to at least £5 an hour?

Mr. Hain: As the Chancellor announced at the Trades Union Congress last week, the minimum wage will go up next year to £4.85 and thereafter to £5 an hour and more. That contrasts with the position under the Tories, who had no minimum wage and presided over poverty pay and the exploitation of workers. Under the Labour Government there has been more and more investment in the valleys. Today, for example, 400 new jobs in the airline industry are being created in Blackwood and Cwmbran, coupled with other manufacturing jobs in the sector. That is a sign of the manufacturing sector being given the support that it needs to go from strength to strength in difficult international conditions.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I know that the Secretary of State is interested in manufacturing jobs. After all, he has manufactured enough jobs for himself over the past six years. At the last Welsh questions, I suggested to him that he set up a taskforce to address the meltdown in manufacturing in Wales. However, since then, more manufacturing jobs have been lost, and the Office for National Statistics has downgraded Wales's gross domestic product as compared with England's—from 81.3 per cent. to 79.2 per cent. If that trend continues, the whole of Wales will be eligible for objective 1 status in six years' time.

Professor Dylan Jones Evans, of the University of Wales, Bangor, has pointed out that

"manufacturing is continuing to decline and we are not replacing the jobs lost with high value"—

[Interruption.]

Mr. Speaker: Order. Questions are too long.

Mr. Hain: The hon. Gentleman has my sympathy. I know that it is difficult for him to keep up with what is going on in Wales, as he is not a Welsh MP. Let us look at the facts, instead of talking down the manufacturing sector in Wales. Last Friday, I attended the commercial launch of a big power station by General Electric, the multinational company. It involved more than £1 billion of investment, with huge numbers of jobs being created. It located at Baglan in south Wales because that was the best location for the most highly developed gas power technology. Hundreds of people from Japan, Korea, Australia and the US came to Wales to see that it is now a good place to invest, compared with the Tory years.

Bed Blocking

5. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones** (Cardiff, Central): What consultations he has had with the Welsh Assembly Government concerning the Wanless report recommendations on alleviating bed blocking in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [129540]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): My right hon. Friend and I have regular meetings with the Assembly Minister for Health, Jane Hutt. I met her yesterday and I shall meet her again today. I am also keeping in close touch with her on the issues arising from the Wanless report and I look forward to the Assembly's response and its implementation plan, to be announced later this year.

Mr. Jones: The Wanless report said that the health service in Wales was unsustainable. In particular, it highlighted the problems of bed blocking. It offered four options to deal with that problem and identified an immediate need. Given that the report was published in July—but had been given to the Minister in Wales five months earlier—and that some of the options require primary legislation, I should have thought that the Wales Office would have been prepared by now for those options. If it does not act now, we will face a delay of at least a year and half before any action is taken.

Mr. Touhig: It is important to bear it in mind that Wanless also said:

"The provision of health and social care is complex and multifaceted and cannot be summarised in a single sentence."

The Public Accounts Committee report published this morning on bed blocking highlighted several of the problems that we face, and it will also inform any Government response. The Assembly Minister is preparing a response to Wanless and an implementation plan. If that requires any primary legislation, the Assembly will bid in the proper way and we will give every encouragement to ensure that what is needed to deliver an improvement in the health service in Wales is supported by the Government in Westminster.

Low-flying Exercises

6. **Adam Price** (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): What recent discussions he has had with the Ministry of Defence on low-flying exercises in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [129541]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): I regularly discuss matters affecting Wales with Ministers in the Ministry of Defence.

Adam Price: The Minister will be aware that in parts of Wales military aircraft are permitted to fly at an altitude of just 60 m, causing distress to individuals and many fallen livestock. Will he clear his diary to meet urgently colleagues from the Ministry of Defence to ask them why such exercises are allowed to continue in Wales when they have been banned in almost every other NATO country? Why are they necessary when low flying has not been used as a military tactic by British armed forces in any conflict since the end of the cold war?

Mr. Touhig: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is well skilled in self-defence, as he is about to attend his party's conference. He will need protection from the hand-to-hand fighting and back stabbing that characterises his divided party. However, he raises a serious issue. I experienced low-flying aircraft when I was in north Wales a week or so ago. The UK has no uninhabited areas large enough to meet the essential training needs of aircrew. The Ministry of Defence aims to spread the disturbance, but for operational and weather reasons some areas are busier than others. A reduction in low flying over the hon. Gentleman's constituency, Carmarthen, would obviously increase the burden elsewhere. I sympathise with the hon. Gentleman and I share his concerns, but I point out that less than 10 per cent. of operational low flying takes place over Wales. I will keep abreast of the issue, and do anything that I can to help obviate the problem.

Inward Investment

7. **Sir Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): If he will make a statement on prospects for inward investment in Wales. [129542]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Hain): In a tough economic climate, Wales remains one of Europe's top inward investment locations. Wales's share of British projects, together with the levels of jobs and investment, has increased. That is testament to the work of Team Wales and the partnership effort that is clearly achieving great things.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: Is the Secretary of State aware that the latest report from the accountants Ernst and Young shows that, outside the euro, the share of inward investment going to the UK—including Wales—rose from 26.5 per cent. in 2001 to 28.4 per cent. in 2002. Do we need the euro? Were not the Swedish people right in their decision?

Mr. Hain: Three quarters of Welsh exports go to the eurozone countries. Clearly, in the right economic

circumstances—and the Treasury will continue to assess those—an opportunity to join the euro would benefit the Welsh economy and inward investment.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the launch of the aerospace cluster in my constituency last week? It will play an important role in inward investment, and also a crucial role in military aerospace and aviation. Will he do all that he can with colleagues in the Ministry of Defence to ensure that the red dragon project proceeds on course?

Mr. Hain: Yes. The red dragon project will proceed on course—both on and off the rugby field. My hon. Friend spoke about creating a centre of excellence for air investment in south Wales, and that is certainly happening. I can announce today that 400 new jobs are being created in the aerospace industry, in Blackwood and in Cwmbran. That will link with the excellent increases in investment in the military aerospace industry.

Public Sector Employment

8. **Mr. Bill Wiggin** (Leominster): What proportion of jobs in Wales are in the public sector. [129543]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Hain): The most recent data from the labour force survey show that one third of jobs in Wales are in the public sector.

Mr. Wiggin: So why is that not making any difference?

Mr. Hain: It is making a difference. The increase in employment in Wales last year—78,000—was the largest of any UK region. In the three months to July, Wales was once again among Britain's top-performing regions in terms of private sector output growth, according to the chief economist for the Royal Bank of Scotland.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): Is my right hon. Friend aware that 256 public sector jobs are in the forensic science laboratory in Chepstow? Those public servants provide a superb service to the Dyfed-Powys and South Wales police forces. However, staff are seriously worried about possible privatisation plans. Is my right hon. Friend willing to meet staff representatives to discuss the matter?

Mr. Hain: I should be happy to meet my hon. Friend's constituents. However, I point out to the House that implementation of the Tory policy of 20 per cent. across-the-board cuts would mean that jobs such as those that my hon. Friend has described and other public sector jobs elsewhere in Wales would be savaged.

Common Agricultural Policy

9. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What representations he has received from tenant farmers in Wales on proposed reform of the common agricultural policy. [129544]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): The hon. Lady takes a keen interest in this matter, about which she asked me questions in February and April. I understand her persistence. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received no representations from tenant farmers in Wales on the proposed reform. However, he has regular meetings with the Assembly First Minister, and I also meet the Assembly Minister responsible for the environment and for agricultural matters.

Miss McIntosh: Does the Minister still think that common agricultural policy reform will happen, given the collapse of the Cancun talks? How will tenant farmers benefit from the rural development strand of that reform?

Mr. Touhig: The issues relating to tenant farmers are complex, and my colleagues in the Assembly are consulting farming unions and other stakeholders on CAP reform. All sides in Wales have welcomed the reform package as a significant step in sustaining the Welsh farming industry. I shall spend two days next week in mid-Wales visiting Welsh producers, promoting Welsh foods and products, and visiting Welsh farms to obtain a first-hand understanding of some of the difficulties that our farmers face. The reforms that we are pushing for will benefit the industry.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [130437] **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 17 September.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): Before listing my engagements, I express my condolences on behalf of the Government, the House and the British people following the tragic murder of the Swedish Foreign Minister Anna Lindh last week. She was an inspiration to the Swedish people and an internationally respected Foreign Minister. She will be deeply missed.

This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I will have further such meetings later today.

Mr. Jack: The whole House will share in the Prime Minister's words on the sad death of the Swedish Foreign Minister.

Can the Prime Minister justify his policy on student tuition fees in the light of research showing that graduates pay £2,000 a year more in tax than non-graduates do, and given that his own parliamentary party has rejected his policies and that he told the British people that he would not introduce student tuition fees?

The Prime Minister: I suspect that graduates probably pay more income tax because they earn a great deal more money—something like 40 per cent. more. The choice is simple: either we get more funds into universities so that we have a fair system under which no one pays money up front, or we adopt the Conservative policy, which would result, according to the Institute of Education, in a cut of 100,000 students every year.

Q2. [130438] **Barbara Follett** (Stevenage): Will my right hon. Friend do all he can to ensure that when the Post Office consults the public about the closure of a branch, it must demonstrate that it has taken their views into account? That certainly did not happen recently in Stevenage, when a strong case made for the retention of Chells post office was ignored by the Post Office. As a result, we are losing a strong branch and keeping a weak one.

The Prime Minister: I know that my hon. Friend has campaigned hard on that post office in her constituency. I also understand why people feel strongly about such closures. I know, too, that she would expect me to point out that at the end of the current programme of change in the Post Office, 95 per cent. of the urban population will still live within one mile of a post office. It is obviously important that we should try to provide the right facilities, and she will recognise that we are putting about £1.5 billion into the Post Office over the next few years. In the end, however, every decision of this type must, with the proper consultation, be a matter for the Post Office.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): I associate the Opposition with the Prime Minister's condolences to the Swedish Government.

On 10 June the Prime Minister launched a roadshow to sell the single currency to the British people. Can he tell us where it has got to?

The Prime Minister: There have been about 60 visits from Foreign Office Ministers over the past few months. It is important to keep the option of joining the single currency open for the reasons that I have given before. The right hon. Gentleman's policy of closing off that option and saying no in any set of circumstances would not be the right one for the British people.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The whereabouts of the Prime Minister's roadshow are a mystery even to his Government. The Treasury, when asked, says:

"There are so many roadshow events we can't begin to list them all."

The Foreign Office said:

"The roadshow hasn't actually begun."

Meanwhile, the Minister for Europe said:

"It's not a literal roadshow, it's only a figure of speech."

Given that the roadshow has not even got on the road, will the Prime Minister confirm that there will not be a referendum in this Parliament?

The Prime Minister: No, I certainly will not confirm that. We should keep our options open. The right test to apply is whether membership is in the economic interests of this country. We said that we would return to that issue next year. I see absolutely no reason for this country to say that it will foreclose its options and rule out membership of a single currency. We should do what is right for this country and keep the option open.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister is spinning roadshows, wasting public money and legislating for a referendum that he does not have the courage to hold. Why does he not admit what everybody else knows—that his dreams, his schemes and his hopes to scrap the pound are utterly wrecked?

The Prime Minister: It is slightly odd of the right hon. Gentleman to accuse me of not having the courage to hold the referendum when in his second question he asked me to rule out holding one. We have to decide what is in our best interests as a country. I happen to believe that, in our best interests, we should keep open the option of joining the single currency if it is in our economic interests to do so. The truth is that the right hon. Gentleman now holds a position not merely of blocking any change in the European constitution but of ruling out the single currency even if joining is in our economic interests. That is not a position that will recommend itself to the country, and when his predecessor adopted that position at the last general election, it was rejected.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Does my right hon. Friend share my concern about the imminent job losses at Sheffield Forgemasters—actually, at a local company that is better known as the family firm of R.B. Tennant? Does he agree that every possible effort should be made to consider the options by which we can retain those vital and highly skilled jobs?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is right to raise that issue as it is important. The Sheffield Forgemasters engineering business continues to have financial backing, and I understand that a series of meetings are taking place between the Department of Trade and Industry, the regional development agency—Yorkshire Forward—and the company. I hope very much that a way forward can be found in the coming months.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Last September, and again this February, the Prime Minister released dossiers to the British public that included the intelligence assessments that underpinned the case for war in Iraq. Why did he choose to withhold from those dossiers other intelligence that would undoubtedly have undermined his case in the minds of the British public?

The Prime Minister: I do not accept that it would have undermined our case. If the right hon. Gentleman is

referring to the Joint Intelligence Committee assessment about the danger of the weapons falling into the hands of terrorists, it would have been totally irresponsible if we had said that that danger meant that we should allow Saddam Hussein to carry on developing them. That would have been a foolish state of affairs to have brought about. That is why I do not believe that it undermined the case for war at all.

Mr. Kennedy: We now know that the Prime Minister was warned by the intelligence chiefs that war in Iraq could increase rather than decrease the risk of terrorism. We now know that the line in the original draft of the September dossier that reassured our public that Iraq was incapable of launching a nuclear strike against Britain was removed before publication. Why was the Prime Minister not willing to trust the British public to form a balanced judgment on those matters? Why did he not play it straight with the public at the time?

The Prime Minister: It is extraordinary of the right hon. Gentleman, whose case as I understand it is that those weapons did not exist in any event, now to say—

Mr. Kennedy *indicated dissent.*

The Prime Minister: Oh, I see, they did exist—we should just have done nothing about them. All I can tell the right hon. Gentleman, if he wants it straight, is that the day this country's foreign policy is run by the Liberal Democrats will be the day this country really is at risk.

Mr. Neil Turner (Wigan): Recently, a young girl was raped in my constituency, and earlier in the summer a young girl was enticed to Europe from the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham). Internet chatlines are the connection between the two cases. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Home Office, and other relevant Government Departments, all join together to ensure that chatlines are properly regulated? May I also ask my right hon. Friend whether there is some way to ensure that internet chatline organisers police themselves so that other families do not suffer the same trauma as those in my constituency?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises a valuable and important point. The Home Office and the task force for child protection on the internet are working together to try to ensure that the internet is safe for children to use. In addition, the Sexual Offences Bill contains measures that bear on the problem and will help. I assure my hon. Friend that we shall continue to work with the industry, law enforcement and children's charities so that we do our very best to ensure that the law is sufficiently tight and also that internet services are greatly restricted whenever they may collide with the interests of children.

Q3. [130439] **Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell): When the Prime Minister said recently,

"We should be willing to experiment with new forms of co-payment in the public sector",

what did he mean?

The Prime Minister: We have many examples of that: in pensions, where people make co-payments; in transport, where there is road-user charging in certain parts of the country; and in relation to student finance, where there is already co-payment through fees. It is important to recognise that when we are trying to boost our public services not all the money will come from the taxpayer. It is a pretty extraordinary thing if today's Conservative party is against those proposals.

Q4. [130440] **Mr. David Borrow** (South Ribble): Fire, police and ambulance services in Lancashire are appointing a number of emergency community support officers to work in rural areas, one of whom will be based in Tarleton in my constituency. In addition to supporting the police, those officers will act as the first responder, having been trained by the ambulance service, and will undertake fire prevention work, after training from the fire service. Will my right hon. Friend congratulate the emergency services in Lancashire on that initiative and will he also urge emergency services in other rural areas—

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is fine. The Prime Minister can answer.

The Prime Minister: I certainly will congratulate the emergency services on the work that they are doing. It is worth pointing out that there are about 1,200 community support officers—something that the Conservatives opposed when we introduced them. Those community support officers will be especially important not only at present but also when the Anti-social Behaviour Bill comes in, because they will be able to issue fixed penalty notices in respect of antisocial behaviour and truancy. It will be important that we increase the number of community support officers, as they are a huge help to the police—whose numbers are now at record levels.

Q5. [130441] **Mr. Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland): Does the Prime Minister accept that the restoration of basic services in Iraq is not progressing and will not do so as long as it remains under the control of the United States and the United Kingdom? Does he agree that delay in making the United Nations the principal authority in Iraq simply delays the day when basic services such as water, electricity and health care can be given to the Iraqi people?

The Prime Minister: First, I do not agree at all that the problem in providing decent services is the presence of the British or American troops. Our troops in the south of Iraq are doing their utmost to provide electricity, water and basic services. The people who are stopping those services are those who are sabotaging them—terrorists and supporters of Saddam. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would be getting to his feet to praise our troops for the work that they are doing in the south of Iraq. As some of the facts do not always come across, I shall also tell him that all 240 hospitals in Iraq are now functioning; by the end of June most of the schools were open and about 5.5 million children were able to take their end of year exams; and we are putting in hundreds of millions of pounds of infrastructure investment to provide better power and electricity. That

money was denied the people of Iraq by the regime of Saddam Hussein; had we followed the hon. Gentleman's policy, Saddam would still be in charge of it.

Q6. [130442] **Mr. Barry Gardiner** (Brent, North): Yesterday, a report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development catalogued the decline in standards in British schools, but can the Prime Minister tell the House whether any part of that report related to any period while he was in government, or does it represent a catalogue of the failure of the Conservative party?

The Prime Minister: It is interesting that the report, which was supposedly about Britain's school performance slumping, was analysing the school attainment of those aged 25 to 64 in 2001, so not a single person involved was in school under this Government. However, the OECD report about this Government and our record shows that, in reading, our 15-year-olds are eighth out of 43; in maths, eighth out of 31; and, in science, fourth out of 31. The report yesterday shows precisely the reason why we needed the increased investment that we have given.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Can the Prime Minister tell us how much council tax has gone up by since 1997?

The Prime Minister: I cannot give an exact figure, but it is true that council tax has gone up since 1997; however, so has the amount of Government support to local government.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The answer to the question—the straight answer—is that council tax has gone up by a massive 70 per cent., a typical family is now paying £413 more since Labour came to office, and the very poorest pensioners spend nearly £1 in every £10 on council tax. Can the Prime Minister tell us all where in his manifesto he warned people of those massive tax rises?

The Prime Minister: It is correct that council tax has gone up, but it is also correct, as I say, that the amount of money coming from central Government to local government has increased. It has increased by 25 per cent. compared with a real-terms cut of 7 per cent. in the last four years of the Conservatives. The additional money that we are giving to local government at the moment was in the spending proposals, and was voted against by the right hon. Gentleman's party, which is in favour of cuts in that spending, so perhaps he will tell us how the council tax would be lower if we cut the amount of central Government support.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Let me remind the Prime Minister of what he actually said. In his manifesto, he promised that there would be no "excessive council tax rises". Yet, under Labour, council tax rises have become the biggest stealth tax of all, and next year he and his colleagues will send them soaring through the roof. Is not the reality that the Labour lies on taxes are the biggest single reason why nobody believes a single word he says anymore?

The Prime Minister: The local authorities set the levels of council tax. The question, surely, for central Government is: are we providing them with sufficient money? [HON. MEMBERS: "No!"] So it is apparently the position of the Conservative party that the increases that we have given are not enough, which is presumably why they voted even against the increases that we gave them. The truth of the matter is that we have given— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Leader of the Opposition must calm himself. *[Interruption.]* Order. I am telling him and other hon. Members to calm down.

The Prime Minister: We have put more money into local government, and it is for the local authorities in the end to decide what their levels of council tax are, but that money has helped our education, our social services and our other local services. Whatever the situation is, the position of local authorities could not be improved by the right hon. Gentleman's policy, which is to cut even the money that we have put in. So in the end, it is a matter for local government; but so far as we are concerned, we have been increasing the amount of money to local government, not decreasing it.

Q7. [130443] **Mr. Martin Salter** (Reading, West): Heroin and crack cocaine are flooding into our country, destroying lives and tearing apart families and communities. In my constituency in Reading, street crime recently fell by a third, but the town is still blighted by the scourge of hard drugs, as addicts turn to other forms of crime to feed their habits. What are the Government doing to improve joint working between the police, the courts and the treatment agencies to tackle that menace?

The Prime Minister: We are making sure that for the first time there is proper working across the agencies, involving the drug treatment agency, the criminal justice system and the police, to deal with offenders who have a crack or heroin addiction. We are saying to them clearly that they can have the treatment that is available for them, but if they do not accept that treatment, under the Criminal Justice Bill that we are putting through the House, they stand at risk of bail being refused. We cannot have a situation in which people who are drug addicts and who have tested positive for drugs are put back out on the street where they will commit further crime.

More than 6,000 drug treatment and testing orders, which are for those who have already been convicted of a crime, have now been issued, and 50 per cent. of the people on them have either given up drugs or are co-operating with the authorities. That is why the huge

investment that we are now making in drug treatment across the country is for the first time giving us the chance to deal with this problem.

Q9. [130445] **Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): Does the Prime Minister think that a majority of Labour Back Benchers support his current policy on student top-up fees?

The Prime Minister: I believe that when we come to the debate we shall see what the support is. Yes, I do believe, however, that the vast majority of people here will support that proposal. Let me tell the hon. Gentleman why. We have a simple choice: either we make sure that we widen access to university and allow those universities to bring in more and more people, whom we need in today's world, or we adopt the policy with which he has now associated himself, which is to cut by 100,000 a year the numbers going into university. That is an inequitable policy, and this side of the House will not support it.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden): Is my right hon. Friend aware that in January the south-west London diagnostic and treatment centre for hips and knees will open? It will be the largest such centre outside America. Not only will it benefit my constituents and those of other hon. Members by performing 1,500 more hip and knee replacements a year, but it will provide an unparalleled base for research in Europe on orthopaedics. Would he support plans to provide such a centre of excellence on this site?

The Prime Minister: I am delighted about the centre in my hon. Friend's constituency. By 2005, such centres will be providing around 300,000 extra operations in the health service a year, and will be one of the reasons why every national health service indicator is already better than in 1997. I see from the comments of the Conservatives' health spokesman the other day that they are opposed to those centres. Any constituency that gets one of those centres therefore knows that the Conservatives would take it away.

Q10. [130446] **Mr. Gary Streeter** (South-West Devon): Returning to the vital issue of drugs, for which I make no apology as it is surely one of the biggest social challenges facing our nation, is the Prime Minister aware that we now have a growing number of heroin addicts—up to 250,000—yet only 2,000 places at treatment centres to which they can turn for help? If an addict therefore makes the brave decision to turn his back on a life of misery and crime, there are simply not enough places for him to get help at the moment. Will the Prime Minister take an urgent look at this problem and, if necessary, redirect resources and make sufficient numbers of places available?

The Prime Minister: Actually, the treatment position is better than the hon. Gentleman describes. It is improving all the time, and more and more places are being made available. A presentation was made to me yesterday by people working in Manchester on this issue, and, as a result, they are able to extend treatment to the numbers of people that they are identifying as drug addicts in the criminal justice system. The only way we will do that, however, is by investing the necessary money. It is not a question of redirecting it from elsewhere, but of making that basic investment, to which we are committed. Whatever the hon. Gentleman's concern, which I am sure is sincere, the fact is that his Front Benchers are opposed to that money going in.

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): Given that it is essential to bring more money into the universities and to increase opportunity for people to study in universities, is not the fairest and most effective policy to achieve those purposes to allow an increase in university fees, covering the costs through loans to be repaid by graduates as and when their income permits, while bringing back maintenance grants for people from less-well-off households and increasing support for universities and schools to work together to raise educational aspiration?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend, who makes the right argument. That is why I believe that, as the debate progress, people will support it. The alternative is to cut the numbers of people going to university and for Britain to become the only country anywhere in the world that is reducing the number of people with access to higher education.

Q11. [130447] **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): Has the Prime Minister seen from the Public Accounts Committee report that 50,000 beds have been lost since 1996? Is he surprised by that when there has been a 20 per cent. increase in fees to the National Care Standards Commission and a 142 per cent. increase in enhanced criminal record checks? What is he going to do about that?

The Prime Minister: Today's report is about delayed discharges and it indicates that there is still an awful lot to do. However, I point out to the hon. Lady that, under this Government, we have had the first increase in the number of beds in the health service for many years. We have already halved the number of delayed discharges. It is true that we have got to go a lot further, but there is no way at all, if we compare the position now with that of 1997, that we are not in a better one.

Q12. [130448] **Mr. John Smith** (Vale of Glamorgan): With more than 55 million Britons taking flights abroad each year, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is wholly unacceptable that airlines in this day and age have no legal liability whatsoever for the health or well-being of their passengers? Will he undertake to look into this?

The Prime Minister: We are supporting the research into deep vein thrombosis that is being carried out by the World Health Organisation. I also say to my hon. Friend that the United Kingdom will ratify the Montreal convention when all 15 members states of the European Union are in a position to do so simultaneously. At the moment, that is not the case, but I hope that it will be. Obviously, the next steps on this will be informed by the research that is being undertaken by the WHO.

Q13. [130449] **Bob Russell** (Colchester): What does the Prime Minister think will give him the most concern on

Friday as he looks at the collapse of the Labour vote in Brent—the fact that Labour supporters no longer trust him or the fact that traditional Labour supporters no longer have any faith in new Labour?

The Prime Minister: If I may give the hon. Gentleman some advice, it would be as well to wait for the verdict of the electorate before the Liberal Democrats presume it. From what I can make out, one of the key issues in this by-election is antisocial behaviour. The Liberal Democrats have been putting out leaflets saying how serious they are about tackling it. However, when legislation was before the House to give the police the powers to tackle antisocial behaviour, the Liberal Democrats voted en masse against it. I thank the hon. Gentleman for the opportunity to tell people that.

Q14. [130450] **Mr. Stephen Pound** (Ealing, North): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware that the High Hedges (No. 2) Bill died a "mute, inglorious" death a few weeks ago on the Floor of this very Chamber. This Bill, which was piloted with great skill, ability and intelligence through the upper House by my colleague, Baroness Gardner of Parkes, and by a rather less distinguished parliamentarian in this House, deserves a second chance. Will my right hon. Friend give the High Hedges (No. 2) Bill the chance to rise again—even though that will cause some pain to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope)?

The Prime Minister: Well, it says—I understand the disappointment of my hon. Friend that his Bill did not make better progress, but the Government have had a long-standing commitment since August 2000 to bring forward new laws to give local authorities in England and Wales powers to determine complaints about high garden hedges and will make every effort to get them on to the statute book at the earliest opportunity. I cannot say better than that.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): In three weeks' time, the Prime Minister's tenure in Downing street will exactly match that of John Major. Does he not think that enough is enough?

The Prime Minister: One of the things that we did on coming to office was to deliver devolution in Scotland. After devolution in Scotland, the nationalists in Scotland had their worst election result. May I also point out to the hon. Gentleman that, since 1997, it is not me who has retired from leadership?

Q15. [130451] **Jim Dobbin** (Heywood and Middleton): May I tell my right hon. Friend that a constituent of mine, Mr. Maurice Jones, who was a company director of Lister Yarns and worked for the company for 42 years, retired recently with little or no pension after the scheme collapsed? Can the Prime Minister offer a ray of hope to Mr. Jones and the 20,000 other pensioners in the same situation that retrospective compensation may be looked at? Surely it is a wrong that needs correcting.

The Prime Minister: I will certainly bear in mind the point that my hon. Friend makes. He will know that the pensions protection fund that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions announced recently is precisely to deal with that situation so that we have insurance underpinning people whose pension schemes collapse. I will look into the issue that my hon. Friend raises very carefully.

WTO Ministerial Conference

12.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the fifth World Trade Organisation ministerial conference in Cancun from 10 to 14 September, which I attended together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my noble Friend the Secretary of State for International Development and my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade and Investment. Commissioners Lamy and Fischler negotiated on behalf of the European Union.

The UK delegation included my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman), who represented the Select Committee on International Development, as well as representatives of the CBI, the TUC, the Consumers Association and the UK Trade Network. I warmly welcome their participation and thank them for their work.

The conference was attended by delegates from all 146 members of the World Trade Organisation, accompanied by many thousands of parliamentarians and civil society organisations as observers. On the opening day, we welcomed the accession of Cambodia and Nepal.

The British delegation worked hard to help to secure an outcome that would meet the needs of developing countries. Ministerial colleagues and I met a large number of representatives from those countries, and we ensured that their views were reflected when we met the United States and EU colleagues and others.

The conference was the WTO's opportunity to restore momentum to the Doha development round, which was launched with such high hopes in November 2001. It is with great regret that I must report that we were unable to reach an agreement. Talks broke down on the final day.

Before the talks ended, however, Commissioner Lamy, on behalf of the European Union, offered to abandon completely negotiations on two of the so-called Singapore issues—investment and competition—which was a position that the British Government fully supported. Many other WTO members also signalled a willingness to be flexible on various issues. With more time, I believe that it would have been possible to reach agreement.

Failure to reach agreement at Cancun is a serious setback for the Doha round, but it is not the end of the round or the WTO itself. In anticipation of Cancun, we had already reached agreement, which was overdue but welcome none the less, on access to medicines for developing countries. That agreement stands and must now be built on, especially through the global fund to fight HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

In June, the Agriculture Council of the EU agreed significant reforms of the common agricultural policy. The reforms will mean substantial cuts in the trade-distorting support and export subsidies that we give to our own farmers, which do so much damage to farmers in the developing world. The EU has already offered, in principle, to phase out export subsidies on products of particular interest to developing countries. The agreement on CAP reform was, of course, not conditional on agreement at Cancun.

We also saw at Cancun the formation of the G21 and other strengthened developing country groupings. I wholeheartedly welcome the emergence of this stronger voice for poorer nations. Indeed, the Government have led the way on helping developing countries to build their negotiating capacity. We have given £110 million to trade-related capacity building and technical assistance since 1998 and an additional £50 million was announced by the Secretary of State for International Development last week. Furthermore, at Cancun itself we made real progress in discussions on agriculture and other vital issues. There is no doubt that we were closer to agreement at the end of the Cancun conference than we were at the beginning.

We now need to lift our sights once more to the prize that is on offer, particularly for developing countries, if we can get the round back on track. The Cancun conference agreed a new deadline of 15 December to try to resolve the issues that we could not sort out at Cancun. I have already spoken to the director general of the World Trade Organisation, Dr. Supachai, about how the United Kingdom can help to drive that forward.

The final ministerial statement of the conference urged that those renewed discussions be based on the concessions that delegates offered at Cancun and not on their earlier positions. In the case of the European Union, that means that we should accept that, despite our continuing commitment to encourage and to facilitate direct investment in developing countries, WTO agreements on investment and competition are off the EU's agenda.

The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank announced in Cancun a new initiative to help developing countries to overcome problems in adjusting to a more liberal trading environment. I warmly welcome that. The UK Government will make a substantial input to the design and implementation of the initiative.

In the wake of Cancun, it is, I am afraid, inevitable that more emphasis will be put on regional and bilateral trade agreements. Although those could help to promote south-south as well as north-south trade, they risk excluding many poorer countries and leaving others isolated in negotiations with far larger countries. We continue to believe that the multilateral system should be the cornerstone of world trade rules.

All WTO members now need to reflect on the lessons to be learned from Cancun and to find ways of improving processes. We also have to address the issues of substance that prevented agreement at Cancun. We shall discuss how best to make progress on all those matters with our EU partners, the European Commission and others, taking particular account of the views of developing countries.

This Government are determined to do all we can to help to deliver a development round in line with the promises that we made at Doha. All countries stand to

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gain, but the poorest stand to gain the most. That is why we support the round and will continue to work for its success.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I welcome the Secretary of State back from her sojourn in the sun and am grateful to her for making available a copy of the statement in advance of it being delivered.

The collapse of the Cancun talks is a serious setback for rich and poor countries alike. No one can take satisfaction from an outcome that threatens the timely and successful completion of the Doha round. There will be widespread dismay in Britain at the breakdown and at the absence from the Secretary of State's statement of any firm, specific proposals to overcome the difficulties that have arisen.

Reducing barriers to free trade is essential to raising living standards worldwide. If progress towards the goal of freer trade is hampered by the breakdown at Cancun, we need to understand why the talks failed. Does the Secretary of State agree that, despite the fact that the European Union went further than it has done previously in its offer to reduce agriculture subsidies, the continued existence of protectionist farm policies both in Europe and the United States remains a very big obstacle? Will she admit that claims by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that the common agricultural policy reforms agreed earlier this year would meet World Trade Organisation needs have proved to be completely wrong? Is not the truth that, within Europe, the British Government have been sidelined from agriculture policy reform discussions by France and Germany?

Will the Secretary of State also admit that, although in 2003 Britain has had a unique and historic opportunity to influence United States policy, it has failed to do so in this respect and that United States intransigence on farm subsidies remains as strong as ever? Does she recognise that these talks are not a one-way street and that developing countries must make serious efforts to tackle corruption and to provide greater transparency? Does she share my disappointment that the breakdown of the talks was apparently regarded by some of the development non-governmental organisations as a cause for celebration?

Given the importance of making progress on steps that will encourage investment in developing countries and the understandable concern of those countries about burdensome negotiations, does the Secretary of State now accept that a specific advocacy fund, as proposed by the Conservatives, would be an excellent and practical way to help developing countries and to resume progress on the Doha round? The general trade facilitation programme announced by Baroness Amos last week and referred to in the statement is no substitute. In relation to Baroness Amos, does the Secretary of State understand the concerns of my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for International Development that that important Department is no longer represented in the House of Commons by a Cabinet Minister?

Will the Secretary of State enlarge on the nature of British input in the IMF-World Bank initiative that she mentioned in her statement? Does she feel that Britain was justified in sending such a large and costly delegation to the talks? Does she now regret visiting Honduras, and one minute telling small farmers that they should be protected and the next, behind their backs, that they had no future?

Does the Secretary of State have any concerns about the way in which the talks were chaired? I share her view that their termination at a time when some people felt that avenues could still be pursued was a mistake. Does she feel that the existing arrangements in the European Union create the risk of the Commission sometimes negotiating in isolation without enough political input from member state Governments?

The world will be poorer if the Doha round fails. For the sake of men, women and children in both developed and developing countries—I share the Secretary of State's view that it is the poorest countries that stand to gain the most—Governments around the world need to work harder to overcome their differences. I trust that Britain will play its part in that process, and if the Government do so they will have our full support.

Ms Hewitt: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's assurance that we will have his full support in our efforts to get the talks back on track.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the CAP reforms that we agreed with our European colleagues, which were described by none other than Ben Gill as revolutionary.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Labour stooge.

Ms Hewitt: It is wonderful to hear the head of the National Farmers Union described as a Labour stooge.

The reforms were described as revolutionary, and nobody would have believed them possible if we had predicted them only six or eight months ago. I do not think that anyone in the House or, indeed, the NGOs should talk down the significance of the reforms for agriculture policy. They may not do everything, but they go a very long way indeed towards remove the trade-distorting subsidies that do so much damage to the developing world. Having made that enormous step forward in Europe, we are indeed entitled to expect other developed countries to match the reforms, particularly in export credits and food aid.

On the issue of transparency, one of the things that I welcomed at Cancun was the extent to which developing countries in the first two or three days of talks said how much better the process was than at Doha. Of course, it was streets ahead of where we were in Seattle. That, unfortunately, was not sustained in the final days, and it is one of the lessons that need to be learned. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that nobody should regard the breakdown of the talks as a cause for celebration, although some signs of celebration, especially among the smaller developing countries, reflected the fact that the developing countries themselves were much stronger. The dynamics and balance of power in the WTO have undoubtedly been altered.

I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman about the advocacy fund. Developing countries do not want to be given money to hire other countries' experts—they want their own people to be trained and supported so that they can negotiate more effectively. That is precisely

what we have been doing through the significant investment that I described in trade-related capacity building.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned my visit last week to Honduras, where I was able to see for myself, as I have done in other countries, the effect of abrupt market opening—in this case, 10 years ago, under pressure from the IMF, to subsidised rice imports from the United States. That abrupt market liberalisation—that opening to subsidised imports—destroyed the rice farmers of Honduras for many, many years. The rice farmers are beginning to come back into production, thanks to a change in the market rules made by the Honduran Government, underlining the importance of the discussions that we had in Cancun on special and differential treatment and different approaches for products of special concern to developing countries.

Finally, on the Department for International Development, I remind the hon. Gentleman that in the days of the Conservative Government, Baroness Chalker, who I thought was an excellent Minister for Overseas Development, was neither in this House, nor in the Cabinet. I will certainly not take lectures on international development from a member of the party that cut international aid budgets from where we had left them in 1979 to such an extent that developing countries lost out to the tune of £20 billion. We will deliver on development, and we will continue to try to deliver on fair trading rules that will benefit developing countries, as well as the rest of the world.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I welcome the Secretary of State back and suggest that she probably now appreciates the significance of the fact that in the Mayan language, I believe, the word Cancun means "snake-pit". I agree that it is genuinely bad news that the negotiations have broken down, and that those who were celebrating were being premature, if the breakdown opens the way, as it might well do, to much more unilateral and bilateral policy. That would be damaging, particularly to the weakest countries, which have little negotiating power.

I endorse the right hon. Lady's positive remarks about the ability of the developing countries to articulate their case much more forcefully and coherently. However, one of the serious misjudgments in the negotiations was the reaction of the rich countries, especially the patronising attitude of European Commissioner Fischler, for example, with his condemnatory remarks about the developing country group, and, even more, the attitude of the American Administration. The American trade negotiator revealed the protectionist and corrupt heart of the Bush Administration when he argued publicly that as President Bush could not conceivably be expected to give up subsidising his allies who own cotton plantations, developing countries in Africa should find a comparative advantage in something else.

It is not helpful for the Secretary of State to suggest, as she has been doing, albeit in quite subtle ways, that the failure of the negotiations is primarily down to the Mexican chairman or the process. Some severe miscalculations were made by the European Union, and she should be honest about those failures. Why, for example, did EU negotiators go into the negotiations with, as one of their central demands, a set of new issues for which the developing countries were clearly not prepared and for which there was little interest or enthusiasm in the investment community?

Why did the EU negotiators go into the negotiations publicly proclaiming, as Commissioner Fischler did on several occasions, that their central negotiating objectives were the interests of the 1 per cent. of the population of Europe who own large commercial farms? They failed to make it clear to the developing countries that there is a real commitment to get rid of export subsidies and production-linked subsidies and—something that was rarely mentioned—to improve market access.

Who does the right hon. Lady blame for that failure? Was it the European Union negotiators? When I criticised them in the past, she responded by saying that they, particularly Commissioner Lamy, are brilliant. Does she now reappraise her assessment or does she take the view that it was not their failure, but that the EU Ministers had a flawed mandate? If that is the case, does she not accept some responsibility for it?

In conclusion, let me turn to the future. The Secretary of State is right to put the emphasis on rescuing this disaster. What specific new liberalisation initiatives, especially in agriculture, will she and the Secretary of State for International Development seek from other member states in the next few months so that they go into the next negotiations with a much more credible position than on emerging from the last ones?

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful for a number of the points that the hon. Gentleman made. First, on the reaction to the emergence of the G21, which also caused some consternation among smaller African countries in particular, my view is that, as with much else at Cancun, there are lessons to be learned all round. All of us need to reflect on what happened at Cancun.

Secondly, in relation to cotton, the hon. Gentleman is right that there was great anger not only among the four desperately poor cotton-producing African countries, but among all the other countries that had supported them. We had also supported them with money to help them in advancing their cause. There was enormous anger about the draft text that appeared on Saturday suggesting that those countries should be helped to move out of cotton production, in which they would be competitive if they were not competing against subsidised products.

Thirdly, as I have indicated, the European Union signalled its commitment to agricultural reform and flexibility in the negotiations. However, one of the problems at Cancun was that the negotiations began so late in the day and that so many days were wasted in restatement of uncompromising and uncompromised positions.

All members of the WTO—especially the larger ones—need to take responsibility for the breakdown of the talks, and we all need to learn lessons. On the next steps, I remind the hon. Gentleman that we have only just agreed far-reaching reforms of the common agricultural policy and that, as we put them into effect, they will have a beneficial impact on developing countries. We will continue to press inside the WTO and outside for other developed countries to match the commitment that Europe has already made to admitting

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"everything but arms" and ensuring that all non-armament imports from the least-developed countries are completely free of tariffs and quotas. As I said, we will redouble our efforts to try to achieve through the WTO in Geneva the agreement that we should—and, I believe, could—have made at Cancun.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. As I am about to call Back Benchers, I say to hon. Members that supplementaries should be brief.

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): Will the Secretary of State pass on my thanks and those of other parliamentarians to the superb team of officials that we fielded in Cancun? Those of us who attended the conference were appalled at the criticisms made by certain Opposition Members, who questioned whether they should be present. Their skill and knowledge was appreciated not only by the European Commission, but by the many developing countries that sought advice from them and to which they were very helpful.

The Secretary of State mentioned the World Bank-IMF proposals that were announced on the first day of the conference. Will further work be done on them before 15 December, when the WTO reconvenes? What will our input be? In particular, work is being proposed for developing countries that reduce their tariff barriers and subsequently face budget deficits. The World Bank and IMF may be able to help significantly in that regard—for instance, in ensuring that the millennium development goals are not harmed by such reductions in tariff barriers.

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks about our officials, who have done outstanding work not only at Cancun, but at Doha and since.

On the World Bank and the IMF, my noble Friend the Secretary of State for International Development and I will meet shortly to see how we can most effectively support the initiative that he mentioned. For example, we need to find much better ways to help the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries as they face the erosion of their preferences that will come from a more liberal trade environment. We need to deal with the issue of possible loss of revenues from import tariffs, at least in the short term. That can all be achieved by a convergence between the WTO and the international financial institutions so that trade liberalisation, instead of devastating some of the poorest producers as it did in Honduras, can become an effective way of achieving more rapid development.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): The Secretary of State will recall that, in November 2001, I urged that we retain the linkage between investment, competition and new issues and trade liberalisation. I regret the loss of that linkage. If it is taken off the agenda, it will be developing countries that lose the most in the longer term, because of the benefits of inward foreign direct investment. We can see those benefits even in the United Kingdom in terms of additional productivity growth. Will she at least give an assurance that we will continue to press hard through capacity building to try to encourage developing countries to build up the capacity to enter into those new issues as soon as possible?

Ms Hewitt: As I made clear in my statement, increasing foreign direct investment into developing countries is essential. The problem that arose was that developing countries did not feel able to participate in negotiations on those issues, given everything else that was going on. On trade facilitation—one of the other Singapore issues—there was general agreement that it was valuable to developing countries to make progress. If and when we secure agreement on the next stage of the Doha round, I hope that we will start negotiations on trade facilitation. However, we will pursue by other means the issue of supporting developing countries in getting the investment that they need, rather than by seeking to add to the negotiating agenda in the Doha round.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): It is encouraging to hear my right hon. Friend say that this is not the end of the round and that we must press forward. Will she assure us, however, that the new issues, as they are now becoming known, will not be pushed on to the table in Geneva by our Government or the EU, so that there can be some positive progress on the agenda?

Ms Hewitt: I have already made the position clear: in line with the ministerial declaration made at Cancun, I anticipate that the European Union will no longer seek to press for negotiations on investment and competition. We will continue to support countries in other ways in getting the investment that they need, but not through those negotiations.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): As one of those who was at Cancun, may I endorse the remarks made by the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) about the professionalism of UK officials and the contribution that they made?

When the Secretary of State gave evidence to the Select Committee on International Development, she said, with some perspicacity:

> "If we do not get progress on agricultural market access and agricultural export subsidies we will not get a round."

We did not and have not done so. The Doha declaration states that we need to place the needs and interests of developing countries at the heart of WTO negotiations. Between now and the end of the round, how does she believe that the needs and interests of developing countries will be put at the heart of the WTO process?

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his compliments to the officials.

We never got into the detailed discussions on agriculture that should have taken place at Cancun, although positions were already starting to shift. Indeed, the Trade Minister of one of the major developing countries, a member of the G21, told me and, I understand, the chairman that, with a further five or six hours of discussions on agriculture, he believed that an agreement would have been reached. That is what we now have to strive towards in the talks at

Geneva, as well as agreement on industrial market access and special and differential treatment. That cannot simply be left to the ambassadors in Geneva; it will require the wholehearted support of Ministers, and I will certainly give such support.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Was my right hon. Friend able to raise at Cancun the issue of steel tariffs, which are having a very serious effect on the special and stainless steel sectors in south Yorkshire?

Ms Hewitt: I did indeed take the opportunity to raise the issue of unlawful steel tariffs with Ambassador Zoellick. I urged on him the need for the US Administration to use the mid-term review of the tariffs, to which they are committed, to withdraw them in line with the WTO judgment that has already been given. Although he made no commitment—my hon. Friend will not be surprised to hear that—he indicated that the Administration would be considering their position very seriously in the mid-term review.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): Does the Secretary of State agree that the most significant development at Cancun was the emergence of the G21 nations—a bunch of nations that are no longer prepared to be fobbed off, fought off or picked off? Rather than being the rebellion of the midgets, as suggested by some western Governments, is this not the rebellion of the up-and-coming nations—the economies of tomorrow? Will she pledge to meet those nations and take the opportunity to address their agenda? Most important of all, will she ensure that the British Government are part of the solution, not part of the problem?

Ms Hewitt: As I said earlier, the emergence of the G21 and other groups of developing countries has transformed the dynamic and the balance of power in the WTO. I wholeheartedly welcome that, although we must not make the mistake of thinking that the G21 countries speak for the whole developing world, which they clearly do not. Some commentators made that mistake initially.

These countries are enormously important. They form the largest group of countries in the developing world, and include the fastest-growing. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that, for many months as well as in the past few days, I have had a number of telephone conversations with the Trade Ministers of Brazil, South Africa, India, Pakistan and China.

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): I, too, welcome the birth of the new, assertive developing-world groups, which I am sure we will see as a positive move when we look back on the conference.

Will my right hon. Friend enlarge on her comments in Honduras, quoted in the *Financial Times* on Saturday? She said:

"part of the development path for any country is to move people out of small-scale subsistence farming into larger-scale production or industrial production".

That, I think, has considerable ramifications for agricultural production in the developing world, especially in the context of employment, the environment and subsidies.

Ms Hewitt: One of the greatest challenges to all the developing countries is the appalling poverty in which small-scale subsistence farmers live. Helping them to move out of that poverty is central to the achievement of the millennium goals.

When I was in Honduras I was able to discuss the issue with the Minister for Technical Co-operation, who is effectively responsible for social inclusion programmes. She made precisely the same point that I had made: that over time, with effective Government and NGO support, small-scale farmers who are struggling to live on less than $1 a day, scratching a living from a hectare or so of land, can move into larger co-operatives and gain some market power. Eventually more will move into larger-scale production, or indeed into other sectors of the economy. That is the development path followed by the rich countries, and we should not seek to deny it to the desperately poor countries of today's world.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): As the Secretary of State will know, those of our constituents who take an interest in these matters are strongly influenced by the many committed, dedicated NGOs that operate in the area. When one or two of them gave evidence to the International Development Committee on the Doha round, some of us felt concerned about the gap between their perception of what the round would be able to achieve for developing countries and the view expressed by the Secretary of State today, which a number of us share.

Bearing in mind the NGOs' influence on our constituents, is the right hon. Lady planning any initiatives to get closer to them and to ensure that they are given a rather different picture of a complicated issue which, if over-simplified, may give rise to a very clear sense of right and wrong that may not always be accurate?

Ms Hewitt: I pay tribute to the excellent work that many NGOs do in developing countries. I was with Christian Aid when I visited Honduras.

We regularly meet NGOs, particularly in the trade justice network. We all meet them in our constituencies, but, along with my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade and Investment, I do so regularly on behalf of the Government. In Cancun, we had six meetings with the UK NGOs that were there.

Throughout our discussions before and during Cancun, we have tried to ensure that as far as possible we share an analysis of the potential gains for developing countries from a successful Doha round. On some issues, notably trade in services—as the hon. Gentleman and others will know full well—I simply do not accept the statements made by one or two NGOs, which we have sought repeatedly to rebut and disprove; but I am afraid that that is in the nature of those NGOs. We will continue to work with them, because the support and pressure from the Trade Justice Movement is entirely welcome. I wish that it were replicated in other parts of Europe and other parts of the developed world.

Denzil Davies (Llanelli): Is it not less than satisfactory for negotiations with 15 individual European Union member states to be headed and conducted by, in effect, a single European Union civil servant? Given that from next May there will be 25 member states, should we not

[Denzil Davies]

look at the arrangements again? Should not member states that wish to do so be able to conduct their own negotiations, headed by democratically elected Ministers accountable to democratically elected Parliaments?

Ms Hewitt: The European Union is, of course, a single trading community. There would be havoc if individual countries tried to secure different agreements on some of the highly technical matters with which we deal in the WTO. I shall not name any states in particular, but I think that my right hon. Friend can conclude for himself that such an arrangement might not be entirely helpful in the case of matters relating to agricultural subsidies.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): If we were really five or six hours away from an agreement on agriculture, the break-up of the talks is inexplicable. The Secretary of State was right to point to the danger of allowing bilateral trade agreements to take over from multilateral agreements. The principal protagonist in that is the United States, an example being the proposed all-Americas trade agreement. What influence can the United Kingdom exert on President Bush to emphasise the primacy of a rules-based multinational approach to trade? As we approach the expiry of the peace clause, is there not a danger of a spate of extremely angry and violent disputes in the WTO, which would make the situation worse?

Ms Hewitt: The right hon. Gentleman draws attention to an important issue: the expiry of the peace clause at the end of December. It is curious that no one mentioned the peace clause at Cancun. Following its expiry, all the trade-distorting agricultural arrangements could be subject to trade disputes in the WTO settlement procedure. That may prove to be the most powerful lever available to all of us who want the round to make progress, ensuring that everyone returns to the negotiating table and proceeds on the basis of the compromises that were beginning to emerge at Cancun.

Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the genuinely intelligent and enlightened view that she has expressed today was not, unfortunately, reflected in the EU's negotiating position? She deserves no discredit for that—and the same applies to the position of the United States.

If we are to return to the Doha commitment that the rich world will listen properly to the developing world, will my right hon. Friend pledge to convey that message to our colleagues in the EU? Will she tell them that we must listen to the developing world, as we did not in the case of the Singapore issues and the negotiating mandate for Pascal Lamy in Cancun?

Ms Hewitt: Both the European Union and the United States played an important role in launching the Doha round nearly two years ago. My hon. Friend is right: if we are to make progress on this round, we must listen to the increasingly powerful voice of the developing countries. We must deliver on the promises that we made at Doha—and that is precisely the message that I shall reinforce in all my discussions with European and other developed-world colleagues.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Secretary of State will be aware that many supporters of the Trade Justice Movement in the United Kingdom share her disappointment. However, I welcome her announcement that there has been movement in terms of aid going in to tackle the HIV pandemic. Bearing in mind the failure of others to implement the wiping out of debt that we have pursued, does she foresee any problems in implementing the decision on the AIDS pandemic? Will any countries resile from it?

Ms Hewitt: The agreement that we reached on intellectual property and access to medicines was in no way conditional on agreement at Cancun, so it stands and will now be implemented. Indeed, the general council of the WTO endorsed it before we arrived at Cancun. Of course, dealing with the issue of intellectual property is only part of the picture; we also have to ensure that Governments of developing countries can actually afford to buy the drugs, even when they are manufactured under compulsory licence. This Government have already committed more than £1.5 billion to support the strengthening of health care systems in developing countries, and we have pledged an additional $80 million to the global fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): In negotiating these trade issues, will the Secretary of State pay attention to the particular concerns of the Caribbean and other small island states? A completely free market in sugar and bananas would clearly be good for some of the very poorest countries in the world, but it would be unfortunate if that benefit were achieved at the expense of the Caribbean, a region in which 1 million British citizens still have very close family ties.

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. Indeed, my noble Friend the Secretary of State for International Development spent a great deal of time at Cancun, and previously, talking to representatives of the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries about the impact on them of trade liberalisation—in sugar, in particular. In the next month or so, we are expecting proposals from the European Commission on reform of the sugar regime, and the interests of the ACP countries is one issue that we will bear in mind as we seek to conclude reform of our wholly unjustified sugar subsidies. It surely makes no sense for the European Union to be putting so much subsidy into sugar that Finland is a major sugar beet producer. This has to stop.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Does the Secretary of State accept that those of us who were in Cancun saw the huge steps that the European Union has taken to reform the common agricultural policy, and that we respected the way in which Commissioner Lamy put the case on our behalf? Does she also accept that the attitude of the United States on cotton and in terms of refusing to go back beyond the Farm Bill makes it very

difficult for the rest of the world to believe that the Bush Administration are really interested in multilateral trade agreement? Will she bring home to that Administration that until they stop subsidising a $3 billion crop of cotton with $4 billion of subsidy, it will be impossible to take their position seriously?

Ms Hewitt: I agree entirely with what the right hon. Gentleman says about cotton. As I said earlier, US subsidies are having a devastating effect on some of the poorest African countries. Through direct discussions with our American colleagues and through the European Union, we will continue to call for the United States—and other developed countries—to match the steps on reform of agricultural subsidies that we are taking here in Europe.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Although the news is depressing overall, it is not fair simply to say that the outcome was depressing; surely we must also consider the process. Will my right hon. Friend look at ways in which the WTO itself can be further reformed, so that developing countries can have more of a direct voice? If nothing else, they should be able to speak for themselves, rather than having others arrogating decisions on their behalf.

Ms Hewitt: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend's comments, and we will certainly look at how we can help to continue to improve WTO processes. As I said, they were better this time than at Doha or Seattle, and a number of developing country Governments welcomed that fact. We must also recognise that a very real change has taken place in terms of the strength with which developing countries speak for themselves inside the WTO. We in the United Kingdom have helped that process along through our capacity-building measures, which have been hugely important. We will continue to do that, and I hope that we do not hear again from parts of the anti-globalisation movement that the WTO is somehow trampling over the interests of developing countries, which in fact constitute the majority of WTO members and are increasingly powerful within it—a fact that all of us should welcome.

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): What practical steps can the Secretary of State take to convince the poorest developing countries that what is in our interests is also in theirs? I welcome what she says about high tariffs on sugar, but will she also extend the idea to dairy products? We may see the negotiations as a failure, but for the poorest nations this is a matter of life and death.

Ms Hewitt: I have said repeatedly that the developed world is not going to convince developing countries of our good intentions if we preach and impose liberalisation abroad but practise protectionism at home. That is why the reforms that we secured at the Agriculture Council in June are of such enormous importance. They may not represent everything that we—and some others—wanted, but they are a very significant step forward. Part of our task is to continue to discuss with developing countries the benefits that can come to them as we implement those reforms.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does the Secretary of State recognise that the very welcome development of the group of 21 has forced the de-linking of farm subsidies from investments? Will she use the gap between now and December to ensure that the United States addresses the issue of its huge farm subsidies and dumping of products, which are killing the livelihoods of many third-world farmers, and that we respect the independence of third-world nations? They want investment to be made not solely on the terms of the wealthy in west—to ensure the return of 100 per cent. of their profits to western interests—but in the light of the needs of poor people in the poorest countries.

Ms Hewitt: I pointed out earlier the damage that food aid and export credits, as well as export subsidies, do to farmers in the developing world. One of the arguments that we made—albeit unsuccessfully—for a WTO agreement on investment was that from the point of view of developing countries, multilateral rules on investment would be preferable to their having to negotiate bilateral agreements with the USA or other major players. Such agreements generally include far more stringent requirements on investment, which can prove very problematic for some developing countries.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): It is disappointing that no Minister from the Department for International Development has bothered to turn up for this statement.

Does the Secretary of State really believe, given all that we have heard, that the political will exists in the developed world to undertake the level of dismantling of protectionist structures—in agriculture, for example—necessary to create a truly fair trade system for the developed and developing worlds?

Ms Hewitt: I have no doubt at all that the will is there within Europe. As I said, the CAP reforms that we agreed in June are a very significant step forward. We must to continue to work with, but also challenge, colleagues in other parts of the developed world, so that they step up to the mark themselves. If we do not, and as Cancun made clear, the developing countries—particularly the larger ones, to whose markets we also want access—will simply not agree. They must see far greater and more immediate gains for themselves in this round than occurred in the Uruguay round.

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): Is not direct investment in the developing world the right type of investment, because it does not destroy capacity and prevent companies from emerging within those countries? Otherwise, such companies leave and end up in a worse position than when the richer countries made the initial investment.

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes an important point, but in opening their markets to foreign direct investment, let us not forget that the Governments of developing countries retain the right and the responsibility to put in place whatever framework they want for investment in order to protect the local environment, social standards and so forth. That is an issue to which the World Bank and the IMF should also pay attention.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): I welcome the Government's commitment to assisting poorly developed countries, but does the Secretary of State share my disappointment that only two of the poorer countries—Cambodia and Nepal—have actually acceded to the WTO? How many under-developed countries remain outside, and what special efforts are being made to help them join?

Ms Hewitt: It is important for the least developed countries to make their own judgment about the point at which they join the WTO and accept the responsibilities as well as the benefits of membership. In common with the hon. Gentleman, I warmly welcome the accession of Cambodia and Nepal. In the EU, we have sought to conclude agreements that will be of special benefit to the least developed countries. Partly as a result of the everything but arms initiative, to which I referred earlier, the EU is now—I think by a long chalk—the largest importer in the entire developed world of agricultural and other products from the least developed countries, and we want to see that increase still further.

Ann McKechin (Glasgow, Maryhill): I thank my right hon. Friend for her commitment to making further progress in the talks, and I welcome in particular her comments on investment and competition issues. Having been in Cancun, I know how hard she and her officials worked for a successful outcome, and I share her disappointment at the failure to achieve it. Does she agree that the EU and the US need to reflect on the failure to meet prior deadlines in negotiations regarding both special and differential treatment, which particularly affects the poorest countries in the world, and also on the failure to deal with issues of implementation? If we are to follow the spirit of the Doha agenda, we must now recommit to those issues and make substantial offers.

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Since we launched the Doha round, we have unfortunately missed every deadline in the trade negotiations, so she is right that we must redouble our efforts and make offers that will enable us to secure agreements.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): I, too, welcome the Secretary of State's renewed commitment to multilateralism, but does she agree that the WTO as an organisation now faces a massive challenge, with the US vigorously pursuing bilateral and regional agreements and with Commissioner Lamy being reported today as questioning the EU's commitment to multilateralism? What specific steps need to be taken to get the Doha round back on track? Given that she said in her statement that we need to find ways of improving processes, does she have any specific proposals for reforming the WTO?

Ms Hewitt: I said that I thought we all needed to reflect on what went wrong at Cancun, and I propose to reflect for a little longer than 48 hours. However, I have already said that we will discuss through the Council of Ministers the approach that the EU should take and how to strengthen the multilateral system. Nothing that I have heard from Commissioner Lamy suggests that the Commission wants to weaken the multilateral trading system. We will discuss it with colleagues in the Council of Ministers and work, as I said, with the WTO secretariat to help ensure that the EU itself and other countries work in Geneva on the basis of the compromises that we were beginning to reach in Cancun and the offers made there. We want to avoid everyone falling back into their own positions or simply giving up on the WTO and going off into bilateral agreements.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): While commending the energy and moral commitment of my right hon. Friend and her team, and wishing her the very best for future rounds of negotiations, may I express a certain disquiet at her response to my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Rothwell (Mr. Challen)? She seemed to commend industrialised agriculture over small-scale producers. Such agricultural mega-businesses not only profit from very intense subsidies but benefit from the depression of oil prices, which makes fertiliser and the transport of agricultural produce cheaper, and they often avoid having to pay for the environmental damage that they cause. We need to take a different approach to such businesses, and I hope that my right hon. Friend will think seriously about the future of smaller-scale production, which could bring about a more realisable and sustainable agriculture for many of the world's developing countries.

Ms Hewitt: I entirely share my hon. Friend's commitment to sustainable agriculture, whether in Europe or in developing countries. I am sure that he would share my commitment to ensuring that small-scale subsistence farmers are not left in the poverty that now afflicts them. One of the ways forward is to ensure, through measures for special and differential treatment and for special products, that Governments in developing countries have the policies base on which to ensure that vulnerable producers in rural communities are properly supported and protected. That also needs to be taken into account by the World Bank and the IMF.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): A major way in which the poverty-stricken in this country advanced their lot against the filthy rich was obtaining the vote on an equal basis. Is not that type of pattern within the WTO something that is necessary if we want to secure wider membership and the type of agreements that will be beneficial to the third world?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend is, of course, right about the importance of democracy, but let us not forget that the WTO is itself based on the principle of one country, one vote. That is why the developing countries have such a strong voice within it.

BILL PRESENTED

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY AND LOCAL ELECTIONS (PILOTS)

Mr. Christopher Leslie presented a Bill to make provision for piloting in certain regions different methods of voting at the European Parliamentary general election in 2004 and at certain local elections held at the same time; and to enable consequential alterations to be made to voting procedures at local elections. And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow; and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed [Bill 160].

Stray Animals

1.27 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for stray animals and for their ownership; and for connected purposes.

In all our constituencies, as we walk up and down the streets visiting people, we often see pinned to trees notices advertising various animals that have been lost and found. I wonder whether the House has any idea that re-homing animals is in no sense a straightforward matter. Sadly, we live in an increasingly litigious society. Not a week goes by without a new story of individuals suing someone for what most right-thinking people would regard as trivial or malicious reasons. Although one would not think so, that happens even in the world of animal welfare and care. Unfortunately, the excellent work that individuals and organisations such as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals undertake in re-homing stray animals is threatened by the lack of legal certainty in this area.

The Bill that I seek to persuade the House to accept would clear up the anomalies and introduce some common sense into an area of law that has been neglected for too long. In moving the Bill, I hope to achieve two clear objectives. First, the Bill would assist individuals and organisations to re-home animals more quickly, thereby improving animal welfare. Secondly, it would update our nation's legislation and raise it to the standard enjoyed by many other modern democracies.

Under the current position, literally thousands of individuals, along with large and small charities, regularly re-home stray animals—and I join all hon. Members in paying tribute to those people. In very many cases, the animal is reunited with its owner. Just as often, a new owner is found and the animal goes off to a new, loving home—a happy ending in all senses. That frees up space in the re-homing centre for more strays to be taken in. However—and this is where our law is insufficient—those hard-working individuals have to go to inordinate lengths to prove that they have sought to identify the original owner. If they do not, there is currently no defence to any future civil action by a person claiming to be the owner of the animal.

I recently spoke to a senior RSPCA inspector from the east of England who told me that all too often he and his colleagues get stuck in the middle when owners seek to reclaim animals they believe to be theirs. Only last week, he had to mediate between an aggressive individual trying to take back a cat more than a month after it had been re-homed. Along with all the other excellent work the RSPCA inspectorate undertakes, we should not expect it to have the wisdom of Solomon.

My Bill would strike a balance between trying to reunite an animal with its owner and dealing with animals efficiently, so that capacity is available for more stray animals to be re-homed. Fortunately, there is an excellent precedent that proves that such a change is not just possible in theory, but actually works in practice. It is the New Zealand Animal Welfare Act 1999, and I hope that the Government will study it closely.

[Mr. David Amess]

In New Zealand, a section of the 1999 Act deals exclusively with the "disposal" of animals in custody. It states:

"Where a person (other than the owner of an animal) gives that animal into the custody of an approved organisation and that approved organisation accepts custody of that animal, or where an approved organisation takes any animal into its custody, that approved organisation . . . Must take reasonable steps to identify the owner of the animal; and . . . May take such steps as it considers necessary or desirable to prevent or mitigate any suffering of the animal."

Furthermore, it states:

"Where the approved organisation cannot identify the owner of the animal, an inspector or auxiliary officer acting for the approved organisation may . . . After the animal has been in the custody of the organisation for at least 7 days . . . Sell the animal; or . . . Find a home for the animal; or . . . Destroy or otherwise dispose of the animal in such manner as the inspector or auxiliary officer thinks fit."

The Act also states that if the organisation or individual has made every effort to locate the owner, it may then re-home the animal, without fear that the original owner, at some point in the future, can come and claim their animal. That may seem harsh, but it is a practical solution according to all the advice that I have been given.

The effect of such a change would be that more stray animals could be re-homed more quickly, and more animals could be received into re-homing centres. That would lead to a decrease in the number of animals that tragically have to be destroyed through lack of space. It would also certainly lead to a saving in time and money for animal centres that encounter the problem. We should not forget that many of those wonderful homes depend on charitable giving. People who give money do not want it to disappear into the bottomless pit of litigation.

I understand that some people may be concerned by the Bill and may say that seven days is too short a period before strays can be re-homed. However, the provision is in line with the local authority obligation created in respect of stray dogs by the Environmental Protection Act 1991. Some may be of the view that 14 days might be appropriate to allow for owners who are away on holiday when their animal is found. I say loud and clear that anyone who owns a pet should be responsible in how they care for it. Responsible pet ownership dictates that proper arrangements should be made for pets while people go away on holiday, so that the animals do not stray. Those left in charge should be responsible enough to carry out all reasonable efforts to find the animal, in the event that it does stray.

I am grateful for the support that I have received for this modest measure from both sides of the House. As a result of the Bill, I hope that my phone will not ring endlessly, and that people will not visit my house, to ask me to mediate in such matters or to find homes for stray animals. I gently say to the Government, given that we do not have much time left in this Session, that I hope that I am pushing at an open door and that the Government will seek to take this modest measure forward when they finalise the arrangements for the Gracious Speech. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. David Amess, Mr. David Atkinson, Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. Keith Bradley, Mr. Ian Cawsey, Mrs. Helen Clark, Mr. David Drew, Mr. Andrew Rosindell, Bob Russell, Bob Spink, Angela Watkinson and Miss Ann Widdecombe.

Stray Animals

Mr. Amess accordingly presented a Bill to make provision for stray animals and for their ownership; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 21 November, and to be printed [Bill 161].

Northern Ireland (Monitoring Commission etc.) Bill (Allocation of Time)

1.37 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): I beg to move,

That the following provisions shall apply to the proceedings on the Northern Ireland (Monitoring Commission etc.) Bill [*Lords*]—

Timetable

1. Proceedings on Second Reading, in Committee, on consideration and on Third Reading shall be completed at this day's sitting and shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, nine hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.

Timing of proceedings and Questions to be put

2. When the Bill has been read a second time—

(a) it shall, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of bills), stand committed to a Committee of the whole House without any Question being put;

(b) proceedings on the Bill shall stand postponed while the Question is put, in accordance with paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 52 (Money resolutions, and Ways and Means resolutions, in connection with bills), on any financial resolutions relating to the Bill;

(c) on the conclusion of proceedings on any financial resolutions relating to the Bill, proceedings on the Bill shall be resumed and the Speaker shall leave the Chair whether or not notice of an Instruction has been given.

3. On the conclusion of proceedings in Committee the Chairman shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question and, if the Bill is reported with amendments, the House shall proceed to consider the Bill as amended without any Question being put.

4. For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph 1 the Speaker or Chairman shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed;

(c) the Question on any amendment moved, or Motion made, by a Minister of the Crown;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded.

5. On a Motion so made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chairman or Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

Subsequent stages

6.—(1) Any further Message from the Lords on the Bill shall be considered forthwith without any Question being put.

(2) Proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

7.—(1) This paragraph applies for the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph 6.

(2) The Speaker shall first put forthwith any Question which has already been proposed from the Chair and not yet decided.

(3) The Speaker shall then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown which is related to the Question already proposed from the Chair.

(4) The Speaker shall then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown on, or relevant to, any of the remaining items in the Lords Message.

(5) The Speaker shall then put forthwith the Question, That this House agrees with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Proposals.

Reasons Committee

8.—(1) The Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the appointment, nomination and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons in relation to the Bill and the appointment of its Chairman.

(2) A Committee appointed to draw up Reasons shall report before the conclusion of the sitting at which it is appointed.

(3) Proceedings in the Committee shall, if not previously brought to a conclusion, be brought to a conclusion 30 minutes after their commencement.

(4) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with sub-paragraph (3) the Chairman shall—

(a) first put forthwith any Question which has been proposed from the Chair but not yet decided, and

(b) then put forthwith successively Questions on motions which may be made by a Minister of the Crown for assigning a Reason for disagreeing with the Lords in any of their Amendments.

(5) The proceedings of the Committee shall be reported without any further Question being put.

Miscellaneous

9. Paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business) shall apply to any proceedings to which this Order applies.

10. The proceedings on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 15 shall apply to those proceedings.

11. Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee) shall not apply in relation to any proceedings to which this Order applies.

12. No Motion shall be made to alter the order in which any proceedings on the Bill are taken or to re-commit the Bill.

13. No dilatory Motion shall be made in relation to proceedings to which this Order applies except by a Minister of the Crown; and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

14.—(1) This paragraph applies if—

(a) a Motion for the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 24 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) has been stood over to Four o'clock, Three o'clock or Seven o'clock (as the case may be), but

(b) proceedings to which this Order applies have begun before then.

(2) Proceedings on that Motion shall stand postponed until the conclusion of those proceedings.

15. If the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before the conclusion of any proceedings to which this Order applies, no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

16. Proceedings to which this Order applies shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

I would like to take this opportunity to explain to the House the urgency with which the Government seek to progress this Bill, and why it is necessary to take the Bill through all its stages in this House today. It would not be appropriate to dwell in detail on the broader context in the debate on this timetable motion. Members will have an opportunity to debate the Government's analysis, and their policy, more fully on Second Reading, and I intend to address those issues in my speech in that debate. However, I should like to say a few short words now about the context to explain clearly why the Government consider that the Bill before the House today merits urgent consideration.

On 1 May this year, the Government published a series of proposals for the full implementation of the Good Friday agreement and the restoration of the

[Mr. Paul Murphy]

devolved institutions on a stable and inclusive basis. Those had been drawn up in the light of our earlier discussions with the Irish Government and political parties at Hillsborough. As the House well knows, we were unable to proceed with the implementation of all those proposals in the absence of satisfactory commitments on an end to paramilitary activity.

We have proceeded, with the Irish Government, to take forward certain elements of those proposals as a contribution to building trust and confidence, and the Taoiseach and Prime Minister, on 2 July, reaffirmed the importance of that commitment.

Among those proposals that we have committed to implement is the agreement between the two Governments on monitoring and compliance. In that text, we undertook to establish an independent body to monitor commitments given regarding the implementation of the Good Friday agreement and the restoration of stable institutions. The Government also undertook to seek to amend the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to broaden the range of measures available to the Northern Ireland Assembly, and ultimately to the British Government, to respond to the commission's recommendations.

Of course, those are complex proposals, in a completely new field. They required a good deal of working up. Apart from which, the practical side of setting up the commission also required a good deal of work—in particular in the search for people of the highest ability and authority to become members of the commission. I am happy to say that I believe we were successful in that search. The result of this was that it was not possible to bring forward our plans before the summer.

We all recognise the urgency now of early political advance in Northern Ireland. As I shall outline in my speech on Second Reading, it is our ambition as a Government, quite as much it is everybody else's, that there should be elections at the earliest possible stage to the Northern Ireland Assembly, and also that they should be successful elections, in the sense that they will carry with them a real prospect of a return to devolved Government.

Mr. John Taylor (Solihull): Last Tuesday—eight days ago—in the Committee Corridor, an Order in Council was treated as a statutory instrument. The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the right hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Jane Kennedy), offered the Committee a lengthy litany of things that would need to be done by way of acts of completion prior to elections being held. Will the Secretary of State say—either now or later today, after a period of reflection—whether the litany offered to the Committee must be thoroughly and entirely discharged before there can be elections?

Mr. Murphy: I shall talk to my right hon. Friend during the course of the debate so that I can answer the hon. Gentleman more fully on that point, but I am assured that she said that getting acts of completion from the IRA was an important part of getting all the institutions involved—of which the Assembly is only one—up and running. That has been made clear for months and months. Assembly elections were not held because we knew that the Executive—the Government of Northern Ireland—could not be active unless there was trust and confidence between the parties involved. That trust can be established on the basis of acts of completion.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): I do not want to turn this debate into a Question Time about Northern Ireland, but does the Secretary of State accept that the postponement of the elections in itself has become a barrier to achieving the acts of completion and the normalisation of the political process that we all want?

Mr. Murphy: I have no doubt that the issue of the elections is hugely important. I shall return to it in the debate on Second Reading, but I fear that I would be stretching the patience of Mr. Deputy Speaker if I did not stick to the timetable motion before the House.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): Perhaps it would be helpful to those of us from Northern Ireland if the Secretary of State were to inform the House, at an early stage in the debate, whether the Government were minded to accept the amendment on this matter agreed in the Lords in the past few days.

Mr. Murphy: We will come to the relevant clause later in the debate, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the Government do not intend to send that amendment back to the other place. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State will deal with that particular clause later, and will refer to that matter.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Will my right hon. Friend answer a timetable point? Although everyone agrees that there is a need for urgency in this matter, I am waiting with bated breath for his explanation of why it all has to be dispatched in one parliamentary day. If there is no Committee stage—as was the case with the previous legislation piloted through the House by the Secretary of State—will that mean, ipso facto, that that Lords amendment is accepted?

Mr. Murphy: We must wait until we get to the Committee stage to discuss the details of the amendments.

The return to devolved government requires trust and confidence in the community that departures from the fundamental values of the agreement—including, crucially, the definitive ending of paramilitary activity—will be addressed with determination. In that regard, we believe that the independent monitoring commission has a fundamental role.

That explains our anxiety to have the commission in place as soon as possible. Developing that confidence remains a serious challenge to all participants in the process. The sooner we can have all the arrangements in place, the sooner we can formally establish the commission. That, we believe, will be a substantial step along the road to creating the conditions for a real step forward.

The Bill will place the IMC on a proper statutory footing, and so allow it to undertake the full range of its functions as soon as possible. However, its passage

would also send an important signal that the Government are committed to taking the steps that we have outlined as essential to promoting trust and confidence. We very much hope that it will be possible for elections and a restoration of devolved government to take place as soon as possible. The passage of this Bill will help to maximise the chances of such progress in the near future.

I am aware that we have sometimes had cause to ask the House to consider legislation relating to Northern Ireland in relatively quick time. I hope that Opposition Members—and, indeed, Labour Members—will draw some comfort from the terms of today's guillotine motion, which allows us scope for nearly a full day's debate, should the House so choose.

I hope that hon. Members will agree that the compressed timetable for the Bill's passage, although always regrettable, is necessary in the circumstances, in the interest of the political advance that I believe all sides of this House wish to achieve.

1.46 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): The Opposition reject, absolutely and with passion, the Government's pattern of imposing automatic timetables on all Bills. We are not alone in that. The whole country, and anyone in the world brought up to observe democratic principles, will consider the motion deeply offensive to those principles and to the spirit of the parliamentary system.

In pragmatic terms, the motion is unnecessary. We would have been perfectly happy to discuss a reasonable timetable for the Bill with the Secretary of State. That would have allowed proper reflection between Second Reading and Committee, between Committee and Report, and then between Report and Third Reading. That is what should happen in any parliamentary system that is not being made a mockery of by an arrogant Government, but I am afraid that that is the case today.

Mr. Murphy: I think that the hon. Gentleman is rather over-egging the pudding, but does he accept that the length of time available today is, in essence, the equivalent of almost two days' debate in the House?

Mr. Davies: The right hon. Gentleman will not mind if I reveal the private conversations that we have had, as they are very much to his credit. I would not reveal anything from a private conversation that was not to his credit, or not within the spirit of that conversation. However, the agreement that we came to resulted in our getting more time than we would have got otherwise. Of course I am grateful for small mercies—for crumbs from this almighty Government's table—but that will not prevent me, or those of my colleagues who have the same problems in other departmental areas, from making genuine protests. There must be no mistake about the seriousness of our feelings about the attitude to Parliament taken by the Government since they were first elected.

I have said already that the Government's approach would be offensive to anyone of genuine democratic principle and bent. I am sure that that applies to many Labour Members too, and the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) has just expressed his view on the matter. It has nothing to do with party politics, but with the manner in which Parliament should operate. Let there be no misunderstanding of our strong feelings on the subject.

That said, the arrangement to which the Secretary of State referred means that we have more time than would normally be the case on a Wednesday, especially when a statement and other business have also been scheduled. We have been promised nine hours on the Bill and, in that spirit, I shall ask Opposition Members not to adopt our usual course of dividing the House and voting against the timetable motion, but to do everything possible to allow us to use the greatest possible proportion of the time to discuss the substance of this very important Bill.

I wish to leave one thought on the record. The Secretary of State in many ways endorsed everything that I have said. I noted his comments, and he said that the proposals in the Bill were "complex proposals in a completely new field". They are indeed, and I entirely endorse his description of the Bill. However, I hope that he appreciates that his description is the greatest possible indictment of the perfunctory way in which the Government and their Whips—not the Secretary of State personally—believe that Parliament should discharge its obligations.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: I am not going to take interventions, as I want to get on to the substance of the Bill. There should be no misunderstanding on any side of the strength of the Opposition's feelings on this very important subject, which goes to the heart of the way in which Parliament operates.

1.49 pm

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): To divide the House on the motion would compound the charade of the process before us. I welcome the fact that the Conservatives do not intend to divide since that would be a waste of our time. None the less, it would be wrong to let pass the way the Government are bouncing through a Bill in one legislative day. I listened carefully to the Secretary of State, but he did not answer my question about why we have to go through all stages in one day. He will try to imply that I and others do not understand the gravity of the situation or the need for expedition. We do, and there is no reason why the Bill must go through in one fell swoop.

The Secretary of State is making a habit of this. He behaved the same way on the legislation deferring Northern Ireland elections to such an extent that the House was denied a Committee stage. That was reprehensible, and I rather thought that even this Secretary of State might have learned that that truly offended Parliament. It may sound old-fashioned, but there are those of us who believe in this place and its job of scrutinising and probing the Executive and examining legislation. I had hoped that the Secretary of State would not repeat what he had done.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that Members from Northern Ireland have no other way to

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express their feelings on the motion than by voting on it? What is the difference between voting on this motion today and dividing the House on all the other occasions on which it has also been a charade because the Opposition know that they cannot win the vote? We must have our rights, and I regret that Members whose parties represent absolutely no seats in Northern Ireland are telling us that we are not allowed to vote against something totally obnoxious to the people of Northern Ireland.

Andrew Mackinlay: If hon. Members want to divide the House, we will have to make a decision. I sympathise with the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) because the 1 million and more people of Northern Ireland do not enjoy enough scrutiny of their legislation in this place. Much of it goes through by Order in Council and cannot be amended in the Delegated Legislation Committees that deal with those orders. When there is primary legislation, we are surely obliged to put it through the House in the proper manner, including a Committee stage that allows proper scrutiny.

All the textbooks on the British constitution say that we debate broad principles on Second Reading, and then a Bill goes to a Committee of the whole House or a Committee Upstairs to be gone through line by line. I tell students that that is complete nonsense. Governments hardly ever accept amendments, and the few that they do accept often put right their botched legislation. If I am wrong to make that charge, perhaps the Secretary of State can help me by saying whether a day has been earmarked for the House of Lords to consider any amendment that we may make to the Bill. I hope that he will say that a date has been pencilled in. That would at least demonstrate that he is in listening mode and is prepared to accept some amendments to improve the Bill.

I have referred to what happened when we discussed a previous Bill, and the House will recall that that Bill was introduced in the House of Commons and did not have a Committee stage. It was, however, thoroughly examined in the House of Lords and was, in my opinion, improved there, or at the very least amended. My fear is that tonight's Bill, having been already through the House of Lords, has arrived here, and that, come hell or high water, there is no way the Secretary of State will allow any amendment to it. That would be reprehensible, and if he thinks that I am criticising him unfairly, he might indicate that he is prepared to consider amendments and provide further time in the House of Lords to debate them.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Does the hon. Gentleman suspect that the Bill before us did not begin its passage in this House last week because it might have been improved if it had gone to the House of Lords this week?

Andrew Mackinlay: The hon. Gentleman may well be correct. In considering the charges that I am making against the Government, Members should bear it in mind that the elected House of Commons, which contains representatives from throughout Great Britain and, in particular, Northern Ireland, is being given one day for debate whereas their lordships, not one of whom has been elected by the people, had two days and an interruption over a weekend in which they had the opportunity for review and reflection and to table amendments.

It is a travesty that we are being asked to rubber-stamp the Bill today. The danger is that if we acquiesce in that by our silence, it will happen again and again. Nor will it be confined to Northern Ireland legislation; on more and more general legislation, Secretaries of State will tell us that it is of the utmost importance that Bills are passed in hours. They will tell Back Benchers, particularly those on their own side, "You're not playing the game, you're being uncomradely, you just want to make an exhibition of yourself." I know all that they say about me, but I can tell them that it will not wash. Until the people of Thurrock put me out, the Secretary of State will have to put up with me telling him that he is turning Parliament into a charade, and he can wave his hands about all he likes.

Mr. Paul Murphy: That is offensive.

Andrew Mackinlay: If the Secretary of State thinks that I am being offensive, I will be happy to give way.

I want the Secretary of State to say why it is necessary to rubber-stamp the Bill and bounce it through the House of Commons today without proper scrutiny or an opportunity for reflection. I want a Secretary of State who is prepared to listen and to accept improvements to his legislation.

1.56 pm

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): It is interesting to hear the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) outlining the increasing concern among many of us about the Government's arrogance in assuming that they should be able to use programme motions to speed things through even when there are a considerable number of matters to debate. It is fair to say that, like the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies), we were consulted on the timing, and, in my judgment, nine hours should be sufficient to do all we need to do, especially if we get quickly through the programme motion. For that reason, it would be disingenuous of us to take any opportunity that may arise to oppose the Government if a vote is called. On that principle, we shall not resist the programme motion, but we act with little enthusiasm.

I am extremely concerned that in a previous Northern Ireland debate, which the hon. Member for Thurrock said had set a precedent, there was at least one occasion on which a Minister spoke at such length that those who are in the front line when it comes to justifying the legislation to those most affected by it—the Northern Ireland Members—were more or less excluded from speaking. We have heard from Members who represent Northern Ireland parties that they felt some frustration about the strictures of previous programme motions. I very much welcome the fact that a Labour Member has sought to highlight to the Secretary of State the dangerous precedents that some of us feel are being set when Bills are taken through in just one day.

The various legislative stages have traditionally been staggered, for very good reasons. We were meant to have an opportunity to raise general issues without

going into detail on Second Reading. There would then be an opportunity between Second Reading and the Committee stage for Ministers and their representatives to seek consensus and resolution in those areas legitimately raised as concerns by participants in the debate. After that, there was meant to be a further opportunity before Report for cool reflection on matters raised by Government Back Benchers or members of other parties that the Government might not have felt they could modify in the heat of debate but which, with the benefit of a slightly longer period, they could accept were valid concerns. After that, there would be a Third Reading when we could survey the work that had been done.

If all those stages are gone through in one day, all that opportunity is thrown out of the window. The Government have prevented us from having those quiet conversations through the usual channels and there is a danger of railroading the House and parties that are concerned about this legislation—in this case, the other place and the Dublin Government—in a way that will create unnecessary and unwanted frictions. I counsel the Secretary of State to reflect on the potential consequences of moving so fast with legislation which almost by definition walks the boundary between the uncontroversial—the areas that fall within the terms of the Good Friday agreement—and the controversial—the areas in which it challenges that agreement.

The Secretary of State mentioned elections, which are perhaps outside the terms of reference of the programme motion. However, I hope that we will get a chance to express our considerable concerns and the scepticism on the Liberal Democrat Benches about the wisdom of postponing the elections, not least because that increases the expectation in some quarters that, having postponed elections in Northern Ireland once, the Government will find it less difficult to do so again. Perhaps we can return to that matter on Second Reading.

In conclusion, the Liberal Democrats have always sought to walk a transparent and honest line in our dealings with Ministers—*[Interruption.]* We have done so in our dealings with my portfolio—matters relating to the north and south of Ireland. We have tried to do so in a way that enables people to understand where we stand, regardless of whether we expect them to align themselves with our position. While we may have had differences with Ministers and representatives of the Northern Ireland parties, our commitment to the Good Friday agreement and the peace process cannot be questioned. We sincerely hope that Ministers will play a straight bat with us, that they will act in good faith in the debates in this Chamber and that we can be confident that all discussions with the Dublin Government will be held in the same context.

The peace process can be successful only if people can trust each other. Therefore, as we discuss this controversial legislation today, let us hope that the debate will have the foundation of that good faith. I never feel positive about any programme motion, but under the circumstances and given the sensible consultation conducted by representatives of the Ministers, the Liberal Democrats are not inclined to resist this motion.

2.3 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Trade unions are aware of the distinction between procedural and substantive agreements. For example, they believe that getting the procedure agreement for their negotiations right is tremendously important in enabling them to sort out acceptable substantive agreements on issues, principles, terms and conditions. The peculiarity for me today is that the Bill—the substantive issue—is basically acceptable, but the procedures being used to deal with it are not. Of course, if we went through the normal, proper procedures, I might develop reservations about the substantive elements of the legislation, as I would have the benefit of the cross-fertilisation of ideas that results from discussion.

The arguments outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) are of great significance. My hon. Friend is a great parliamentarian, both in the Chamber and in the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs. We should all recognise that, emulate the positions that he takes and follow the avenues that he chooses. I am happy to associate myself with him in this matter. He pointed out that the other place has had a better bite of the cherry with this measure. It had a formal First Reading on 8 September to enable the Bill to be printed. It met for a Second Reading on 12 September and had the weekend during which to reflect before dealing with the remaining stages on 15 September when the measure was sent to us. We only have today. Given that we have returned for a fortnight, the arrangements could have been better. Perhaps the Bill should have originated in this House and gone to the other place later, where we could have seen what transpired.

I feeling considerably disquieted by the procedure but I want to get on to the substantive measures contained in the Bill, so I will take the halfway-house position suggested by the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. I shall not vote against the programme motion, although I will not vote for it because I want to register my disquiet.

Interestingly, we are able to pursue this Bill because of the alteration in the timetable of the House. We have returned for a convenient fortnight. I am keen that that fortnight's return should continue, as it gives Back Benchers access to procedures of the House that would not otherwise be available to them. No doubt, the Government will also find it useful so that they can push through any measures that are lying around which they might find it difficult to push through on another occasion. If they are going to do that, they should respect hon. Members and enable them to be involved in the procedures of the House and to reflect on the processes.

2.7 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I wish to congratulate the Secretary of State on one point. During his contribution, the word "guillotine" fell from his lips. I was delighted to hear that instead of the rather ugly new Labour phrase "timetable motion." Guillotines are what they are. It is wrong to guillotine legislation, but the Government routinely guillotine everything. As a consequence, the opportunity for scrutiny in this House has been greatly reduced.

[Mr. David Trimble]

Many people outside this place are talking about the ineffectiveness of Parliament. People do not realise that the main reasons for the decline of Parliament are the so-called modernisation ideas introduced by this Government, every one of which has disadvantaged the House in carrying out its functions.

Some hon. Members have referred to the contrast between this House, where this Bill is to be rammed through in one day, and the House of Lords, where it has received more serious consideration. Some may think that that is due to the fact that the Government have a huge majority in this place but not in the other place. I do not think that that is the case; it is simply that the House of Lords has retained greater control over its own procedures than we have. I suspect that the so-called reforms that the Government are proposing for the other place largely have the purpose of trying to subject it to the same amount of control as they exercise here. I very much hope that they will be unsuccessful.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): The right hon. Gentleman used the term guillotine, which is an appropriate expression given the procedure's effect on parliamentary scrutiny and accountability. The guillotine is all the more regrettable given that the Bill had its genesis in an agreement between Governments that was made in April. There ought to have been more of an opportunity for this place to look at what those Governments were doing.

Mr. Trimble: I will come back to the genesis of the measure in a moment. Although I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman supported my point about the guillotine and I welcome that, it is none the less my intention to disrupt the cosy consensus that has emerged between the Government, the Opposition and the Liberal Democrats on whether the House should divide on the motion. It has always been our view that guillotines should be opposed on principle. That will continue to be our view, so we invite those hon. Members who have spoken against the motion, rather than sitting on the Bench for 15 minutes twiddling their thumbs, to carry their principled view through to the Lobby with us when we divide the House.

I take issue with the Secretary of State on the genesis of the Bill. His account of the origin of the Bill was seriously defective. The Bill owes its being to discussions held not only in April, but in June and July last year. I remind the Secretary of State of a statement made in the House by his predecessor on 25 July 2002, when I think the Government said they were sympathetic to the proposal that there be some form of machinery to supervise and monitor ceasefires. At the same time, we were pressing for sanctions in the event of breaches of ceasefires. It is from that commitment that the measure flows.

The significance of that point is that the Bill has not come up in a hurry. The proposals have been around for 14 months; they have had a long gestation. The Bill could have come forward much sooner, and had the Government been better focused and followed the advice given by my hon. Friends and me last year, it would have done so. If there is urgency, it is entirely due to the Government's dilatoriness—although I even doubt that the question is urgent.

I have said enough to indicate my party's attitude to the motion. Although we shall necessarily divide the House, I do not want to take any more time from the discussion in substance. We have made our point.

2.12 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): On this issue, I am normally on the side of the angels; over the years, I have agreed with those who are opposed to guillotines. However, this case is slightly different.

It is remarkable how often the main point is missed. In reality, under the Bill, we cannot amend, change or omit any of the functions of the commission. Those functions, under the 15 clauses of the draft agreement between the Government and the Irish Government are received from that draft international agreement, not from legislation. In terms of the Bill, Parliament has no capacity to deal with the functions of the commission.

Let me invoke authority for the Government's position, as confirmed in another place by Lord Williams of Mostyn:

> "I remind the Committee, the commission receives its functions from the agreement."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 15 September 2003; Vol. 652, c. 667.]

He said, in effect, that an amendment to add to those functions could not become law under the Bill. For that reason, my complaint in respect of the procedural issue is not about the length of time but about the fact that on at least two substantive points in respect of which I should have liked to change the functions, I cannot do so because they derive not from the Bill but from a draft international agreement.

Mr. Carmichael *rose—*

Mr. Mallon: I give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Carmichael: I am merely honourable. I may be right, but not in that sense.

My question is simple: is it the hon. Gentleman's thesis that it is now the Executive and not Parliament who are sovereign?

Mr. Mallon: I simply present the point of view set out by the Government spokesman in another place on Monday. As the debate proceeds, I await confirmation that he was right.

David Burnside (South Antrim): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Quentin Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mallon: I shall give way shortly.

The point goes to the heart of what has been said not only about the legislative role of Parliament but about the position of a party or an individual Member who wants to amend legislation. I recognise the authority of that Government spokesman. He was saying that we should not try to amend those functions because such amendments cannot become law under the Bill. I am thus precluded from tabling amendments that I would have wanted to make.

David Burnside: Will the hon. Gentleman join me in asking for an early statement from the Secretary of State

on that point about sovereignty? Why are we wasting our time here this afternoon if we cannot attempt to amend the Bill? Does that not have a bearing on the fundamental power and authority of the House? I am glad that the hon. Gentleman referred to the joint agreement between the Governments, because it was not a joint agreement or declaration between the Governments and the parties. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will seek clarification from the Secretary of State as to whether those of us who have tabled amendments and new clauses are wasting our time.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. A number of Members have tabled amendments to the Bill, yet the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) tells us that it cannot be amended. Can we assume that, in accepting those amendments, the House rather than the hon. Gentleman was right?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): That is a matter for debate rather than for the Chair at this point in time.

Mr. Mallon: I thank the hon. Members for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) and for South Antrim (David Burnside) for those interventions.

According to my understanding of the words of the Government spokesman in another place, the reality is that whatever Parliament's complaints about lack of time, it does not have the capacity to change, amend, add to or subtract from the functions of the international monitoring commission. I may be wrong, or the Government spokesman in another place may be wrong, but as we are discussing procedure I must record that I feel at a disadvantage because if I cannot add at least two further functions, the Committee stage will be rather academic.

Mr. Quentin Davies: The hon. Gentleman is in a bad way if he assumes that anything a Minister says is the oracle of truth. Yesterday, I, too, read what Lord Williams said on Monday and was deeply shocked by it. I hope that, on reflection, the hon. Gentleman and the whole House will agree that what Lord Williams said was arrant nonsense. Parliament can do what it likes; it can decide what it likes in this or any matter—it has no higher authority below heaven. If we change the Bill, it may indeed make inoperative the proposed British-Irish intergovernmental agreement. It will be for the Irish Government to decide whether they want to continue with the agreement and modify it to bring it into line with the Bill. It will be that way round, and I hope that there is no doubt in the mind of anyone in the House about that important constitutional principle.

Mr. Mallon *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think we are getting a little way away from the allocation of time motion, which is what we should be discussing.

Mr. Mallon: I agree, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Rev. Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you give us an assurance, Sir, that we will be permitted to move the amendments when we come to do so?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: A selection list for the amendments has been circulated already, and we shall deal with things as we usually do.

Mr. Mallon: I take your direction, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I had not realised that my simple observation on what the Government spokesman said would lead to such controversy. I do not always have total respect for Ministers, but I have enormous respect for the Minister who made that statement. I believe that he is right, but I await confirmation of that.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): Would it not be clearer if my hon. Friend were to put it this way: the fact of the matter is that the House has the right, if it so wishes, to amend the Bill, but, if it does so, that will be a breach of faith in respect of agreements that have been reached between the UK Government and the Irish Government?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) is again being tempted away from the straight and narrow path that I had encouraged him to take. I should be grateful to him if he returned to that path.

Mr. Mallon: I am being tempted, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and, like Oscar Wilde, I can resist everything except temptation.

I shall conclude with this point: this issue arose yesterday in the House in the debate on the European Union and, although it was not expressed in the terms in which it is being expressed in relation to this Bill, the same point of principle is involved. I simply flag it up. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for your indulgence, and I shall return to the matter at a later stage when I will seek clarification. If I am wrong, I fear that the other House has been misled.

2.21 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): The Northern Ireland people have been treated in a disgraceful manner again. It used to be that Parliament would fight across the world for the right to hold elections. Now, part of the United Kingdom has been told that it would have an election and that there would be no alteration of it. Then, later on, that election was called off. Now, we are debating something that is to do with parties outside the United Kingdom that relates to whether we will have the right to hold an election. The amazing thing is that we will have an election, according to the Secretary of State, if it gives the right answer. The right answer that he wants is that everyone will bow the knee and say, "Yes, we're going to accept what the Government want." Are we in a democracy, or are we not?

I am amazed at the statements made by the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) because it does not matter who says anything: Parliament is the supreme court of us all, and it is entitled to say what it wants and pass what it wants. Whether the Government have entered into a cushy agreement with Mr. Aherne and his colleagues in Dublin and agreed it with the high councils of the IRA so that they can come in on the act, and with Mr. Adams and his colleagues, it matters not: the House has a right to say.

I regret that those hon. Members who can see how the people of Northern Ireland have been treated take this up as though we were wasting time in saying that we will divide the House. The House needs to be divided so that a proper protest can be on record showing that the people elected from Northern Ireland do not want their

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

country to deteriorate into an appendage of two Governments who will make arrangements behind closed doors not only for themselves, but about what the outcome of an election should be.

It is disgraceful that we will not have time to look fully at the Bill today. The Secretary of State knows very well that some amendments will not be called because there will not be time for them. When he was asked whether he is likely to accept any of those amendments, he was silent. Therefore, we will argue something, but for the Secretary of State and the Government the doors are locked against it and it is all agreed, even before we move the amendments. Who is it agreed with? Is it agreed with paramilitary chiefs, who call the shots in regard to this matter? That is who it is: the IRA—and the hand of the IRA is in the House today.

We then have a further example. The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh says that we should not really be trying to amend the Bill because we have no authority to do so. All I can say to him is that he should go back and read what the Government spokesman said, and he will find that what was said is not exactly what he said in the House today. Even if it was, it does not alter the fact that the Bill proposes to allow another sovereign state to have an unprecedented say in the internal affairs of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

If another country were to be given an input into the Welsh Assembly, the Secretary of State would be the first on his feet, saying, "No, no, we are not going to allow some outside Government to enter into an agreement with the United Kingdom Government to deal with the Welsh people. We have dignity; we have our country; and we have our rights." He would fight, as I am fighting now for the people of Northern Ireland. He would say, "No, you can't do that", but he comes to the Dispatch Box to tell us that we have to do such things. What right has the southern Government to tell us what to do?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but he is falling into the trap about which I have already reminded other hon. Members. We are specifically talking about the allocation of time, and he is touching on matters that would probably be better reserved for a little later in the day.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I was trying to put the argument, Sir, that if what I am saying is so, what is the use of our talking about time at all? We should not really be here in the House at all today, and I am trying to tell the House about the Bill's origins and to explain why we should have time to discuss it. It has immediate and terrible consequences for the people of Northern Ireland.

This is not the first time that the Government have treated Northern Ireland like this. On 12 May 2003, the Government hurried the Bill to cancel the Assembly elections through the House in a day, wiping out the right of the people to express their views on a certain subject. The Government were not having it. The IRA did not agree to it; Gerry Adams did not agree to it; they did not agree to it; and the southern Government did not agree to it, so the people of Northern Ireland were not to be allowed to vote.

When it comes to giving the House scant opportunity to scrutinise its work in Northern Ireland, the Government have repeated their offences over and again against the electorate there. The Government have got into a habit and I fear that if such things are permitted again today, they will be repeated again and again, and, as the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh has told us, they will creep into the legislation for England, Wales and Scotland. So we are carrying a flag for the sovereignty of the House and the sovereignty of those who send people to the House.

Despite earlier claims that progress would not be made until the IRA moved to abandon violence completely, the Government have been negotiating in secret with the IRA already, after telling us that they would not do so. I asked the Prime Minister a question in the House on 27 November, and he said:

"It is not merely a statement, a declaration or words. It means giving up violence completely in a way that satisfies everyone and gives them confidence that the IRA has ceased its campaign, and enables us to move the democratic process forward".—[*Official Report*, 27 November 2002; Vol. 395, c. 309.]

The Prime Minister was saying something that we have been saying for years—that we cannot move the democratic process forward until we are dealing with democrats who believe only in the vote, and not in the bullet and the bomb. There was to be no further discussion—the IRA must decommission. The decommissioning issue, however, has almost been forgotten in this whole debate.

The IRA still has the power, which is increasing every day because of the deterioration of security in Northern Ireland. In east Belfast on Monday night, serious incidents took place. I was called to those incidents as the MEP for the area. The chief of police for east Belfast said to me, "Mr. Paisley, are you aware of how many policemen I have tonight for the entire policing of east Belfast?" I said no. He said, "I have six men." We know from a Police Authority report this week that only 1 per cent. of all the terrible burglaries that have taken place have been solved in 12 months. With that background, what would happen to the people of Northern Ireland if there were a resurgence of the IRA? Those are issues that this House needs to take into account.

By speeding this legislation through the House, one can presume only that the Government have something that they do not want discussed. If they have a case, why do they not argue it? Why do they not welcome a full exchange of debate in this House? Why not give us time to debate it? Some very important areas in this Bill need to be put under the spotlight of parliamentary scrutiny. It is clear from what is contained in these proposals that, rather than punish the IRA, the commission will reward it. Sinn Fein-IRA are no more likely to be removed from Government when this Bill is passed, as was attempted previously. Most of this Bill, although Members of the House may not realise it, is directed against the party that I lead. It attacks those who would not sit down with armed gunmen who were prepared even to carry out a spying operation in Stormont. It is aimed against the Democratic Unionist party. The Irish representative on the commission will have a say in the internal affairs of the Northern Ireland Assembly despite what the leader of the Ulster Unionist party tells the country—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is now really making a Second Reading speech. I am not

sure whether he will seek to catch my eye on Second Reading, but, if so, perhaps he ought to leave himself something to say.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I have said my say.

2.33 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. John Spellar): I am mindful, as you have stressed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of the narrow terms of the motion and of the need to get on to debates of substance. I stress, however, as did my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, that this is not just a day's debate; it is a much-extended day's debate. I give credit to Opposition spokesmen who have been gracious enough to concede that that is the case.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear in his opening speech, the Government believe that pressing reasons exist for putting this legislation in place as soon as possible. I shall not reiterate those, but suffice it to say that we consider the Bill's swift passage an essential component of our proposals for political progress in Northern Ireland.

We have taken steps to take account of the concerns of hon. Members, which have been expressed again today, that this legislation should be debated fully. We have provided that additional time, as well as providing that the time not used in this debate on the timetabling motion should be given over to consideration of the Bill. We look forward to a constructive and illuminating debate on that, which I hope will be conducted in a reasonable spirit. I must say to my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) that, enthusiastic as he is when he makes points about which he feels strongly, I wish that he would not personalise them in the way that he often does, particularly in relation to someone whom everyone regards as an extremely honourable Member of the House and honourable Minister, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. On reflection, he might regret those comments.

Mr. John Taylor *rose—*

Mr. Spellar: In that spirit, I bring my remarks to a swift close so that we may move to substantive consideration of the Bill.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 243, Noes 21.

Division No. 316] **[2:35 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blair, rh Tony
Bleaks, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Byers, rh Stephen
Caborn, rh Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Linton, Martin
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McKechin, Ann
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mandelson, rh Peter
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Murphy, rh Paul
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Hara, Edward
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*

Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Short, rh Clare
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Murphy and Charlotte Atkins

NOES

Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Ewing, Annabelle
Hancock, Mike
Hermon, Lady
Hunter, Andrew
Llwyd, Elfyn
Mackay, rh Andrew
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Shepherd, Richard
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Trimble, rh David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nigel Dodds and David Burnside

Question accordingly agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Northern Ireland (Monitoring Commission etc.) Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

2.50 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill is one of the outcomes of discussions with the Irish Government and Northern Ireland political parties that were held at Hillsborough earlier this year. I acknowledge the point made earlier by the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) when he said that the matter was discussed last summer when the then Secretary of State referred to the points that he mentioned. The Bill represents an essential step along the road to a key objective of the Government that is, I believe, shared by the great majority of hon. Members—elections that lead to the restoration of devolution in Northern Ireland on the basis of full implementation of the Good Friday agreement.

The commitment to the agreement includes, most crucially, a commitment to the use of exclusively peaceful and democratic means by all involved in government in Northern Ireland. It also includes a commitment to operate the institutions in good faith. Those matters are the concern of the independent monitoring commission for which the Bill will make provision, and the Bill will confer new powers to deal with departures from those commitments.

Let me outline the context of the Bill, which represents the efforts of the Government and the Irish Government—and earlier efforts—to encourage political advance in Northern Ireland. It is essential that we secure such an advance. It is almost a year since we were forced to suspend devolved government in Northern Ireland, but we should all remember that devolution has had many successes. Constructive instincts and talents, some of which were unsuspected perhaps even by those who harboured them, found fruitful outlets with great benefits for the public good in Northern Ireland. New methods of working were found that enabled people with widely different political interests to work together for the common goal of all the people in that part of the United Kingdom. Talented people from outside politics came into the political system.

We still see that promise at work in some areas. I pay tribute to the excellent continuing work of the Northern Ireland Policing Board and district policing partnerships, and especially, given the current circumstances, to the courage of those who face threats and intimidation when playing their part in those institutions. However, as regards the wider political system, such a time has elapsed since suspension that we now risk some of the gains being lost unless we are able to restore devolved government and the institutions in the near future.

A great deal has already been done by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach to establish the foundations on which restoration could take place with broad support among Northern Ireland

parties. In the light of discussions with the parties at Hillsborough, we published documents on 1 May that set out our view of the most promising route ahead, including the joint declaration.

An essential part of that way forward was finding a basis on which there could be confidence among the people of Northern Ireland that paramilitary activity on the part of those associated with political parties in power was definitively at an end. The two Governments made it plain what they meant by an end to paramilitary activity in paragraph 13 of the joint declaration.

The two Governments also agreed on the establishment of the monitoring and compliance regime that is the subject of the Bill. The commission is intended to build confidence on all sides because confidence and trust are essential for politics to work in Northern Ireland. There must especially be confidence that paramilitary activity is over and that all parties are properly fulfilling their obligations. We remain clear that the agreement marks the only way forward. We do not believe that there is a workable approach that differs from the fundamentals of the agreement, although we will, as ever, try to engage in dialogue all significant strands of opinion in Northern Ireland, including parties that do not share our view.

There is a good deal of speculation about whether elections will be held this year. We are working hard to try to ensure that they can be held; as the House knows, I profoundly hope that they will be. However, we should remember that elections in themselves are not a panacea for Northern Ireland's problems. If they are to lead to the stable restoration of the institutions—instability has caused much of the difficulty that has faced Northern Ireland over the years—we also need to restore trust and confidence. Of course, we also want the restoration of the Executive to govern Northern Ireland, because it is the combination of the institutions that were set up by the Good Friday agreement that governs Northern Ireland. It is not only the Assembly that governs—important as that is—but the Executive and other institutions.

People must be reassured not only that paramilitarism is ending, but that if it were to re-emerge there would be authoritative public confirmation of what was occurring and that appropriate measures would be set in hand to remedy and sanction it. That is why the independent monitoring commission and the mechanisms that the Bill will establish will be of central importance.

David Burnside (South Antrim): Will the Secretary of State clarify an important point at this early part of the debate? Will he confirm that if Sinn Fein-IRA, the corporate body that is the republican movement, are proved to have been involved in Colombia, Castlereagh and Stormontgate, the new monitoring body will have no power or authority to expel them retrospectively from the Executive or the institution of the Assembly?

Mr. Murphy: Of course, the body is yet to be set up and although the people who will serve on it have been chosen, they will have first to examine the state of what is alleged to be paramilitary activity at this stage. I would not want to comment on individual cases, which are still being investigated by the authorities in three separate legal jurisdictions. As we will discover as the debate continues, the body will have to decide how it will operate. It will have to decide its procedures, which is why it is so important to pass the Bill and to enable it to establish its mechanisms. Perhaps we will address the hon. Gentleman's point in more detail in Committee.

We intend that the commission will be set up under an international agreement between this Government and the Irish Government. It will make assessments about fundamental requirements of the agreement to which we are both parties, and it will be permitted to report fully on activities in relation to Northern Ireland in both the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. A draft of the agreement that will establish the body has been made available to the House. We intend that it should be signed in that form and ratified in October following the passage of legislation in the Irish Parliament and formal procedures here. The Bill contains several further provisions in respect of the commission, which I shall outline later.

In line with the Hillsborough scheme, the commission will be composed of four distinguished individuals who will bring a wide range of valuable experience. They will be able to speak authoritatively, as well as impartially, on central questions of public trust. Two members will be appointed by Her Majesty's Government, one of whom will be from Northern Ireland. One will be appointed by the Irish Government and the other will be appointed by the two Governments on the nomination of the United States Government, who, as so often in recent years, have shown that they are a staunch friend of the peace process and of Northern Ireland in general.

We have already announced the names of those concerned: Mr. John Grieve, until recently a senior Metropolitan police officer; Lord Alderdice, who served with distinction as the first presiding officer of the Northern Ireland Assembly; Mr. Joseph Brosnan, a former secretary general—we would call them permanent secretary here—of the Irish Department of Justice; and Mr. Richard Kerr, a former deputy director of central intelligence in the United States of America. I am deeply grateful to them all for agreeing to serve. I believe that this is a group of very high calibre, with the right skills and experience for the challenging task that the commission faces.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): Will the Secretary of State explain the reasoning that led him to decide that there should not be in the commission a respected figure of the Northern Ireland Unionist community? Is that not a deficiency if the objective is to restore confidence?

Mr. Murphy: The appointments were based not on whether someone was a Unionist or a nationalist but on the experience that they would bring to bear. The people whose names I have just read out have a wide variety of experience, much of it in the security sector. Of course, the nomination of Lord Alderdice rests very much on his position as the former Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The commission will be purely advisory.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): Should not it be made clear to the House that, with all due respect to Lord Alderdice, he was never elected Speaker by

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

Members of the Assembly? He got in because no one could agree who it should be. To say that he was elected by the Assembly is wrong.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Totally wrong.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Totally wrong.

Mr. Murphy: I have to correct the hon. Gentleman. I did not say that Lord Alderdice was elected as Speaker. I said that he was the presiding officer of the Northern Ireland Assembly. I suppose he was not unelected by the Assembly because he stayed there for all those years. One imagines that he had the support, at least tacitly, of the majority of Members.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): Will the Secretary of State confirm that all Assembly Members had the opportunity at every turnaround, every week, of electing a different Speaker, had we so wished? I certainly would like to put on record the fact that Lord Alderdice would not perhaps have been the person whom I would have voted for had a vote taken place, but he did a remarkably good job. In fact, if the circumstance arose, I would vote for him, and I have no doubt that he will perform his functions in the commission with the same ability as he did as Speaker.

Mr. Murphy: I give way to the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble).

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): May I remind the Secretary of State that the term that he used in describing the noble Lord was that he was the greatly respected interim presiding officer of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and in that respect may I assure the Secretary of State that he is absolutely right? Lord Alderdice earned respect on all sides, and the absence since the announcement of his appointment to the commission of any criticism from any serious quarter underlines the extent of the respect that he earned.

Mr. Murphy: I agree entirely. Lord Alderdice did his job extremely well. Obviously, one cannot please all the people all the time. I suspect that, whatever name emerged as the Northern Ireland representative, as it were, on the body, it would have been very difficult to have got someone whom 100 per cent. of the people of Northern Ireland agreed with, but I will stay absolutely firm on the fact that I believe that he did a very good job and that he is highly qualified to be a member of that body.

David Burnside: On that point, does the Secretary of State agree that one of Lord Alderdice's advantages is that his political pedigree is that of the Alliance party, which cannot make up its mind whether it is Unionist or nationalist and changes every now and again? Therefore, in the ambiguity of political evolution in the past four or five years, he is exactly right for the job.

Mr. Murphy: The commission will be purely advisory.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Does the Secretary of State accept that, from the impartial position in which I find myself, I have nothing but praise for the courage of the Alliance party in bailing out the Ulster Unionists when they needed its help? More to the point, does he accept that we run the risk in this debate of setting the precedent of appointing the entire House as the appointments panel for the membership of the IMC? Will he therefore give his judgment on the most effective way of ensuring that we have the right four people, whomever they may be, to serve on the commission?

Mr. Murphy: Members were appointed by the Governments. Obviously, we looked very carefully at the background, experience and expertise of the people concerned. I am not sure whether it would be worth continuing to discuss individuals in this debate, but I repeat that I think that the four people who have been appointed will be do a very good job indeed.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) said he was neutral, but I thought that the Alliance party was a sister party of the Liberal Democrats. May I press the Secretary of State not on the quality and character of the four, for I have no difficulty with that, but on the question of whom the commission will be reporting to and how will it report? Will what it says be published clearly, or will it be massaged by Government at some level?

Mr. Murphy: I hope that we will be able to address all those issues not just in what I have to say—I will touch on some of them in a few moments—but in Committee. Those matters are, of course, crucial to the understanding of the mechanisms.

Rev. Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It would help hon. Members to know what time is going to be allotted. I understand that there is nine hours, but there is no set time for Committee. I understand that the Second Reading debate can run for all that time. Is that so?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): The hon. Gentleman is correct. The total time for the debate, including the debate we have had on the allocation of time motion, is nine hours. There is no specific time for any particular section of that, so the length of the Second Reading debate is entirely a matter for hon. Members who contribute to it.

Mr. Murphy: It is up to us how we deal with those matters, but it is important that we have a reasonable amount of time to discuss some of the detail that the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) mentioned.

The commission, which will be advisory, will deliver its assessments of the matters referred to it, and may recommend remedial action and measures that the Assembly might take under its powers, as extended by the Bill, but it will make no substantive decision. If the commission recommends that measures should be taken, it becomes a matter for the agreement institutions, and ultimately for the Government.

The commission will have three remits, the first of which will be to examine and to report on paramilitary activity. The draft agreement makes it clear that that

covers every aspect of paramilitary activity: not only bombing and shooting but training, targeting, carrying out so-called punishment beatings, and all the other associated activities, including those set out in paragraph 13 of the joint declaration.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): This would be a good moment to answer the very pertinent question that has already been asked by the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside), which is whether the commission will be able to undertake investigations into previous—that is to say, up until now—alleged breaches, including Castlereagh, Stormontgate, Colombia and so forth, and to make appropriate recommendations, or whether it will be limited to looking at events that follow its setting up.

Mr. Murphy: I have not forgotten that point. If the hon. Gentleman would wait a little longer, I hope to be able to give him the answer to those questions.

We shall provide the commission with all the support that we can, and so too, I believe, will the Irish Government. However, the body will reach its own conclusions. The commission will consider progress on security normalisation, which is a key element of the 1998 Good Friday agreement that has yet to be fully implemented. While the security situation that we have faced has prevented us from moving as quickly as we would have wished, the Government have nonetheless made significant progress in this area. I pay tribute to the security forces for all that they have done to meet that objective while ensuring at the same time that the people of Northern Ireland continue to be properly protected.

Let me make it clear that the programme of normalisation outlined in the Hillsborough texts is linked to the ending of paramilitary activity. Monitoring of that will not begin until the Government set it in train, although at our request the Commission will be able to report on normalisation activity in recent years, and we intend it to start on that at an early stage. The commission will, finally, also be responsible for investigating certain conduct in the political field. The agreement, in its pledge of office, imposes important standards of behaviour, which, if they are not observed, mean that the institutions cannot function properly. The commission may investigate complaints that a party or Minister is in breach of the pledge.

There is a long-standing convention that matters relating essentially to internal Northern Ireland institutional affairs which, as we all know, in the political talks leading to the agreement were called strand 1 issues, should be decided by people from Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom alone. So, for example, in the talks, those issues were discussed in a format chaired by the British Government—in fact, by myself—without Irish representatives being present. There were concerns that that principle would be undermined in the scheme introduced at Hillsborough, and we have reflected on those concerns. I believe that the draft agreement—the international agreement—fully respects the convention. In so far as complaints made to the commission concern the operation of the internal institutions of Northern Ireland, they will be considered only by those two members of the commission who are appointed by the British Government. The other two members of the commission will not be concerned with them at any point.

In respect of paramilitary activity and political breaches, the commission or the two members concerned will be required to report their findings and, where they consider it appropriate, recommend what measures they envisage the Assembly taking. Their reports will be published. However, as I have said, decisions are for the Assembly, and ultimately, if it cannot agree, for the British Government.

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): The Secretary of State has made the point that political breaches will be considered by the two appointees of Her Majesty's Government. However, what is the position when it comes to the Secretary of State taking action? Will he take action if he needs to do so alone, or will he first consult the Dublin Government and involve them before he makes a decision? In the latter case, Dublin is involved in strand 1 matters.

Mr. Murphy: The Dublin Government are not involved in making the decision. May I make it absolutely clear that decisions on political issues should rest with the Assembly, both through the implementation group and the Assembly as a whole? The Assembly, acting as a body corporate, should ideally deal with those issues. It will be self-regulating and will deal with its own disciplinary matters. If that fails, the agreement resulting from the Hillsborough talks is that the British Government will deal with the matter because it is a strand 1 matter.

Of course, we consult the Irish Government on all issues, but at the end of the day, the decision is ours. It is important that that should happen. The operation of all the institutions derived from the Good Friday agreement, because the agreement was set up between two Governments and the political parties, involves collective discussions. However, it is quite clear that when it comes to decision making the decision rests with me and the British Government—of course it does. I shall return to the issues in more detail later and make the position clear. I would not want to mislead either the House or the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds) on some of the details.

Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) *rose—*

Mr. Murphy: Before the hon. Gentleman speaks, may I say that I want to clarify some of the issues later.

Mr. Donaldson: The Secretary of State said that matters relating to the Assembly's internal affairs are for the Assembly and the implementation group to determine. Why do we need an independent commission to monitor the conduct of parties in the Assembly in the first place, apart from the issue of a commitment to exclusively peaceful and democratic means, if the implementation group will decide what happens?

Mr. Murphy: Certainly, it is for the implementation group in the Assembly in the first instance to try to decide how to deal with these issues. As I said, I hope that it will do so, and that such matters will come to the Government very much as a last resort. Obviously, it

[Mr. Murphy]

was a matter of debate in the discussion which took place in the spring whether in fact the commission should or should not have responsibilities beyond looking at what might be called paramilitary and security issues. The decision made by the Governments in the spring was that that opportunity should be given to the commission.

The hon. Gentleman knows that Assembly Members can go to the implementation group and argue that a breach of the Belfast agreement has taken place. The Assembly has to deliberate on those matters and make its own decisions. The hon. Gentleman and I would probably disagree as to whether in principle the issue of political breaches as opposed to paramilitary activity should or should not be dealt with by the commission. However, that is what was agreed would happen.

Mr. Donaldson: How does it assist the credibility of the implementation group in the Assembly if a Member has a choice and can decide whether he wishes to make the complaint to the implementation group or the independent commission? Surely it undermines the position of the implementation group if there is another route that Members can take. I cannot understand the need for matters other than the commitment to democratic and peaceful means to be addressed by an independent commission, as the Assembly itself already has a means of addressing those issues.

Mr. Murphy: I understand where the hon. Gentleman is coming from, but the principle of whether political breaches should be dealt with is a proper one. However, he and I probably disagree about that.

To return to points made earlier by the hon. Member for Belfast, North, I deliberately did not conclude my remarks on his question, because I wanted to check the position. The House will understand that the procedural aspects of the work of the commission are a matter on which we have not gone into great detail because we are only setting the legislative framework. It is probably reasonable to say that where British members of the IMC have reported on a strand 1 matter, I would not expect formally to consult the Irish Government.

Mr. Dodds: I am interested to hear what the Secretary of State said on that particular point, because it directly contradicts what was said in the other place by the Government spokesman. Will he reflect on what he said, and clarify the position further? We are told in one House that the Dublin Government will be consulted, but now we are told that they will not be consulted, although the Secretary of State used the word "formally", whatever that means. Perhaps he would clarify what "formally" means. Does it mean "secretly", or does it mean that civil servants will not be present? The fact is that the Secretary of State referred earlier to Dublin being excluded from strand 1—its representatives were not in the room, so why are they being brought into the room on this issue?

Mr. Murphy: I think that there is a distinction to be drawn about a formal consultation, which will be required, as it were, with regard to the paramilitary activities, and where the four members of the commission are involved. An undertaking was given at Hillsborough in the joint declaration that there would be formal consultation with the Irish Government on that issue. I think the hon. Gentleman would accept that in the real world, if some major crisis was affecting the stability of the Northern Ireland Assembly, it is inconceivable that in the course of a conversation about general matters, I would keep my mouth shut and say nothing. If the whole institutional stability of Northern Ireland was in jeopardy, would I not speak? He knows that that is nonsense and it would not happen. However, the formal position—where there is to be a formal consultation because of paramilitary matters—is now clear, and we will go through it.

It was also an important part of the Hillsborough scheme that there should be an increased range of measures available against individuals and parties in the Assembly who were in breach of their obligations. The Bill amends the Northern Ireland Act 1998 accordingly. The Assembly will be able to exclude individuals and parties from office in Northern Ireland for a range of periods, rather than for the 12 months that was the only option under the 1998 Act. The Assembly will also be able to withhold pay and party allowances, and pass motions of censure. In taking such steps, the Assembly would, as with exclusion motions now, need to make its decisions with cross-community support. That is in line with the agreement. These are decisions that may be absolutely fundamental to the future of the devolved system.

Rev. Ian Paisley: What percentage of the Assembly would need to support a motion to meet the requirement for cross-community support? As the Secretary of State knows, a percentage was specified previously.

Mr. Murphy: That is set out in the Bill, and I shall return to it.

Those powers are available to the Assembly at any time. However, as we have seen in the past, the Assembly may be deadlocked at a time when the resolution of an issue demands some action, failing which the institutions could become inoperable. The Hillsborough agreement addressed that. It made it clear that there would be a range of discussions in the light of any finding by the IMC that a party or Assembly Member was in breach, and any recommendation by it of consequential measures.

Those discussions would involve the implementation group, of which the pro-agreement parties in Northern Ireland are members. If the group recommended that a motion should be put before the Assembly for the taking of such measures, the Secretary of State would exercise his powers requiring the motion to be moved, but where the motion had failed to achieve cross-community support in the Assembly, or the implementation group had failed to agree any course of action, it would be for the British Government to turn now to the paramilitary aspects in consultation with the Irish Government and the parties, to resolve the matter consistently with the commission's report.

The Bill accordingly provides powers for the Secretary of State himself to take the measures required. Though the Bill does not set out all the procedures in the Hillsborough text, I confirm now that we would

envisage following them in the light of a relevant commission report. We should, in particular, consult the implementation group, and the Irish Government, as the text specifies.

These are powers of last resort. It is right that intensive efforts should be made by people in Northern Ireland to resolve these issues. They should not end up, before that, on the desk of a British Minister. That is not the Hillsborough plan, and it is far from the 1998 agreement. I should also say one other thing of the spirit in which we should operate these arrangements: we believe it is very important—difficult and painful though it may be in the circumstances—to give effect to the commission's recommendations. We certainly intend to use these powers where the commission had so recommended, but action had not been taken.

I shall not dwell at length on the details of the Bill. As I said earlier, it is important that hon. Members have an opportunity to deal with it in Committee. I hope that the explanatory notes will have been of use to them. Clauses 1 to 3 make provision for the commission, supplementing the agreement establishing it. Clause 1 provides for it to have immunity from suit, which is essential for the safeguarding of information that it has received in confidence. Clause 2 places on it a duty in carrying out its functions to do nothing to prejudice national security, put lives at risk or prejudice legal proceedings. Clause 3 requires me to lay a copy of its reports before Parliament.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Clause 3 provides for the reports to be laid before Parliament. The agreement between the two Governments suggests that those may include a wide range of matters relating to paramilitary activity and the people leading it. However, clause 2, dealing with the commission's duty to avoid prejudicial effect, states that a report should not put anyone's life in danger or prejudice future legal proceedings. Might not the situation arise where, although the commission knows the identity of people against whom action needs to be taken, it cannot report that to Parliament because it would be prejudicial under clause 2?

Mr. Murphy: I repeat that the commission must work out how it deals with its own mechanisms, but I am sure that my hon. Friend would understand that its reports could not include details that would put lives at risk, and it is clearly not a court of law. Its purpose is to monitor and then tell the House of Commons and the people of Northern Ireland whether, in its view, having examined the evidence, there have been breaches of the agreement and paramilitary activity has been taking place.

My hon. Friend knows, too, that some of the commission's examinations would inevitably deal with highly sensitive intelligence which, if revealed, could compromise people's safety. Members of the commission would be conscious of that, which is why it is so important that we have confidence in them and in their ability to give the House an honest report that reflects its findings but contains essential safeguards to protect the safety of the people concerned.

David Burnside: The people of Northern Ireland are confused about the recommendations that we are discussing. Could the Secretary of State give an example, without commenting on the legalities of it? If a murder by the IRA occurred, such as the murder of Gareth O'Connor, about which the police will have advised the right hon. Gentleman, and if he is also advised by his police advisers that Martin McGuinness still sits on the army council of the IRA, would that be an offence that could lead to Martin McGuinness's exclusion from the Executive? How long does he think the commission would take before it excluded Martin McGuinness from the Executive?

Mr. Murphy: It would not be proper for me to comment on individuals in a debate such as this. In general terms, the commission would nave to make up its own mind collectively about how best to report what it had discovered. It would make recommendations to me first, and the Assembly would then consider them and take decisions. If it did not, I would.

Clauses 4 to 8 are concerned with amendments to the Northern Ireland Act 1998 in respect of measures against individual Ministers or parties. Clause 4 provides for the new range of periods of exclusion and obliges me, in requiring the Assembly to consider exclusion, to take account of reports from the commission.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): The Secretary of State will see that I have tabled an amendment to clause 4. If the Assembly is not dealing on its own initiative with a motion to exclude, but he is persuaded that there should be an exclusion, why should the vehicle of the presiding officer be used? In what must be extraordinary circumstances anyway, would it not be more appropriate for him to present his case directly to the Assembly?

Mr. Murphy: The provision follows the 1998 Act and the Good Friday agreement, in which it was decided that such mechanisms were the best way of proceeding. As my hon. Friend knows, there has to be cross-community support, but we shall return to the matter in a little more detail in Committee.

Clause 6 permits the Assembly to reduce the remuneration of a Minister or members of a political party and confers on me a reserve power in the same sense. Clause 7 makes similar provision in respect of financial assistance. Clause 8 permits the Assembly to pass censure motions.

Lembit Öpik: I have a question about clause 7, although Ministers may wish to return to it in Committee, as it concerns a point of detail. Around line 19 on page 9 of the Bill, it seems that, while salaries can be reduced, there will be no negative effect on pensions, which implies that if the Assembly were suspended for 40 years, a Member would still retire on a full pension. What is the logic for not penalising the pensions outcome as well?

Mr. Murphy: I would be 96 after a 40-year suspension of the Assembly, and I would have to consider the effect on my pension in such circumstances. We will come back to the hon. Gentleman on that issue; he is right to highlight the current position.

[Mr. Murphy]

Clause 9 provides for parliamentary procedures in respect of my powers.

Mr. Dodds: On clause 8, the Secretary of State mentioned censure motions. What is the thinking behind that clause? At the moment, it is possible for a Member or party to table a motion in the Assembly expressing no confidence, censuring a Minister and so on. Clause 8 makes that harder and restricts Assembly Members' freedom. Such provision did not feature in the Belfast agreement or even the Hillsborough talks, and it is not in the joint declaration, as I understand it. Where did it come from? Why does it restrict the right of Members to call for a vote of no confidence or table a censure motion in respect of any other party or Minister? Can he explain that clause?

Mr. Murphy: I was not aware that the measure made it more difficult to table censure motions, but if the hon. Gentleman will allow me to continue, we will deal with that point in winding up the debate, as it is a technical one. More generally, the reason why the provision is included, as opposed to how it affects the current circumstances, is that there will be a gradation of punishments starting at a motion of censure—a reprimand by the Assembly as a body corporate—increasing in severity in terms of the various measures outlined in the Bill and ending up with exclusion.

There is provision for those powers to be exercised in advance of approval, as is right given that urgent action may be required, perhaps when one or both Houses of Parliament are in recess. There is provision for the consequences if such an exercise of powers is not upheld.

We now need to move forward with great urgency in the Northern Ireland political process. We all want to see elections; confidence restored on all sides to the point at which politics can again operate; and decisions that are properly made in Belfast again being made there, in Northern Ireland.

The independent monitoring commission will be part of the foundations of rebuilt trust and confidence in Northern Ireland. No one who is committed to wholly democratic politics should object to the new independent scrutiny of paramilitary activity that this new body will provide. No one can claim that the men involved will not bring objective expertise and experience to the task, and no one can convince me that the commission will not help to restore the trust and confidence that are required to allow elections to a working Assembly and a stable and peaceful future for Northern Ireland.

I commend the Bill to the House.

3.33 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): Nobody could possibly object to the fact that the Secretary of State has spoken for three quarters of an hour on a Bill of such importance. He was generous—and rightly so—in taking interventions and giving detailed explanations, at least most of the time. However, that illustrates the anomaly whereby nine hours have been allowed not for Second Reading alone, but for all stages of the Bill's consideration, including the time taken in considering the allocation of time motion, which should never have been tabled. In conducting the debate as he has, he has demonstrated that Second Reading should have lasted the whole day. We should have had a proper Second Reading taking the whole afternoon, after which we would have had time for reflection, discussion and even negotiation. The other stages could then have taken their turn.

The history of Northern Ireland over the past five or six years is one of great hopes followed by severe disappointments. The Belfast agreement was not in any sense an ideal document—it contained many features that were unpalatable to many people, including me—but it was a great achievement, and I have always given the Government due credit for it. Nevertheless, it was not followed, as it should have been, by full decommissioning, by the disbandment of private armies, by the end of intimidation, harassment and paramilitary murders and by the successful and permanent embedding of devolved government—in short, by normalisation. Five and a half years on, we still await substantial progress in decommissioning. The exiles remain exiled, and the intimidated remain intimidated. Only yesterday, as the Secretary of State knows, there was another resignation from a district police partnership because of intimidation.

The Government suspended the devolved institutions nearly a year ago. There have been two successive postponements of Assembly elections since then, and in the second instance no date was given for them to take place. Since the second, indefinite postponement—exactly as I predicted—there has been no progress on negotiations for the completion of the peace process. Instead—here I use the words that I used in May—rather than parties being compelled to examine the scope for agreement with each other, they have turned in on themselves.

Thank heaven it has remained relatively quiet on the streets this summer. I pay tribute to all on both sides who have used their influence in favour of forbearance, patience and moderation. It would, however, be utterly irresponsible to suppose that because things have been calmer over the summer, they can be counted on to remain calm irrespective of progress on the peace process or opportunities for peaceful, democratic expression at the ballot box.

Who bears the blame for the disappointment of the great hopes of five years ago? Of course it is predominantly Sinn Fein-IRA. Whether through deliberately planned duplicity or otherwise, they have talked peace while continuing to plan and prepare for war—procuring arms, training, targeting, spying, intimidating. We all know the names of those responsible for these egregious breaches of the ceasefire and the agreement: Florida, Colombia, Castlereagh, Stormontgate. No words are too strong to condemn their behaviour. If the peace process collapses—and it could—they will bear, in the eyes of generations to come, the great historic guilt for destroying a precious opportunity for all the people of Northern Ireland.

But no peace process that was not properly and effectively chaired and managed was going to work. That role could fall only to the British Government. What was required was the application of some classic principles of good negotiation and good chairmanship: clarity, consistency, decisiveness, balance, fairness,

rewards for compliance, and penalties or sanctions for bad behaviour. Have we had any of those? The Government have proved themselves quite incapable—consistently—of supplying them. There has been muddle, and there have been U-turns. Just look at the elections. They have been promised, postponed, promised, postponed again and now, apparently, promised again.

We have had false assurances, such as those given by the Prime Minister at the time of the campaign for a referendum on the agreement in 1998. We have had indecisiveness, we have had unilateral concessions, and we have had complete abdication—complete inaction—in the face of the most serious breaches, including the four that I mentioned.

I have often said, in this place and outside, that the Government have committed four cardinal errors. Time has moved on, and I am sorry to say that that number is now five. The first error—I have of course said this before and I am afraid that I will continue to say it, because no one should ever forget it—was the catastrophic decision to release all the prisoners without any decommissioning at all, giving away the most valuable card for precisely nothing. It is not surprising that no IRA decommissioning whatever took place for three and a half years after the agreement, until the Americans themselves took a hand and became directly involved, after 11 September. But the Government could hardly have predicted that tragedy and its consequences for, among other things, the peace process in Northern Ireland.

The second cardinal error was the making of unilateral concessions that went quite beyond the Belfast agreement, and which were not required by it at all. They included the special status for Sinn Fein-IRA MPs and the amnesty for on-the-run terrorists, which, at Weston Park, the Government promised would be delivered by the end of 2001. The Secretary of State has been good enough to acknowledge publicly that it was, in retrospect, a thoroughly good thing that the Conservative Opposition were able successfully to oppose implementation of that concession, and that in consequence that valuable card now remains in the Government's hands, so I shall say no more about that.

The third cardinal error was the complete failure to respond with any sanction at all to serious breaches of the ceasefire and the agreement by Sinn Fein-IRA. I said after Florida and Colombia that if there were no sanctions—no downside to such behaviour—more breaches would inevitably occur. The right hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Jane Kennedy)—it is a pleasure to address her in that fashion—has listened to me these past two years, and has heard me say that many times before. I am afraid that it remains as true as when I first said it.

After what happened at Castlereagh, the Opposition themselves proposed a remedy—a point that takes us directly to the Bill's substance. On 16 July 2002, I suggested that we empower the Secretary of State to exclude from the Executive parties that were in breach of their obligations under the agreement, or that were acting in concert with persons in breach. I also predicted—this point was raised earlier—that, in the event of a serious breach and a requirement to exclude, it would be ineffective to rely on the Assembly's voting for an exclusion motion. I said:

—"I think that the Secretary of State may be missing the point"—

that was being polite—

"which is purely practical—that one has no credibility in this life in threatening a sanction that one is not in a position to enforce. The right hon. Gentleman will get no leverage in the negotiations with Sinn Fein by suggesting that one day there might be a majority of Sinn Fein and Social Democratic and Labour Members who might like to exclude Sinn Fein from the Executive. If he wants to use that mechanism, he will have to take powers in this House."—[*Official Report*, 16 July 2002; Vol. 389, c. 233.]

It has taken the Government 15 months to come to this House to try to take those powers. It has taken them 15 months to realise that it was not sufficient to rely on the Assembly to vote through an exclusion motion, and that we need to provide a procedure for dealing with the situation in which the Assembly cannot agree—through securing agreement in both of the two camps, according to the principle on which that Assembly works—to vote through such a motion. But I am delighted that after 15 months, the penny has dropped.

Mr. Mallon: Will the hon. Gentleman elaborate on what he means by "the two camps"?

Mr. Davies: I hardly need to describe to the hon. Gentleman how the procedures work in the Belfast Assembly. He knows perfectly well that, to get an exclusion motion through, it would be necessary to have a majority in both the Unionist and the nationalist and republican camps. That is a fact—I do not want to quarrel about it now—and he knows it even better than I do.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, even at this stage, the Government seem not to have woken up, in that, instead of the Bill stating that the Secretary of State "shall", it states that he "may"? In other words, the Bill leaves one means of leverage out.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman is right, and I shall come to that when I deal with the Bill in more detail.

Mr. Mallon *rose*—

Mr. Davies: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman, if he will forgive me.

The Secretary of State's predecessor never produced any arguments against following up the Opposition's suggestion at the time to introduce a Bill containing exclusion powers. I do not know why he did not; he never explained. Perhaps he could not make up his mind, or suffered from a bad case of "not invented here" syndrome. The Government often seem to suffer from that. Perhaps he could not persuade Mr. Jonathan Powell.

Whatever the explanation, it was a grave error that had serious consequences within only a few months when, as I warned was likely in the circumstances, the next breach came. Of course it came in the shape of Stormontgate. When that happened, the Government found that they did not have the necessary weapon in their armoury, which I had tried to place there. No effective sanction was available to them, which is precisely why they ended up having to resort to dismissing the whole institutional structure of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive. They

[Mr. Davies]

brought the whole edifice down, unjustly and perversely punishing the innocent with the guilty, and plunging Northern Ireland into the constitutional crisis and political impasse in which it remains embedded. All that could have been avoided.

As we now see from the Bill, the new Secretary of State has seen the point of exclusion. Although we have several difficulties with the way in which he proposes that it should operate, it would be churlish and ungenerous not to pay due tribute to him, which I certainly do.

The Government's fourth cardinal error was not to appreciate that every issue in Northern Ireland—its institutions and their working, decommissioning, policing, demilitarisation and so forth—is inevitably interlinked. Some parties are more committed to some aspects and other parties to others, so any solution and any negotiation must be comprehensive, by any definition. It is therefore always an error to believe that some issues can be resolved in vacuo or that side deals can be done with one party without unwinding the commitment of others. We have seen far too many unilateral concessions, one-sided assurances and side deals done with one party, offending another, which then has to be appeased with another concession that in turn upsets another party.

That was a hopeless way of conducting a negotiation, but every time that I mentioned the word "linkage"—the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the right hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree will remember me doing so on many occasions—to the right hon. Gentleman's predecessor, he bridled at it and rejected it.

Lembit Öpik: The Conservatives called for unilateral exclusion and demanded that Ministers implement it last year, so I am at a loss to understand why they repeatedly criticise the Government for acting unilaterally when they requested such action last year.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman has completely misunderstood what I have said. I am criticising any sort of unilateral concession, which I said was completely wrong. Equally, I have said that it was necessary to have a balance, not unilateral action. I said that part of the balance—I hope that the hon. Gentleman was listening, but if he was not, I shall repeat it for him—requires some sanctions for bad behaviour. The Government found themselves in a hopeless position last year when no response was available to them. I suggested a response, but they did not take it. That is why they ended up dismantling the whole institutional structure in Belfast and are now finding it difficult to put it back on its feet again. That, in a couple of sentences, shows the tragic outcome of a series of avoidable mistakes.

Lembit Öpik *rose—*

Mr. Davies: I will not give way again, because we are under a time constraint. It is not my fault, but we suffer from a time constraint imposed on us arbitrarily by an arrogant Government.

To be fair, after the present Secretary of State took office, we had a different approach, which resulted in multilateral and comprehensive negotiations at Hillsborough. As the House knows, we strongly supported those negotiations and they led to some genuinely encouraging progress. Sadly, that progress has not been sustained. The best hope that we have is that it has been deep frozen and can, in due time, be revived and built on.

The Government committed the fifth cardinal error when they postponed the Assembly elections indefinitely. The difference between an indefinite postponement and a cancellation is a nice philosophical question, but an important pragmatic question that the Government should ask themselves today is how long does an indefinite postponement need to continue before it has the political consequences of a cancellation?

That postponement was an error is now clear—for two reasons. First, it penalised the innocent, and the democratic process itself, for the failings of one party. It thus breached both an elementary principle of justice and the pragmatic requirement in any process that the structure of incentives should be rational and not perverse. Secondly, it was an error because it made it predictably certain that no progress would be made in the peace process. Before an election, parties and political leaders in Northern Ireland will always seek to strengthen their position in their own sectarian camps. That means talking tough and pointing to rivals' weaknesses. No one can make concessions in such circumstances, nor accept concessions from the other side as adequate. It follows that no concessions will be made. It follows that no negotiations will proceed. The history of the past few months may prove more eloquent than any analysis of mine, and I hope that the Government will draw the right conclusion from that before even greater risks are run.

The Bill enshrines two principles—the principle of exclusion and the principle of a monitoring commission. We clearly do not object to exclusion, because we first introduced the concept into the Northern Ireland political debate and we feel as strongly about it as we did when we advocated it 15 months ago. We will not play dog in the manger. Simply because we had to wait for 15 months for the Government to come around to our point of view is no reason to fail to support the principle of exclusion. We will hold firm to that principle.

We equally approve of the concept of a monitoring commission. We cannot claim authorship of that, because the credit goes to the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), who tried to urge it on the Secretary of State's predecessor, with no more success than I had with exclusion. However, the concept was generally accepted at Hillsborough and we greatly welcome it. I recall suggesting to the Secretary of State that to give effect to the monitoring commission, we might simply expand the remit of General de Chastelain. I saw advantages in asking a military man to supervise the essentially military task of unwinding the paramilitary operations of terrorist groups in Northern Ireland. However, that is in the past and I am happy to endorse the Government's approach to the constitution of the monitoring commission.

We have considerable problems with the Government's original proposal to link the concept of exclusion and the monitoring commission. The Government's original idea was that the Secretary of State would have no power to exclude, except on the

recommendation of the commission. To us, that clearly raised a matter of fundamental principle, and I am surprised that it was not equally clear to the Government. We all believe in democracy, and its first principle is that government is conducted by those who are elected or those who are accountable to those who are elected—in the case of our parliamentary system, to Parliament. The original, pristine Bill proposed that four people, who would not be democratically accountable to Parliament or in any other way, should determine who should and who should not serve in the Government of Northern Ireland and exercise executive functions, not the Secretary of State, who is democratically accountable. That is a fundamentally obnoxious procedure, and one that we could not accept.

I am glad that the Government have—wisely—accepted the Liberal Democrat amendment tabled in another place. My own party made a significant contribution to that amendment, which was also supported by the Ulster Unionists. It gives the Secretary of State a power of exclusion for a period of two weeks, irrespective of the monitoring commission's recommendations. That is a substantial improvement, and it affects the Opposition's attitude to the Bill. However, a point of principle is still involved for exclusions that continue for more than two weeks. I hope later to be able to advocate an amendment that would protect the principle entirely, and another that would require the Secretary of State to take account of the commission's recommendations when making a decision to exclude. We believe that the role of the commission in this matter should be advisory. It is totally inappropriate that it should have a decisive role in determining who should sit in an Executive.

The Bill enshrines two important innovations. For the reasons that I have given, we strongly support them. The Government have accepted an amendment that attenuates considerably our remaining concerns, although it does not remove them entirely. We shall therefore support the Bill on Second Reading. We hope to improve it further in Committee. Above all, we hope that it will contribute—as I believe that it will—to progress in the peace process.

3.56 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): I shall begin with a brief account of the context and background of this debate. There is more to this than the nihilistic apologia that we have just heard in respect of who was right and who was wrong. The reality is that anyone dealing with politics in these circumstances is caught between armies, in the quagmire of violence. In that context, rights and wrongs have neither the neatness nor the absolute values suggested by the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies).

I recognise the hon. Gentleman's point, and in some respects he is technically correct, but we are trying to end 30 years of violence and to bridge almost 100 years of political, religious and sectarian divisions, and in the search for absolute wisdom, we must remember that our own sense of rectitude – of being right or wrong – is not as absolute as we might wish.

The collective effect of matters such as the Castlereagh break-in, the IRA's spying operation and its activity in Colombia broke the back of a political process that was already struggling. It was readily accepted that the Ulster Unionist party could not have stayed in the power-sharing Executive in those circumstances. There is a general realisation that no political party or organisation could live with another party that undertook such activities while involved in government.

Mr. Donaldson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mallon: I have anticipated the hon. Gentleman's question, and I have my answer waiting for him.

Mr. Donaldson: If, in the circumstances that the hon. Gentleman has described, and following the Stormontgate revelations, a motion had been tabled in the Assembly to exclude the Sinn Fein members from the Executive, would his party have supported it?

Mr. Mallon: I was not in the leadership of our party at that stage, but I am not evading the question because the answer is in the Bill and in what the Secretary of State said. There already exists a built-in barrier—prohibition would be the wrong word—against that happening, just as there was in the negotiations before the Good Friday agreement. The Ulster Unionist party was then able to resist action against those who would not play a full role in the Executive, and that was so for reasons that we recognised as good ones. I myself tried and failed to find a way to deal with that problem. It was spurned by the Ulster Unionist party, which ignored it for a year. It was spurned by the IRA. Neither made any attempt to see whether that was workable. I failed on both counts, therefore, but I would rather have failed than not tried. That is the approach that I want to bring to this Bill, too.

Mr. Donaldson: Is this a yes or a no?

Mr. Mallon: The hon. Gentleman will have time to nibble away as we go along and—he need not worry—I will nibble back.

I am no great advocate of commissions. I have a concept of the sturdy, independent Ulsterman, standing on his own two feet, going about his own business, looking after himself and not having to resort to commissions. I am on record as praising the commissioners: I know two of them well and hugely respect them, and I have no doubt that I would have similar respect for the other two. However, I would much prefer it if the matter could be dealt with through the political process in the north of Ireland by those who should and could—I hope will—slot into the vision of the sturdy, independent Ulsterman, standing on his own feet and doing things for himself.

We are not short of commissions. Now we are to have the monitoring commission. We have the international commission on decommissioning, a commission for the disappeared—that is, those who were murdered in various ways—and a human rights commission, the least said about which the better at this stage. However, if the political process were strong, vibrant and self-confident enough, we would not need to appoint people to commissions. We could deal with things ourselves.

I have nothing fundamentally against the new commission. It may throw some light on Castlereagh. It may be able to look into the way in which some sectarian

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attacks take place. It may be able to establish the role of paramilitary groups in riot situations. It may even look at the Government's credibility when they become tardy in relation to some of their commitments. I am not against the international commission in those terms, but I feel that we will soon have almost more commissions than we have issues to deal with.

I am not against sanctions, and I want to put that point on the record, although I do not doubt that it will be misunderstood. Along with the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), I saw how difficult it was to sit through a situation in which the basic rules of politics were flouted daily before our eyes. The standards of non-violence and the highest standards of the duty of office that the Good Friday agreement demanded were tossed to the wind, and we were not capable of doing anything about it.

However, when I say that I am in favour of sanctions I mean the sanctions in the Good Friday agreement, which—except for some people—we have all broadly agreed: sanctions that are workable and sanctions that protect and defend the political process and will not eventually tear it apart. That is one of the difficulties with this Bill and with the draft agreement on which it is based. We must be careful that, while we seek the optimum protection for the political process, we do not create the means by which it could be torn apart again.

I am not in favour of contrivances. If we are all honest, we will accept that in many ways this legislation is a contrivance—I do not mean that disparagingly. It is a contrivance for various reasons. It is intended to bridge the gap that I identified—the political inability to make the Assembly take decisions. Also in many ways, it has more of a paper value than the real substantive value that it might well have had.

Indeed, the legislation is a contrivance in the sense that although it is derived from the Hillsborough joint declaration, it was not part of it; it was an addendum. It did not come out of the joint declaration as agreed by the political parties; it was stuck on to it and issued separately, almost as a counterweight to whatever had been agreed about what might be done governmentally about the issue of on-the-runs. In many ways, that adds to the contrivances. The balancing act that resulted from the two addendums has not increased the standing of the approach.

I am not against sanctions, but this contrivance is political—I can see why it was a political requirement for some, but a political contrivance to get people in may not be the right method of ensuring that everyone stays in or that there is anything in which to stay. I hope that I am wrong.

I can say with some confidence that the mechanisms within this legislation will in any case never be used. I am firmly of the opinion that the day on which the Secretary of State—whoever he or she may be—decides to exclude without cross-community support within the Assembly will be the day on which the question of pensions to which the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) referred becomes very relevant indeed. That is when the political process in the north of Ireland will have decided that it cannot sustain itself and cannot stand on its own two feet. That is when the test that is in this legislation will be used. *[Interruption.]* I will not lose that confidence because of heckling from the cheaper seats. I shall not lose that confidence in spite of those the Americans would call "bleachers"; we might say they were the people up in the stands—*[Interruption.]* I did not mean that offensively.

I am confident because there are many good people in the north of Ireland who want the agreement to work. They want devolution to work. They want north-south development, through the Assembly, to work. They want to experience the sense of pride that Northern Ireland people can fairly and effectively administer their affairs. I am not confusing good people with people who think as I do or who believe what I believe; there are many good people right across the board who genuinely believe that the principle of consent is the cement that will bind the people of the whole of Ireland, north and south, into a people at peace with themselves and with others.

Even as we approach what I hope will be a new electoral situation and a renewed establishment of the political process, I have no doubt that the trust and confidence required are being, and will be, put to the test. There are images in my mind that show how difficult it will be for good and brave people inside and outside politics in Northern Ireland. Those good people in Unionism and in nationalism will have to look at some of the things that are happening around them and face those things down.

The question put by the Good Friday agreement is whether those involved in violence can be regarded as genuine political partners in the creation of lasting peace and a wholly new political dispensation. Sometimes, it is hard to believe that that can be so. Among the images that I recall, just from the past few weeks, is that of the body of Jean McConville, found at Shelling Hill beach—a place I know well. I remember, too, the awesome comment of one of her relations that she was identified because the cardigan found in her sandy grave was her only cardigan. That is some comment on those who murdered Jean McConville, those who gave the instruction to murder her and those who belong to the organisation that killed that lady. Why? Because she was a person of compassion and humanity and gave comfort and help to a dying soldier on the streets of the city in which she lived. That image does not do much for confidence.

I recall a photograph of four Sinn Fein TDs, pictured in Castlerea prison with the murderers of Jerry McCabe, the garda killed outside Limerick. Four Members of Parliament went to that prison to be photographed with the men who murdered one of the Garda Siochana and published the picture in *An Phoblacht* to be gloated over. That is how they feel. Multiply one Jerry McCabe by every policeman killed in the north of Ireland and you see the extent to which those two images alone put the fingers in the eyes of good people in the Unionist community and good people in the nationalist community who want a different and new way of life.

Mr. Dodds: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mallon: I will give way in just one second.

There will be such an occasion in Letterkenny, when a reunion of those who escaped from Crumlin Road prison will take place. There will be dancing and singing.

photographs and gloating, and others will be reminded of their tragedies. I ask this question, simply because it has to be asked: is that the way to create trust and confidence in the Unionist community about a new electoral situation and a new administration? Is that the way to create confidence in the nationalist community that, in effect, a new way of life is coming from the political process?

Add to that the fact that Father Dan White received death threats because he had the audacity to carry out a religious service in a graveyard in Greyabbey. Add to that the desecration of headstones at the small parish church at Ballyargan in my own parish at the weekend. And add to that the threats to brave people who sit on the policing partnership boards from, in the words of the Chief Constable, the Provisional IRA. All that is sticking fingers in people's eyes. I believe that those things have got to be looked at. I will give way now, but I want to expand further on that if I may.

Mr. Dodds: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He is right to draw attention in such a forceful way to the issues that he highlights. On the issue of the Sinn Fein TDs photographed with those responsible for the murder of Garda McCabe, does the hon. Gentleman understand the outrage felt by the families of RUC officers murdered in Northern Ireland who have seen the murderers of their loved ones released and set free, yet people in the Irish Republic—politicians, newspapers and others—say what an outrage it is even for Sinn Fein TDs to be photographed with the perpetrators of such violence? The hon. Gentleman and other Members voted for the release of prisoners—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I have allowed some latitude to the hon. Gentleman, but I hope that other hon. Members will bear in mind just what we are discussing today.

Mr. Mallon: I thank the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds), who asks a valid question. Do I understand? Yes, I think I understand, but this is not just about understanding; it is about feeling. In my view, this is something that transcends understanding, and perhaps that will take us further than a lot of the analysis that we impose on things.

I have mentioned certain visual images. I hope that the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) does not mind that I refer to this, but his churches have been attacked—desecrated—in Counties Monaghan and Cork. I include that with the other images as a means of saying to all of us and to myself that, while we recognise that the creation of peace and the creation of new political institutions have created a moral quagmire for all of us, it is the responsibility of politics to proceed, not to be bogged down in that moral quagmire. In my view, the business of politics will survive.

Politics is about compromise. It is about arbitration. It is about giving a little and getting a little. It is about understanding the other person's position. It is about leaving the other person with enough to ensure that self-respect is not taken away. It is about all those things. It is not about always winning.

I recently noticed a newspaper article by Professor John Murphy. I forget whom he attributed the quote to, but it was this:

"God cannot change what happened in the past—historians, revisionists and spin doctors can."

And they are doing it now. The awfulness of what we are talking about, and the awfulness of the moral quagmire that the good people in the political parties and in the community must wade through rather than get bogged down, is that those who carried out the murders of Jean McConville and young Columba McVeigh—they are digging for his body not far from where I live now—are lionised and heroised. Their dealings and activities are airbrushed in such a way that, in effect, they become folk heroes within their own country. The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford said previously that history will blame. Unfortunately, the most recent part of history does not. It lionises those who use violence. It makes them the pin-up boys of the political process and it gives to them an aura that they simply do not deserve. That is another problem that the good people in the political process will have to see down and see out, and live with it in such a way that we can bury it eventually by creating the type of society that we want.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Should not my hon. Friend's words be heard particularly by one or two who can find kind words for the IRA—*[Interruption.]* I repeat: should not his words be heard by those who have said one or two kinds words about the IRA?

Mr. Mallon: If I were to answer my hon. Friend's question, I would be here a long time. I would apply those words especially, however, in generic terms, to the media in Ireland and in Britain. Could I apply them also to those commentators in Ireland and in Britain who see something exciting about the whiff of cordite and who are prepared to airbrush the awfulness out of their considerations? May I refer them with the greatest of respect to two sovereign Governments and simply say that the more that those who carry out acts of violence become the beneficiaries—in many ways, the gratuitous beneficiaries—of political negotiations, the more the good people in the political process in Ireland, be they Unionist or nationalist, are sacrificed? I therefore thank my hon. Friend for his question. Those are harsh and difficult words to say, but if we are to get beyond this moral quagmire into real development as a people and in terms of a political process, we must say them.

I want to make one or two observations about the legislation. As I said earlier—I could not believe the hornet's nest that I was raising—we are dealing not just with this Bill, but with the draft international agreement, which has established the functions. I will not go through that again. I simply raise the issue because of the distinction, which I believe was confirmed by the Government spokesman in the House of Lords—I am convinced of this, and it is the advice that I have received—that the international commission receives its functions from the agreement between the two Governments, not from the legislative process in which we are engaged here. Consequently, any changes in or to the functions cannot be dealt with in Committee. If I am wrong, I have got it terribly wrong and the Government

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spokesman misled the House of Lords. I have far too much respect for him as a person and for his intellect to believe that that would be the case.

Lembit Öpik *rose—*

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy) *rose—*

Mr. Mallon: I give way to the Minister. Ladies first.

Jane Kennedy: I hesitate to interrupt my hon. Friend, but it would help me to understand the point to which he and others have already drawn attention if he could give me the column reference from the Lords *Hansard*. I would then be able to read it and perhaps respond.

Mr. Mallon: So that there is no lack of clarity, I make it clear that the remarks appeared at column 667 of the Lords *Official Report* on Monday 15 September.

Lembit Öpik: Surely in any practical sense it is reasonable for us to assume that the will of this House can be seen to prevail. The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) certainly made the point that this is the sovereign court of the laws of the United Kingdom. For all practical purposes, we can proceed on the assumption that if the House votes in a certain way, it can be taken as the outcome of our deliberations and that will stand in the eyes of our national and international colleagues.

Mr. Mallon: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but the conclusion will have no legal effect. *[Interruption.]* I hear someone suggesting that that is ridiculous, and perhaps it is. However, that is the reality. I am not a lawyer, but there are many eminent lawyers on these Benches. There are those who properly advise Lord Williams. I do not make my point in a legalistic sense because there is a reason for my wanting to make a change in relation to the functions.

Mr. Quentin Davies: The hon. Gentleman has just said that a decision of Parliament has no legal effect. Of course, that is absurd. Only decisions of Parliament can have legal effect in this country. It may well be that the opposite of what he has said is the case, namely that if Parliament takes certain decisions that have a legal effect, that may invalidate other documents. That is a very different matter.

Mr. Mallon: I take that point, so perhaps I should at this stage explain the reasons for my belief. In response to an amendment tabled by Lord Maginnis of Drumglass, Lord Williams of Mostyn said:

"Therefore, however much one sympathises with the thinking behind it, the amendment would have no legal effect."

Later in the same column, he repeats that point. He said:

"So if the amendment were carried it would have no legal effect."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 15 September 2003; Vol. 652, c. 667.]

That may or may not be the case, but I happen to believe that it is.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): I think that the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right in his analysis of the words spoken by Lord Williams of Mostyn. However, I also think that Lord Williams is absolutely wrong. This is probably the most significant point that we will deal with today in relation to a Bill that may or may not ultimately have short to medium-term importance. Lord Williams was speaking about the exercise of a function by the Executive, but the Executive only have the powers that this place gives them. If this place declines to ratify an act by the Executive, that act is surely null and void. To that extent, when the hon. Gentleman says that something that the other place does by way of amendment would have no legal effect, he is wrong.

Mr. Mallon: I am not saying that. I was simply doing what any Member of Parliament would do by reading what a Government spokesman said. What he said was either right or wrong—I shall leave it to hon. and learned Members to sort that out.

The issue is important to me because when I read the draft agreement, I noticed one great omission. That has caused my difficulty because I would not have gone down this road at all were it not for that. Article 4 of the draft agreement specifies the things that are to be monitored, which include attacks on security forces, murders, sectarian attacks, involvement in riots, other offences, training and targeting. They all appear in paragraph 13 of the joint declaration, but there is one exception: organised crime.

Given Northern Ireland's post-ceasefire experiences, why has organised crime been omitted? Living where I live and coming from where I do, I can tell hon. Members that organised crime is the greatest source of benefit for paramilitary groups because it gives them unlimited money to follow their paramilitary activities and objectives and the money is also channelled into their political objectives. It perverts the society in which racketeering exists to the extent that it does in the north of Ireland and changes and perverts the approach in society. It has a long-term effect and it will take decades before parts of the north of Ireland recover from it, if they ever do. I have to ask again why there is such an omission and why I cannot make an amendment. When the lawyers sort this out, we shall see.

Mr. Donaldson: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that he can seek the leave of the House to table a manuscript amendment? He would have support on this side of the House if he tabled such an amendment, given that he has not already done so.

Mr. Mallon: The right hon. Member for Upper Bann smiled whimsically at me when he heard the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson) saying that I might get support. The right hon. Gentleman sometimes recognises what that is worth.

I shall leave it to the lawyers to sort out the situation but in addition to defrauding the Exchequer, creating a mafia culture in our society and perverting the democratic standards for decades to come, organised crime will fill political coffers north and south of the border in a way with which the Bill should deal.

There is a serious second issue, although perhaps it is not as dramatic. Again, no attempt has been made to deal properly with the failure to fulfil properly functions in the Executive. The joint declaration at Hillsborough said that the body

"will also have a more general responsibility to consider claims by any party in the Assembly that another party is fundamentally in breach of requirements in the Declaration of Support or elsewhere in the Agreement."

The words have been changed so that the draft agreement says:

"has failed to observe any other terms of the pledge of office".

There is a substantive difference. The question of the difference between the pledge of office and the duty of office has still not been resolved. It could have been resolved under the terms of the wording of the joint declaration at Hillsborough, in my view. Again, it is questionable. It is a legal matter. It cannot be done in relation to this, in terms of the pledge of office, rather than the duty of office.

I have already alluded to my third point and will not labour it. There is something weak inherently and something wrong fundamentally, when a political process has to go to a Secretary of State to sort out its problems and has to appoint commissioners from America, the Republic of Ireland, Canada, Finland—name any country in the world and we have commissioners from it—rather than sorting it out ourselves. I very much regret that the cross-community support element can be superseded by a decision of the Secretary of State. I think that I understand the reason for it—I am sure I do—but it tells us something about ourselves.

Mr. Dodds: Does the hon. Gentleman think it is right that those who are supposedly or allegedly in breach of political obligations should be treated in the same way and possibly have the same sanctions applied against them, for taking a principled political position, as those who are alleged to have taken part in criminal or terrorist activity or who are associated with those who do? Is it right that the same sanctions should be applied in both cases?

Mr. Mallon: The hon. Gentleman is asking me to quantify guilt. The reality is that it is not possible. If he is asking me whether it is as damaging, it is not—that is obvious—but is it in the best interests of the political process?

I leave it to people to try to resolve at some time the distinction between the pledge of office and the duty of office, because until we do it will be a running sore.

Mr. Peter Robinson: The hon. Gentleman is on record that, during the lifetime of the Executive, he sought to have excluded from the Executive my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds) and me because we would not sit down at the Executive table with Sinn Fein, yet at the same time the hon. Gentleman did not go after Sinn Fein and its association with the IRA. How could he try to have the Democratic Unionist party, as democrats, removed but not Sinn Fein?

Mr. Mallon: For obvious reasons, I did not table anything in relation to the hon. Gentleman's position. I did not table anything in relation to the Sinn Fein position. As I said earlier, I made an offer that failed on both counts but surely when there is a failure properly to fulfil the duties that are required, as in attending North/South Ministerial Council meetings, that is a breach of the duty of office, however one semantically argues about the pledge of office.

Rev. Ian Paisley: The hon. Gentleman is on record that the agreement was to bring about an inclusive Government. I have heard him say it, I have heard him preach it. Why now is he so anxious to exclude people who are not engaged in violence, who are not leading people on to kill one another but simply want to have the basic democratic principles upheld, which are, as set out by the Prime Minister, that one is not expected to sit down with people in Government and pretend that one can do something, because one must have faith that everyone in that Government has said goodbye to violence and wants democracy to have the ascendancy?

Mr. Mallon: I do not want the exclusion of the hon. Gentleman's party or any party. I want the adherence of all parties to the title duties required in the political arrangement and the agreement, and the adherence of all parties to the crucial point of non-violence. I want a situation in which the hon. Gentleman's party and all political parties in the north of Ireland are inclusively involved in trying to create something that is new and that can give us a new way of life. I am confident that that can happen, and to maintain that confidence I have to believe that inclusivity means serving in an Executive, an assembly, committees and every walk of political life with people whom one may not particularly like, including those who in the past have carried out atrocities. That is what inclusivity means, and that is the moral quagmire that I spoke about earlier.

We must consider which is the more powerful position—not moving out of the moral quagmire because of one's perception of one's own rectitude or having the courage to move out of the moral swamp, and biting one's lip as one goes to do something that will put an end to the swamp. It is easy for all of us to become self-righteous and stay in the swamp because of our beliefs, principles and self-righteousness. However, people of courage get out of the swamp and do difficult things like trying to reach an accommodation, even with people whom they find revolting. That is the challenge that we face, and that is what this is all about.

Finally, I shall return to the good people in the north of Ireland in all political parties who, I hope, will shortly have the opportunity in an election and subsequently to get out of that moral quagmire. If they do so, their contribution to this period of Irish history will be enormous.

4.42 pm

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): I expressed reservations about the allocation of time motion in our first debate, but I am now concerned that if everyone who wishes to speak in this debate does so we will not complete Second Reading before 10.27 pm. However, we will see what happens.

I should like to underline something that arose in our discussion of the motion that is relevant to Second Reading and has direct implications for the process that

[Lembit Öpik]

we are debating. My biggest reservation about completing all the Bill's stages in one day is the fact that it leaves no time for reflection between Second Reading and Committee, and between Committee and Report. Quite apart from the fact that the purpose of the Report stage has been virtually invalidated, it would have been better if the Government had allowed themselves room to manoeuvre on something that is evidently contentious. On balance, they could have saved time by allowing us to have the sort of dialogue that the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) said would be helpful.

Notwithstanding my reservations, I should like to set out the Liberal Democrat view of the Bill, highlighting the things with which we agree and areas that, should we reach a discussion of amendments, we may be able to discuss in more detail.

First, I must take issue with something that the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford said. He described, as he often does, the five cardinal sins committed by the Government with regard to Northern Ireland policy. I humbly suggest that the one cardinal sin that he committed was to attempt to take credit for other people's ideas. He said that on 16 July last year he proposed the arrangements that we are discussing today. I am sure that he will remember that 12 days previous to that, around 4 July 2002, the sister party of the Liberal Democrats, the Alliance party of Northern Ireland, suggested something similar in the Hillsborough talks. I am sure the Alliance party of Northern Ireland would welcome the Conservatives' support for the idea, but it a bit cheeky for the Conservatives to suggest that they came up with it first, when the Alliance party has consistently suggested such ideas, perhaps not realising that it was being watched so closely from across the water.

David Burnside: On the subject of the Liberal Democrats' contribution to new ideas, will the hon. Gentleman confirm that one of the more constructive ideas in recent years from their sister party, the Alliance party, was the contribution from Seamus Close, who suggested that if Sinn Fein cannot turn into a democratic party, we might have to move towards a weighted majority representing both the Unionist and the nationalist community? Perhaps that is the position to which we are now moving.

Lembit Öpik: The hon. Gentleman raises the issue of cross-community support for legislation, which touches on the present debate. Seamus Close was right to raise that for consideration. We are acutely aware of the sensitivities involved, and the SDLP would no doubt have much to say about the abandonment of that principle. My personal feeling and the view of the Liberal Democrats is that at this point it would be premature to abandon the principle on a wholesale basis, because it underpins a large part of what has been shown to be successful in forcing the many different parties in Northern Ireland to work together.

I am sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's concern, and I am sure that he could give examples of business being held up by the need for cross-community support, but it is probably more necessary to have that brake in the system than expedient to remove it at this stage. If one considers the history of the Good Friday agreement and the Assembly, one realises that a great deal has been achieved through consensus, but of course that is not reported in the news so much because it is not controversial. In domestic and social policy, the cross-community requirement has served to improve the quality of the legislation passed, and has certainly improved the prospects of ensuring that decisions made in the Assembly have cross-community applicability. For those reasons, I would resist such change.

It is necessary for the Assembly and all of us to allow space for blue-sky thinking so that more controversial and creative thoughts can come forward. In such a debate, we may come across third alternatives that win on all sides.

I remind the House what the Alliance party was suggesting—that the two Governments appoint an independent person of domestic and international standing to monitor paramilitary activities in Northern Ireland. That was originally conceived as a means whereby domestic and political pressure could be brought to bear on those engaged in sinister deeds and deeds detrimental to the normalisation of the Province. It was not so much about catching people out in order to impose sanctions as about embarrassing groups into changing their undesirable actions. Sanctions are only a backstop in the event that people do not change their behaviour, and with sanctions come all the dangers about which we have heard from the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon).

I welcome the recent announcement of the four commissioners. The Secretary of State went into some detail about Commander Grieve, Mr. Brosnan, Mr. Kerr and my noble Friend Lord Alderdice. In my judgment, they have the background, the experience and the authority and respect to ensure that the commission undertakes its role efficiently and effectively. I congratulate the Government on convincing them to take on the role, which was probably more difficult than deciding who would perform it. It is reassuring to know that the tasks of the monitoring commission in investigating paramilitary activity, security normalisation and parties' political commitments will be undertaken by such distinguished persons. I was slightly concerned that we were heading down the path of becoming the appointments panel en masse. Giving 659 politicians the potential to make such appointments will guarantee that we never achieve consensus. To that extent, I am willing to tolerate the concession to the political hierarchy of accepting that the decisions will be made by a small number of individuals connected with the Northern Ireland Office.

In another place, concerns were expressed about the powers of the Secretary of State. Given the Liberal Democrats' involvement in tabling an amendment on that matter, I feel that it is appropriate to raise it now, not least because the Secretary of State himself was silent about it. There was unease about the feeling that the Bill as it stood did not give the Secretary of State the freedom to work positively, ahead of the monitoring commission, if he or she felt that some people or parties in the Assembly were not committed to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means. While we appreciated those concerns, my noble Friends in the

other place were especially concerned that the commission and Assembly should not be sidelined by any remedy in that regard.

As I said, we support the commission, and we are firm supporters of devolution. As such, we believe that it is vital to tie the Assembly into the process of any exclusion or strategically important decision that is made, for example, by the Secretary of State. In essence, we are saying that it is essential that the democratically elected body in Northern Ireland has the opportunity to discuss the exclusion of a Minister from its own Executive.

A range of amendments was tabled in an attempt to address that concern. My noble Friends did not feel able to support the amendments tabled by the Conservatives or Ulster Unionists as they thought that they were too wide, strong and exclusive of the Assembly and the independent monitoring commission to be acceptable. As I said, we believe that it is crucial that both those bodies are involved in any sanctions. That is why my noble Friends tabled an amendment attempting to do two things—address the concerns expressed about the Secretary of State's ability to act, and ensure the integrity of the monitoring commission and the Assembly in any decision that is made. The amendment was agreed and is now part of clause 6.

With the amendment in place, the Secretary of State would indeed be able to exclude Ministers or junior Ministers from office if he felt that there were exceptional circumstances. That would include a situation in which something happened and he felt it prudent to act immediately without waiting for a report from the commission or for the Assembly to discuss the exclusion. There could subsequently be a space of 24 hours before the Assembly could discuss a motion seeking to exclude Ministers, or perhaps a few days. Let us remember that a week is a very long time in politics. We have seen many times in Northern Ireland a situation that began in tension ending in crisis within hours or days.

That is why we felt that it was appropriate to table an amendment seeking to ensure that the Secretary of State could exclude a Minister from the Executive, but only for a period of two weeks. In that time, the commission would report. Frankly, if something so monumental had happened that the Secretary of State chose to act without reference to the commission, I have no doubt that it would certainly want to investigate and report on it. The Assembly would also debate it. If there is any concern that the Assembly would not discuss exclusion, the Secretary of State can serve a notice on the presiding officer requiring him to table an exclusion motion. There is no question but that a debate could be secured in the Assembly in that period.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that, because of an amendment to the Liberal Democrat amendment tabled by my noble Friend Lord Glentoran, which was agreed, the Secretary of State will have the power of exclusion for two weeks, and the two contingencies to which he refers are included in the possibilities involved when the Secretary of State exercises his judgment, albeit that he can do so without those contingencies if he so wishes? That is a very important point.

On the hon. Gentleman's point about claiming credit for the idea of exclusion, before I brought the proposal to the House, over several weeks previously, I discussed the matter in detail, as I always would do, with parties in Northern Ireland, including the Alliance party, the SDLP and the Ulster Unionist party. If a member of the Alliance party made a statement about exclusion in the days before the debate, he might have been not uninfluenced by his discussion with me in the preceding period.

Lembit Öpik: I recall the occasion when the hon. Gentleman suggested that Sinn Fein, and perhaps the IRA, had crumbled from their stubborn position on a matter of important policy because—I do not quote him exactly, but this is close to what he said—the Conservatives had chosen to debate it on an Opposition day.

I applaud optimism. Indeed, as a Liberal Democrat I am a perpetual optimist, not least in regard to a by-election that will take place tomorrow. I will leave it not just to Members here but to the Alliance party, whose members assiduously read the *Hansard* reports of all our proceedings, to decide who is right and who is wrong; but if it can be shown that the hon. Gentleman was the architect of this inspirational idea, in a spirit of fairness I shall buy him a gin and tonic when we return from the recess, however damaging that may be to my social credibility.

The hon. Gentleman made a substantive point as well. It would, I think, be very undesirable for the Secretary of State to operate unilaterally, without respect for the commission or indeed the Assembly. As ever, there is a degree of interpretation—and there will always be a degree of precedent—governing how an amendment or legislation is established; but just as I have no doubt that the commission would report very shortly after any period of exclusion implemented by the Secretary of State, I consider it pretty much inconceivable that any Secretary of State could withstand the pressure to ensure that it did report, and that the Assembly—if it was sitting—had an opportunity to discuss the report. Failure to do so would not just be disrespectful to the democratically elected body in Northern Ireland; it would make a mockery of the Bill.

In the event of the Assembly's failure to achieve cross-community support for an exclusion motion, the decision would revert to the Secretary of State under clause 5. While giving the Secretary of State a certain amount of discretion, the clause ensures that both the commission and the Assembly are ultimately included in any decision about the exclusion of Ministers from office. The Liberal Democrats consider the involvement of those bodies to be critical.

I realise that there will be some discussion about the latitude within which we can operate. I am aware of the tensions and pressures affecting others involved in this debate, not least politicians in Dublin. I sincerely hope that Ministers will accept their responsibility to ensure that any dialogue with key decision makers, here and in Dublin, that is needed to bring about consensus in favour of the Bill will indeed take place.

It is here that the compressed time scale is perhaps most critical. The Government, having decided in their wisdom to compress the entire debate into nine

[Lembit Öpik]

continuous hours, must also take responsibility for ensuring that our partners in the peace process are involved directly and expeditiously in the ironing out of any problems caused by pressures. Obviously, I hope that there will be no such pressures, but I do not think anyone other than the Government is responsible for disposing of them, given that the Government have chosen to truncate a process that was designed specifically to ensure that no such pressures would arise as a result of our decisions.

Another key point relates to pensions. I have raised it before, and I hope that if we have an opportunity to discuss the amendments in detail the Minister will provide a plausible explanation for the fact that salaries can be curtailed while pensions are untouched. It massively reduces the credibility of the sanction to say "You will suffer in the present, but in the long term you need not worry, because on the day you retire you will receive everything that would have come to you if you had not been mucking about." Ministers should perhaps consider whether there are grounds for changing the relevant provision, perhaps today on Report. Indeed, if that is possible we need not hold up the very tight agenda that the Government have presented us with.

It is clear that the Bill's essential purpose is to act as a confidence-building measure for all in Northern Ireland. Matters of interest to everyone in the community will be investigated and reported. Paramilitary activity, security normalisation and any claims that a political party is not observing the pledge of office can come, as I understand it, under the commission's remit. I hope that, in considering the Bill's provisions so quickly, we have not missed some crucial points, thereby making it less effective.

Andrew Mackinlay: As I understand it—this is really a question for Front Benchers—a Minister's allegedly not fulfilling the pledge of office is one of the issues reserved for the two UK-appointed commissioners. If one were indisposed, could the other act alone—in other words, is the quorum one? Do they have to meet formally, or can they communicate by post, telegraph or pigeon? This is a very real point: do the two British commissioners dealing with strand 1 institutional issues have to come together, or can one of them act alone?

Lembit Öpik: I shall let the Minister respond to that point. Such salient and practical matters need at least to be put on the record to provide guidance for the future.

This is a confidence-building measure, but as the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford rightly said, the most confidence-damaging measure of late was probably the postponement of the elections, and in that regard I am forced to agree with him about the fifth cardinal sin committed by the Government. They have postponed the elections twice, and there is little confidence in the Province that they would not be comfortable with doing so again. As he correctly pointed out, that takes the heat off, in terms of focusing on garnering support in the constituencies. We will all agree that it would be totally unacceptable for the Government to choose the election date to try to achieve a particular political outcome, just as they would never dream of doing so on the mainland, on the occasion of a general election. Of course, the difference in Northern Ireland is that they have to change the law to change the election date, which is a serious business indeed. Liberal Democrats do not consider it acceptable to change the election date, but we also feel that the Government have to climb the mountain of credibility again whenever they talk about confidence-building measures. That is a great shame.

We agree in principle with this measure, which goes beyond the Northern Ireland Act 1998. That Act dealt with exclusion but only the Assembly could exclude, and there was no censure resolution or financial penalties. So this Bill has gone further, and in our view the amendment to it could be regarded in the same category as the censure resolution and financial penalties.

I hope that the Minister can answer our questions, that we get further reassurance about the election date, that we get some perspective on the amendment passed in the other place, and that the question asked by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) is answered. I hope, too, that we are all looking for solutions rather than victories, and that we recognise that no single measure will be successful if people set their faces against getting an effective Assembly up and running in Northern Ireland. As the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh pointed out, however hard we try in this place, we are talking about a contrivance that requires a positive attitude to make it work. Still, Liberal Democrats feel that if this Bill succeeds in moving our attitude forward by increasing the mutual good faith that exists in the Province—thereby ensuring that we get back to the democratic process, which must run hand in hand with the peace process—at a strategic level it is worth passing it.

DEFERRED DIVISIONS

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I now have to announce the results of the Division deferred from a previous day.

On the motion of the implementation and compliance of the common fisheries policy, the Ayes were 235, the Noes were 155, so the motion was agreed to.

[The Division List is published at the end of today's debates.]

Northern Ireland (Monitoring Commission etc.) Bill *[Lords]*

Question again proposed.

5.4 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): I recognise the significance of the measures proposed by the Liberal Democrats in the other place to press some extra powers on a reluctant Secretary of State. That can be valuable in certain circumstances. I notice that Lord Smith of Clifton, who was my former politics tutor at the university of Hull, introduced the debate there. If I do not look young enough, it is because I was an adult student at the time.

I want to refer to the speech made by the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), certain sections of which were very powerful, especially on the misuse of views about the assassination of Sergeant McCabe and the position on Jean McConville. The rhetoric was particularly important.

It also seems to me that important rhetoric is contained in the agreement between the two Governments. Paragraph 12 states:

"Five years after the Agreement, the transition to exclusively democratic means must now be completed. Ongoing paramilitary activity, sectarian violence, and criminality masquerading as a political cause, are all corrosive of the trust and confidence that are necessary to sustain a durable political process."

Paragraph 13 continues:

"Paramilitarism and sectarian violence, therefore, must be brought to an end".

It later refers to the need for paramilitary groups to

"make it clear that they have made such an historic act of completion, and that this is reflected in reality on the ground."

The measures in the Bill are attempts to move in that direction. It is important for Governments and politicians to say what it is all about and to be involved in the high hopes of the people. Powerful rhetoric can, if people actively pursue it, change attitudes, so the words used by politicians are important.

I think that it is bad enough that new Labour has got rid of its socialist policies, but it is far worse that it has got rid of the rhetoric of socialism, because rhetoric offers hopes for the future, for changes and developments. Even if a battle is not won now, people still have some hope around the corner that changes will take place. I might fall into those positions in condemning much of the violence and paramilitary activity that takes place in Northern Ireland, but I realise that words alone will not help to resolve positions. There is a danger, and it applies even to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh and myself on occasions, that words become a substitute for the hard positions that are necessary for action to take place.

I read out a few moments ago the principles contained in the agreement. Even if we have agreed to push the barriers further back in the hope that bodies such as the Provisional IRA will fall into line and go ahead with acts of completion, there must be a point at which the barrier remains firmly in place, whatever the consequences might be. The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh was worried about triggering a situation in which the entire agreement came tumbling down when, at last, action was taken, presumably against Sinn Fein, which made it face up to its responsibilities. There is a stage at which, when we have tried almost everything under the sun, another measure becomes the next stage of development and we will reach the end-point of the game if no action is taken fully to live up to the measures.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that in the agreement the commission was set certain guidelines, targets and dates, to do with government and normalisation, but that the provisions on paramilitaries were open-ended?

Mr. Barnes: I do not think that the agreement is open-ended on terrorism, because it states in the provisions for the commission that it can report on such matters and seek to initiate legal action. It will have to face up to those issues as they arise. The commission will be tested by those issues. Paramilitaries may back off, because of the action that would be taken against them, or the arrangements might crumble, because the paramilitaries do not like what the commission does.

The rhetoric of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh did not carry the day in terms of the legal technicalities of what was said in the House of Lords and whether we could take or leave the Bill according to the occasion. The situation is analogous to an international treaty, in which the Government can engage under royal prerogative powers. On occasions, a treaty might have national implications and would then be discussed by the whole House—as in the case of the Maastricht treaty. What happens then can knock the measure into touch or require the treaty to be tweaked or altered if it is to be adopted. Therefore it is relevant for us to discuss amendments to the Bill later today.

The Secretary of State has been questioned about whether past issues, such as the problems in Colombia and Castlereagh involving the Provisional IRA, can be investigated. We were promised the answer when the Minister winds up. In my opinion, the answer will be that such issues cannot be investigated, because the agreement talks of

"any continuing activity by paramilitary groups."

Some attempt to claim that anything that happens now is in some way linked to events in the past, in order to try to fulfil the criteria of continuing activity. That might be a shortcoming for some people, and they may wish to amend the Bill accordingly.

David Burnside: It appears that the legal action on Sinn Fein-IRA activity in support of FARC, the terrorist movement in Colombia, will not be concluded before this legislation passes through the House, which will be quite soon. In that case, does the hon. Gentleman think that Colombia should be on or off the agenda?

Mr. Barnes: I think that Colombia is liable to be off the agenda as far as the commission is concerned. It does not mean that it has to be off the agenda as far as the Northern Ireland Office or the general political process is concerned. An interesting report on the financing of terrorism was produced by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, and it raised questions about American involvement and FARC activity. The investigations by the police and other forces, and the NIO, will be able to continue, so that action can take place.

HOUSE OF COMMONS PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD) ● 2002-03

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[Mr. Barnes]

I asked the Secretary of State earlier about the relationship between clauses 2 and 3. It is possible that my point in that short intervention was not as clear as it should have been. Paragraph 3 of the agreement between the British and Irish Governments states:

"Any incidents of non-compliance by any party will . . . be subject to either political exposure or, where appropriate, the process of law."

I presume that political exposure will happen through reports made to the House. It struck me that a problem with clause 2 could inhibit the nature of a report under clause 3. Obviously, I do not want the contents of a report to put people's lives at risk, or prejudice future legal proceedings, but there is some restraint on what the commission can tell us.

If the commission believes that it knows who is involved in a certain activity, and that that person should be exposed, that could be achieved by means of a statement to the House, which would be privileged. However, that could still affect future legal proceedings. Alternatively, the life of a person implicated in the serious paramilitary activity proscribed by the agreement could be put at risk, as a result of the activity of opposing paramilitary forces. Does that mean that we will not find out who is involved in paramilitary activity? If so, the Bill will be less effective than intended.

My final point has to do with on-the-runs. The material on the Bill placed in the Library by the Northern Ireland Office for this debate contains a document—"Proposals in Relation to On the Runs"—that was agreed in April 2003. It makes it clear that, in future, certain rules will apply to people who are on the run, and it seems that some sort of offer is being made to the paramilitary organisations. The offer is that, if on-the-runs play ball with the work of the commission and act according to the principles that it supports, they will get the clearance outlined in the document.

The document is the carrot and we are now discussing the stick. The problem is that people, when offered a carrot, will sometimes go after that incentive, in the hope that they can get round other limitations placed on them. Before any provisions are implemented in respect of on-the-runs and the conditions that they would have to observe, I want to ensure that people who are on the run from the on-the-runs, and their organisations, are free to return to Northern Ireland, if that is what they wish. The agreement between the two Governments refers to such exiles, if only by inference, and they must be provided for. That matter must be sorted out.

I generally favour the Bill. I recognise that we are moving the goalposts back in the hope that the game can be completed. However, there must come a point at which we say, "That's it." This is that point, and it must be reached without there being some way of wheedling matters so that those on the run can be got off the hook.

5.20 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Let me comment on the closing words of the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), without endorsing any form of amnesty, because we have always opposed any provision with regard to on-the-runs. I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's work over the years in highlighting the plight of those who have been forced to leave as a result of paramilitary intimidation. They have become exiles from Northern Ireland and can return only at risk to themselves. His significant contribution in bringing the focus to bear on that form of paramilitary abuse should be recognised. We would all agree entirely with what he said about exiles.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) made a compelling contribution, particularly when he talked about the activities of paramilitarism and about how he understood the feelings that exist. I endorse a lot of what he said about that. He referred to the way in which some sectors of society almost glorify those who have been involved in violence, and he criticised in particular the broadcast media and the press. That brought into my mind a newspaper article published today, as did his mention of the planned celebration for those who escaped from the Maze prison many years ago. *The Independent* today carries a huge spread on that subject. I have not read the article by Mr. David McKittrick, and I do not prejudge it. I did not get as far as reading the article because the graphic at the top of the page was enough for me to throw the paper away. It superimposed on a photograph of the Maze prison small photographs of some escapers along with little notes about who they were and what their contributions had been.

The note on one escaper referred to his having been

"at the forefront of the peace process".

Who was that? Mr. Bobby Storey. Since the agreement, Mr. Bobby Storey may have been at the forefront of some things, but they certainly were not the peace process. *[Interruption.]* I can hear some comments being made about some of the achievements to Mr. Storey's credit over the past few years.

The glorification of that gentleman in that newspaper illustrates precisely what the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh was saying. The attitude among some politicians and members of the media has made achieving completion of the peace process more difficult. The whole process is predicated on giving to those involved in violence in the past the opportunity to move towards peaceful democratic politics. That process is impeded or delayed while some people tolerate, or even encourage, the glorification of paramilitary activities and paramilitarism. Any commentator, politician, newspaper or television programme that engages in that behaviour is helping to undermine the process in which we have all been engaged.

We will broadly endorse the Bill, but it should not, in many respects, be before us at all. If successive Secretaries of State had done their job properly over the past four or five years and if the Government had done their job and kept their pledges, it would not be necessary for us examine such legislation. In that respect, there is much merit in what the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) said.

My colleagues and I started to argue in the spring and summer last year for the creation of some sort of arrangement to monitor ceasefires, simply because successive Secretaries of State had failed to do so. After the agreement, we had the unedifying spectacle of continuing paramilitary activity and of Secretaries of State failing to identify it as such and brushing it under

the carpet—one Secretary of State used the phrase "internal housekeeping" about murder. If it had not been for that approach, we would not have had some of the difficulties that have arisen in the past four or five years and it would not have been necessary for us to consider this measure.

One of the objects of this exercise—it is sad that this has to be the case—is to make it difficult for Ministers to turn a blind eye. Those people who have taken on responsibility in the independent monitoring commission should clearly understand that. Their job is not to support the Government; by scrutinising paramilitary activity and reporting on it clearly and accurately, their job is to ensure that the Government do not fail to carry out their functions in these matters.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh regretted the fact that instead of doing the job ourselves we are once again turning to someone outside, and I sympathise entirely with him. When the suggestion was made last summer, ensuring that this scrutiny was done properly was in the forefront of my mind—getting the right people to ensure that the Secretary of State did not dodge the column. Indeed, hon. Members may be interested to know that one of the first suggestions that I made—if not the very first—when we were thinking of a single ceasefire monitor was the distinguished Spanish judge Baltasar Garzon, whose achievements in a wide range of fields are extremely well known. Indeed, his achievements with regard to ETA are significant, as are those in outing the dirty war committed by the socialist Government of Spain.

David Burnside: One of the great contributions of that Spanish gentleman resulted in the proscription of Batasuna—the front organisation of ETA, which I do not believe will be debated later this evening.

Mr. Trimble: If my hon. Friend looks at the dates, he will notice that that happened after I had identified Baltasar Garzon as a first-class person for this job, so I am not surprised at what he describes.

In an intervention, I referred to the fact that as a result of the representations of my party and others, we made some progress in persuading the Government of the desirability of moving down this road—establishing some oversight of ceasefires. A statement was made to the House on 25 July last year. Unfortunately, that statement was not emphatic enough in its commitment and it did not give any sense that there would be a radical change in the Government's approach. That was a great disappointment to us.

The day after the statement, a colleague contacted the Government to say that as a result of the way the issue had been fumbled in the House, we could expect a violent summer and a political crisis in the autumn, which is precisely what happened. As hon. Members will remember, last summer was certainly the worst for violence and public disorder that we have had in the Belfast region since long before the ceasefires. That was no accident, and it could largely be attributed to the Government sending the wrong signals last summer.

The crisis came in the autumn, with what we call Stormontgate, although it was slightly different from what I had anticipated. Stormontgate was in fact part of the same operation that led to the Castlereagh raid. There were two manifestations, but both arose from a widespread intelligence gathering operation conducted by the mainstream IRA. To ensure that I do not prejudice future legal proceedings, I shall not mention the person in the IRA who was responsible for directing both Castlereagh and Stormontgate—*[Interruption.]* We should not have sedentary interruptions on that point.

As a result of the crisis, we had suspension. If, in June or July last year, the Government had taken up the suggestions that I and other parties made in the spring and early summer and put in place some form of ceasefire monitor or sanctions, we might not have had suspension in 2002. These provisions come a long time after the event, to try to repair the damage done by the Government due to their mistakes in managing the process.

Since suspension, questions obviously arise about the circumstances in which there could be a return to devolution and to the Assembly and the Executive. The criteria have been spelt out by our party, embodied in a resolution of the Ulster Unionist council of September 2002. They were reflected in language used by the Prime Minister in his speech at the Belfast harbour office in October last year and, as was pointed out earlier, elements of them were reflected in comments about the ending of paramilitary activity made by the Minister of State to a Standing Committee last Tuesday.

The ending of paramilitary activity has repeatedly been defined. Hon. Members should bear it in mind that the time scale, too, has been defined. The relevant paragraph—paragraph 13—of the joint declaration refers to the "immediate" ending of paramilitary activity. The time scale embodied in the word "immediate" is fairly clear.

Decommissioning is also required; it has not been forgotten. Again, careful perusal of the documentation makes that clear. Actions are needed that effectively carry us towards completion. It must be clear that the process is moving to a conclusion, according to the definitions that have been offered.

It is necessary not only for paramilitary activity to end but for a clear indication as to the future status, role and structure of the organisation currently referred to as the Irish Republican Army. We need to know that the cessation of paramilitary activity and decommissioning are more than here-and-now events. We need to know what is intended and what is likely to happen in the future.

Those things have not yet happened, although we know that considerable efforts were made in March and April to obtain adequate responses on those matters and that the republican movement failed to make adequate responses. Hopes have been expressed by several hon. Members that we can make progress, that we can get the Assembly back, reform the Executive and hold the elections that would be necessary for that. However, to do so, the underlying problems of paramilitary activity must be resolved.

A mere glance at the calendar shows us that, if we are to move to elections in the autumn, it will be necessary for the republican movement to take those steps during the next few weeks. I am not in a position to define how much time there is, but it is important to note that time is limited and that action must occur quickly. We cannot

[Mr. Trimble]

have the sort of spun-out, long-delayed process that we have had in the past. Things need to move very quickly indeed. I hope that they do, because to go through another winter with the political process in uncertainty and with the institutions continuing to be suspended would be deeply damaging.

Mr. John Taylor (Solihull): Is the right hon. Gentleman acquainted with the words that the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the right hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Jane Kennedy) uttered in Committee on 9 September, when she provided a litany of the steps to be taken by republican terrorists before an election can be considered?

Mr. Trimble: Indeed, I am aware of those steps, and the right hon. Lady gave a full and detailed description of what is involved in relation to the ending of paramilitary activity in her contribution in Committee last week. The hon. Gentleman will recall that, in addition, I referred to the need for decisive action to be taken in relation to decommissioning and for clear indications about future conduct because action in the here and now is, of course, extremely valuable, but we also need to find out where things will rest in the future.

I was referring to the damaging effect if the uncertainty is prolonged into the winter and the spring. A simple point underlies all this; and it was also touched on by the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford. Suspension punishes everyone for the misdeeds of a few. Suspension took the Northern Ireland Assembly and all its Members out of operation because paramilitaries linked to a few had been engaged in unacceptable activity. It is in itself unacceptable that all the institutions should be suspended, consequently depriving Northern Ireland's electorate of the opportunity of democratic representation in the Assembly, because a handful of people have behaved badly.

It may be that the Government, for whatever reason, were not prepared to take the necessary action in October. It may be that the Bill will give them the power to take that action in the future, but the legislation will bite only after the resumption of the Assembly. At present, the Assembly is suspended and the offices are vacated, and the penalties in the Bill will have no effect this side of resumption. Of course, without progress from paramilitaries, do we get resumption? So the legislation will have no impact until we are the other side of the resumption of the Assembly, the re-formation of the Executive and, of course, the elections, which should have taken place. There is a significant question that the Government need to address: what happens if we do not see sufficient acts of completion from republicans? We cannot be expected to remain excluded indefinitely from the Assembly and the Executive because of the fault of others? If the Government find that they have been unable to make progress come 15 November, the Government—the Secretary of State, the Prime Minister or whoever—will have to come to the Dispatch Box and give hon. Members and, through us, the people of Northern Ireland, a clear explanation of what the future holds, rather than simply relying on hope and saying, "Well, we'll keep on trying", even after 13 months of trying time and again. If that is what the Secretary of State says, the general assumption will be that we are going back into deep cold storage and direct rule for years, perhaps decades. There is a danger of drift, and the Government must know that they ought not to allow that drift to occur and that, during the next few months, they will have to find answers to the questions that I have put.

This legislation is essentially intended for a post-devolution situation, and it is needed because of the lack of confidence that exists. Let us assume that we had a statement from P. O'Neill announcing the disbandment of the IRA, for which many Unionists have called. If such a statement were made, how would we know whether it had happened? The IRA is a secret army—an underground organisation. There are some indications in terms of activities, but how can we tell whether an underground army has disbanded? A huge element of trust is involved in that, and in view of what has happened over the last several years, that trust is in short supply. The need is for the monitoring commission not just to monitor activity but to attribute responsibility, for it to give the people of Northern Ireland a guarantee that, if an organisation says that it has disbanded, that it has ceased activity and that there will not be any activity in the future, someone independent of the Northern Ireland Office or the Secretary of State will blow the whistle if it turns out that that claimed disbandment did not occur and that a secret element within the private army continues to exist and be active. That is why it is important.

The reserve power for the Secretary of State to act is also important not just because in the practical circumstances of the last five years an exclusion motion was never carried in the Assembly, but to provide a reassurance to the people of Northern Ireland if, as a consequence of an election, it appears that an exclusion motion might never be carried in the future in the Assembly under the existing rules. The reserve power is therefore important for the future, and I will return in a moment to the question of the reserve power for the Secretary of State as currently defined.

Nothing in this world is without difficulty or free from problems. It has been suggested that there are some fundamental problems with this legislation, particularly with regard to preserving sovereignty. At the strict legal level, there is no problem with sovereignty, because the agreement to create the monitoring arrangement is very clear. In its last couple of sentences, it talks about what might happen in the event of continuing paramilitary activity, and includes the phrases,

"it would be a matter for the British Government . . . to resolve the matter . . . The British Government would envisage amending the Northern Ireland Act . . . to enable a variety of responses".

Of course, this legislation amends that Act and confers the power to act on the British Government and the British Government alone. In strict legal terms, therefore, there is no breach of sovereignty on this issue at all.

There are two areas, however, about which people might have concerns. One is with regard to the ground rules that we developed for the inter-party talks. In developing those ground rules, there was one important issue on which I and my colleagues were careful to insist: that while the inter-party talks included the British Government and the Irish Government, as well as the

political parties in Northern Ireland, strand 1 of those talks should be between the political parties in Northern Ireland and the British Government alone, and that the Irish Government should have no participation in strand 1. As originally drafted, the paper that appeared at the beginning of May appeared to breach that. I am glad that the international agreement, the draft of which has been published, makes it clear that the strand 1 issue has been resolved. Some people have queried whether that is so, and I have referred to article 6 of that draft agreement, which refers in (a) to whether people are committed to

"non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means"

and in (b) to whether they have

"failed to observe any other terms of the pledge of office",

which relates to the internal affairs of the Northern Ireland Assembly. The provision that has been made in the draft agreement to preserve the strand 1 issue relates to (b) but not to (a). It has therefore been suggested that the sovereignty issue has not been resolved with regard to (a). To those who make that point, I say that what we have in this agreement is precisely what we had during the inter-party talks. The details of the operation of the Assembly are a strand 1 issue, but the question of someone's fundamental commitment to the process and to peace and exclusively peaceful and democratic means has regard to the talks as a whole.

The distinction can be illustrated by remembering what happened during the talks. During the talks, a number of violent incidents took place that were attributed to paramilitaries who were related to parties that were engaged in the process. Most of the talks took place in Belfast, but it will be recalled that there were two weeks out—one in London and one in Dublin. By coincidence, when we got to London, the entire week was taken up with the question of whether the Ulster Democratic party—which had links with the Ulster Defence Association, a paramilitary organisation—should be excluded from the talks because of violence committed by the UDA. When we got to Dublin, the whole time was taken up with the question of whether Sinn Fein should be excluded from the talks because of violent acts committed by the IRA.

How were those issues conducted and resolved? In both cases, exclusion occurred but the decision was taken jointly by the British and Irish Governments in exactly the manner to which article 6(1)(a) relates. The position in the agreement is precisely what happened during the talks. When we were in Lancaster house or Dublin castle and we were urging the Governments to exclude both the Ulster Democratic party and Sinn Fein, it was never suggested that there was any great breach of sovereignty there or that any fundamental principle was being violated. Those who are concerned about the matter should consider it in that context and see that it is entirely in accordance with the precedents established in the talks.

I have dealt with what is called the strand 1 issue, but there is another aspect of sovereignty that we must consider. I have referred to the reserve power for the Secretary of State; it is crucial that there is that reserve power. However, the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford was right to say that the Bill, as published, fettered that power unduly because the power would arise only when there was first a determination or report by the monitoring commission with a recommendation. If there were no report or recommendation, there would be no power for the Secretary of State. I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman that that was too great a fetter on the Secretary of State's power and that a power conditioned in that way would not reassure the public.

I hope that the independent monitoring commission will work. We do not know what the future holds and we do not know exactly how the IMC will operate. The hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) asked about the IMC's rules of procedure, its quorum and whether its decisions would be based on unanimity or a majority. We do not know the answers to those questions, and we do not know the pressures that may be brought to bear on the individuals concerned. I am generally content with the individuals concerned but we are moving into uncharted territory. It would be wrong to assume that everything will be all right and that we do not need to make sensible provision for unforeseen circumstances.

Because it is wise to make provision for unforeseen circumstances and for emergencies that might not occur, it is right for the Secretary of State to have a reserve power that he can actually use. Not making provision for such a power is not something that Governments usually do when they draft legislation. When drafting legislation, efforts are usually made to try to provide for contingencies. Friedman has referred to the law of unintended consequences and unanticipated events, and it is better to have a reserve provision that might at least cope with them than to proceed on the assumption that everything will be all right and that there will be no problems. Given the history of Northern Ireland over the past few years, it is wrong to proceed as though there will never be problems.

As originally drafted, the Bill was seriously defective. That was why my colleagues in another place tabled amendments, which have been tabled again for consideration today. If the amendments had been passed, they would have resolved the problem entirely. At one stage, we thought that they recommended themselves to the Liberal Democrats but when it came to the bit, they unfortunately went off on a venture of their own and drafted an amendment without thinking the matter through carefully. Their amendment was an endeavour to provide a reserve power but it was seriously defective. I endorse the comments made by the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford about Lord Glentoran's work in the other place because he improved the Liberal Democrat amendment significantly, although it remains defective.

Lembit Öpik: Given that that is the right hon. Gentleman's view, it is a matter of regret that, despite my efforts to consult him, he did not try to respond in a like kind. It might have been possible for us to negotiate but his silence indicated that that would not happen.

Mr. Trimble: I am puzzled by the hon. Gentleman's comments because I had several meetings with Liberal Democrats last week and a conversation with him on these Benches. Subsequently, on Friday, I had a conversation with his party leader, so I am not sure to what he refers. I responded clearly about our position up until Friday night. I do not wish to inquire about the internal affairs of his party because I know that a party's

[Mr. Trimble]

internal activities are sometimes difficult to fathom. However, my limited acquaintance with the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords has told me that, whatever the difficulties in my party might be, there are huge difficulties elsewhere that are comparable, if not greater. Perhaps we should draw a discreet veil over such matters.

Although Lord Glentoran improved the Liberal Democrat amendment that appears as clause 6, it is still defective and in need of improvement. I have tabled a few amendments, several of which are technical. Indeed, one would insert a safeguard on the Secretary of State's power so that he could exercise it only if he were satisfied that people were not committed to exclusively peaceful and democratic means—I was rather surprised that the Liberal Democrats omitted such a measure. They also omitted another measure that is fairly obvious if one reads comparable provisions, so I have tabled amendments to make the clause more effective.

Of course, I would prefer it if the group of amendments that we have tabled that starts with amendment No. 2 were accepted. I refer to those amendments because I have looked at the clock and I am not confident that we shall have the opportunity to debate them: I put on record the fact that, although the Liberal Democrat amendment goes some way toward solving the problem, we would much prefer the group of amendments linked to amendment No. 2.

May I also draw attention to new clause 5? It is extremely important because it embodies a significant aspect of the agreement that is, regrettably, not replicated in the Bill. I quoted previously part of a sentence that appears toward the end of the agreement on the establishment of the monitoring body. It says:

"it would be a matter for the British Government . . . to resolve the matter in a manner consistent with the report of the Independent Monitoring Body."

Rev. Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the right hon. Gentleman to make a speech about those amendments on Second Reading?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Let me say to the House that the matter is generally one of proportionality. Obviously there can be reference to possible amendments, but I would not expect any hon. Member to go into too much detail. I was listening carefully to what the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) was saying. I might also offer the view to the House that the progress that we make and whether we shall be able to have a certain number of hours in Committee is up to hon. Members. I appeal to hon. Members to determine for themselves how they wish the time to be shared.

Mr. Trimble: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My intention was simply to emphasise how important that part of the agreement was to us. I hope very much that we get the chance to have a detailed debate on that and that the Government get the opportunity to accept that new clause. That would go a long way to building confidence. As I said at the outset, part of the reason for this is because of the way in which the Government as a whole have handled these issues and their failure to act at particular times. It is necessary for that reason.

I am sure that the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) will forgive me if I comment just for a few minutes on an issue that has been raised by amendments that his party has tabled. There is some merit in the points that he has raised. Hon. Members have referred to the disjunction—the inequality—between failure to be committed to exclusively peaceful and democratic means, which is fundamental to the process, and alleged breaches of other aspects of the pledge of office, which operates on an entirely different plane. It may be thought invidious that those two are linked together and that is a view with which I have much sympathy.

I will not go into detail or mention names, if only to protect the guilty, but when the issue was first raised at a discussion involving a number of parties, it was suggested that rather than have it look as though we were focusing all our attention in terms of sanctions purely on one particular party, we should have provisions that meant that other parties, not just Sinn Fein, might potentially be in breach. "Why just point the finger at that party? The finger could be pointed at any one of us," was the phrase that was used. I remember in that discussion saying that, when that particular person volunteered for punishment, he was certainly not speaking for me, but, unfortunately, the suggestion was made, the idea was out and other people ran with it. It is not an idea that I have thought appropriate in this context. Consequently, if we reach those DUP amendments, I will feel a lot of sympathy for them, but that depends on circumstances.

It is desirable that a variety of penalties are provided for. One reason why the Government were reluctant to act on continuing paramilitary activity was that the only sanction that existed was the nuclear option of exclusion—there was a reluctance, sometimes understandable, to use that nuclear option. With other penalties, if the infringements are not that serious or not thought to justify the nuclear option, at least there is a way in which the Assembly or the Government, if that is the case, can formally indicate their displeasure and dissatisfaction, and that is extremely useful.

I will not say much about the membership of the commission. Some of the gentlemen are not directly known to me but, from what I do know, the membership has a good balance. We have on the commission someone who, as part of the Metropolitan police, specifically dealt with anti-terrorist activity; someone who, as secretary general, the equivalent of permanent secretary, at the Irish Department of Justice has clear familiarity with criminal law and legal procedures; and someone who, as deputy director of the CIA, is accustomed to handling intelligence matters.

We have three specialists with practical information and that is balanced by someone from Northern Ireland, who will be able to inform the views of those specialists, to tell them how things are perceived in Northern Ireland and to reflect the views of people in Northern Ireland. He may, if it is necessary, be able to act as a whistleblower to the people of Northern Ireland if the specialists for some reason fail to deal with the issues seriously enough.

I make one small point with regard to the procedures. It is unfortunate that the procedures in the intergovernmental agreement make reference to the implementation group. There is no implementation group in the Belfast agreement. It is a novel concept that has come forward since. It has tended to undermine some basic concepts in the agreement. When the idea was first proposed, it seemed to have some utility, but the way in which it has developed lately is not advisable. It is unfortunate that it has been given a central role, when its structure is not properly representative. I urge the Secretary of State to reflect on it and things that have been spun off it that are even less representative and capable of developing things that should be done by political parties in Northern Ireland. It is unfortunate that that novel concept, which was originally devised to give comfort to certain parties, is now taking on an unwanted life of its own. It may be dangerous, as it is undermining some of the basic concepts in the agreement.

That brings me to my final point which, I hope, will commend itself to other Members on these Benches. An important aspect of the agreement is the undertaking that the Prime Minister gave on 10 April. I do not have the text before me, but he said that, if the procedures in the agreement on excluding from office persons who are not committed to exclusively peaceful and democratic means proved ineffective, he would support changes to the agreement. Those were the general terms of his undertaking, and my colleagues and I gave them considerable weight in our decision to proceed. To a certain extent, the Northern Ireland Act 2000—the suspension Act—put that undertaking into effect, but did not do so directly. It dealt with the issue indirectly and, for the reasons mentioned earlier, unsatisfactorily.

Now, however, the Government, five years late, are fulfilling their pledge—I hope that that is what is happening. But the way in which they originally drafted the legislation was halting and hesitant. If they want the process to prosper, they need to fulfil their pledge wholeheartedly in a way that builds confidence. I hope that they do so and that we get the chance to deal with the detailed amendments. I hope that the Government will respond to them positively, although that hope has not always been met in the past. I hope that they will deal with these matters on their merits, rather than simply arithmetically and that, as a result of all of this, we can make progress in Northern Ireland.

6.2 pm

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): I should like to start my limited contribution by echoing the sentiments of many on the Opposition Benches about the programming of the Bill. It is extraordinary that the Government should introduce legislation with a guillotine timetable, which will necessarily result in our having no time for any scrutiny or considered reflection. The Government would perhaps be more credible if they were as swift and determined to condemn and penalise parties and individuals who repeatedly violate the terms and spirit of the Belfast agreement as they are in trying to get this Bill through the House in just one day.

I suspect that, in all fairness, the Secretary of State is under considerable pressure from the Irish Government as well as the Prime Minister. We are all aware of the logjam of Government Bills in the other place. The Secretary of State no doubt wishes to get the Bill through the House to concentrate on the November election for a restored Assembly. Crucially, the Government believe that the creation of the monitoring commission will go a long way towards allaying the fears of the Unionist community, which has become increasingly disillusioned with the Government's repeated concessions to Sinn Fein-IRA. To many, that is exactly how recent history post the Belfast agreement appears.

The Secretary of State referred this afternoon to an absence of satisfactory commitments to end paramilitary activity. The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the right hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Jane Kennedy)—I was in the Standing Committee last week—recently reiterated that acts of completion were needed before the Assembly elections are held. The great majority in all parts of the House agree with both statements. However, many feel that the carrot and stick have not been applied equally in enforcing the Belfast agreement. Many perceive the concessions made at Weston Park in 2001 and the concessions on the dismantling of watchtowers made at Hillsborough in March, with no movement by republicans in return, to be part of a continuing and depressing pattern.

Let us not forget that decommissioning was meant to have been completed by May 2000. Yet here we are three years later—three years during which we have witnessed Colombia, Florida, Castlereagh and Stormontgate. In a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) on 13 April this year, the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the right hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree confirmed that there had been three acts of decommissioning carried out by paramilitary organisations—one by the Loyalist Volunteer Force and two by the Provisional IRA.

On 27 April Gerry Adams stated that the IRA was willing to decommission all its arms and ensure that there was complete and final closure to the conflict. However, his careful phraseology drew the proper response from the Prime Minister that he was being extremely ambiguous on the future of paramilitary organisations. That ambiguity remains.

I fully support the principle of excluding any party or parties in breach of their responsibilities. It is worth noting that, despite what the Liberal Democrat spokesman said, my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) initiated the proposal last July. Had he been listened to at that time, we would probably never have had to dissolve the Assembly, and all that ensued thereafter could have been avoided. As a result of the Government's decision at that time, all parties suffered equally, as did the peace process itself.

I support the establishment of the monitoring commission. When it was first suggested, it met with strong resistance, not least from the Secretary of State's predecessor the right hon. Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid), but Downing street waded in, and as we now know, the matter once again gained prominence at Hillsborough on 3 and 4 March this year. The terms of reference for the commission are clear. Important points such as strand 1 reserved matters, which relate purely to the two British members, are useful and important.

[Mr. Hugo Swire]

Other equally important points are less clear, as has been pointed out by Baroness Park in the other place. Where will the commission get its information from? What powers will it have to obtain information from the British and Irish security services? What will its relationship be with the General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland and with the Garda Siochana? How much will it all cost? Where will it be based and how will it be staffed? Will it have access to the ongoing work of the Criminal Assets Bureau and the Organised Crime Task Force? As we discussed this afternoon, will it be able to investigate past and current alleged violations of the agreement?

The only body with which we can compare the new body is the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning under General de Chastelain, but what has that body achieved? That commission operates in such secrecy that it is difficult to know whether it has achieved anything of significance. We are asked to take too much on trust, and stonewalled when we ask what terms such as "significant" and "verifiable" mean. If the monitoring commission is to have any credibility, it must operate in a more open manner. We must be able to see that progress is being made, that intimidation is stopping, that exiles are being allowed to return and live in peace, and that paramilitaries have ceased both fundraising and stockpiling arms.

The Government themselves must now take more responsibility for their actions. They cannot continue to set up commissions and abrogate decision making to them. That is why the official Opposition believe that the Secretary of State himself must have the power and ability to exercise his judgment and prerogative to make an exclusion with or without a recommendation from the commission. Anything else would tie his hands and represent an abdication of his responsibility as Secretary of State.

I concede that Northern Ireland is mercifully a safer place today than before the Belfast agreement, but abuses continue daily, adversely affecting the lives of thousands of wholly innocent people. If we read the papers any day, we will see that that is the case. Only yesterday, *The Irish Times* contained reports about intimidation of members of the police commission and about a death threat to a Catholic priest made by a so-called loyalist paramilitary group. There was also a report about the dinner that is to be held in Donegal on Friday to commemorate Maze escapees, which the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) mentioned. I earnestly hope that, as we speak, the Chief Constable is in talks with his opposite number in the Garda to ensure that any on-the-runs who turn up are arrested.

That is everyday news in a Northern Ireland that is still suffering abuse at the hands of a limited number of people with disruptive agendas of their own. Like my party, I shall always support any measure to combat that continuing menace. If a reformed Assembly is the goal of this Government, it must not be achieved at the cost of principle. The Belfast agreement committed all participants to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations. Both the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning and the new monitoring commission have their part to play in enforcing the agreement. Ultimately, however, it is the Secretary of State who must take responsibility for ensuring that anyone violating the Belfast agreement will be excluded from the democratic process in Northern Ireland.

6.12 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Perhaps you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will give me latitude by allowing me to put on record at the commencement of my speech my condolences and those of my colleagues to the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady). I trust that his colleague can pass those condolences on. His wife died this week and I think that anybody who has been with him and his wife will know that theirs was a very warm and loving relationship. Indeed, it was a lifelong relationship, which makes the cloud all the darker for him.

Many in Northern Ireland, or at least those who have studied the Bill, will consider it an odious, unnecessary and loathsome measure that demonstrates two key Government failures. It also attempts to achieve the impossible and prop up the failed agreement. The first Government failure is their admission that, until this moment, they have been unwilling to act on their own behalf or take the necessary powers enabling them to act in order to do their duty by expelling those who have corrupted the political process in Northern Ireland through their involvement in ongoing terrorism. In introducing the Bill, the Government want to share their inertia with others.

The second Government failure that the Bill demonstrates is that, instead of dealing with those who wish to be at the same time Ministers and members of the army council of the IRA by isolating them and excluding them from the Executive, they seek to link and equate those terrorists with democrats who refuse to partner them in government. I suspect that, in another more enlightened age in society, those who refused to get into bed with the representatives of unrepentant and active terrorism would be applauded and supported by their Government—but not here, and certainly not by this Government. Indeed, the Bill even offers the same range and level of penalties against democrats as against terrorists.

Let me deal first with the origins of the Bill. Reference has been made to the Belfast agreement, which referred to how the Assembly might deal with those who were in breach of the requirement for using exclusively peaceful and democratic means. The paragraph in question appears under that dealing with executive authority and says:

> "An individual may be removed from office following a decision of the Assembly taken on a cross-community basis, if he or she loses the confidence of the Assembly, voting on a cross-community basis, for failure to meet his or her responsibilities including, inter alia, those set out in the Pledge of Office."

On a first reading of that section of the Belfast agreement, it was clear that it would never work. From the moment we read the agreement, we warned the people of Northern Ireland not only that it would not work, but that it was intended not to do so. It was a device to create a pretence that tough action would be taken against terrorism, yet the ability to take such action was not allowed for in the agreement or subsequent provisions contained in the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Indeed, the 1998 Act contained an additional provision ensuring that, if the Secretary of State was of the opinion that people had been in breach of their anti-violence pledge, he could submit a resolution to that effect and require it to be debated in the Assembly. Interestingly, in the five years when IRA activity was ongoing and we saw the catalogue of incidents that has been mentioned, not once did the Secretary of State, past or present, make any move to ensure that Assembly met to consider breaches of that pledge.

When we made it clear to the people of Northern Ireland that the exclusion provision would not be workable, we did so on the basis of never contemplating the possibility that the SDLP would be prepared to stand up and exclude its colleagues in Sinn Fein. It was clear to all but the most politically pubescent that a veto would be used by nationalists to ensure that IRA-Sinn Fein were not expelled, no matter what they did, and that no act, no matter how vile or wicked, would irritate the SDLP sufficiently to lead it to exclude IRA-Sinn Fein.

The evidence is there for all to see. Gun running from Florida did not make the SDLP take action, and nor was the murder of more than 20 people by the Provisional IRA enough to do it. The Provisional IRA shot more than 200 people, but that still was not enough to prompt the SDLP to act. More than 350 paramilitary beatings took place, but even that did not cause it to take action. The exiling of the IRA's opponents took place, but no action was taken. Even training in Colombia, the raiding of Castlereagh and spying at Stormont did not provoke the SDLP sufficiently.

I cannot imagine that even the most depraved, murderous act that it would have been possible for the Provisional IRA to commit would have provoked the SDLP to vote Sinn Fein-IRA out of office. What I consider even worse is the fact that nothing they did was enough to force the Government to take action against them. The Government knew that the IRA was in breach of the agreement, but could not bring themselves to say as much. So what did they do? They punished everyone. Rather than putting the provos out, they suspended the whole Assembly. Now what do they do? They produce this Bill, in which once again they attempt to pull others into the provos' net. They equate the behaviour of terrorists with the function of Government to decide the appropriate level of security for Northern Ireland. The Provisional IRA's security level is to be equated with what is described as normalisation — or, in provospeak, British demilitarisation.

In addition, those who will consider whether the IRA is fit for government will seek to punish the unblinkered democrats who have concluded that Sinn Fein-IRA are not fit to be a partner in government, and who therefore refuse to sit with them in the Executive. The Government have sunk to the level of accepting terrorists as bona fide politicians, so they intend to force others to stoop to their position or else be punished for having the principle and courage to resist.

As for the scaled-down punishments in the Bill, does any Member actually believe that Sinn Fein will alter its position by one iota because it has been threatened with a fine? My colleagues and I passed on our ministerial salaries so that no hardship would fall to us. At no stage while I was a Minister would the threat of fines have influenced any action I took. These lesser punishments are being placed in the Bill to serve as a pretence that action is being taken while terrorists remain in government.

Let me say this to the Government. If I refuse to sit on an Executive with Sinn Fein and the House considers that to be an offence that should be punished, my colleagues and I will happily bear that punishment; but to suggest that if I refuse to sit on an Executive with Sinn Fein-IRA all the members of my Assembly party should have their salaries stopped for two years is absurd, and probably does not comply with the European convention on human rights.

Why are these things in the Bill? Why do the Government now want to punish those of us who acted as Ministers but refused to partner Sinn Fein-IRA? Not once did a motion to exclude us come before the Assembly. Our modus operandi never caused a crisis in the Assembly. No Secretary of State ever suspended the Assembly because we had taken a particular position. No one claimed that we did not fulfil our responsibilities to the whole community effectively and fairly. Indeed, it was quite the opposite: three Secretaries of State, in the House and outside, have praised the work that we did. Let me set modesty aside, and remind the House that frequently — and almost universally the press describe my colleagues and me as the best Ministers in the Northern Ireland Executive. But now the Government want to punish us. Why?

The answer is simple. Indeed, it was given by the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble). The Government cannot bring themselves to tackle Sinn Fein-IRA in isolation; they require balance. There is no Unionist terrorist capable of getting into Government who can be excluded from the Executive or fined, so a democrat who refuses to bow the knee will do just fine. As the right hon. Gentleman says, we are the next best thing. The Government have to find someone whom they can balance with Sinn Fein-IRA.

Breaches in the pledge of office will be easy to identify, and it will be easy for any monitoring body to consider them and reach a conclusion. That does not apply to those who breach the non-violence pledge. They work in the dark, and make their decisions behind closed doors. Under the Bill, they will even be able to argue that the decision in question was made not by the leadership of the Provisional IRA, but by some maverick group. They will be able to jump through a plethora of loopholes and I shall be interested to discover just how clear the monitoring body will be in tying down the Provisional IRA in relation to any particular incident.

Why, after all, should the monitoring body differ from former Secretaries of State? As the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson) will recall, one of them even went to court over a case. She then had to justify the decision she had made in relation to Sinn Fein. Her defence was that, in the round, she considered that it was adhering to its ceasefire. If, despite the list of offences committed by the Provisional IRA over the past five years, the Secretary of State is not prepared to take action — if he cannot pin down the IRA — what hope have any of us that the monitoring body will do so?

The Bill is entirely unnecessary. We do not need a monitoring body to tell us when the IRA misbehaves. The Chief Constable is quite capable of informing the Secretary of State of that, and indeed has a duty to do

[Mr. Peter Robinson]

so. He even tells the world publicly when the IRA misbehaves, and I am sure that the General Officer Commanding and the intelligence services will give the Secretary of State whatever advice is needed in respect of Provisional IRA members who have stepped out of line.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Did not a former Secretary of State always hide behind the fact that when a Chief Constable gave such advice she would say "Why do you not charge these people and bring them before the courts?"? She failed to recognise the difference between intelligence and evidence that would stand up in court.

Mr. Robinson: There is indeed a distinction to be drawn between what might be of evidential quality and information that the intelligence services might have. There is another distinction, however: fulfilling the requirement in the legislation for the Government to present the Assembly with a resolution stating that the IRA has breached its ceasefire arrangements does not demand evidence of the kind required for a conviction in the court. A political rather than a legal decision is being required of the Secretary of State, and therefore an entirely different level of evidence can suffice.

The Secretary of State, of course, was never prepared to make that decision. The monitoring body is unnecessary, because the advice has always been there. At all stages, it has been possible to advise the Secretary of State to act. What we need is not more advice, but action by the Government.

The monitoring body is, in fact, a vehicle for delay and camouflage. Whenever an incident occurs, there is likely to be a cry for the monitoring body, and all the other cogs in the wheel, to take action against the IRA representatives in the Assembly and on the Executive. The process, however, could be dragged out for months, and indeed that is precisely what the Government want. They realise that, given enough time, they will be able to cobble together something that the right hon. Member for Upper Bann will swallow again, and back into Government those IRA representatives will go. All that is needed is delay.

Mr. Trimble: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robinson: I should be delighted.

Mr. Trimble: I shall not refer to the pejorative language used by the hon. Gentleman, which I consider entirely inappropriate. Let me simply ask this question: if, in whatever circumstances, my party and I return to government, will he follow me?

Mr. Robinson: Things will have changed so much that — as the right hon. Gentleman will see if he looks at his end of the Bench — the following will be done by him and not by us. As members of the largest political party in Northern Ireland, we will take steps to ensure that very different structures exist in Northern Ireland from the ones that the right hon. Gentleman yielded to. We have seen the mess that his party, which has held the reins of Unionism for so many years, has made of it. The electorate are looking for the opportunity to make changes, but I have no doubt that behind the scenes, the right hon. Gentleman will urge some caution before the Secretary of State moves towards elections.

On the composition of the IMC, to listen to the Secretary of State and some others, one would think that we had produced four Solomons whom the community will immediately recognise as people who inspire confidence, and whose judgment can be respected. As with so much that the Government do, they have discriminated in terms of this body's membership, just as they discriminated in terms of the membership of the other place, and even of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, which includes not one anti-agreement Unionist, even though such Unionists represent a third of the community.

Someone asked earlier what urged the Government to start the legislation in the House of Lords. The answer is that they do not have to deal with the depth of argument from anti-agreement Unionists in the House of Lords because they have excluded them. Yet the patronage to the right hon. Member for Upper Bann ensures that a disproportionate share of the Lords has gone to his wing of the Ulster Unionist party.

So we have a four-man commission, none of whom is an Ulster Unionist. Indeed, there is a fervent Irish nationalist on the panel. One can be absolutely certain that the permanent secretary from the Irish Republic will speak the language of his Government and, through them, of the Social Democratic and Labour party and Sinn Fein. I liked the language that the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) used earlier. He said that he was a sturdy, independent Ulsterman standing on his own two feet. Well, that is not the way I see it. We are talking about a party that has been propped up by the Dublin Government for more than a quarter of a century. Whenever its members did not get their own way, they dug in their heels until Dublin got them out of the mess that they were in. They have refused to stand on their own two feet and deal with Unionism; indeed, doing so on an eye-to-eye basis might have been much better for Northern Ireland than their always getting their parent in Dublin to argue their case for them.

Two people from outside the United Kingdom have been inserted into this commission, and they will be part of the political decision-making process. Of course, the Government have gifted the Irish Republic's Government with a central role in the internal affairs of Northern Ireland. My colleagues and I are not fooled by the sleight of hand that places only two commissioners on the panel that considers Assembly matters. In addition to the rather evasive language used by the Secretary of State today when questioned on that issue, we have read what the Government spokesman in the other place had to say. As the Secretary of State is doubtless keen to have the reference, I can tell him that

the following quote is to be found at column 584 of the *Official Report* of the Lords. The Government spokesman said:

"I should underline"

so this is an important point that he wants to emphasise

"that, as the Hillsborough text makes clear, we would of course consult the Irish Government, as co-guarantor of the Good Friday agreement, in considering the exercise of that power."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 September 2003; Vol. 652, c. 584.]

So the Government spokesman emphasises that the Irish Government are going to be given a direct consultative role before any decision is announced.

As reference was made to the text, I decided to consult it to see what it said. There are two relevant references, the first of which states:

"Any motion put before the Assembly following the tabling of a report would be subject to decision on a cross-community basis. Where such a motion failed to attract cross-community support, or where the Implementation Group had failed to agree a course of action, it would be a matter for the British Government, in consultation with the Irish Government".

So it is very clear: reference to consultation is in the text, just as the Lords spokesman indicated. However, the annexe to it goes even further. Paragraph 3 of the annexe states:

"At the request of the Governments"

plural

"the Independent Monitoring Body may be asked to consider claims by any party in the Assembly that another party is in breach of requirements in the Declaration of Support or elsewhere in the Agreement."

So according to the text, the matter is one for the two Governments.

We were told in the other place that although we in this House may want to tinker as much as we like through amendments, we cannot make amendments because this is an international, binding agreement, entered into between the Government of the United Kingdom and the Government of the Irish Republic. If the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh were here at the moment, he would doubtless applaud the fact that the Government spokesman in the Lords said that.

So it is clear that a direct role is given through the text of the joint declaration, and through the text dealing with the monitoring body at Hillsborough—a role confirmed by the Government spokesman in the Lords. The Secretary of State may attempt to side-step the issue by referring to formal consultation, but as everybody knows, the text of an international agreement is pretty formal. I suspect that the Secretary of State recognises that the Government of the Irish Republic have, as many others have been saying for several months, been given a right to interfere in Northern Ireland's internal affairs.

Of course, if, after consideration, there are those who believe that Sinn Fein-IRA is continuing to promote and support terrorism, no monitoring body and no Secretary of State who offers a contrary opinion will be heeded. What kind of politician would defer their judgment on such matters to any commission, or to any other Government or party? Let me offer an example from the real world of politics, and it is probably not an absurd one. Let us say that the Provisional IRA kills half a dozen people, and that the Unionists in the new Assembly say, "This is absolutely disgraceful! We cannot be expected to sit in government with people who, by night, are plotting to murder and carrying out these activities." It would not be unnatural for Unionists to take that position. So off they go to the IMC—or to whatever Government structure may exist after the legislation completes its passage—which says, "Well, yes, but that was a bit of a maverick act—it wasn't really sanctioned by the leadership. Therefore, we are not going to take any action against them." Does anybody really believe that in those circumstances, the trust that is essential to the Belfast agreement's structure would exist, and that Unionists would be able to continue in government? They would not. Certainly as far as the decision that I have to take is concerned, nobody else's judgment will be able to supersede mine. It would be a very foolish politician who simply accepted another person's judgment on this issue.

For years, the Government have stretched themselves to prop up this failed agreement. It cannot be propped up by this commission: what is needed is a completely new structure.

The Government can try to put Humpty Dumpty together again, but they will fail. Better by far that the Government exert themselves in holding an election, letting politicians get a new mandate and make a new start. They should start negotiations for a new agreement, seeking structures that can survive any election result and that IRA activity cannot collapse. They should get an agreement that Unionists as well as nationalists can endorse.

Hon. Members will have detected that my colleagues and I intend to oppose the Bill. The previous exclusion mechanism has for years been the subject of public ridicule, and this one is no less likely to become the subject of public contempt.

6.40 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I follow the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) and in common with the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) I recognise the lack of trust in the current position—and that is putting it mildly. In fact, there is a degree of mounting cynicism in Northern Ireland, particularly among Unionists, about the way in which issues that are seen as a threat to the Belfast agreement—or, above all, to republican support—are dealt with. The cynicism has reached a point where people believe that it is highly unlikely that Sinn Fein would ever be excluded on its own, no matter what it did. There have been successive suspensions, putting everyone out of office, when only Sinn Fein has been shown not to be committed to exclusively peaceful and democratic means. The will has never been there to take the terrorists on and force them to leave a democratic Government.

We should recall some of the issues of the past. I have to say that although the amendments to the Bill state that the Secretary of State "shall" rather than "may", I still have some misgivings, because that will not necessarily restore confidence. Many people will remember that previous Secretaries of State have been involved in the political machinations. No one living in the United Kingdom today should be unaware of the

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

lack of trust in the political system, as revealed by the disclosures over Iraq. We need to go back to recognition of thought processes. Reference has been made to those allegedly in the forefront of the peace agreement. No names were mentioned because other issues may be coming up.

We must bear it in mind that, in the understanding of Her Majesty's Government, the IRA entered into a military ceasefire. In other words, as long as it was not shooting soldiers or police officers, it could do whatever it liked with civilians. When Mo Mowlam was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, she ruled that the IRA had probably been behind murders, but that that did not constitute a breach of the ceasefire. Word games do not inspire confidence.

Paragraph 4(b)(i) of the agreement between the UK and the Irish Governments states that the Commission shall assess

"whether the leaderships of the such organisations are directing such incidents or seeking to prevent them".

It has already been mentioned, and I underline it, that these are word games similar to those of the past. The get-out clauses and excuses are already being established.

Terrorist organisations are made up of individuals who carry out acts. Dare I suggest that the Bill comes on the stage now as a further sop to the IRA demand to have the date for an election before it can take any forward steps on decommissioning? In other words, the British Government must take the initiative while the IRA holds on to its arms and continues to pose threats.

David Burnside: Does my hon. Friend agree that the legislation will not have any impact or effect until after we get the date for the election? The second measure that will come before the House, perhaps in only a few weeks' time, will be the promises—they are outside the agreement between the Government and Provisional IRA—on on-the-runs.

Rev. Martin Smyth: That would be what one might call an informed guess. I would not dispute at all that the nods and winks have already been given. Others as well as me believe that Sinn Fein and the IRA are inextricably linked, yet we still play the game that they are not. Is the Bill strong enough in specifying that acts of the IRA be linked to the removal of Sinn Fein from office?

At least two hon. Members have referred to the celebratory events in Letterkenny. It was fascinating the other evening to hear one of the spin doctors for IRA-Sinn Fein justifying it. He said that it came at a time of high emotions when 10 hunger strikers were killed. As I understand it, the hunger strikers took their own lives; they were not killed. He was turning that into an emotional issue. He said that it was an emotional time for them when the then Prime Minister said that the prison was the best protected in the world and it was marvellous to be part of those who escaped from it. They were able to justify it, even though a prison officer died as a result of the breakout. According to British justice, a person is innocent until there is no reasonable doubt, but the judge in that case ruled that the prison officer died of a heart attack rather than from the stabbing of escaping prisoners. We have to reflect on that.

Can the Minister help us to understand the current state of readiness in the IRA? If the Chief Constable can confirm that certain people have been involved in acts and Monsignor Dennis Faul can claim that they were involved in the abduction and possible murder of a young man in South Armagh, can the Secretary of State or any other Minister tell us that that is false? Above all, are our own intelligence people not telling the Government that, despite the rumours that Gerry Adams is not in control of the situation and that the dissidents are acting separately, the fact is that he is very much in control and very much part of the command structure. They have reorganised dramatically and are better equipped than they were at the cessation of the spell of violence. It is important that the House has a proper assessment of what is going on.

Reference has been made to democratic parties and I underline once again that I know only one member of the four-person commission personally. I accept that the others have had experience in different places. One member has had much experience with missing marks on extradition papers in the past, which meant that people were not extradited to face charges in British courts. The Justice Department in the south was certainly adept at turning down claims for extradition. I recognise that one member has been involved in anti-terrorism in this country, and I hope that he will use that expertise to penetrate the terrorists' webs. One member comes from the CIA, but at times its intelligence has not always been accurate and many of our American friends have not always been happy with its actions.

I ask bluntly how we can expect the IMC to improve a situation that has not been dealt with in the past. It is time that the excuses for inaction were removed, and time for the Government to act. An old friend, Michael Armstrong, who was tragically killed in a car accident, used to speak about those within Northern Ireland who worked with an outside Government to undermine Northern Ireland's place as part of the United Kingdom. He used to compare them to the Sudeten Deutsch, and their existence has been confirmed in this House.

It appears that this House has surrendered a degree of sovereignty in Northern Ireland, over and above the sovereignty that we have all surrendered within the European Union. Anyone who says that they do not have a say in strand 1 is perhaps protesting too much. Some say, in Shakespeare's term, that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.

We have had an interesting development in our prison services, although some of us feel that we have seen it all before. The phrase is now "separation, not segregation", but I have yet to discover the difference between the two. I understand the problem, but I also understand the problems that prison officers will face in seeking to implement that decision, which was recommended by an independent body.

I ask the Government, in these serious times, to recognise the greater understanding of those of us who work on the ground. In the Roman Catholic community and in the Protestant community, many fear that we have created mafiosi who work together when that is

convenient and seek to dominate communities by force of terror. They do not deserve to be recognised as bona fide politicians. I have no difficulty in accepting that some members of Sinn Fein have not been involved in terrorism, but the organisation is led by people who are still leaders in the army council. As someone once said, between the Dail Eireann, Stormont and Westminster, at least half of the army council are elected Members. It is in that context that we have no good reason to adopt this course. We should ask the Prime Minister to implement fully the commitments given at Balmoral and other places and deal with the terrorism in our community.

6.54 pm

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): I agree with the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) that the Bill is unnecessary and avoids the main issue. It does not deal with the fundamental problem that currently exists in Northern Ireland in terms of the political process and the Belfast agreement. It was the avoidance of the fundamental problem that led to the cancellation of the elections.

The fundamental problem with the Belfast agreement is that while its premise is that it has the support of both communities, Unionist and nationalist, and that that was the basis on which the Assembly was set up and operated, it is now clear – except to those who refuse to admit it or who base their views on opinion polls that they distort to try to get a different result – that the clear majority of Unionists no longer, if they ever did, support the Belfast agreement. A clear majority of nationalists may support it – and why not, because it delivers the nationalist agenda – but the vast majority of Unionists want a new agreement. They are against the Belfast agreement, but they are for an agreement to which they can sign up. As long as the Government and parties from Northern Ireland in this House ignore that reality, we will not deal with the fundamental issue or be able to move on to create political stability. It is to that end that my parliamentary colleagues and I are committed.

It is vital that we have an election that will show once and for all exactly who represents whom in Northern Ireland. The Bill is supposed to pave the way for the elections, but it is clear from recent remarks by the Secretary of State, and from the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic, that they want an election only if it will produce a certain result. They want an election only if it will mean that an Executive can be formed that will include IRA-Sinn Fein. Interestingly, the Irish Prime Minister repudiated that position in the Irish general election. He made it clear that under no circumstances would his party, or other parties in the Irish Republic, contemplate IRA-Sinn Fein taking part in their Government. Yet the Irish Prime Minister demands that that should happen in Northern Ireland and that the election should not take place until such an outcome is guaranteed.

The people of Northern Ireland should be given a free choice in free elections, but the Government want to deny people a voice. They deny the people a voice in a European referendum and in Northern Ireland. What are the Government afraid of? They should let the people speak on this and other issues.

The Bill shows that it is not difficult to change the Belfast agreement, when that is desired. Those of us who share the majority view of the Unionist community in Northern Ireland are frequently lectured that the Belfast agreement cannot be altered. We are told that it is the only show in town and there is no alternative. It must be preserved and upheld in all circumstances. However, the Bill makes it clear that the Belfast agreement is being changed – and it will happen again in a few weeks' time, with legislation on the on-the-run issue. No one should therefore argue that our position has no credibility. In fact, when the circumstances require it, the Government and the pro-agreement parties have no difficulty changing the agreement if they think that it will help their political positions or for the sake of expediency.

Other hon. Members have mentioned the background to the Bill. The passage of time means that it is difficult to recall the events of October last year, and of the weeks and months leading up to them. People felt strongly about the activities of the IRA and what they had been exposed

It being Seven o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, proceedings on the Northern Ireland (Monitoring Commission etc.) Bill [*Lords*] (Allocation of Time) Motion and consideration of any Lords Messages that may be received may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour. *[Gillian Merron.]*

Question agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before resuming the Second Reading debate, I must advise the House that an amendment in lieu of the Lords amendment to the Local Government Bill, to which this House disagreed, has been received from the Lords. It will be considered at the conclusion of all proceedings on the Northern Ireland (Monitoring Commission etc.) Bill. Copies of the Lords amendment are available in the Vote Office.

Question again proposed. That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Mr. Dodds: It looks as though it will be a very long night indeed.

I was casting my mind back to the events of last October. The Castlereagh break-in happened on St. Patrick's day 2002. The facts about Colombia were emerging, as were revelations about high-level IRA involvement in the Florida gun-running plan, which involved the importation of arms. The Stormontgate affair was also taking place. All those contributed to a strong feeling that the IRA could not be part of the Northern Ireland Government as long as it retained its capacity and eagerness to carry out such activities. The IRA caused riots and mayhem on the streets of Northern Ireland over that summer, and engaged in all sorts of other nefarious activities.

The Prime Minister came to Northern Ireland and told us in a famous speech that a fork in the road had been reached. He said that the pressure was on the IRA to make up its mind. People waited to see what would happen.

It was not long before a process of negotiation and discussion began with IRA-Sinn Fein and other political parties. We had been told that there would be no more inch-by-inch discussions, but just such discussions began in an attempt to resolve the problems. The talks at Hillsborough and elsewhere resulted in the

[Mr. Dodds]

publication of the joint declaration and the attached documents dealing with on-the-runs and with the monitoring of paramilitary activity—the matter that is now before the House.

The crisis that brought about the fall of the Assembly was clearly the responsibility of the IRA but has led to a package of measures that is a litany of concessions to IRA-Sinn Fein. It covers some of the IRA's most cherished demands—that on-the-runs should not be pursued, and that border security installations be dismantled, even though mainstream and dissident activity is continuing.

Another demand concerned the future devolution of policing and justice powers. Such powers could have meant that Mr. Kelly—the Assembly Member representing the constituency that I have the honour to represent in this House—could become the Minister with responsibility for justice and policing. He said on television the other night that he was going to Letterkenny to participate in the jamboree celebrating the breakout by Maze escapees that resulted in the death of a prison officer. Mr. Kelly said that he was proud to have been part of that.

The feeling in the Unionist community can be imagined. I know that some hon. Members in other parties take time to visit Northern Ireland and talk to people. They know what is going on, but many others will troop through the Lobby tonight to vote for this Bill who do not understand the situation at all. They do not take the time to listen to people, especially in my community, to find out the strength of feeling on these matters. If they did, they would understand the community's anger and frustration at a joint declaration that is no more than a list of concessions to IRA-Sinn Fein.

IRA-Sinn Fein representatives have boasted about their participation in the Maze breakout. They have been involved in the intimidation of independent members of district policing partnerships. They voice mealy-mouthed apologies and explanations in respect of the disappeared, and—as the Chief Constable and others have noted—they are still involved in murder. How can we even contemplate a scenario that is intended to allow IRA-Sinn Fein back into government?

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) described how some republican movement representatives had been glorified. The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) rightly chastised sections of the media for that. However, what could confer more glory on such people than to bring them into the Government of Northern Ireland, or to try to bring about conditions under which they would once again be inserted into the Government of part of the UK? People in Northern Ireland cannot understand how hon. Members can say in this House that they are sickened at the glorification of Sinn Fein-IRA when those same hon. Members have pandered to the IRA agenda, released all IRA prisoners and destroyed the RUC at the IRA's behest. Those people have worked with IRA-Sinn Fein in government. They have put their representatives into the Government of Northern Ireland, and now they want to put them back there yet again. The hypocrisy is simply breathtaking.

We are told that there is a need for action to be taken. I shall not rehearse the arguments about why the Government do not need this Bill if they want to act. The Government could have acted on many occasions in the past, but they refused to do so. The Social Democratic and Labour party could have taken action on many occasions in the past, but its members sat on their hands.

I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Upper Bann is not in his place. He berated the Government for their failings, but how many times have Ulster Unionist Members tabled motions to exclude Sinn Fein-IRA for ceasefire breaches and for not being committed to exclusively peaceful and democratic means? The right hon. Gentleman has highlighted some of what has gone on, but he and his colleagues ran away from Stormont rather than vote against IRA-Sinn Fein.

There is no need for the Bill. Action could have been taken, but was not. The Government still could act, but instead they have introduced this Bill. It will not work, and it is designed not to do so. Its procedures will be so cumbersome and lengthy that the Secretary of State's final decision on a complaint will take a very long time to produce. In that period, newspaper editorials and various pundits will urge people not to rock the boat. They will say that people are working together, and they will ask whether the price of excluding Sinn Fein is worth tearing down the edifice of the agreement.

We need a means for the Government to act swiftly and efficiently as soon as a complaint is brought to light, but I fear that the IMC is being established for the purpose of delaying action and distracting attention whenever the republican movement is in clear breach of its obligations.

I hope that the Minister of State, when she sums up, will deal with the past acts that have been mentioned Colombia, Castlereagh, Stormontgate and so on. It would be useful to know whether the IMC will consider the outcome of those events, some of which have yet to be divulged by the relevant courts.

Article 4(b)(i) of the agreement between the Governments deals with the functions of the IMC and is very significant. It says that, in dealing with breaches by paramilitaries of their obligations in relation to criminal activities and all sorts of terrorism, the IMC is to assess whether the leaderships of organisations are directing incidents or seeking to prevent them. That is a significant get-out clause for Sinn Fein-IRA. They will argue, as they have in the past, that they are not the IRA and cannot be held responsible for the actions of the IRA.

When pressed, the IRA will make it clear that the actions in which it is alleged to have been involved and which may constitute a breach of its obligations were not authorised and were carried out by mavericks and local brigades. It will say that the actions were not authorised at high level and that it is working to try to stop those actions. It is written into the text of the agreement between the two Governments that the IMC has to have regard to that. That is a serious loophole and a get-out clause for Sinn Fein-IRA.

Over the past few days, the Chief Constable has made it clear that not just dissidents but mainstream Provisional IRA members were involved in intimidation and threats against independent members of district

policing partnerships, and that is deplorable. Martin McGuinness came straight out to say, "That was not authorised and we are opposed to it." That is a classic example of what the IMC will face—an allegation made by the Chief Constable that clearly sets out the position versus a denial by Sinn Fein that it was involved in any way and a claim that it was trying to prevent it. We know what the outcome will be.

I fear that article 13(2)(iii) of the draft agreement between the two Governments could also open a major loophole in the provisions designed to deal with IRA-Sinn Fein. The article states:

"The Commission shall not do anything in carrying out its functions which might . . . have a prejudicial effect on any proceedings which have, or are likely to be, commenced in a court of law."

One can well imagine that if, for example, a Castlereagh, Colombia, Florida or Stormontgate were to happen in future, any such incident would be likely to result, as those did, in legal proceedings. Are we to say that in such cases the commission "shall not do anything" that might have a "prejudicial effect"? That will seriously restrict the IMC in dealing with Sinn Fein-IRA, and that point must be clarified.

Other Members have dealt with the equation of political breaches with breaches by paramilitaries, so I shall not dwell on that, except to note that a number of speakers have made it clear that it is neither desirable nor acceptable. I hope that the Government will consider our amendments and reflect on the fact that attempting equality, for the sake of balance, between those of us who take a principled political stance and those who carry out terrorism and murder and undertake criminal activity, by meting out the same sort of discipline, is neither fair nor democratic.

When I intervened on the Secretary of State on clause 8, his answer was not clear. He did not seem to understand that clause 8 places restrictions that will make it harder for the Assembly to debate and vote on a motion of censure. Surely anything that restricts the right of the Assembly to deal with a vote of no confidence or of censure against a Minister or party in government is to be deplored. There is no logical reason for the clause being in the Bill, except to try to restrict opportunities for those of us who have tabled such motions in the past to highlight the glaring hypocrisy of Sinn Fein-IRA. The clause was not foreshadowed in the Belfast agreement or the joint declaration. I should be grateful for an explanation of where it has come from.

Clause 1(1)(b) deals with the IMC's role in monitoring so-called normalisation, which means the dismantling of security in Northern Ireland in order to address Sinn Fein-IRA's political agenda. A detailed timetable is set out on three pages of the joint declaration, giving a detailed list of exactly how much the Government have to do in tearing down security along the border and at other installations throughout the Province, leaving many people defenceless on both sides of the community at a time when dissident and mainstream republicans are very active, and when loyalist groups are active too.

It will be easy for the IMC to monitor that against the timetable, yet there is nothing on the paramilitary side but vagueness and aspirational talk. There is no detail and no timetable for the dismantling of the IRA. It will all be done in a cloak and dagger way. There is no provision to force the international decommissioning body to be upfront and public about acts of decommissioning. We shall have a charade in which so-called acts of decommissioning happen but no one knows what they are because the IRA has asked General de Chastelain not to reveal the detail. How very considerate of the general to accept what the IRA says. Whereas the dismantling of security will be all too visible and people will see security towers torn down and demolished and their security taken from them, anything that the IRA does is to be done in secret. That is totally unacceptable.

Other hon. Members have dealt with Dublin's involvement and the breach of sovereignty that the Bill constitutes, so I shall not go into detail on that.

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann promised us that monitoring and sanctions would provide a guarantee and build confidence among the Unionist community. He said that they would provide an opportunity to call to account those who breached their obligations on the paramilitary side of things. It is clear that they will do none of those things. They will provide no confidence for the Unionist community and will simply be a mechanism allowing the re-forming of an Executive of which IRA-Sinn Fein will be part and parcel. We are told that there will be the means to get them out, but the many people for whom I and other Members speak believe that Sinn Fein-IRA should not be admitted to the Government of Northern Ireland in the first place. It is time to stop allowing those people in and then saying that we are putting them to the test or trying to get them out. Every time we do that, it gets harder and harder.

Government should be for democrats. It is clear that the IRA still exists and is still wedded to the use of violence. Sinn Fein and the IRA are inextricably linked and there should be no question of allowing them back into the Government of Northern Ireland.

7.19 pm

Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley): Right hon. and hon. Members have touched on the background to the legislation and the reason why the Government have brought this Bill before the House. In numerous debates in the five years since the Belfast agreement, I have warned that the provisions that were being enacted by this House would be futile, would not work and would not succeed in moving the republican movement towards a commitment to exclusively peaceful means—that they would not be successful in dealing with the problems in what has become known as the peace process.

I must issue the same warning this evening. I do not believe that this legislation will deal with or resolve the problems that face the political process in Northern Ireland. It is merely a cover for trying to cobble together another deal that will be flawed and inadequate and that will fail. The legislation will fail because it does not go to the heart of the problem that has confronted the process since 1994 and the first IRA ceasefire. That is how long we have been engaged in this process—almost 10 years.

Some people argue that we are further forward. I have heard it said tonight that Northern Ireland is a safer place today than it was before the agreement. That is

[Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson]

true if one is a police officer. The Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland is the first in recent memory to have completed his first year in office without having had to bury a member of that service—formerly, the Royal Ulster Constabulary—as a result of terrorist activity. As someone whose family has seen two members serving with the RUC murdered in what became known as the troubles, I welcome that. However, Northern Ireland today is not an entirely safe or peaceful society. For many people living in Northern Ireland, the peace process has not brought the peace and stability that we all want.

Mr. Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that figures released by the Northern Ireland Office in the past few months show that, in the past five years, the number of shootings and the number of bombs and bombs defused have increased compared with the number in the five years before the agreement? While he rightly says that the number of deaths has decreased, other violence has increased.

Mr. Donaldson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution, which was the next part of my speech so I will not repeat it, save to say that he illustrates well that we can play around with statistics but, for people in Northern Ireland, the violence, threats, intimidation and paramilitary terrorist activity continue to be a reality of life. I will not rest until every citizen in Northern Ireland is liberated from that fear and from the consequences of paramilitary activity and violence. Right hon. and hon. Members will join me in seeking to achieve those objectives. I fear that where we differ is on how we are to achieve that.

We are here tonight because of a number of events, which other hon. Members have mentioned, including IRA gun running from Florida—importing new weapons when they were supposed to be getting rid of all of their weapons—and the involvement of three republican IRA members in training the FARC guerrilla organisation in Colombia in the use of technology that it has since used to devastating effect there. My hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) has just returned from Colombia. FARC guerrillas have been using mortar devices similar to those utilised, and indeed developed, by the Provisional IRA, that have resulted in the deaths of many innocent people in that country.

Castlereagh was another such incident—perhaps the most serious breach of security in the past 30 years of conflict in Northern Ireland. We are still dealing with the consequences. Police officers have had to move home with their families because of it. Moving those families and the additional security measures required have cost the taxpayer millions of pounds. Then there was Stormontgate. Every week in my office, I deal with prison officers and their families who are struggling to get security measures implemented at their homes because their personal details were compromised when the IRA procured personnel information illegally from the Northern Ireland Prison Service. Hundreds of prison officers have been affected, again at a cost of millions of pounds to the taxpayer.

That money could have been much better spent in Northern Ireland on our hospitals and schools. Sinn Fein-IRA spokespersons lecture us on the need to invest more money on this, that and everything—new schools, hospitals, roads and housing—and yet the money that could have been spent on those projects is being spent to protect prison officers, police officers, soldiers, politicians and civil servants because of IRA activities. So, we are here tonight to deal with the consequences of those problems—dealing with the failures of the Belfast agreement.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) made a significant contribution to the debate. There was much in what he said, but I shall focus on one aspect of his speech because it has serious consequences for the operation of the independent monitoring commission and the implementation of the legislation that we may agree tonight in this House. He said that if a motion were tabled in the Assembly to exclude from ministerial office representatives of Sinn Fein-IRA, cross-community support was not forthcoming for the motion and the Secretary of State acted to exclude those Ministers, it would precipitate the collapse of the political institution. That is what he clearly implied tonight—that his party would withdraw its support in those circumstances.

We heard much from the hon. Gentleman about the activities of the republican movement. He spoke about that in laudable terms. Yet the reality is that we need this legislation because of the failure of the Social Democratic and Labour party to support any motion in the Assembly to exclude Sinn Fein, even though he accepts that its activities meant that it could no longer remain in office. Many on the Opposition Benches are astounded that he can make those comments and yet his party failed to support the exclusion of representatives of the republican movement in those circumstances.

The legislation flows from the joint declaration. It contains many proposals, but it is the basis for a possible deal to enable elections to proceed and for the Assembly and Executive to be restored. Indeed, some hon. Members have mentioned this evening that a process is in train that will result in that deal coming to fruition in the next few weeks, provided that Sinn Fein-IRA delivers another gesture on decommissioning and perhaps a statement from the IRA army council. That will result in elections—perhaps, in November—and the possible restoration of the devolved institution.

The proposals contained in the joint declaration and the legislation before the House are not adequate to deal with the problems in the peace process and the political process in Northern Ireland. The legislation deals with the role and remit of the monitoring commission and the sanctions that will be applied against parties and individual Members of the Assembly. The hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds) was right to highlight the distinction in the ways that normalisation issues are to be tackled, with timetables and clear benchmarks for the British Government—our Government—to implement their commitment to reduce the security presence in Northern Ireland, but a complete lack of any timetable for decommissioning or disbandment of paramilitary terrorist organisations. There are no benchmarks whereby the commission can judge whether those organisations are making progress. We can only

conclude that there is little prospect of the commission working effectively to monitor the activities of the paramilitary organisations.

We object to the Irish Government being involved in security normalisation in Northern Ireland—a matter that should be exclusively for Her Majesty's Government. It is solely the responsibility of the Government to protect their citizens and I can see no role for the Irish Government in deciding what security I, my constituents and the constituents of my colleagues from Northern Ireland require against the continuing terrorist threat. Nor should the Irish Government have any involvement in monitoring the activities of parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

I disagree entirely with the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) in his assessment of the Irish Government's role in this legislation. He referred to the talks process, saying that it offered precedents for the Irish Government's role in such matters. I disagree. No independent commission was required during the talks process to decide whether the IRA, the Ulster Defence Association or the Ulster Volunteer Force were in breach of their ceasefires or that parties linked to those organisations were failing to make a commitment to peaceful means. That decision was made by the political parties and by the Government.

It is true that, because the Irish Government participated in the talks process, they were consulted about that decision, but that is entirely different from dealing with the strand 1 institutional arrangements that flow from the agreement. We were told that the Irish Government would have no role in strand 1 of the Belfast agreement. Indeed, it was a requirement that strand 1 be hermetically sealed so that the Irish Government could have no say, yet it is crystal clear from the draft agreement between the Governments of the UK and the Irish Republic that establishes the independent monitoring commission that the Irish Government will have a role in strand 1.

Article 6 of the agreement between the two Governments states that the commission—the whole commission, all four members, including the Irish Government's representative—

"may consider a claim by any party represented in the Northern Ireland Assembly".

That could not be clearer. The commission may consider a claim by a party represented in the Assembly; that is covered by strand 1 of the agreement.

There are two further aspects. One deals with whether a Minister or a party

"is not committed to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means".

That is still a strand 1 issue, because the question of whether a Minister is thus committed is dealt with in the pledge of office in annexe A of strand 1. That pledge requires a Minister to be committed to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means. The Irish Government are, therefore, involved in judging whether a Minister or party in the Northern Ireland Assembly is committed to exclusively peaceful means. In anyone's terms, that is a breach of strand 1 of the Belfast agreement. For the first time, it gives the Irish Government a say in the internal affairs of the Assembly. That cannot be denied, so there is no point in trying to paper over the cracks or pretend that it is something else.

I echo the comments of Lord Kilclooney, who said:

"So there still remains this proviso that Her Majesty's Government are not sovereign on this issue. But the legislation will proceed through this Parliament, on the recommendation of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, only after consultation with the Irish Government. To that extent the Irish Government remain involved in strand 1 of the Belfast agreement of 1998. Therefore, this is a clear breach of the agreement." [*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 September 2003; Vol. 652, c. 593.]

He is right. Unionists will have to consider that point carefully. It has been a key Unionist principle that the Irish Government should not be involved in strand 1, in internal matters relating to the Northern Ireland Assembly. That is why my hon. Friends and I tabled an amendment to remove both the Irish Government representative and the American Government representative from the commission and to provide that the commission shall comprise only representatives from the United Kingdom appointed by the UK Government. Any ambiguity would thus be removed; there would be no question of the Irish Government interfering in matters that are internal to the United Kingdom and to Northern Ireland as part of it.

The hon. Member for Belfast, North also referred to the clause that deals with the commission's duty to avoid prejudicial effects. That is crucial. It goes to the heart of the commission's effectiveness in dealing with possible breaches of the agreement and of the pledge of office.

Based on the Government's past performance, I have great difficulty in understanding how they will be able to decide whether a Minister is in breach of the pledge of office. Will the Minister have to be personally involved in terrorist activity to be deemed to have broken the pledge of office? The Secretary of State must address that question, because Sinn Fein will merely repeat what it has often said—"We are not the IRA". Martin McGuinness, or whoever may be in ministerial office, will simply say that it was, or was not, the IRA but, "You can't blame me, I am not the IRA".

To this day, Gerry Adams, the president of Sinn Fein, denies that he has ever been a member of the IRA. If he were holding ministerial office, how would the Secretary of State prove that he had broken the pledge of office because the IRA had been engaged in terrorist activity? The issue is important, because I have no doubt that republicans will go to the High Court—as they have done in the past—and challenge decisions or recommendations of the commission or the Secretary of State related to their holding ministerial office. They will mount legal challenges, so the Government must be sure of the grounds on which they are proceeding.

The Government may argue, rightly, that the IRA and Sinn Fein are inextricably linked, but I am not sure that the legislation will be tight enough to ensure that an individual Minister could be firmly pinned down on whether they have broken their pledge of office because of their IRA activity. One could also apply the argument to Sinn Fein-IRA as a political party acting in the Assembly, especially if the commission's activities and investigatory powers were circumscribed by its inability to investigate a matter that could result in legal proceedings.

As the hon. Member for Belfast, North rightly pointed out, there are legal proceedings in respect of each of the four breaches that I mentioned earlier—

[Mr. Donaldson]

Florida, Colombia, Castlereagh and Stormontgate. So will the commission be unable to investigate such matters? If so, what is the point of the Bill? What is the point of the commission in the first place? In those circumstances, we would be back to where we are today, with a Government who are either unwilling or unable to take action to deal with a political party that is inextricably linked to a terrorist organisation that continues to engage in terrorist activities while being in the Government of Northern Ireland.

I am afraid that the sanctions themselves are weak. As the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) said earlier, the Government are trying to apply a lesser form of sanction initially in the hope that that will buy some time if there is a problem, and they will then gradually ratchet up the pressure until we may eventually get a motion to exclude a Minister or a junior Minister from the Executive.

Sinn Fein-IRA will not be at all impressed by the prospect of a censure motion in the Assembly, a reduction in their pay or the removal of financial support in the Assembly. The republican movement does not rely on the financial support that it receives in the Assembly to finance its operations. We have ample evidence that it is making a lot of money in all kinds of other activities—some lawful, some not so lawful—so it will not be too bothered by the prospect of financial sanctions being applied.

What really matters is the principle of whether it is right for someone who is linked to a paramilitary terrorist organisation to be in the Government—none of the other sanctions matters; the issue is one of principle. Is it right for someone who is linked to a party that is part of a terrorist organisation that engages in terrorist activities to be in the Government—yes or no? If it is wrong, that party should be excluded from the Government. Indeed, is that not what the Prime Minister promised the people of Northern Ireland when he wrote those handwritten pledges on the wall in Coleraine during the referendum campaign? He pledged:

"Those who use or threaten violence excluded from the Government of Northern Ireland."

There was no mention of censure motions or reductions in pay. The pledge was very clear, but it remains to be delivered to the people of Northern Ireland.

There are very real problems with the legislation. It is flawed. It is inadequate to deal with the current problems that we face in the political process in Northern Ireland. Moreover, although the proposed sanctions relate to political parties, no sanction is proposed in the legislation against a terrorist organisation. Hon. Members may say that the rule of law deals with terrorist organisations. If they breach their ceasefires or engage in illegal activity, it is a matter for the process of law and for police investigation, and so on. That may be so, but what about proscription, which is still on the statute book? Why is that not being considered as a possible sanction? If the Government believe that a political party linked to a terrorist organisation is not committed to exclusively peaceful and democratic means, does that not raise a question in relation to whether that political party is a bona fide democratic party?

How will the Secretary of State form his opinion? What evidence will he require to judge whether a person who is a Minister or a junior Minister is in breach of the commitment to democratic and peaceful means? I should like to know the answer to those questions. Will the Secretary of State simply rely on the investigations of an independent commission? Will he still take the advice of the Chief Constable, the General Officer Commanding and the intelligence agencies? That is important.

The Government do not tell us what the security forces' role will be in influencing the process and the judgments made by the Secretary of State about whether a party or a Minister is committed to exclusively peaceful and democratic means. I certainly hope that the commission will not replace the Chief Constable and the security services in providing intelligence and that its investigatory role will not replace the intelligence gathering capacity of the police and the security services in informing the Government in making their judgments on those crucial political issues.

We have heard about consultation with the Irish Government. I shall not dwell on that issue—other hon. Members have dealt with it adequately—but it is a concern for us because we have little doubt, given the Irish Government's past performance, that they will be continue to be the dead hand when it comes to taking action against the republican movement. Their past resolve to deal with republican breaches has been less than satisfactory.

The reality is that the legislation is so ambiguous on crucial matters that are important to political progress in Northern Ireland and—as the hon. Member for Belfast, North said—that the process of monitoring is so convoluted, cumbersome, imprecise and ineffective that there is little prospect of real and meaningful sanctions ever being applied against the political parties that are linked to the paramilitary terrorist organisations.

The commission's objective may be to rebuild confidence in Northern Ireland. The real polls—the elections—and the opinion polls show that, where confidence has dropped, it has happened almost exclusively in the Unionist community. The most recent opinion poll indicated that, if a referendum on the agreement were held tomorrow, 70 per cent. of Unionists would vote no. If the Government's objective is to address the loss of confidence in the process that has occurred in Unionism, I have to say, as a representative of Unionism, that the legislation will not achieve that objective.

Indeed, my two colleagues—my hon. Friends the Members for Belfast, South and for South Antrim (David Burnside)—and I felt so strongly about those issues that we resigned the Whip of the Ulster Unionist parliamentary party, so that we could vote against the Bill tonight. It is flawed, and I believe that, in time, it will prove inadequate and ineffective in dealing with the problems that we face and that we will have to return to the House to find another more effective way to deal with those issues.

7.47 pm

David Burnside (South Antrim): It is with great regret that I rise, as an Ulster Unionist from the Unionist Bench, at a time when the Unionist cause is once again

dogged and damaged, as it has been for so long, with divisions in my own party—the Ulster Unionist party—and without a co-ordinated policy and strategy. Different views have been expressed tonight from right across the Unionist family, and the Ulster Unionist cause continues to be damaged in the House and the nation. That damages us in establishing accountable, democratic government in Northern Ireland.

We are still dealing with the problem which historically united Unionism back in 1985: opposition to the Anglo-Irish agreement, which was supported by Margaret Thatcher, to her shame, even though she was a very great lady in her time. We are still suffering from that joint authority, even though the 1998 Belfast agreement promised to replace the Anglo-Irish secretariat. Well, the secretariat moved from Maryfield to another headquarters, but the continuing involvement and role of the Irish Republic in our affairs does not help accountable government in Northern Ireland.

I wish to refer to the amendment, which is in the first group for consideration in Committee, and to the new clause on proscription tabled in my name, which will not be debated this evening. Perhaps you will correct me if I cannot refer to them, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The amendment and the new clause are fundamentally important to expressing the Unionists' concerns about the proposed legislation.

The hangover of the Irish Republic's involvement is not all malign, against the interests of democracy or against the desire of the majority of people in the Republic of Ireland to have a better, stable relationship with their neighbours in Northern Ireland. But the Republic's involvement—as Her Majesty's Government allow its Government a constant say, consultation and involvement in our internal affairs—has created in the past, creates in the present and will create in the future opposition from the Unionist community. The amendment refers to the make-up of the commission, and was tabled deliberately on the basis that the commission should include only representatives from the United Kingdom, including one from Northern Ireland. Let us have help and co-operation, but there is no need to have a representative from the Irish Republic or a representative from our ally and neighbour in the United States. Let us co-operate with them in the normal diplomatic manner.

The new clause that I tabled with the support of both Ulster Unionist and Democratic Unionist Members lays out the final penalty for a so-called democratic party with a mandate, Sinn Fein. Yes, it has a mandate, but I disagree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) who recently referred to expulsion from the Executive as the nuclear option. The nuclear deterrent should be proscription of that political party on the ground that it is not operating as a normal democratic party. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany established after the second world war would not have allowed the activities of Sinn Fein. In my opinion, the activities of Sinn Fein would not be tolerated within our European neighbour Spain at present.

It is intolerable that this so-called political party with a mandate continues to operate the dirty double game that the republican movement has pursued since 1998. We know what the problem is: we were told and we hoped that it was on the road from terrorism to democracy, which is possible, admirable and should be encouraged. But we have suffered by not having sanction against it, and it is continuing to play the dirty double game. It has not changed, and I believe that we have problems in the Government of Northern Ireland at present. I do not believe that we have a crisis—although I would be worried about ever saying in the House that there was no crisis, as I will always remember Jim Callaghan's dreadful remark when he came back with a suntan from the Caribbean in 1979, which resulted in the defeat of Labour and the Tories' coming to power after the winter of discontent. We have a number of problems that can be dealt with in Northern Ireland, but they are not dealt with by the legislation proposed tonight. I will not go over again the issues of Colombia, Florida, Castlereagh and Stormontgate, to which many right hon. and hon. Members have already referred. I referred earlier in an intervention to the murder, which the police believe was carried out by the Provisional IRA, of Gareth O'Connor, and the Secretary of State and the Police Service of Northern Ireland are well aware of the circumstances of that. With Martin McGuinness and Gerry Adams sitting on the army council of the IRA, should that offence of murder lead to Martin McGuinness being expelled from the Executive? In my opinion, it should lead to the proscription of Sinn Fein as a political party until it starts to behave decently and democratically and to co-operate with its neighbours in Northern Ireland, the Unionist majority.

Mr. Mallon: I am very aware of the case that the hon. Gentleman mentions, which is within my constituency. It would be helpful to the House, and certainly to me, if he could show where the Police Service of Northern Ireland made that statement or indicated in any way that that was the case. It would be very helpful for many people such as myself who have been trying to resolve that matter. It is incumbent on the hon. Gentleman to put it on the record now.

David Burnside: Informed sources within Northern Ireland—*[Interruption]* I will answer the intervention. Those sources have said that the Provisional IRA—no dissident group—have been involved. I quote from Kevin Myers, a respected journalist, who was published at the weekend and who had the courage to stand up and look at the reality of Sinn Fein. He referred to the murder of the hon. Gentleman's constituent, saying:

> "No one in the three governments participating in the peace process ever announces the Shinners must stay within the law".

That is the view from a southern journalist, writing in what is admittedly a mainland Sunday newspaper. He has been highly critical of the outpouring of the peace process in Northern Ireland that has allowed criminality, including murder, to take place.

Mr. Mallon: I have here the article to which the hon. Gentleman refers, by the journalist to whom he refers. But that was not the question I asked. My question was whether, to be helpful to everybody, not least the family of the young man who was killed, he could put that information from the Police Service of Northern Ireland

[Mr. Mallon]

on the record now. I am not asking for him to name Kevin Myers, any journalist or any informed source, but the PSNI source. That is crucial.

David Burnside: It is my information within the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and I would be pleased to ask the Minister—or if she cannot respond, the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland—to make a statement on the subject. It is my information that the murder has been carried out by the Provisional IRA and that no other form of investigation is being carried out within the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The hon. Gentleman refers to confusion, which is buck passing, and it is exactly the same as the false information that came out when we were told that Castlereagh was an inside job by the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the special branch in Northern Ireland. We all now know that there is only one line of investigation into that break-in—into mainstream republican Provisional IRA within Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mallon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

David Burnside: No, I have given way twice.

I will vote against Second Reading this evening because the legislation is part of the overall declaration, which does not have the consent or the support of the Unionist population. It is not a basis for the way ahead. We are dealing with the problem that we have been dealing with since 1998, which is that, time and again, republicans are let off and not punished for continuing to play the double game of terrorism and masquerading as a democratic political party.

There has been much talk this evening about whether we are going to have an election in Northern Ireland. I am a selected candidate in South Antrim for the Ulster Unionist party and I look forward to an election whenever it is called. I think that it is a major mistake to postpone it. But many questions have to be answered if and when there is an election. How will the Executive be formed, and can the Unionist population have the confidence that this Bill has any chance of expelling Sinn Fein from the Executive for the type of activities in which it has been involved in Colombia, Florida, Castlereagh and Stormontgate—there are enough instances of which the Northern Ireland Office is aware. If my party, the Ulster Unionist party, goes into an election on a manifesto to rejoin this inclusive Executive, including Sinn Fein, I have no confidence that the legislation before the House tonight will exclude Sinn Fein from the Executive. So we will come back to the House again. If that is the sequence of events that unfolds in the next few weeks and months, the Unionist population and electorate will give one clear message: the fudge and double standards are continuing because Her Majesty's Government have refused to stand up to Sinn Fein-IRA. That is why the Unionist population have lost confidence in the agreement and its implementation. I would love to be able to support this measure as a new way forward in dealing with the problems that were ambiguous in 1998 and to which solutions were not delivered by the Prime Minister's promises at that time. I do not believe that they will be delivered here tonight.

If Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness are backing, under this institutional arrangement of the agreement, an Executive who have bureaucratic, slow, complicated and ambiguous legislation, does anyone think that they fear being thrown out of the Northern Ireland Executive? I do not question the credentials of the four gentlemen proposed for the commission, but does anyone think that it will recommend the expulsion of Sinn Fein from the Executive, or that the Secretary of State will expel it? No way. To think that is to live in a dream world. This is another fudge, and I will vote against it on principle on Second Reading, just as I will vote against any other legislation linked to the joint declaration, such as that dealing with the on-the-runs, which I believe has already been promised to Provisional IRA-Sinn Fein and which may be brought before the House in November in an attempt to get the election on its way.

This is another bad night for Unionism. We have another fudge from the Government. Yet again, they are refusing to stand up to Sinn Fein-IRA.

8.1 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I empathise considerably with the hon. Members for South Antrim (David Burnside), for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson) and for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) in their present political predicament. I found myself somewhat distant from the Conservative party over the Belfast agreement and matters flowing from it. I substantially agree with what those three hon. Members have said.

Because of the pressure of time—we have spent a long time on Second Reading—and the fact that the salient features have been well and truly covered, not least by my hon. Friends the Members for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds) and for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), I shall keep my comments to the barest minimum.

According to some media reports that I have heard and read, the provisional republican movement is unhappy about the proposed monitoring commission, fearing that it may lead to the exclusion of its leadership from political office. At first sight, that might therefore suggest that the proposed commission has some merit. The prospect of at last being able to exclude from political office those who have continually demonstrated that they are not exclusively committed to non-violence and democracy is an appealing prospect. However, as we have heard from many hon. Members, on closer observation, the proposed commission fails to inspire confidence. It will be ineffective for a variety of reasons; cumulatively, because it does not in itself contain the authority to exercise its own judgments and conclusions.

The Government make much of the swift establishment of the monitoring commission as a key element in what their press release of 4 September says is intended to rebuild the

"trust and confidence necessary for the restoration of stable and inclusive devolved government in Northern Ireland."

However laudable that objective may be, the Bill as it stands will not help to achieve it.

We can be forgiven for having lost count of how many commissions have been created in recent years. There has been the Patten commission, the Parades Commission, the Human Rights Commission, the

Equality Commission, the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning and perhaps others. One can cynically wonder what rational grounds there are for thinking that this commission will fare any better than the others.

The proposed IMC is fundamentally flawed for all the reasons that we have heard. I do not propose to enumerate them at any great length. The Irish dimension has been mentioned a great deal. There is no justification whatever for allowing this intrusion into what should be reserved as strand 1 matters.

It is the Government's adherence to what they call "demilitarisation", to be monitored alongside terrorist decommissioning, that disturbs me most. Let us be clear. This is not a confidence-building development; it is a confidence-destroying development. The draft agreement asserts parity between the legally constituted security forces of the state and weapons illegally held by illegal terrorist organisations. Such parity is totally unacceptable, politically irresponsible and, arguably, morally wrong because no such parity can or should exist. No wonder that some conclude that the commission appears designed to ensure the speedy reduction in security as promised to the IRA by the Government and apparently endorsed by the pro-agreement parties.

Secondly, and significantly, the origins of the new body lie in the discovery of the IRA's spy operation at the heart of Stormont. Rather than dealing solely with Sinn Fein-IRA, as they should have done, the Government decided to suspend Stormont and punish every party for the wrongdoing of one. To compound matters, in the face of overwhelming evidence of continuing terrorist activity, the IRA was then rewarded with the joint declaration. This Bill compounds that injustice. Why should the Northern Ireland political parties that have no connection whatever with terrorist organisations but which, on the basis of their democratic mandate, declined to participate in a Government surrender to terrorism be subject to the same punitive regime as Sinn Fein-IRA? No comparison can or should be made between parties exclusively committed to the principles and practice of democracy and those that are a political front for unreconstructed terrorist organisations.

Thirdly, there is nothing whatever in the draft agreement – or, equally significantly, outside it – to give any confidence at all that the Government might use the power to exclude parties in the event of a negative finding by the commission. Despite having had the power throughout the period of devolution to refer to the Assembly a motion for the expulsion of republicans, the Government never did so, regardless of the ongoing violence sanctioned and authorised by the Sinn Fein-IRA leadership. In the light of those developments, does anyone seriously believe that the Government, having started more than 10 years ago a process that sought to bring the republicans to the centre stage of Northern Ireland politics, will now in any circumstances take action to remove them from the Executive? I very much doubt it.

The Government's actions over the past few years have themselves destroyed confidence in the process. Nor can Unionists take seriously the claim that this proposed commission will remove Sinn Fein from government when, before any action can be taken, the commission will have to report to a Northern Ireland Assembly in which there is an inherent nationalist right to veto.

The creation of this commission can and will be no more successful in removing terrorists from government than the current so-called exclusion mechanisms. Quite frankly, it is now too late for the Government to restore confidence in a discredited process. The Bill will certainly not achieve that objective. Confidence can be restored only by elections followed by a fundamental renegotiation of the basis for agreement.

8.9 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies: I think that it might be in the interest of the House, given the limited time that we have

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to wind up the debate, he will need the leave of the House.

Mr. Davies: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak. I think that it will be in the interest of the House if I forgo the right to wind up the debate. We have had a good, if predictable, debate. As the Secretary of State said, the Bill is complex and important. We unfortunately have limited time in which to do it justice, so I think that we should make progress without further ado.

8.10 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): A number of points and questions have been put during the debate, so I cannot reciprocate the speed of the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies).

I associate myself with the remarks made by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) when he referred to my hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady). I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) will convey to his colleague the profound sympathy and condolences that I am sure that not only my hon. Friends and I, but hon. Members of all parties would wish to express. That is likely to be the only occasion this evening on which I shall achieve unanimity in the Chamber.

I hope that the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford will accept that my comments will be made affectionately, if not entirely respectfully. He entertained us by storming and raging at the inadequacies of Her Majesty's Government. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that he evoked a college of cardinals, so great was the number of cardinal sins committed by Her Majesty's Government. However, his wisdom and perspicacity know no bounds. I ask him to consider the fact that I frequently think about his colleagues, the hon. Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) and the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir Brian Mawhinney), and their time as security Ministers when thinking about some of the difficult issues that my colleagues and I have to consider, sometimes on a daily basis. It is not difficult to talk the talk of peacemaking—we often do that in the House. However, it is much more difficult to walk the

[Jane Kennedy]

walk, and I have learned the truth of that. It is difficult to engage with those for whom it is anathema to engage but we do so for the sake of those whose lives we are responsible for and to secure a peaceful and safe society. Sometimes our efforts are successful and sometimes they are less successful than we would want, but they are nonetheless sincere.

I shall try to respond to several questions that were asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh and other hon. Members. My hon. Friend asked whether the monitoring commission may receive functions from the Bill, and a great amount of debate was caused by what I am sure he meant to be a helpful suggestion. The model that we have chosen will set up the commission by international agreement. Indeed, in the other place, my noble and learned Friend Lord Williams of Mostyn referred specifically to clause 1, which defines the agreement referred to. Amending that clause would not confer functions on the commission because of the way in which it is drafted. Of course, Parliament could confer functions on a commission in the UK if it wished but that is not the model that we are following. As I said, we have chosen to set up an international commission that will receive its functions through the agreement.

Mr. Mallon: The Minister is effectively answering a question that I did not ask. I gave the column number and date of the debate in which the Government Minister in the other place was talking not about article 1 but about article 4. That was specific in terms of the wording of his reply. The Minister should again clarify the situation accurately.

Jane Kennedy: I was referring to clause 1 of the Bill rather than article 1. I thought that I had answered my hon. Friend's question, but I shall read his comments carefully just as I have the comments of Lord Williams. I might need to clarify the point further as we approach the Committee stage.

Mr. Mallon: I thank the Minister for giving way again, but the reality is that clause 1 does not refer to the functions in any way.

Jane Kennedy: That is precisely my point. Clearly, we shall not get to the bottom of this confusion and I shall need to re-read the *Hansard* report that we have received and examine the response that I have given to determine whether I can provide greater clarity. If necessary, I shall write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library for the benefit of all hon. Members who have an interest in the issue.

My hon. Friend asked about article 4 of the international agreement to establish the monitoring commission by querying whether the commission would be fettered in presenting reports to which organised crime was relevant. However, article 4 includes other criminal offences and the list of activities that it defines is not exhaustive. Organised crime is caught by article 4 of the agreement if it is carried out by paramilitaries. We know that there is significant involvement of paramilitary organisations in organised crime in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mallon *rose*

Jane Kennedy: I shall give way to my hon. Friend for a final time.

Mr. Mallon: The Minister is very kind. Will she confirm that in terms of investigations into organised crime, 14 files exist now, but not one refers to the provisional IRA or those associated with it? Will she put on record her confirmation that that information is correct?

Jane Kennedy: I am afraid that I cannot confirm that at the moment. I am not aware of the detail to which my hon. Friend referred, so I shall have to examine the matter again. Given that we are under time constraints, I shall try not to be provocative and I hope that there will be few occasions when hon. Members will feel goaded to ask for further clarification of my points.

My hon. Friend and other hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay), who is not in the Chamber, asked about the duty of office. I am not sure whether I understood fully the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh, but I confirm that the pledge of office in the Good Friday agreement and the Northern Ireland Act 1998 contains a requirement to discharge in good faith all duties of office. I hope that that addresses his point but I am happy to respond to his worries further, perhaps after considering them more carefully.

I hesitate to be provocative but every time I hear the hon. Member for Belfast, East speak, it occurs to me that he would do well to listen to a song called "Paint It Black", which was written by some of my favourite musicians. He does not want colours anywhere and where there are colours, he wants them painted black. He describes a world that I simply do not see. The song is by the Rolling Stones and I invite him to listen to it if he would like to hear not only a good song, but something that describes the way in which we in the Chamber hear his outlook.

The hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) suggested that the Government equate normalisation and paramilitary activities but that is not the case. The timetable for security normalisation set out in the joint declaration was illustrative, and it was set out on the basis that appropriate acts of completion occurred at the time of its publication. Article 15 of the agreement makes it clear that the programme of security normalisation and the timetable associated with it will be determined once the British Government are satisfied that appropriate commitments have been given on an end to paramilitary activity.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East talked about withholding the salaries of all members of a party and suggested that that might be likely to breach the European convention on human rights. I do not believe that that is the case. We do not believe that withholding, or reducing future income would be a breach of the European convention. However, European case law

draws a distinction between rights to future salary that is not protected under the law and pension rights, which are protected under the law. That brings me to one of the points raised by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) in a characteristically good-humoured contribution.

Lady Hermon (North Down): On the human rights point, I am intrigued by the fact that this Bill does not carry a statement of compatibility with the European convention on human rights. [HON. MEMBERS: "It does."] I stand to be corrected. Perhaps the Minister can explain why it does not appear on the front page. If the Minister could deal with that, I would be grateful.

Jane Kennedy: It may not be on the front page but it is definitely in the Bill; perhaps it is on the back page.

My hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire, if I may call him that, raised the question of pensions. This is a complicated area. Whenever I engage in debate about the European convention on human rights, I do so hesitantly and I accept the charge of hesitancy that the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) laid against us in this context. It may assist if I explain why the Government consider that new section 48(2A) is necessary.

Pension contributions are assessed as a fixed percentage of a Member's salary and pension entitlement is calculated on the basis of a Member's final salary. That provision ensures that any reduction in salary will be disregarded for the purposes of the pension scheme – that is, it will not affect a Member's rights or his obligations. For example, if salary is reduced by half, a member will remain liable for pension contributions calculated as a percentage of his full salary. Similarly, a 50 per cent. reduction in salary will not affect pension entitlement, which will still be based on full salary should a Member decide to stand down while the reduction is in place. *[Interruption.]* I sense that that has provoked a series of questions. I ask hon. Members to resist the urge to intervene.

Lembit Öpik: I am sorry but I cannot resist it. Just for clarification, is the Minister saying that the pension contribution is calculated on the basis of the full salary even when that salary has been reduced – in other words, that the reason that the final pension is consummate with the full salary is that the actual payments into the scheme do not alter with variation in the amount that the individual pays?

Jane Kennedy: The pensions of Members of the Legislative Assembly are contributory, so a Member's share in the pension fund is likely to be protected from interference under article 1 of the first protocol of the ECHR, the protection of property protocol. If a Member's salary was reduced and he retired while a reduction was in place, the value of his pension could be substantially reduced. Therefore, there is, we fear, a serious risk that that would breach the ECHR.

The hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) is right: the statement is not in the Bill. However, it is separately stated that the Bill is compliant.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Just to be accurate, it was in the original Bill that went to the House of Lords. It was not in the reprinted one.

Jane Kennedy: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for clarifying that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock asked whether the commissioners can deliberate by correspondence. The commissioners' working methods will be a matter for them to determine. For myself, I can see no reason why they should not maintain contact by a range of methods. That may be particularly appropriate if a commissioner were sick but I imagine that they would also regularly deliberate in person. If a commissioner is incapacitated, it is open to the two Governments to replace him, although obviously I hope that that would not be the case.

Andrew Mackinlay: It seems to me that if the commissioners are to have any function at all, they have to be inquisitorial. While they may not hold full hearings, dare I say it, like a Select Committee, presumably, they would have to take evidence and to hear from people at some stage. Is the Minister saying that the rubrics of how they work have not yet been thought through? I find that surprising because it seems vital that that should be defined and understood.

Jane Kennedy: It is not that it has not been thought through. It is something that we are saying to the commissioners. We expect that they will wish to meet as a group not only to discuss and to deliberate on information that they have received but to meet those from whom they wish to receive information, so there is no impediment to that, but I expect that their working practices will evolve.

The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) asked what the cross-community voting requirements are. Although it is not in the Bill, it is in the explanatory notes on page 4. That may be of benefit to the whole House.

A number of hon. Members raised the question of retrospectivity, particularly the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside), who raised it initially in an intervention and was supported by other hon. Members. The commission will be established by the agreement and we intend that its first report on paramilitary activity will for the most part cover matters since its establishment. The commission may wish to include in its first report some recent contextual material but I do not expect that it will spend its time looking backwards. That will not be the answer that he wanted but it is the only answer that he will get today.

David Burnside: It is not very satisfactory. I specifically asked about retrospectivity regarding four investigations, of which she will be aware with her ministerial responsibility, including Colombia, Castlereagh, Stormontgate. Those are investigations presently taking place. Will the commission have a remit with a view to making recommendations that could lead

[David Burnside]

to the expulsion of Sinn Fein from the Executive? That is why the people of Northern Ireland are still confused over this debate tonight.

Jane Kennedy: I do not think that there is the degree of confusion that the hon. Gentleman suggests. I have made it clear that we would expect the commission to begin its work from the point at which it comes into existence. There will be when it comes into existence, I suspect, occasions when it may want to look at the context within which it has come into existence but I am not giving him any assurance that the four cases to which he has referred will be part of its considerations.

The hon. Members for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds) and for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) referred to

Mr. Quentin Davies: I wonder whether the right hon. Lady would be kind enough to make an important point absolutely clear: she is not saying that the commission will indeed look at those four egregious breaches, but she equally, as I understand it, is not saying that it will not. She is going to leave it to the commission to decide – is that right? – the extent to which it looks retrospectively, the extent to which it looks forward and generally how it responds to any complaints or any incidents.

Jane Kennedy: Yes.

I make it clear that my thoughts this weekend will be with the family of Prison Officer Ferris, who was stabbed at the time of the Maze escape, and I am grateful to the hon. Members for Belfast, South and for Belfast, North for raising his case. The hon. Member for Belfast, North also raised the question of elections. We are all working to create the conditions for an election to the Assembly from which a viable Executive can be formed. There has been no secret about that. We have never disguised that that is our objective. We want to put the government of Northern Ireland in the hands of locally accountable representatives and the IMC is a key element but just one part of that drive. Others have commitments to make, too: to rebuild the trust and confidence necessary to move forward to stable and inclusive institutions, and we all know what those commitments are.

The hon. Member for Belfast, North suggested that censure motions would be weaker as a result of the Bill. The Bill provides that the Assembly may resolve by cross-community vote to censure a Minister or a party on the basis that it does not believe that they are committed to non-violent, peaceful and democratic means or any of the other terms of the pledge of office. It remains open to the Assembly to pass motions censuring Ministers or parties on other grounds according to its own procedures. I do not see how in substance the Bill weakens the Assembly. In fact, it widens the range of measures available to it.

Mr. Dodds *rose*

Jane Kennedy: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I am seeking to make a little progress as I am conscious of the pressure of time.

Lembit Öpik *rose*

Jane Kennedy: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman a number of times so, if he will forgive me, on this occasion I will press on.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) tempted me to respond to his comment about new Labour, but I will resist, as that is not within the confines of our debate, but perhaps I will discuss it with him later. However, he spoke about people who have been forced into exile and the need for acts of completion to include scope for them to return. He is quite right to raise that. The practice of exiling must come to an end, and the exiled must feel free to return in safety. That is a point that not only he but my right hon. and hon. Friends and I have made on many occasions both in the House and Northern Ireland.

My hon. Friend also questioned an issue raised by clause 2, and the need to avoid making reports that are prejudicial to criminal proceedings. Commissioners will obviously exercise discretion about the information that they wish to include in their reports, subject to the provisions of clause 2. While putting an independent spotlight on ongoing paramilitary activity, we must also ensure that any legal proceedings and, in particular, criminal proceedings are not jeopardised. We must not allow the commission to be seen to influence the outcome of criminal proceedings because that could cause the collapse of a case. That does not, however, prevent the IMC from giving an independent and accurate picture of the scale of ongoing paramilitary activity.

The hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire), in a well-argued and thoughtful speech, referred to a statement by the leader of Sinn Fein last April that represented progress on the part of the IRA, which we have acknowledged. However, as the hon. Gentleman knows, I have said on a previous occasion, that that does not answer the Prime Minister's final, simple question – will the IRA call a halt to all paramilitary activity? The hon. Gentleman also asked about the relationship between the commission, Garda Siochana, the General Officer Commanding the Army in Northern Ireland and the Chief Constable. The IMC will be open and accessible to all interested parties and will consult on issues relevant to its functions, as he would expect. However, the two Governments have made it clear that it should be provided with the information that it needs to do its job. It will have access to the Chief Constable, the General Officer Commanding and other agencies with law enforcement and security roles in Northern Ireland. It would be wrong to go into specifics, but I can confirm that the IMC will receive material drawn from intelligence. It will then be for the IMC to decide what to include in its reports, provided that it does not breach

the duties under clause 2. As for costs, we estimate that those will be £2 million a year, and a contribution will be received from the Irish Government on a 50:50 basis. I am happy to use that phrase in a context different from that which I normally use.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South referred to recent decisions regarding prisons. He will forgive me for not being drawn down that path in this debate, but I appreciate his comments and anxieties about prison officers. I share his concerns, but they are not often raised in our discussions of security matters in Northern Ireland. The hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson) and other hon. Members asked about the IMC's determination of cases referring to strand 1 questions. In view of the convention regarding the operation of the internal political institutions of Northern Ireland, it would be inappropriate for non-UK nationals to have a role in investigating and reporting on allegations concerning such matters. That is why, for complaints concerning the operation of internal political institutions — strand 1 institutions — the Irish and American members of the commission will stand aside.

The key point is surely that, on matters relating to the operation of those institutions, the British members alone will examine the issues and report their conclusions. The whole commission will have a role in reporting its view, when asked to do so, on whether particular politicians are genuinely committed to peaceful and democratic means. That is a basic requirement of trust and confidence — it has nothing to do with the workings of the internal institutions.

Mr. Donaldson: The hon. Lady is mistaken in her interpretation. It is clear in clause 6 of the agreement between the British and Irish Governments that the full commission, including the Irish Government's representative, will be involved in considering complaints from parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly — a strand 1 institution — in relation to the pledge of office, specifically the provision relating to the commitment to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means. That is specified in annexe A of the Belfast agreement — the hon. Lady is wrong.

Jane Kennedy: We will have to agree to disagree on that point. I do not accept the premise from which the hon. Gentleman is arguing.

The hon. Member for Lagan Valley asked whether members of Sinn Fein will escape charges that they have broken the pledge of office by saying that their party is not the same as the Provisional IRA. It is already the case under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 that Assembly parties or Ministers may be excluded from office, as the hon. Gentleman is aware, if the Assembly concludes by cross-community vote that they are not considered to be committed to peaceful and democratic means. However, the international agreement establishing the IMC makes it clear that the commission may make recommendations about the steps that the Assembly could consider taking against Ministers or parties if it concludes that they are not committed to peaceful and democratic means. The nature and consequences of the links between a party and a paramilitary organisation will be for the IMC to establish and respond to. Members of the commission will have significant and relevant experience and are not likely to duck the issue.

David Burnside *rose*

Jane Kennedy: The hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not give way to him at this moment in time.

Finally, the right hon. Member for Upper Bann, in a typically forceful speech, said that the IMC is being created so that Her Majesty's Government cannot turn a blind eye — I understand why he made that comment. He went on to talk about the huge element of trust that will be required. Confidence in the IMC will have to be established, and it will have to win the confidence and respect of the people of Northern Ireland if it is to assist with the process of restoring trust and confidence — that great project to which we are all committed. I very much agree with some of his comments about the nature of that trust and confidence which, indeed, are essential if we are to re-establish the consent for partnership government to work.

The right hon. Gentleman raised the passage in the Hillsborough text whereby if steps are not taken in the Assembly to give effect to an IMC report it will be for the British Government, in consultation with the Irish Government and the political parties, to resolve the matter in a manner consistent with the IMC's recommendations. I stress again very firmly that we should act in those circumstances. Where an IMC report includes recommendations for action and where the process outlined in the Hillsborough text does not lead to resolution of the issue, we envisage no circumstances in which we would not exercise the power in a manner consistent with the IMC recommendations. That is the spirit of the Hillsborough text — the Government would seek to give it effect, and do so faithfully with the approval of the House and another place.

Finally, I shall deal with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh. I have tried to answer some of his questions. In a fine speech, in keeping with the highest traditions of the House, he spoke solidly and seriously in favour of the sanctions that the IMC will be able to impose. He recognised the involvement of the Irish Government in the new commission as a strength, not as a weakness. Paramilitaries know no boundaries, and the independent monitoring commission will be able to work closely with and gain the confidence of the security forces, both in the United Kingdom and in the Republic of Ireland, as a result of the bilateral agreement underpinning the IMC.

The power of my hon. Friend's oratory was evident when he condemned paramilitaries and underscored the fact that those participating in democratic politics in a power-sharing Executive must not be associated with paramilitary organisations that threaten, attack, intimidate, shoot young men in the legs and drive whole families into exile. His comments are not lost on the Government. We have worked tirelessly to bring peace and normality to Northern Ireland. We inherited the foundations laid by the outgoing Conservative Government.

I met and talked to a former Royal Ulster Constabulary officer at the dedication of the RUC George Cross garden of remembrance, which is a place of great tranquillity, full of powerful images movingly recalling the sacrifice of all too many police families. The

[Jane Kennedy]

former officer said that he was struck by the fact that so many police lives had been lost, as one sees laid out year by year as one walks through that garden, as well as the many hundreds of others—soldiers, Catholics, Protestants and others. But he commented on how many lives had been saved since the ceasefires. We should not forget that that move, and the work that we are undertaking to continue it, is saving lives. It is imperative that we continue to maintain the momentum for peace.

As I said at the outset, it is not difficult to talk the talk of peacemaking. It is much more difficult to walk the walk. Introducing the commission is an important step along the way towards achieving the peaceful outcome that I hope we all seek.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 325, Noes 7.

Division No. 317] **[8:42 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Austin, John
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Butterfill, John
Byers, rh Stephen
Cameron, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chaytor, David
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dismore, Andrew
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Garnier, Edward
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Gummer, rh John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Heald, Oliver
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, rh Oliver
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackay, rh Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maude, rh Francis
Mercer, Patrick
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Moss, Malcolm
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Opik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*

Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Rooney, Terry
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Tredinnick, David
Trickett, Jon
Trimble, rh David
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Watkinson, Angela
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Vernon Coaker and Gillian Merron

NOES

Burnside, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Dodds, Nigel
Hunter, Andrew
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Iris Robinson and Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Committee of the whole House, pursuant to Order [this day].

NORTHERN IRELAND (MONITORING COMMISSION ETC.) BILL [LORDS] [MONEY]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with Bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Northern Ireland (Monitoring Commission etc.) Bill [Lords], it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure incurred by the Secretary of State under the Act, and

(b) any amount refunded under the Act in respect of any tax or duty. *[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

NORTHERN IRELAND (MONITORING COMMISSION ETC.) BILL [LORDS] *[WAYS AND MEANS]*

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with Bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Northern Ireland (Monitoring Commission etc.) Bill [*Lords*], it is expedient to authorise such incidental charges to inheritance tax as may arise from granting any relief from tax provided for by the Act. *[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

Bill immediately considered in Committee, pursuant to Order [this day].

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

THE MONITORING COMMISSION

8.55 pm

Mr. Gregory Campbell: I beg to move amendment No. 64, in page 1, line 4, leave out from 'established' in line 1 to 'to' in line 6.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Amendment No. 55, in page 1, line 8, leave out from beginning to end of line 11.

Amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 11, at end insert—

'(1A) But, notwithstanding the provisions of that agreement, the Monitoring Commission shall consist of two members only, who shall be appointed by Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, and of whom one shall be from Northern Ireland.'.

Amendment No. 65, in page 1, line 12, at end insert

'( ) establish the Monitoring Commission'.

Amendment No. 66, in page 2, line 21, at end add—

'(b) The Commission shall be appointed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.'.

New clause 3— *Requisition of Report from Monitoring Commission*—

'.—When requested to do so by any party represented in the Northern Ireland Assembly to make a report on—

(a) paramilitary activity, or

(b) whether a Minister or another party in the Assembly is not committed to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means,

the Monitoring Commission shall do so within fourteen days.'.

Mr. Campbell: Amendment No. 64 would restore the rightful role of this, the Parliament of the United Kingdom. As was said on Second Reading, there is a feeling not only among many people in Northern Ireland but among many Northern Ireland Members that that role has been somewhat usurped. Having been raised initially by the hon. Member for Thurrock

[Mr. Campbell]

(Andrew Mackinlay), the issue was then raised by several others. It was felt that Parliament ought to establish the monitoring commission and ensure not only that it has been established but that its composition is appropriate; any further scrutiny could be conducted through the parliamentary process.

The genesis of the commission's establishment has been dealt with at length today. It is, of course, rooted in the abject failure over the past five and a half years to deal adequately with the problem of having a terrorist-related political party in government, and the inability either to proceed against that terrorist-related party or to remove it from government without using the proverbial sledgehammer to ensure that all the democrats get a sore head as well.

The problem has been highlighted in the past 12 months by the suspension of the Assembly. The problem has been compounded by the inadequacy of the voting mechanism to remove the terrorist-related party, namely Sinn Fein-IRA, which is obviously regrettable.

Amendment No. 64 is very similar to amendment No. 1, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for South Antrim (David Burnside). We shall not seek to divide the Committee on amendment 64, in the knowledge that my hon. Friend will do so on amendment No. 1.

Amendment No. 55 was also referred to on Second Reading. A number of Members mentioned the Bill's apparent inability to deal with an IRA breach. We have witnessed several breaches in the past five years, and many Members have alluded to the fact that if devolution is restored, we could well face several more. Of course, the problem with the independent monitoring commission—amendment No. 55 attempts to address it—is that such breaches will be very difficult to define, and to relate specifically to the Provisional IRA and, consequently, to its political affiliate, Sinn Fein.

9 pm

Let us imagine that a security breach occurs, and that the Chief Constable and the security services indicate that, in their opinion, the Provisional IRA is to blame. If the IMC investigates the complaint that would doubtless be levelled—by an Assembly Member or by someone else wishing to complain—vagueness and greyness could well arise, whereby the Provisional IRA's leadership were not told that they in fact sanctioned action against the innocent civilian or security forces member who was targeted.

On the other hand, there are those of us who believe that if the Bill is not amended in this respect, a fig leaf may remain. Some Unionists could pass the buck for security breaches to the IMC, in the belief that it will be difficult, if not impossible, for the IMC definitively to say that the Provisional IRA was responsible for such an action, that it sanctioned it at an official level and that the following sanctions should apply. Of course, those who would wish to use that fig leaf would then say, "We tried our best. We established the IMC and we left the issue with it, but it has not been sufficiently precise, clear and definitive for the sanctions to be applied." They could then decide to proceed in government with those terrorists, as they have in the past. They could try to hold their hands up as if they were clean, yet they would be sitting in government with those who support terror and murder.

Amendment No. 1 deals with the fact that the monitoring commission ought to consist only of members appointed from within the United Kingdom. In the circumstances, it also seems reasonable that one of the two members appointed be from Northern Ireland. As was debated at some length on Second Reading, the difficulty is that if the Bill is not amended and someone from the Irish Republic is appointed to a position that enables them to have an input into the internal affairs of Northern Ireland, that would constitute a clear breach of Northern Ireland's internal politics. The amendment seeks to rectify that.

Amendment No. 65 deals with the establishment of the monitoring commission and the principle of parliamentary sovereignty. If the monitoring commission is not established and approved by the UK Parliament, as outlined in the amendment, the charge will be laid that the Irish Republic is exerting an influence that heretofore the people of Northern Ireland have not had to bear.

Other amendments are consequential. Amendment No. 66 proposes that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland should appoint the monitoring commission. Again, if that were not the case, we would be in serious breach of what was previously termed the strand 1 position in the run-up to the Belfast agreement.

New clause 3 deals with a significant omission in the Bill, proposing a specific time frame within which action should be taken by the commission. The new clause specifies "within fourteen days". We preface the provision with the word "shall" do so within that period. As with previous breaches, we believe that unless action is taken immediately, there will undoubtedly, as in the past few years, be delay and prevarication. The commencement of legal proceedings will then enter the frame and evidently there will be a prolonged delay in dealing with the issue. We know about what happened in Colombia, which has been ongoing for a prolonged period and the issue is likely to continue into the next calendar year, so we want a specific timetable so that the general public can have some confidence that their concerns are being dealt with expeditiously. Failure to do so would lead to the belief that the Government, perhaps even the commission, had tried to sweep the matter under the carpet in the hope that it would not see the light of day.

I have explained the reasons for our proposed amendments and we hope and expect to receive some support from across the Chamber.

Mr. Carmichael: I want to put on record succinctly the Liberal Democrat position on the amendments. In our view, they are all essentially wrecking amendments, given the way in which the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Campbell) and his colleagues voted on Second Reading. It is, of course, perfectly legitimate for them to table wrecking amendments at this stage, but I am afraid that we cannot be party to them.

Andrew Mackinlay: I am truly bewildered. I listened carefully to what the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Campbell) said. On the narrow but

important issue of there being some time scale, I thought that he expressed an entirely reasonable point of view. I am surprised to hear the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) describe the measure as a wrecking amendment. It seems eminently sensible and I hope that the Minister will pick up on it.

Mr. Carmichael: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. I was damning all the amendments in the group by association, but that one is an honourable exception. The effect of amendment No. 1 would be to remove the Republic of Ireland completely from the work of the commission, and that cannot be seen as anything other than a wrecking amendment. A number of drafting difficulties also arise. For example, I have tried to put amendment No. 66 in the context of the Bill but I cannot do so.

David Burnside: I speak in support of amendment No. 1, which is in my name and that of my hon. Friends. It is not a wrecking amendment and it should cause no offence to our colleagues, neighbours and friends in the Irish Republic. Nor should it cause any offence to our allies, the United States of America, whatever Administration are in power. As an Ulster Unionist, I believe that Unionism suffered badly for many years because it did not promote itself with the American Administration and Congress. Nor, indeed, did we argue our cause with the Irish Republic.

Amendment No. 1 is based on a matter of principle. Our experience in Northern Ireland since the internationalisation that resulted from the 1985 Anglo-Irish agreement—which I mentioned on Second Reading—is that we have been under a form of joint authority that would not be acceptable in any other part of the United Kingdom. We wish to have co-operation from the Irish Republic. Indeed, we wish that we had had much more co-operation during the 30 years of terrorism from the Irish Republic on extradition, on acting against the Provisional IRA and on removing the arms dumps in the Republic, which were contrary to its constitution. We also wish that we had had more support from the US Administration in undermining Noraid and other fundraising for republicanism and terrorism. Some things have changed. Good has come from evil, with the worldwide campaign, after 11 September 2001, against terrorism from all quarters. We support that, and we want the help and support of the US Administration.

However, it is not right that a representative from either the United States or the Irish Republic should sit on the commission. It should be the sole sovereign responsibility of the United Kingdom Parliament and Government. We have had enough experience of the Anglo-Irish agreement and its implementation in terms of interference in our internal affairs by the Government of the Irish Republic. We also had an international commission on policing, but it did not reflect the views of the majority law-abiding community in Northern Ireland. It was an internationalised commission that, for political reasons and not good, sensible policing reasons, forced through several changes that did not, and do not, have the consent of that majority.

We wish to divide the House on amendment No. 1. It is an important principle that the Government of United Kingdom, and thus Northern Ireland, has the sole responsibility. We do not need more international commissions or representatives from the Irish Republic. We need help, support and co-operation, but not formal participation from either the Irish Republic or the United States.

Lembit Öpik: Why does the hon. Gentleman think that two people are sufficient for the composition of the commission? Notwithstanding his concerns about the international nature of the body, surely it cannot work practically or effectively with only two members?

David Burnside: Not being a Liberal Democrat, I have never been a believer in large committees, either in my business or my political life. I have believed that small, concentrated decision-making bodies, providing advice to the Executive, are the best way to run a Government. I have proposed in this House on a number of occasions that a commission should be set up that would be a Committee of this House. It would comprise the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the leaders of the Liberal Democrat and Ulster Unionist parties. It would seek advice from the Chief Constable and the General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland. They would give their views on whether Sinn Fein, which is inextricably linked with the IRA, was involved in terrorist activity.

That would be a much better and much more British form of institution than yet another internationalised body. I believe that the proposed commission will be toothless and ineffective.

9.15 pm

Mr. Mallon: I note the content of the amendments and of clause 1. I am astounded by the insular and isolationist approach evident in the remarks of the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside). That is simply an observation.

When the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the right hon. Member for Warley (Mr. Spellar), replies to the debate, I hope that he will confirm that clause 1 contains no reference, oblique or otherwise, to the functions of the independent commission. In fairness to me, and in the interests of accuracy, that must be put on the record, and the response to the debate will provide the opportunity for that.

Mr. Trimble: The hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Campbell) suggested that some awful consequences might flow if it was not shown that the monitoring commission was established by this Parliament. I am not sure what the need for that is, as the proposals show that it is being established under the royal prerogative. I should have thought that that was enough to show the clear British ownership of the concept.

If the amendments are accepted, the proposed monitoring commission will never come into existence, and the procedures that have been discussed and agreed will fall with it. The commitments that have been given about acting in accordance with monitoring reports will disappear into a limbo, and I do not know whether they can be dug out again. If the amendments are carried, the whole idea will disappear into a limbo, as the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) noted.

[Mr. Trimble]

I cannot go along all the way with the comments about insularity made by the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), but I hope that the gentleman sitting to my left, the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside), will reflect on the fact that the problem with which we are dealing is not confined to Northern Ireland. That might be the place where some of the problems are most acute, but they are not confined to Northern Ireland. We know that it extends further afield—indeed, much of the infrastructure of the republican movement is south of the border.

Unionists have complained about that, year in and year out. They have talked about the need for co-operation, but how can that be achieved if they will not deal with people? To assume that a person nominated by the Irish Government must be that Government's agent is a little fanciful. However, the basic point remains: if one wants co-operation, one needs to speak to people and set up procedures that allow them to have their input. We need access to intelligence in the Republic of Ireland. We also need the co-operation of the relevant agencies in the US, and much reference has been made to events in that hemisphere.

Before we cut off all the sources of help, it might be worth pausing for consideration. For that reason, I make it clear that we in the Ulster Unionist party cannot support the amendments.

Mr. Peter Robinson: This set of amendments goes to the heart of the Bill. I believe that it is the most important set that we will deal with in the short time that we have available. I regret to say that each amendment deals with a number of vital issues. For that reason, since the House will not wish—nor will you, Sir Michael, flexible and generous though you always are—to extend us the time for a vote on each, we must choose which is the most important. I wish to speak about several, but it may help Whips and others to know our view that it would be best to divide on amendment No. 1. There is a similarity between that and amendment No. 64, so we will seek to withdraw that and hope to find the Chairman generous enough to allow us to divide on amendment No. 1.

Amendments Nos. 64 and 1 deal with who runs Northern Ireland and whether it is appropriate for people from other countries to be directly or tangentially involved in its governance. The amendments make it clear that we believe that the commission is a United Kingdom matter and that those involved in decision making should therefore come from the United Kingdom, and from the United Kingdom alone. I do not agree with the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) that in order to have friends around the world one must involve them in the day-to-day operation of our country. That is nonsense. We can be best friends with our neighbours in the Irish Republic and the best friends of the Government and people of the United States without having them dealing with matters directly relating to Northern Ireland. Where assistance can usefully be given, it is appropriate to ask our friends for it, but it should not come with the price of allowing them a role—I might say an interfering role—in the way in which the Province is run.

That is all the more important when one considers that the Government of the Irish Republic publicly announce that they speak at meetings with Her Majesty's Government on behalf of the nationalist community in Northern Ireland. They are a partisan player in Northern Ireland matters. Would that there were someone at the table to represent the Unionist community. The Government do not see themselves doing that; they see themselves as neutral. When consultation takes place between the Government of the Irish Republic and the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, one party is partisan in favour of the nationalist community, arguing for and speaking for it, while the other partner claims to be neutral.

The IMC should, in my view, be an entirely United Kingdom body, appointed by the United Kingdom through Ministers answerable in this House. There should not be one member appointed by the Government of the Irish Republic, and one by both Governments on the recommendation of the United States. That is a major point of principle, and I do not support the internationalisation of the Northern Ireland situation. That was the folly of the Ulster Unionist party. Lord Maginnis—as he now is—was the one who publicly announced for an international commission to take a role in decommissioning matters, thus starting the process of internationalisation.

Mr. Trimble: The hon. Gentleman refers to internationalisation of matters relating to Northern Ireland. Can he tell me who agreed to the ground rules and the basic concept of the three-stranded talks back in the early 1990s?

Mr. Robinson: I hope that everyone agreed to the ground rules for the three strands, which clearly said that only the parties in Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom Government should be party to any discussion relating to the internal affairs of Northern Ireland. The Government of the Irish Republic were to be involved in those matters only where the relationship was between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. It seems good common sense that if one wants a relationship with the Irish Republic, one should talk to the Irish Republic. That was the argument. That is why we were round the table with the Irish Republic at that strand. It is not internationalising the Northern Ireland situation. It is having a relationship with your neighbour, not bringing them in to take decisions on the internal affairs of Northern Ireland. Sadly, the right hon. Gentleman and his party, or half of it at least, have been responsible for that.

Other amendments, of which amendment No. 55 is perhaps the most significant, deal with the responsibility of the monitoring commission. Should it have the broad sweep of responsibility—dealing with monitoring behaviour in relation to the pledge to keep politics exclusively peaceful and democratic—or should it be expanded to deal with normalisation, which is a Government matter, and indeed with political issues relating to the pledge of office? Clearly, the latter two are included only because the Government do not want Sinn Fein to be standing out there on its own. That is no good reason to try to bring other people into the process and to expand the role of the monitoring commission.

Amendment No. 55 would restrict any role that the Government might give a commission to determining whether people are exclusively committed to peaceful and democratic means, which seems appropriate. We would like to vote on all the amendments in the list, but clearly the key issue is encapsulated by amendment No. 1.

Rev. Ian Paisley: It would be interesting for the Committee to remember that those of us on the Unionist side who were in at the early talks all agreed that strand 1 was a matter for the people of Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom Parliament and Government alone to decide. The south of Ireland had no say in strand 1—we won that, only because we took a determined stand—although when we went to strand 2, which dealt with issues of neighbourliness between the two parts of Ireland, the Irish Government were there. However, the Irish Government did not like that situation. On every occasion that they could, they insisted that they were the spokesmen for the nationalist people of Northern Ireland.

Only one body can speak for the people of Northern Ireland, democratically speaking, and that is this Parliament. The Irish Government did not say that they were speaking in the interests of the Irish Republic. They said that they were the spokesmen for the nationalist community. One cannot have that sort of carry-on at such talks. There must be people who speak officially for each of the parties. The time has come to revisit this issue. We must insist that the southern Government have no say in strand 1. It is not their bailiwick: it is that of this Parliament, this Government and the people of Northern Ireland.

Lord Molyneaux reminded the other place of what a great Prime Minister and leader of the Labour party and the British people, Mr. Wilson, had to say on the subject: that the governance of Northern Ireland is for the people and the Parliament of the United Kingdom. We hold to that.

9.30 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. John Spellar): During the early part of this debate, I found myself in some agreement with the Liberal Democrat spokesman, but I have recovered.

I am not entirely sure which amendments will be dealt with, so I shall try to encompass all of them in my remarks, as several of the issues that were raised overlap. Amendment No. 55 would limit the role of the IMC to reporting on paramilitary activity. It would remove references in clause 1 to normalisation and the pledge of office. That is not acceptable in policy terms, as it undermines the purpose of the Bill; nor does it acknowledge the realities of the situation.

The agreement carefully provides for reports on three specific matters. The need for reports on paramilitary activity is certainly not in question, but we want and need to go further in order to ensure that there are independent reports on matters that are at the heart of implementing the Belfast agreement. Those reports will help to rebuild trust and confidence. That is our aim.

Normalisation reports are a crucial part of that process, as is the stability of the democratic institutions. To those who are concerned that the joint declaration sets out a normalisation programme, I point out that it will not begin until the right security environment is achieved. The IMC will have no role in monitoring the programme until notified under article 15 of the agreement.

Hon. Members have focused on amendment No. 1, which concerns the membership of the commission. The commission will be established by the international agreement published on 5 September and will take effect once it has been signed and ratified by both the British and Irish Governments. It is that agreement, not the Bill, which establishes the commission's membership and functions.

The international agreement gives effect to the proposals agreed between the Governments at Hillsborough earlier this year, as set out in the monitoring and compliance document published on 1 May. Specifically, the scheme that we are considering today has always envisaged a commission of four members: two appointed by the UK, one appointed by Ireland and one appointed by the two Governments on a nomination from the United States. That flows from the fact that the commission forms part of the arrangements that we are establishing for monitoring and promoting compliance on a range of commitments relating to the full implementation of the Belfast agreement and the restoration of stable and inclusive institutions. That remains the Government's position, so we are unable to agree to the amendment, as it would be incompatible with the requirements of the agreement.

Amendments Nos. 65 and 66 would make the monitoring commission purely a UK body. They would put the setting up of the commission and the making of appointments to it solely in the hands of the Secretary of State. They would not of themselves amend the provisions of the agreement published on 5 September.

The hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) said that the amendments were not intended as wrecking. In part, I take his point. However, they would have an effect on the Bill: namely, the creation of a parallel commission. It would be established by the Secretary of State and appointments would be made by him. Later references in the Bill would thus be to that body and not to the one that would be established by the agreement the Government policy to which the measure gives effect.

The amendments would seriously undermine our purpose of helping to restore trust and confidence through independent monitoring of paramilitary activity, normalisation and political breaches, so we cannot accept them.

New clause 3 is unnecessary. We believe that the IMC should be constituted under the international agreement that we propose. That is the purpose of the legislation. Article 6 of the agreement already permits the commission to consider a claim by any party represented in the Assembly that a Minister or any other party in the Assembly is not committed to non-violence or exclusively democratic or peaceful means. That is in line with the terms of the proposed new clause.

I am aware of the time and realise that the Committee wants to deal with some of the other amendments, so, in summary, we believe that it is right that the commission

[Mr. John Spellar]

is constituted on an international basis, for many of the reasons eloquently expressed by the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble).

Mr. Peter Robinson: Before the Minister strays too far from new clause 3, he might like to comment on timetabling, which is one of its elements. Many of us are concerned that the Bill would allow considerable delay and that weeks or months could pass while a serious issue confronted the Assembly. What is the Government's view as to the length of time that the commission should take when considering such matters?

Mr. Spellar: I am sorry—I had hoped to make progress, but I will now have to refer to new clause 3 in slightly more detail.

The current provisions permit the consideration of claims where the allegation is that a Minister has failed to observe any pledge of office set out in the agreement or that a party has not committed its members who are or may be Ministers to doing so. Those in favour of the amendments and new clause 3 would not allow the commission such a remit. We believe that it is essential to cover such matters. *[Interruption.]* I shall deal with timing in a second. The operation of lawfully constituted democratic institutions in good faith is essential to partnership government, and so to peace and stability in Northern Ireland.

The international agreement puts the commission on a fixed time scale. It has to report at six-monthly intervals. The two Governments jointly may also ask it to make other reports. In principle, we believe that the reporting cycle envisaged by the agreement is correct. Consideration of paramilitary activity across the board, as opposed to the affairs of individuals or a political party, may require a great deal of evidence to be considered.

New clause 3 would render proper reporting impractical, by giving any party the right to commission such reports as often as it saw fit. We believe that a workable, practical timetable has been outlined that will not lead to endless delay. Equally, the commission will not be pressed into ducking and diving between a number of different issues, so it will be able to put in the sustained work that is necessary.

On whether the commission should be placed on an international basis, we believe that it should have a remit to consider not only the commitment to non-violence absolutely vital though that is, for all the reasons that have been given by hon. Members tonight but other threats to the stable operation of the institutions.

The commission should report regularly on paramilitary activity. Subject to that, we believe that it is for the commission itself to judge how long it is necessary to take to evaluate properly and to reach conclusions, and it will obviously want to do so as expeditiously as possible to maintain trust and confidence. Obviously, undue delay would militate against that. For the same reasons, the commission must not produce superficial or insufficiently investigated reports. It must be able to judge in those matters. Accordingly, we believe that new clause 3 is misconceived, and we cannot support it. If Opposition Members persist in wishing to press the matter to a Division, I will ask my hon. Friends to oppose them in the Lobby.

Mr. Gregory Campbell: I wish to respond briefly, as I am anxious about the passage of time. A number of substantive points were made by hon. Members who spoke in favour of these amendments, but of course, the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) was not one of them, which would not surprise most of us. He suggested on a couple of occasions that the entire concept would fall—I think that that was the phrase he used—if these amendments were agreed to. When we align that with some of the statements and references that we have just heard the Minister make, it would appear that the substance behind the IMC seems to have been agreed in advance, that any amendment is likely to be futile and that whatever deal has been arrived at is one of sum and substance.

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann suggests that if we tinker with the proposals at all, they will fall. I do not know whether that is because the entire Bill has been discussed between himself and the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Mr. Adams), who also happens to sit on the IRA army council, and agreed with him, and we will have to see whether that is coloured by the public protestations by Sinn Fein about opposition and non-co-operation with the IMC.

The other issue that leaves us somewhat lacking in information is the Minister's response to the timing. Under new clause 3, we attempted to try to tie down the issues so that the matter would be responded to and dealt with at a brief juncture. He now tells us that there will be a report by the IMC at six-monthly intervals. Given the precedents established by the decommissioning body in Northern Ireland—

Mr. Spellar: May I clarify the matter for the hon. Gentleman? I apologise if I had not made the position clear. The international agreement, as I said, puts the commission on a fixed time scale to report at six-monthly intervals. The two Governments may also jointly ask it to make other reports.

Mr. Campbell: I thank the Minister for that. The two Governments indeed may do so. We will wait and see whether there are any reports that do not amount to a string of beans in between the six-monthly intervals. The issue on which I wanted to elaborate slightly, however, was that the precedents are not good in that we have what amounts to an international decommissioning commission in Northern Ireland, which has been in operation for a significant period. It has not exactly been overburdened with work that is being polite and very kind. In fact, it has cost millions of pounds but it has done virtually nothing. It reports very infrequently. Will the mighty international commission that we are being asked to endorse, without any amendments, it appears, be any more definitive? Will it take any more substantive action, or will it be a case yet again of an attempt to fudge an issue and sweep it under the carpet in an endeavour to try to get the show back on the road and to get devolution restored in the hope that eventually people will be worn down and accept the inevitable, as some people would try to present it?

To assist the Minister, I will repeat what I and some of my colleagues said: because of amendment No. 1 being similar in substance to amendment No. 64, we will not pursue amendment No. 64 to a Division. On that basis, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment proposed: No. 1, in clause 1, page 1, line 11, at end insert—

'(1A) But, notwithstanding the provisions of that agreement, the Monitoring Commission shall consist of two members only, who shall be appointed by Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, and of whom one shall be from Northern Ireland.'.—*[David Burnside.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 7, Noes 321.

Division No. 318] **[9:43 pm**

AYES

Burnside, David
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Hunter, Andrew
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Gregory Campbell and Rev. Martin Smyth

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Austin, John
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bayley, Hugh
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brazier, Julian
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Butterfill, John
Byers, rh Stephen
Cameron, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dismore, Andrew
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Garnier, Edward
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Heald, Oliver
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, rh Oliver
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
Mackay, rh Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Mercer, Patrick
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moffatt, Laura
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Norman, Archie
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Opik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin

Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Squire, Rachel
Stanley, rh Sir John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Tredinnick, David
Trickett, Jon
Trimble, rh David
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and Gillian Merron

Question accordingly negatived.

Motion made, and Question put, That the clause stand part of the Bill:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 330, Noes 7.

Division No. 319] **[9:57 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Austin, John
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bayley, Hugh
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brazier, Julian
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Butterfill, John
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Cameron, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dismore, Andrew
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Garnier, Edward
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, rh Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kennedy, rh Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen

Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackay, rh Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maude, rh Francis
Mercer, Patrick
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moffatt, Laura
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Norman, Archie
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Opik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Sheridan, Jim
Simmonds, Mark
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erd[illegible])*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham[illegible])*
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Squire, Rachel
Stanley, rh Sir John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Tredinnick, David
Trickett, Jon
Trimble, rh David
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Gillian Merron and
Mr. Fraser Kemp

NOES

Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Hunter, Andrew
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Iris Robinson and
David Burnside

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 2 and 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4

Resolutions About Exclusion

Andrew Mackinlay: I beg to move amendment No. 22, in page 3, line 20, at end insert—

'(6A) In subsection (5) (motion for resolution not to be moved unless certain conditions are satisfied), for "Presiding Officer in pursuance of a notice" there is substituted "Secretary of State".'.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Sylvia Heal): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Amendment No. 23, in page 3, line 23, leave out from 'he' to 'move' in line 24 and insert

'may appear before the Assembly and'.

Amendment No. 67, in page 3, line 43, at end insert

'(7A) Where a recommendation has been made by the Commission mentioned in section 1 of the Northern Ireland (Monitoring Commission) Act 2003, the Secretary of State shall within seven days of receiving the recommendation serve a notice on the Presiding Officer requiring him to move a motion for such a resolution.'.

Amendment No. 68, in clause 7, page 6, line 20, at end insert

'(7A) Where a recommendation has been made by the Commission mentioned in section 1 of the Northern Ireland (Monitoring Commission) Act 2003, the Secretary of State shall within seven days of receiving the recommendation serve a notice on the Presiding Officer requiring him to move a motion for such a resolution.'.

Amendment No. 24, in page 7, line 16, leave out from 'the' to end and insert 'Secretary of State'.

Amendment No. 25, in page 7, line 19, leave out from 'he' to 'move' in line 20 and insert

'may appear before the Assembly and'

Amendment No. 26, in clause 8, page 10, line 10, leave out from 'the' to end and insert 'Secretary of State'.

Amendment No. 27, in page 10, line 13, leave out from 'he' to 'move' in line 14 and insert

'may appear before the Assembly and'

Amendment No. 28, in clause 9, page 12, line 17, leave out from 'the' to end and insert 'Secretary of State'.

[Sylvia Heal]

Amendment No. 29, in page 12, line 20, leave out from 'he' to 'move' in line 21 and insert

'may appear before the Assembly and'.

Amendment No. 69, in page 12, line 22, at end insert—

'(3A) Where a recommendation has been made by the Commission mentioned in section 1 of the Northern Ireland (Monitoring Commission) Act 2003, the Secretary of State shall within seven days of receiving the recommendation serve a notice on the Presiding Officer requiring him to move a motion for such a resolution.'.

New clause 4—*Requirement for early debate where notice served by Secretary of State*—

'.—Where the Secretary of State has served a notice under section 30(6), section 47A(7) or section 51A(6) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 the Assembly shall debate such a motion within 7 days.'.

Andrew Mackinlay: I want to speak to the series of amendments tabled in my name. Their kernel is encapsulated in amendments Nos. 22 and 23.

As the Bill stands, if the Secretary of State has not been able to persuade the Northern Ireland Assembly to put in train the exclusion of a Minister from the Executive, he has the option and power to take the initiative. In listening to this evening's debates and thinking about the Bill, I have increasingly felt that much of what it deals with will not happen anyway. I preface my remarks with that observation because we have almost been getting into an academic exercise. However, I am not the author of the Bill and I believe that we need to conduct proper scrutiny.

The Bill proposes that, in extremis, when the First Minister and his deputy are unable to take the initiative by going to the Assembly and obtaining cross-party and cross-community agreement to the exclusion of a Minister, the Secretary of State can—this is the point that I invite the Committee to consider—instruct the presiding officer of the Assembly to table a motion. That is absurd. In the likely event of such circumstances arising, it would be much better and in the interests of everybody concerned for the Secretary of State to attend the Assembly and speak to the motion himself. That is what my amendments seek to achieve.

First, it is part of the rules of natural justice that people should be able to face their traducers and probe the reasons for any action against them. Secondly, I invite the Committee to consider this point: if we are in such a critical situation in which there is a paralysis, that the Secretary of State finds it essential that a Minister should be excluded, it will be in his interests to marshal all his advocacy and oratorical skills to persuade the paralysed Assembly—by definition, it would be paralysed—to take the necessary action.

I do not want to labour the point, but it is nonsense that the presiding officer should be the instrument or vehicle for these matters. Clearly, the legislation as it stands implies that the presiding officer would move the motion formally. If I am wrong, however, the presiding officer will be put in an invidious position, especially as he or she can, under existing legislation, be appointed by the Secretary of State and will not necessarily command widespread support in the Assembly. It seems crazy to introduce a formulation whereby the presiding officer will table the motion to exclude a Minister.

Mr. Dodds: In seeking to require that the Secretary of State come to the Assembly in person to table the motion, does the hon. Gentleman intend that he should be subject to questions? Obviously, the presiding officer would not be in such a position. Does he think that such questioning would be helpful in elucidating the Government's position in such an eventuality?

10.15 pm

Andrew Mackinlay: Absolutely. Let us suppose that, in the absence of the Secretary of State, the presiding officer comes along and tells the Assembly, "I am formally instructed to move this motion." Presumably, that would fall on deaf ears if the Assembly had not already been persuaded, or was not acting on its own initiative. My amendment No. 23 provides for the Secretary of State to argue his case before the Assembly. He would be subject to questioning, and would be able to marshal all his energies to persuade the Assembly that exclusion was crucial to the Northern Ireland political process.

Mr. Carmichael: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says about the invidious position in which the Bill places the presiding officer, but I am not entirely persuaded that his suggested solution is the best. I understand that the Secretary of State currently has no speaking rights in the Assembly, and amendment of its standing orders would be necessary for him to acquire them. I feel that, by acting through the House of Commons, the hon. Gentleman would interfere with the Assembly's integrity. Surely it is every legislature's right to determine its own standing orders.

Andrew Mackinlay: That is an interesting point. We need to distinguish between a devolved and a subordinate Assembly or legislature. Whether we like it or not, painful though it may be, the Northern Ireland Assembly—unlike the Scottish Parliament and, to an extent, the Welsh Assembly—is by definition a subordinate legislature.

We are talking about mechanisms to exclude Ministers who are answerable to the Northern Ireland Assembly. I did not write the provision allowing the Secretary of State to instruct the presiding officer to move a motion to exclude them. If my amendment were accepted, the question of standing orders would become academic.

Mr. Mallon: The hon. Gentleman may not be giving due consideration to two points. First, in his opening remarks, the Secretary of State made the connection between the proposal as it stands and the agreement setting up the entire political process. That cannot be dealt with arbitrarily, although that is what the Bill effectively does. Secondly, the hon. Gentleman said that the Secretary of State should go and speak to the Assembly. One assumes that he will give the Assembly information. Can we imagine a Secretary of State who cannot divulge intelligence and information that he possesses being able to address an Assembly or answer

its questions? Such an arrangement would be dangerous for the Secretary of State, and I cannot imagine any Secretary of State agreeing to be put in such a position.

Andrew Mackinlay: The hon. Gentleman says that the Secretary of State might not be able to divulge information to the legislature. Surely it would be 10 times worse for him to lob a letter through the letterbox and tell the presiding officer to read it out. Not only is that an insult, it would carry no clout whatever. In the extraordinary circumstances in which the Secretary of State could not get the First Minister or the Deputy First Minister to take the initiative, and in which it was impossible to guarantee a majority in the voting system of the Chamber, the Secretary of State might well think he could swing it. Having done his arithmetic, he might think that the voting could be extremely narrow.

Indeed, I can foresee circumstances in which the voting could be very close; it could come down to one or two votes. He might be in a position to persuade the legislature to take that initiative.

Lembit Öpik: This is a very interesting point, not least because it tests the Assembly's status. Given that we are trying to normalise the situation, surely the more that we can ensure that the Assembly conducts such matters itself—even with consultation between, say, the Secretary of State and the presiding officer—the better.

On the presiding officer's having trouble, even Martin Luther King and Gandhi—and, indeed, the current Secretary of State—who had all the charisma in the world would find it difficult simply to go in and achieve the outcome that the hon. Gentleman suggests, not least because doing so would be regarded as interference by the very people who are resisting the actions of the presiding officer.

Andrew Mackinlay: I do not want to labour the point, but we are talking about an in extremis situation. The Bill as drafted deals with the situation in which the Secretary of State tells the Northern Ireland Assembly that it must consider the motion, but does so—I am not being flippant—by letter. That is nonsense. If it is so imperative that that should happen, surely it is in everyone's interests that he appear alongside the presiding officer in that lovely chamber, state his case and respond to questions. Inevitably, there would be a wider audience, including a television audience. He might well legitimately take the opportunity to appeal to that audience, to give legitimacy to what would be a very grave act.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): No one doubts the sincerity of my hon. Friend's suggestions. Following on from the point made during the previous intervention, the question of the Executive entering the legislature smacks of Charles I entering the House of Commons and asking for Members to be removed. There is a fine line between what the Executive can do and what the legislature's approach is, given that we are trying to foster democracy in Northern Ireland.

Andrew Mackinlay: One point

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew Mackinlay: Of course.

Rev. Ian Paisley: This procedure was in fact carried out in the old Assemblies. The Secretary of State addressed us on many occasions; indeed, a whole series of Secretaries of State did so. We did not feel belittled because they came to address us; in fact, it gave standing to the Assembly. It also allowed us to show that we were reasonable people who could argue our case. The Secretary of State's coming to address the Assembly does not demean it.

Andrew Mackinlay: On the King or the Executive coming to Parliament, thank goodness that Charles I did come and that Speaker Lenthall was able to tell him where to go. I remember it well: "If it please your Majesty, I have neither eyes to see nor tongue to speak, except for the permission of this House, whose humble servant I am. Get lost!" At least the legislature was able to stand up to traducers. What if Charles I had simply sent a letter saying, "You're all under arrest"? That is what is being suggested here.

The amendment would improve the Bill, but I imagine that it will not be given further consideration by the Secretary of State. As with much Northern Ireland legislation, the bolts and rivets are being put in the Bill as it goes down the slipway. Bouncing legislation through without due consideration is not the best way to form it.

Mr. Dodds: There is much merit in the point that the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) makes through his amendment. The argument that the Assembly and its Members are in some way demeaned by the procedure that he proposes is ludicrous, given that the entire the Bill is based on the idea that the Secretary of State will have the power to act when the Assembly has not agreed that such action be taken. Those who argue against the hon. Gentleman do so on a completely wrong basis, because tonight they will no doubt support provisions that give the Secretary of State powers to do what the Assembly has not voted for.

I want to speak briefly to our amendment No. 67 and consequential amendments. Their purpose is to ensure that, when the Secretary of State receives a recommendation from the international monitoring commission, he would be required to send it to the presiding officer in the Assembly within a set period of seven days. Under the Bill, the Secretary of State has to consider the resolution to serve a notice on the presiding officer, but absolutely no time limit is specified for his consideration before the resolution has to go before the Assembly. That highlights one of the concerns voiced on Second Reading and mentioned by several hon. Members—how long the procedures will take to reach a definite conclusion from the moment a complaint is made. It will first be referred to the monitoring commission and then go through the labyrinthine and byzantine procedures set out in the Bill. As the Bill is currently drafted, when the Secretary of State eventually receives a resolution, he can spend as much time as he likes considering the matter.

As we heard earlier, the Secretary of State will be required—it applies to allegations of a breach on political grounds or a paramilitary breach—to consult the Dublin Government. On Second Reading, the Secretary of State was rather coy about clarifying the matter. He talked about formal consultation as if it were all about having a chat over a cup of tea in the corridor. The fact of the matter is that the Secretary of State will

[Mr. Dodds]

consult and involve the Dublin Government in the crucial issue of the possible penalties to be imposed on a party or a Minister in respect of a so-called political breach within the Northern Ireland Assembly. That is clearly not a matter for the Dublin Government; it should be a matter entirely for Her Majesty's Government and the parties in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Is the key issue less the procedure that the Government are setting up than the problem of ensuring that there is sufficient time not to deal with the subject matter of the complaint, but to allow the Government to cobble together another deal—as they have on every occasion—by making further concessions to get Sinn Fein to start toeing the line?

Mr. Dodds: That is precisely the case. By the time any decision would be forthcoming, so much time would have elapsed that people in the community—no doubt including newspaper editors and others—would ask whether there was any point in pursuing the matter. They would say that time had passed and that it was time to move on and, as the Minister of State said earlier, to look to the future.

Mr. Donaldson: Is not that precisely what the Government want in respect of Florida, Colombia, Castlereagh and Stormontgate? They propose to take no action regarding those breaches, and no sanctions will be applied against Sinn Fein-IRA for the republican movement's involvement in all those matters. They are to be brushed under the carpet and forgotten about.

Mr. Dodds: That is right. We have just dealt with clauses 2 and 3 and we saw that clause 2 specifically bars the monitoring commission from dealing with matters that may be prejudiced and have to go to court. That will undoubtedly affect cases such as Castlereagh, Colombia and the Florida gun running, which have all been subject to court proceedings. For similar cases in future, the monitoring commission will say that it cannot deal with them, because it is specifically barred from involvement in cases going to court. What therefore is the point of all this? It is designed to act as a fig leaf so that the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) can go around the country pretending that he has an effective sanction—he called it a guarantee—but, as has been exposed tonight, it is nothing of the sort. It is designed to string out complaints so that by the time they are dealt with, another deal or fudge has been put together, as my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) pointed out.

10.30 pm

We can contrast that approach with the Government's attitude to the tabling of a censure motion. I raised the matter earlier and the Minister of State said that it would not demean the work of the Assembly or the value of such motions. However, that was not the point that we were making. Our point was that the Bill would make it harder to table such a motion. The Minister did not deal with that point, but with an entirely different one. I hope that Ministers will listen carefully to the points that we make. To make it harder for Members of the Assembly to raise issues or to table motions when other Members are in breach of the commitment to exclusively peaceful and democratic means is reprehensible. Then to have a procedure that could be strung out, without any effective timetable to bring matters speedily to a head, will not provide much—if any—confidence to the Unionist community in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mallon: I wish to reply to some of the points made by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay). It is a matter of historical record that the then equivalent of the Secretary of State took a view on the subordinate Administration in Northern Ireland. He did not go to that Administration. Instead, he said, "Come to me," and when they got there, he said, "Pack your bags and go." The absence of an Administration lasted some 30 years. Such an approach will not work with the Assembly.

I also noted the disparaging way in which the hon. Gentleman referred to the failure of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to obtain a majority in the Assembly. He should know that given the difficulties in Northern Ireland politics it can be difficult to get a majority within one's own party—I speak of all parties involved—let alone in the Assembly. I make those points gently to the hon. Gentleman.

The functions of the body have been mentioned, so I wish to refer again to Lord Williams of Mostyn and what he said in the other place. My earlier remarks were made at least seven hours ago, so one or other Minister should have had the good grace to get up and say that the Government agree with their Minister in the House of Lords. That is the least that he could expect from his colleagues in the Government.

Andrew Mackinlay: I have been misunderstood enough this summer, so I want to make it clear that I did not mean to make any disparaging remarks about the First Minister or the Deputy First Minister. I am fully aware of the difficulties and constraints of marshalling majorities within one's own party and across the complicated system in the Northern Ireland Assembly. I was looking ahead to when we get the Assembly up and running—I hope that we do, and that it can achieve concord and marshal a majority view—but the Bill foresees a scenario in which the Secretary of State might have to instruct the presiding officer to take that action. I am not the author of the Bill: the Secretary of State is its author.

Mr. Mallon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. Far be it from me to suggest that he might speak in a disparaging way about Northern Ireland parties, or anyone else. I am not suggesting that, but if an Administration in the north of Ireland is to be made to work, we must give it respect. It must be allowed to gain its self-respect, and it should not have to grapple with an overtly subordinate position. Whatever else we know about people in the north of Ireland, we know that they will not respond if they are treated in that way.

Jane Kennedy: I confirm that what my noble and learned Friend Lord Williams said in another place on 15 September—it can be found at column 667 of the *Hansard* record for that day—was correct. I hope that

that answers the point, but I will look in detail at the debate that we have had on the matter to see whether further clarification is necessary.

The amendments and new clause moved by the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds) would curtail the opportunity for reflection among the parties on what the proper response might be to a report by the independent monitoring commission in a way that is inconsistent with the agreement and compliance published on 1 May following discussions at Hillsborough castle. That scheme makes it clear that once a report containing a recommendation has been published by the IMC it is for the Assembly parties to consider what their response might be.

The parties are not bound by the terms of the IMC report. It remains open to them to respond in line with its recommendations or to take any of the other steps available to them under the Bill. By requiring the Secretary of State to act to ensure that a motion embodying the report's recommendation is laid within seven days of the report being received, and that that motion is debated within seven days of its being notified to the presiding officer, the amendments would reduce the time available to the Assembly parties to reflect on what course of action they might take in response to a report.

Not only is that not consistent with the Hillsborough text but, by providing that the commission's recommendations would automatically be embodied in motions before the Assembly—

[Continued in column 1015**]**

Deferred Division

Implementation and Compliance of the Common Fisheries Policy

That this House takes note of European Union Documents No. 7623/03, Commission Communication towards uniform and effective implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy, and No. 10509/03, Commission Communication on compliance with the rules of the Common Fisheries Policy: 'Compliance work plan and scoreboard'; takes note of the Government's support for the work plan; and supports the Government's objective of playing a constructive part in detailed discussion of the proposals to improve co-operation between enforcement agencies and of the feasibility study on the proposed Community Fisheries Control Agency.

The House divided: Ayes 235, Noes 155.

Division No. 315]

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Blair, rh Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blunkett, rh David
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gummer, rh John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

NOES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flook, Adrian
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hawkins, Nick
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Randall, John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trimble, rh David
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Question accordingly agreed to.

[Continuation from column 1014]

It being nine hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Allocation of time motion, THE FIRST DEPUTY CHAIRMAN *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [this day.]*

Amendment negatived.

Motion made, and Question put, That the clause stand part of the Bill:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 338, Noes 8.

Division No. 320] **[10:37 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Austin, John
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bayley, Hugh
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blunt, Crispin
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brazier, Julian
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Cameron, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dismore, Andrew
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Gummer, rh John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, rh Oliver
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackay, rh Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maude, rh Francis
Meacher, rh Michael
Mercer, Patrick
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moffatt, Laura
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Moss, Malcolm
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Norman, Archie
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Prosser, Gwyn

Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Redwood, rh John
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Sheridan, Jim
Simmonds, Mark
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Squire, Rachel
Stanley, rh Sir John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Tredinnick, David
Trickett, Jon
Trimble, rh David
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watkinson, Angela
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Gillian Merron and
Mr. Fraser Kemp

NOES

Burnside, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Dodds, Nigel
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Andrew Hunter and
Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 5 to 11 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 12

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT AND REPEALS

Amendment made: No. 81, in page 16, line 35, leave out subsection (5).—*[Mr. Spellar.]*

Clause 12, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill reported, with an amendment.

Order for Third Reading read, pursuant to Order [this day.]

Motion made, and Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Vernon Coaker.]*

The House divided: Ayes 334, Noes 9.

Division No. 321] **[10:52 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Austin, John
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bayley, Hugh
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blunt, Crispin
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brazier, Julian
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Cameron, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dismore, Andrew
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Gummer, rh John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Healey, John

Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackay, rh Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maude, rh Francis
Meacher, rh Michael
Mercer, Patrick
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moffatt, Laura
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Moss, Malcolm
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Norman, Archie
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Redwood, rh John
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Simmonds, Mark
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Squire, Rachel
Stanley, rh Sir John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Trimble, rh David
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Watkinson, Angela
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and Gillian Merron

NOES

Burnside, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Hunter, Andrew
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Iris Robinson and Mr. Nigel Dodds

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Local Government Bill

11.5 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Under the orders of the House of 15 September, any message from the Lords relating to the Local Government Bill may be considered forthwith without any Question put. I have to inform the House that a message has been received as follows: the Lords do not insist on certain of their amendments to the Local Government Bill to which the Commons have disagreed; they agree to the amendments proposed by the Commons to another Lords amendment; and they agree to the Commons consequential amendments to the Bill. They do not insist on the remaining Lords amendment to which the Commons have disagreed, but do propose an amendment in lieu thereof. Copies of the Lords amendment in lieu—amendment No. 3B—are in the Vote Office. I should inform the House that the amendment involves questions of privilege.

Clause 11

USE OF CAPITAL RECEIPTS

Lords amendment No. 3B

The Minister for Local Government, Regional Governance and Fire (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

I regret that the Lords have seen fit to pass a further amendment to the clause, one of the key financial clauses in the Bill. I particularly regret that, because this House rightly and properly asserted its privilege in financial matters when it disagreed with the Lords amendment on Monday night. The new amendment would have the same effect. It would prevent the pooling of capital receipts and so would alter the financial arrangements made by this House.

The suggestion made by Baroness Hanham in another place that the latest amendment is somehow a compromise is wholly spurious. Like its predecessor, the amendment would make it impossible for capital receipts received by debt-free authorities to be brought within the pooling mechanism. That directly conflicts with the Government's financial provisions in the Bill. Therefore, once again, privilege applies. Indeed, given the nature of clause 11(2)(b), I cannot conceive of any amendment where this would not be the case.

It would not only be utterly wrong but a very dangerous precedent for this House to waive its privilege on financial matters and permit the Lords amendment to stand. It would also be wrong, because the amendment undermines one of the key principles of the Government's housing finance policy and, indeed, one of the key principles underlying the financial provisions of the Bill.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: It is fundamental to the Government's approach to public finance and investment in public services that resources are allocated on the basis of need, not on the basis of accident or chance. On that happy note, I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Davey: Will the Minister explain the point about privilege a little more? The amendment does not increase or lower taxation and it does not increase or lower overall spending. It just changes the way in which the spending is allocated. How can that relate to privilege?

Mr. Raynsford: The amendment alters the financial arrangement made by the House and would have the direct effect of making it impossible for the Government to secure the pooling of £120 million worth of capital receipts received by debt-free authorities. That, by any measure, is a significant financial impact on which this House rightly insists on privilege.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Will the Minister be kind enough to consider this not as a financial matter, but as a moral matter? Surely this is a moral issue. He is taking away from those who have been careful with their money and giving it to people who have not been careful. That is not a financial issue; that is a moral issue.

Mr. Raynsford: I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman was not here two nights ago when we debated these issues in some detail. He would then have heard me explain that this has nothing to do with prudence or good or bad management. We are dealing with the application of capital receipts that come from the sale of council houses under the right-to-buy policy. That reflects the decisions taken not by councils, but by tenants. It also reflects the accidents of geography as to where the properties are located.

The right hon. Gentleman was a Secretary of State for the Environment.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Raynsford: I am answering the question asked by the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), but I shall give way to my hon. Friend in a moment.

The right hon. Gentleman will know that some areas are rich in receipts because they happen to have the good fortune of being located in areas with high house prices. The Government in which he was a senior Minister arranged a mechanism for redistributing capital receipts so that those derived by areas that were fortunate because of their geography and tenants' decisions to buy properties could be used to help areas without such advantages. If that was acceptable and right for the Government of which he was a member in 1990, why is the principle wrong now? What is the morality that differentiates the two circumstances?

Mr. Gummer: The right hon. Gentleman is avoiding my question. I am not arguing about whether he is right or wrong. I am saying that the argument that the matter is one of privilege because it is about only money is not correct. He has to argue the case on its merits rather than arguing the case for putting two fingers up at the other

[Mr. Gummer]

House. If he argues the case well on its merits, I might well be persuaded by it. However, he cannot say, "I am very sorry but we mustn't discuss this at all because I've already decided that it comes under a nice little box on which I don't have to argue the merits." Will he argue the merits of his case and not be rude about the House of Lords?

Mr. Raynsford: As I said to the right hon. Gentleman a moment ago, if he had been here on Monday night he would have heard the debate in detail because we argued the point at length. If he had been a member of the Committee that considered the Bill—I am not suggesting that he should have been—he would have heard the debates there. The issues have been explored in the House in enormous detail. The amendment has significant financial consequences. The House decided by a substantial majority on Monday evening not to accept the original Lords amendment and, on a matter of privilege, advised their Lordships accordingly. It is extremely disappointing that they have, to use the right hon. Gentleman's delightful phrase, lifted two fingers. I hope that he, as a good democrat, will join us in advising Members of the other place to respect this House's privileges.

Mr. Pike: It is right to underline a point that my right hon. Friend is making. If Burnley borough council sold a piece of land, it would get little money for it. However, if the land was only 24 miles away in the centre of Manchester, it would probably be worth 10 times as much, and if it was in London it could easily be worth 100 times as much. The issue has nothing to do with local councils' prudence; it is merely a matter of geography.

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend makes an extremely valid point that is based on his considerable experience. He speaks for a part of the country that has some of the lowest house prices and, therefore, some of the greatest difficulties. He is working with his colleagues to try to address those problems. The Government are trying to help areas in need through the injection of substantial additional funds and by following the previous Government's policy of recycling capital receipts to ensure that they may be allocated to areas in need.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): The Minister might well point out that I was not here on Monday either, but I was actually talking about this very matter with the chief executive of Macclesfield borough council. The council has run its affairs extremely well and is debt free, which it has achieved by not embarking on irresponsible and spendthrift policies. Is the Minister not concerned that his policy might deter responsible councils from trying to become debt free? Surely he wants responsible debt-free authorities.

Mr. Raynsford: That is exactly what we want and our policies are designed to achieve that. Indeed, we made it clear on Monday—I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman could not be with us—that the arrangements that we are putting in place provide real incentives for prudence and good financial management. We want fairness so that authorities that have high needs and low resources are not penalised in favour of authorities that have, by the accident of geography, much greater resources and, in some cases, lesser needs.

11.15 pm

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): The Minister has just agreed with my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton) that what the Government want is responsible, debt-free authorities.

Mr. Raynsford *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hammond: That is exactly what the Minister has just agreed with my hon. Friend. What I understood the Minister to say on Monday was that he did not see any particular merit in being debt free.

Mr. Raynsford: If the hon. Gentleman consults *Hansard* tomorrow, he will see that what I was saying was that we are keen that there should be arrangements in place that encourage prudent financial management and responsible administration. I said nothing at all about whether that involved the authority being debt free or not. That is an accident—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Macclesfield certainly said that but I made the point that we were interested in prudent financial management and good conduct of financial affairs. The accident of whether an authority happens to be debt free is often simply the product of good fortune and of being in an area with high house prices and high capital values.

Mr. Gummer: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Raynsford: I am going to make some progress now because these issues have been exhaustively covered in the debates that have taken place already.

As I have said, it would be a dangerous precedent for the House to waive its privilege on financial matters and permit the Lords amendment to stand. I have also made the point that it would be wrong because the amendment undermines one of the key principles of our housing finance policy and one of the key principles underlying the financial provisions of the Bill. We want resources to be allocated on the basis of need, not on the basis of accident or chance. We want resources to be distributed fairly and objectively through transparent mechanisms without favour or special treatment for one authority or one group of authorities.

I remind the House how important the Bill is to local government. The Local Government Association and indeed large numbers of individual local authorities have repeatedly stressed their wish that the Bill should receive early Royal Assent, so that local government can have the benefit of the significant freedoms and flexibilities that it provides, yet if the Bill is not passed tomorrow, the prudential system cannot be implemented before April 2005. In these circumstances, I cannot believe that anyone who cares about the interests of local government wants to see any outcome other than immediate Royal Assent.

Mr. Edward Davey: On that point, the Liberal Democrats voted for the Bill on Second Reading. We

support the prudential capital regime that the Government are putting in place. The Minister knows that the Government have a vehicle for bringing back the legislation if they think that their argument is so strong: the housing Bill, which is in draft form already and will be in the Queen's Speech. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It would be better if one hon. Member at a time spoke, and may I discourage the Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the hon. Member for Corby (Phil Hope), from interrupting from a sedentary position?

Mr. Davey: The Minister could use that legislative vehicle. It will be open to him in a matter of months. He could have his way if he could persuade both Houses of the virtue of his argument. The problem is that he has not managed that today.

Mr. Raynsford: I remind the hon. Gentleman that we have persistently won the votes in this House; we have won the arguments and the votes. It is only in the unelected House that a different position has been adopted. It is a slightly odd proposition to put to us that we should agree to drop our particular policy and accept the Lords amendment in the expectation that we would be able to get our original proposals through next year in a different vehicle. Is he suggesting that he would vote differently next year? If so, why would he vote differently?

Mr. Davey: It is possible that the Minister may be able to persuade us. *[Interruption.]* It would be good if the Minister could at least listen to the answer. By then, we will have the information from the housing regional boards about how the housing needs of these different authorities will be met. We do not have that information at the moment. It is not surprising that many of the councils from which the money is being taken are up in arms, as they do not know whether they will be able to meet housing needs in their communities.

Mr. Raynsford: Local authorities will be up in arms if the prudential regime that they are looking forward to with great enthusiasm is prevented from being introduced in April 2004 as a result of the delaying tactics of colleagues of the Opposition parties in another place, and most recently by their lordships in their vote.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): If the right hon. Gentleman is sneering at the other place, why is his Prime Minister going to stuff it full of even more of his unelected cronies to try to get his own way?

Mr. Raynsford *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not know what the Minister was going to say in reply, but may I discourage him from following that line, as it is outside the scope of the Bill?

Mr. Raynsford: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was about to say that the general tenor of our debates on these subjects has been slightly more elevated than that adopted by the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire). I do not intend to debase the debate by going down to that level.

I must remind the Opposition parties, who have frequently criticised the Government for not moving faster to extend freedoms and flexibilities to local government, that their colleagues in another place have already put early implementation of the Bill at risk. Any further delay preventing the implementation of the prudential regime in April 2004 would be inexcusable, and those responsible would rightly stand condemned by all involved in local government.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): I doubt that there is anyone in the Chamber or another place who believes that the right hon. Gentleman would throw the Bill away over the provision.

Mr. Raynsford: It is our wish to get the Bill on the statute book as soon as possible, and we have been working to that effect for a very long time indeed. If the hon. Gentleman believed what he said he would have spent time in recent months encouraging his colleagues in another place to be more constructive and expeditious in their consideration of the Bill. Today, Baroness Hanham advanced a spurious argument pretending that the amendment that she was urging their lordships to accept was a compromise. It was nothing of the sort—it was a further wrecking amendment that sought to overturn the decision of the elected House on a financial matter, thereby breaching privilege. I hope that the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) agrees that the privilege of the House is too important to be allowed to be passed over simply because he wants to score a political point. I urge the House to resist the amendment.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): The original clause 11(2)(b) permitted the Secretary of State to sequester anything up to 100 per cent. of the housing capital receipts received by local authorities. The House of Lords, in its wisdom, removed that provision entirely when the Bill was sent back to us on Monday so that receipts would remain with the receiving authorities. Among the arguments that the Minister deployed against the attack on clause 11(2)(b) was an argument about the use to which housing capital receipts had been put by some local authorities. He argued that they had not been used for housing purposes. Our objection, and that of my noble Friends, to clause 11(2)(b) concerns the fact that it interferes with the right of debt-free authorities to dispose of their capital receipts as they see fit.

However, in an attempt to compromise and address one of the Minister's principal objections, which he elaborated at great length in Committee during the Commons consideration of the Bill and again on Monday evening, the amendment was framed to allow the Secretary of State to ensure that a portion, determined by him, of those capital receipts is indeed for housing or urban regeneration purposes. That goes to the heart of one of the Minister's key objections to the thrust of the Lords' attack on the clause.

The Lords amendment does indeed compromise the freedoms of local authorities, which is a cause of some concern. It is a compromise, whatever the Minister says,

[Mr. Philip Hammond]

but it prevents the Government from snatching local authorities' capital receipts in their entirety. The Government have advertised the Bill as being about freedoms and flexibilities for local authorities, but at its heart is a provision that snatches the housing capital receipts of debt-free local authorities, as the Minister himself said, of about £120 million a year to fund the Government's own programme. That is the very antithesis of freedom and flexibility for local authorities.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: May I follow up with my hon. Friend my earlier intervention on the Minister? In Macclesfield, which is debt-free, if the council does not receive the full amount of capital receipts from the sale of council houses, within a short period the account relating to maintenance and upgrading the improvement of housing in the borough will go into substantial deficit. The council has planned for the future. It has been responsible. The measure will penalise a responsible authority such as the Macclesfield borough council, with which I discussed the matter at length on Monday afternoon and early evening.

Mr. Hammond: My hon. Friend is right. Many prudent local authorities throughout the country that have become debt-free will find themselves in the same position as Macclesfield.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Is the hon. Gentleman saying that in some authorities housing capital receipts should be spent on things other than housing, when his own party during my time in this place has been headlining the need to spend more money on housing, both in the south and south-east and in other regions of the country?

Mr. Hammond: No. What my noble Friends have suggested in the amendment is that the Secretary of State should have a power to direct the use of those receipts, to secure that they are indeed used for housing or urban regeneration purposes. That is the thrust of the amendment, under which the Secretary of State would have the power to direct that up to 100 per cent. of the capital receipt could be used by the authority for a purpose specified by the Secretary of State.

Mr. Gummer: Does not that mean that the difference between the amendment and the Government's position is not a financial difference, but a difference about who makes the decision? Would it not be true that any houses built anywhere are necessary, given the very large deficit? In those circumstances, would it not be better for the Government to allow the local authority to make decisions about its local needs?

Mr. Hammond: That is precisely the point that I seek to make. The Minister's synthetic anger—to use one of his favourite phrases—about matters of privilege is just that: synthetic. That is not the issue tonight.

During Monday's debate and before, the Minister argued that it is somehow unfair and even bizarre to allow debt-free authorities to keep and control their housing capital receipts. It is common sense: if one sells an asset and has no debts, one would expect to be free to use the proceeds. Equally, if one sells an asset against which one has borrowed, one cannot reasonably expect to be free to dispose of the proceeds as one wishes. People throughout the country would understand that as the normal way of the world—the way things work.

The Minister speaks as though debt-free status was a freak of nature. It is not. Many local authorities have worked hard to become debt-free. Many more local authorities aspire to that status, only to find now that the prize is kicked beyond their reach. The Minister says that councils' housing stock is a national asset. Of course we accept that some of it has been built and maintained, in part at least, by Government grants, but those have been grants. The Government cannot change the rules retrospectively. The care and maintenance, the enhancement and improvement, and sometimes the original provision of the housing stock, have also been funded by tenants and council tax payers, especially in local authorities that have been in negative housing subsidy for years.

The stock belongs to local authorities and local communities, not to central Government, and the capital receipts from sale of that stock should belong to the local authorities for the benefit of their local communities. What does the Minister plan to do next? Does he plan to attack the cash balances of authorities that have been prudent in managing their resources and their assets, and have accumulated cash balances? Is that his next step?

Mr. Raynsford: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that there should be any mechanism for redistribution between authorities, or does he think that resources should simply rest with the authority that receives the receipts?

11.30 pm

Mr. Hammond: I suggest to the Minister that in the current housing crisis, every authority receiving capital receipts could use every penny in its area. Let us be clear that authorities are receiving these capital receipts because they are disposing of housing stock. In my opinion and that of my hon. Friends, that implies an immediate need to replace that housing stock. I suggest to him that every authority could use every last penny of the capital receipts that it receives for entirely appropriate purposes in its own area. I also suggest to him that it is appropriate to fund the programmes that the Government have rightly and understandably introduced, and that the Deputy Prime Minister has announced, through general taxation. That is an appropriate way of funding those programmes.

Mr. Raynsford: Does the hon. Gentleman agree, therefore, with this statement:

"local Government needs to be granted a far greater degree of financial autonomy . . . Of course, there are important limiting factors on how far these additional freedoms can go. There will always be a vital and active role for central Government in providing mechanisms of redistribution that ensure a degree of territorial equity, as well as in enforcing broad financial stability"?

Mr. Hammond: General taxation in respect of the distribution of Government grant is redistributive by its very nature. *[Interruption.]* The Minister is attacking—
[Interruption.]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but we must not have conversations in the Chamber. If hon. Members want a meeting, they should go elsewhere and not interrupt proceedings here.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister is seeking to grab £120 million—a relatively small sum in the grand scheme of the Government's housing programme—from about 34 authorities that have managed their affairs in such a way that they are debt-free and are situated in areas where capital receipts from housing right to buy are relatively high, which suggests a need to replace units of social housing that have been sold. He is seeking to take those capital receipts and redistribute them to areas that have been less prudent. I argue that, in many cases, such areas will be in less need of affordable housing in the present housing crisis than the areas to which the receipts accrue.

Mr. Raynsford: In the hon. Gentleman's repudiation of the concept of redistribution, why is he clearly rejecting the views set out by his own party in a document called "Total Politics", which was launched on 11 September this year? Are Opposition Members' memories that short?

Mr. Hammond: If the Minister would like a hard copy with a glossy cover, I shall be happy to send him one.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Phil Hope): The hon. Gentleman has not read it.

Mr. Hammond: As it happens, I have read the document.

I have not repudiated arguments for redistribution. What I have told the Government is that they have a large pot of money available for funding housing need. I have told them that the proper way of funding such need is to use the resources that they have available and not try to attack a relatively small sum held by a small number of prudent and well-managed local authorities.

Mr. Pike: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that in a council such as Burnley, which has very low-value properties, we need £115 million to put right the problems that we have in respect of private sector housing, as there are currently 4,500 empty houses? The type of policy that he proposes will provide no solution to such problems.

Mr. Hammond: As the hon. Gentleman will realise if he thinks about the matter, in the areas where the capital receipts are being generated, empty houses could be a solution to the problem. In areas where capital receipts are being generated because house prices are high, our problem is precisely that there is a total dearth of available and affordable housing to house the very public sector workers whom the Government desperately need if they are ever to deliver on their myriad promises to improve public services.

The Minister argues that local authorities with large housing capital receipts do not need housing reinvestment. He ignores the fact that those receipts are being generated by the sale of council houses, which must then be replaced. He also ignores the fact that the areas with high house prices and high housing demand are, in the present crisis, the very areas in which the need for new investment in affordable housing is at its greatest. I suggest to him that the real housing crisis today is in those areas—precisely the areas that he has tried to paint as leafy and suburban, without real housing need and not deserving of the ability to reinvest capital receipts in their own area for the benefit of local people and local communities.

If the Government's agenda of public service improvement, or even maintenance of basic public services, is to stand a chance of being achieved in those areas, the Minister had better support the reinvestment of those funds in the affordable housing that is so vital for key public sector workers.

The Minister argues that receipts have been diverted from housing. Our principled objection to clause 11(2)(b) is that central Government should not interfere in local authorities' disposal of their capital receipts. Whatever he may say, our noble Friends have sought to achieve a compromise, and have addressed his concern. Even at the price of compromising on the principle that central Government have no right to interfere with these receipts, they have proposed a power for the Secretary of State to direct that they be used for specific purposes, the clear understanding being that the power would be used to ensure that the receipts are spent on housing investment, housing repairs and urban renewal.

The Lords, then, have sought to compromise; but they have insisted on challenging the Government's demand to levy what is effectively a tax on the housing capital receipts of well-managed, prudent local authorities. The Government say that it would initially be 75 per cent., but the Bill does not restrict it to that level: it could be increased to 100 per cent. by secondary legislation.

All that the Government have done by insisting on the original clause is to show that their rhetoric about freedom and flexibility for local government is precisely that—empty rhetoric. They have shown their hostility to prudent management of local authority finances and their indifference to local authorities and local communities that have worked hard to become debt-free, and reconfirmed their hostility to the right-to-buy policy that has given hope and opportunity to millions—a policy that the Government, and the Deputy Prime Minister in particular, have sought to erode, restrict and undermine.

I urge my hon. Friends and Liberal Democrats who value the principle of local authority freedom to vote to retain the Lords amendment, and send the Government a clear message that we will not give in to this assault on prudent, well-managed authorities by an increasingly imprudent and cash-strapped central Government.

Mr. Edward Davey: With this amendment, the House of Lords has effectively called the Government's bluff. When we debated this matter in detail in Committee, the Minister gave examples—not many, as he did not have

[Mr. Edward Davey]

many to give—in which he alleged that debt-free authorities used receipts from the sale of council houses for non-housing purposes. He suggested that some of the money was being used to subsidise council tax levels, and that some was being used for other council projects unconnected with housing. The amendment would give the Government power to ensure that councils used the money for the purposes the Government wanted—for housing, presumably. So the Government's bluff has been called. If they wish to ensure that the money is retained in the housing sector, within the overall housing policy envelope, they now have the means to do so.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman will remember that, essentially, our debate of two nights ago was about a very simple argument: whether fairness, involving redistribution, should in this case be given precedence over receipts simply resting where they happen to fall, through the accidents of history and geography. We challenged him to say whether he was on the side of fairness, and of redistribution in favour of deprived areas such as Liverpool, or whether he would like to allow receipts simply to fall in the area in which they were accrued, because house prices happened to be high. Is he now confirming that he is against fairness and in favour of the accidents of history and geography?

Mr. Davey: I am grateful to the Minister for trying to answer my point, but in fact he answered it with a completely different argument. I shall come to redistribution, but I should point out that he did not seek to deny that point in Committee; he used examples of authorities that did not use receipts for investment in housing. Such examples have been shown not to be relevant by the amendment before us; the argument has been well and truly won.

My speech will be relatively short because what I said two nights ago still stands and has not been affected by events, and because I agree with many of the comments of the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond). That said, it would have been good if the previous Conservative Government had allowed local authorities to keep receipts from council house sales so that they could have invested in affordable housing. However, we do not want to return to the sorry history of the Conservatives' many failures in this area.

One key principle that works against the Government's position is that of prudent financial management and proper fiscal incentives for local authorities to run down their debt. In an earlier exchange, the Minister tried to redefine that principle by limiting it simply to prudent financial management, thereby excluding the incentive to move to debt-free status. At no point during our debates on this key fiscal principle—it is certainly important to us, and, indeed, to the Conservatives—was the Minister able to point to any other aspect of the new regime, or of previous statutes, that would provide such an incentive for local authorities to move to debt-free status. The Chancellor of the Exchequer ought surely to be keen on such an incentive.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman is eliding two different concepts: prudent financial management and debt-free status. There will be many cases in which it is prudent to borrow to achieve benefits that would not otherwise be achievable for the residents of a given area. Alternatives such as the private finance initiative—his party is not terribly keen on the PFI—might not necessarily be the best way to invest, if a borrowing alternative exists that will achieve the objective. Does he agree that such a situation is possible, and if so, that it might be prudent—I am not saying that it definitely would be—for an authority to take such a decision?

Mr. Davey: The Minister knows that we do not disagree with that overall point, given that we support the capital regime that the Bill puts in place. That does not mean, however, that no incentive should exist elsewhere in the system to move to debt-free status. The two concepts can exist side by side; the point at issue between us is that the Minister is excluding one of them.

On the Minister's point about fairness, I agree with the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge. In terms of redistribution, it is important that areas with low resource bases and real needs get funds from central Government, but that is not what the Minister is trying to do here; rather, he is trying to take money from other local authorities. As we know, local authorities in many areas—rich or poor—are cash-strapped; that is why the council tax has been going up so much. The Minister ought to have some sympathy and compassion for such local authorities. Redistribution is needed, but it should come from central Government.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: The hon. Gentleman is making an extremely good case, but will he also deal with this point? As a debt-free authority, Macclesfield is going to lose out, in that housing maintenance and other projects and budgets will go into deficit. Affordable, low-cost housing is often funded through the money that housing associations receive from the Housing Corporation. In the foreseeable future, Macclesfield will further lose out, in that the money that its housing associations receive through the Housing Corporation for low-cost, affordable housing projects will be dramatically reduced.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman is on to a good point and helps to explain why some debt-free authorities feel so passionately about the issue. Many of them worked hard to attain their good position because they wanted to meet some of the Government's own targets—on decent homes, for example.

11.45 pm

I know that Three Rivers district council, which I referred to on Monday, worked hard at all aspects of its finances to reach a good position, meet the standards and provide more affordable housing for its key workers. It was a policy target for the council, but the problem is that the Government are changing the rules when councils have worked within them. There is a degree of retrospection, because housing policy has to be considered over a period of years. I am particularly concerned about the retrospection involved in the grab of money from the debt-free authorities.

Another important principle is the balance between centralism and localism. The Bill was sold to us as one that would liberalise local authorities, offering them

freedoms and flexibilities. Yet this week we have already heard that one of the key freedoms and flexibilities for authorities judged excellent and good under the comprehensive performance assessment—namely, no danger of capping—is being removed. We now know that another key financial freedom that existed under the old system is going to be removed. The Government are making it worse than it was under the system that they inherited from the Conservatives.

I want to touch on the point about privilege, which the Minister focused on in his remarks. He is interpreting the principle oddly. As I said in my intervention, it is not about tax or overall spending going up or down, but about redistribution. I recall when the Minister was in opposition and the Conservatives were passing the poll tax. I am sure that his party, like mine, worked as hard as it could in the other place to defeat that appalling Conservative measure. If the House of Lords had insisted that the poll tax should fall, I doubt whether he would have been too worried—

Mr. Raynsford: It did not.

Mr. Davey: The Minister says that it did not, but that is not relevant to my point. He would have supported the House of Lords. Will he tell us whether he would not have wanted the other place to defeat the poll tax if it had the opportunity to do so? On those sorts of matters, the issue of privilege is not so significant.

The issue of privilege has moved on. We have seen various reforms to the other place—introduced by the Minister's Government—to give it greater legitimacy, so they say. Under his Government and the previous Conservative Government, the House's role in public finance and scrutiny of the public purse has been reduced to a myth. The House does not control the Executive over finances and the Minister knows it. We do not have proper debates on the estimates. We have only three days a year under Standing Orders to debate them, and when we do, we do not really debate the estimates, but the Select Committee report. On one of those days, I had the temerity to ask a Treasury Minister about the estimates before us, but that Minister had not even been briefed to answer the question. That shows how the House does not really scrutinise expenditure. The idea of praying in aid privilege when the House has virtually given up any role in financial scrutiny does not bear analysis.

I believe that it would be right for the House to agree with the other place tonight. We have won the argument in principle and in practical examples, and it is time that the Government listened.

Mr. Gummer: It may help if I provide an analogy. If the Government were bringing forward a decision to penalise debt-free Ministers and redistribute their money to Ministers who had not been as careful with their finances, would it stand any examination? The problem is simply this. The difference is not about fairness. If the Minister were saying that local authorities' needs should be examined and, where they have resources far beyond those needs, they should be redistributed, the House might be prepared seriously to listen to his argument.

What the Minister is saying is that it is axiomatic that local authorities that are debt free do no have acute housing needs.

Mr. Raynsford: No, I am not.

Mr. Gummer: If the right hon. Gentleman does not mean that, he should accept the amendment, which would enable him to direct those authorities without needs to use the money for the kind of housing that is necessary in every part of the country. I challenge the Minister to tell me the name of a single local authority that is debt free and does not need affordable housing. If he can give us a list of such authorities, we can think about his argument, but until he can, we know that this is not a matter of fairness. It is a matter of redistribution, and we know why the right hon. Gentleman wants to redistribute. Some authorities have been careful and have sought a way to provide affordable housing in their high-cost areas. Of course, such authorities receive more money when they sell their council houses, because their areas are high cost. Such areas need more money, not less, when they are trying to provide affordable housing. Therefore, the Minister's argument is not just accidentally wrong: it is nonsense.

Mr. Raynsford: Had the right hon. Gentleman been here on Monday, he would have heard me presenting the argument. I argued not that there were no needs in debt-free areas, but that there were relative differences in need between different areas. The right hon. Gentleman would have heard me argue that in the same way that the Conservative Government of which he was a member felt that it was right to exercise a degree of redistribution to achieve fairness, we sought to do the same. Does he agree with the Conservative party's document that states:

"There will always be a vital and active role for central Government in providing mechanisms of redistribution that ensure a degree of territorial equity"?

Mr. Gummer: It is called the council tax grant. We all know that it is a mechanism used by the Government to ensure that the aid from the centre to local government is tailored properly to the needs of the locality. Everybody knows that, and the Minister knows that we spent much time trying to make it as fair as possible.

The only reason why I did not have the chance to listen to the Minister on Monday was that I was in Cancun trying to discuss a trade issue of some importance. I have listened carefully to what the Minister said, and I return to my accusation. To make his argument stand up, he has to show that those councils that are debt free have less need—to such a degree that it is worth overriding the local interest—that they need to have their resources taken away from them.

I do not even argue that every authority that is debt free is so as a result of prudence, although I bet that if Ministers were debt free they would claim it was their own work. The accident that enables some local authorities to have large receipts from the sale of council houses also means that it is more expensive for those authorities to provide housing for teachers and nurses and other essential workers than it is for other areas that are not as fortunate in the amount of money that they receive from selling council houses.

Mr. Hammond: Would my right hon. Friend also note that the very fact that those authorities have received

[Mr. Hammond]

those capital receipts from housing means that they have reduced their social housing stock? They have sold units to obtain the capital receipts, and the presumption must be that they must reinvest to replace those units.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right, but he is being too kind to the Government. The problem is that the Government claim to believe in local decision making and local action, but in every case they turn to central planning and control. The Government use the fine words "devolution", "devolvement" and "locality" whenever they introduce a measure, but what they are actually doing is imposing the central Government diktat.

I noticed the paucity of the Minister's arguments because he could speak only about privilege. This is not about the quantum of money involved, or about raising or lowering taxes. It is about fairness, which is a matter that the House of Lords is perfectly able to debate.

Fairness means that local authorities—where the provision of affordable housing for people who need support is expensive—should be allowed to use the additional receipts that they get. My hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) is right, and the comparison is exact: one sells an asset in an expensive area at a higher price because it costs more to replace it. The Government do not understand the basic facts of supply and demand, or of the provision of affordable housing in areas where that is most needed. That explains why they have presided over the worst housing figures since world war one.

Dr. Iddon *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: The Government must accept that they are incredible when it comes to housing, because they have created circumstances in which fewer houses are built every year. They will make the situation worse unless they allow prudent authorities to use the results of their prudence to provide affordable housing where it is often most needed—in expensive areas where necessary workers who serve the community are not otherwise able to find homes.

Mr. Edward Davey: Does that not show that the Government do not understand how markets work? In this case, they are taking money that could be used to increase the supply of affordable housing. With the starter homes initiative in London and the south-east, in contrast, they are giving money to increase demand. They are therefore reducing supply and increasing demand, and making the problem worse.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman is right. The Government do not understand the laws of supply and demand. They do not understand that, in the present housing crisis, it does not matter where the houses are built, nor what sort of houses are built. We have a shortage at every level, and in every circumstance. The Minister is merely carrying out the diktat of the Treasury. He must get his fingers on as much money as possible, use it centrally, and put it where it can aid his friends. That is what this is about—taking from those who need and giving to those who might support this Government. We know that, as does the House of Lords. The amendment will be rejected, not because it is a matter of privilege but because it is a way of fiddling the books.

Mr. Raynsford: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman, who was once Secretary of State for the Environment, will reflect on what he has said and realise that his final remark was unworthy of him. We are discussing mechanisms very similar to the ones for which he, when in government, used to be responsible. They ensured that capital receipts were redistributed from areas with high receipts and relatively low needs to other areas. Had the right hon. Gentleman been here on Monday, he would have heard me say all that then. Alternatively, he could have read the *Hansard* report.

Dr. Iddon: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Raynsford: Of course.

Dr. Iddon: I have been trying to make this point for some time. Does my right hon. Friend agree that abandoning the concept of pooling, which Opposition Members appear to want, would mean that there was no hope for owner-occupiers in the 23,000 unfit houses in Bolton alone? That is not to mention all the unfit houses in the private sector.

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. He highlights the enormous extent of housing need in this country. We inherited that on coming to government, and it includes the massive backlog of substandard housing, especially council housing. In our six years in government, we have acted to improve more than 700,000 homes which were in appalling condition when we inherited them from the previous Conservative Government but which are now decent and modern homes.

It ill behoves a former Secretary of State who presided over the worst homelessness and housing crisis in a long time to ignore the fact that we are investing two and a half times as much as his Government did. Because we need to maximise investment, we are rightly taking the same approach that his Government took—redistribution in favour of the areas of greatest need. Indeed, judging from a pamphlet published only a few days ago, the right hon. Gentleman's own party still believes that that is appropriate. That leaflet provides recognition by people who have thought about the issues that redistribution is necessary to ensure that resources are used to best effect and to achieve territorial equity.

The Liberal Democrats sadly failed the test of whether they were on the side of fairness or opportunism. Presented with the choice of saying, on a difficult decision, that they would favour redistribution to ensure that areas of greatest need got more or of sticking to the principle of leaving money wherever it arose through the accident of geography, they opted for the latter, even though they know that it is wrong. The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) knows that it is wrong, and he knows that his colleagues in Liverpool would not support what he said tonight. They would argue for redistribution—and I have no

doubt that when he goes to Liverpool with other Liberal Democrats, he too will say, "Let's redistribute more money in favour of Liverpool." That is what they will say in Liverpool; they will not say it here because they are appealing to a different audience. That is the Liberal Democrats—say one thing to one group of people and something quite different to another.

We have established a policy of principle to try to ensure that housing resources are used to best effect and that the needs of our country are met. That policy will be frustrated if the Lords amendment stands. It would deliberately prevent some £120 million in capital receipts from debt-free authorities from being used through recycling to help the needs of other areas. Our policy would not mean that the debt-free authorities would receive nothing: they would stand to benefit and would keep a proportion of their capital receipts. However, it is a principle of fairness that those authorities should be subject to the same redistribution rules that apply to the 200 more authorities that have housing stock. Opposition parties have entirely ignored the argument about why some authorities—a small group of 40 or so—should be uniquely advantaged and given the benefit of keeping their capital receipts in full when all other authorities are subject to a redistribution mechanism.

The Opposition's arguments are threadbare. Their colleagues in the other place are arguing against the privilege of this House and against logic and common sense. This House should reject the Lords amendment.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 221, Noes 112.

Division No. 322] **[12:03 am**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*

Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Ms Bridget Prentice

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Burnett, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hammond, Philip
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mates, Michael
Maude, rh Francis
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Opik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Angela Watkinson and
Mr. Mark Field

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Committee appointed to draw up the Reason to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendment No. 3B: Paul Clark, Mr. Edward Davey, Linda Gilroy, Mr. Philip Hammond and Phil Hope; Phil Hope to the Chairman of the Committee; Three to be the quorum of the Committee.—*[Paul Clark.]*

To withdraw immediately.

Reason for disagreeing to the Lords amendment reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

PETITIONS

Winter Fuel Payment

12.17 am

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): I have the honour to present a petition prepared by Patrick Iddenden and others and signed by more than 100 residents of Hastings and Rye, mostly disabled, who seek an extension of the winter fuel payment to disabled people. Sadly, the first person named on the petition, Patrick Iddenden, has died suddenly since collecting the names, but his widow, Jacqueline, has requested that the petition still be presented.

Addressed to the House of Commons, the petition of Patrick Iddenden, Zena Gould and others declares:

That disabled people suffer from similar mobility problems, and low incomes, as do the elderly, and that their need for warmth during winter months is equally important.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge Her Majesty's Government to allow those on Disability Benefits to qualify for the Winter Fuel Allowance presently only available to the over 60s.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Chenies Village

12.18 am

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I present a petition of more than 400 residents of and visitors to Chenies village.

The petition declares:

Strong opposition to the erection of a 16-metre mast together with equipment cabinets surrounded by a 2-metre high edge and fence compound at OS Field 0069 opposite the Van Hage Garden Company in Chenies; notes that it will significantly detract from and adversely affect the landscape and the locality; and further notes that there are conflicting reports regarding the health risks associated with these masts.

The Petitioners therefore request the House of Commons to urge that that a "precautionary" approach be adopted given the proximity of the mast to local resident children and Chenies Primary School.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Schools (Buckinghamshire)

12.19 am

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I should like to take the opportunity to present a second petition—that of 170 residents of Jordans and others.

The petition declares:

Strong opposition to the review of school catchment areas by Buckinghamshire County Council, which will result not only in the loss of four out of five schools but also in children being sent to three totally new schools, two of which are in High Wycombe over ten miles away; notes that although the changes are purported to cut transport costs and journey times, they will result in children travelling to school over ten miles away; and further notes that while the changes are in intended to give parents a choice of schools, they will result in the parents of children in Jordans losing their choice, particularly for girls.

The petitioners therefore request the House of Commons to urge Buckinghamshire County Council to reinstate Dr. Challoner's Grammar School and Dr. Challoner's High School for the village of Jordans and prevent children from Jordans travelling to High Wycombe, which is over twice the distance away.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Roaccutane

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

12.20 am

Clive Efford (Eltham): I have requested this Adjournment debate because of the widespread concern that exists about the side effects of the drug Roaccutane, which is used to treat people suffering from the most acute cases of acne.

The most common side effects of this drug are worth putting on record:

"Dryness of the skin especially the lips and face and you may get some mild itching and slight peeling. The face may be redder than usual. A dry throat which may cause hoarseness. Dryness of the mucous membranes inside the nose, that may become crusted causing minor nose bleeds . . . Dry eyes that may irritate. This may be a particular problem for patients who wear contact lenses . . . muscle aches . . . you should avoid vigorous exercise. Temporary loss or increase of hair."

The less common side effects include:

"headaches, nausea, fatigue, sweating, changes of the menstrual cycle, slight loss of hearing, changes in vision, jaundice, liver disease, anaemia, seizures and inflammatory bowel disease . . . Some people have experienced mood changes (depression or symptoms of mental disorders) . . . and in rare cases suicide and attempts of suicide. You may also suffer from systemic infections, localised bacterial infections such as infection of the tissue surrounding the base of the nail, swellings which discharge pus, increased facial pigmentation and swollen glands. There may also be inflammation of the blood vessels, blood in the urine and changes in blood glucose levels (especially for patients with diabetes) . . . On rare occasions the uric acid level in your blood may increase and if you suffer from gout, it could trigger an attack. Very high levels of uric acid may affect the function of your kidney. You may also bruise or bleed more easily due to changes in blood cells, which are needed to clot the blood. Other blood changes may make you more prone to infections."

My hon. Friend the Minister may think that I have cobbled together that list to sex up my case, but in fact I have just read out the patient's advice that is issued with this drug. I spared him the list of possible side effects for pregnant women. Irony on irony, the advice says:

"If any of the above side effects become troublesome you should consult your doctor",

which is probably unnecessary advice given the scale and seriousness of those possible side effects.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): My hon. Friend is being very kind to the Minister. Perhaps I can play the hard cop to his soft cop routine on listing the side effects of this dreadful drug. I remind my hon. Friend of the case of Luke Garner, who took this drug at the age of 13.

If I may assist my hon. Friend, I will list the after-effects that Luke suffered. They include mental disturbance, arthralgia, bone pain, bone tenderness, cheilitis, cheilosis, epistaxis, inflammation or burning lips, ocular irritation, skin rash, dry eyes, dry mouth, hair loss, dry skin, severe headaches, nasal dryness, peeling skin, unusual tiredness, depression, joint stiffness, mood changes, muscle stiffness, myalgia, optic neuritis, trouble with concentration, fatigue, weakness, paraesthesias, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, weight loss, loss of appetite, malaise, lethargy, swollen glands, various infections, extreme facial and body flushing, difficulty in walking and panic attacks.

[Mr. Peter Kilfoyle]

According to two neurologists, he also suffers from Guillain-Barre syndrome as a direct result of taking the drug.

Clive Efford: My hon. Friend illustrates the scale of the problems and conditions faced by people who take the drug.

I accept that acne can be a serious condition for the people who suffer from it and that there is a balance to be struck between the risk of medication and the effect of the continuing condition on a patient. However, none of the advice that is given to practitioners or patients warns that any of the side effects may be permanent, which is the most important issue in the debate.

The problems with Roaccutane reached my attention when I was approached by Mrs. Stokes-Perkins. Her son Jack was diagnosed with acne at the age of 13. He was a successful student at school and one of those sickening individuals who are good at just everything they do. He was doing well academically and achieving a great deal at sport. He was a confident and outgoing young man. He developed acne at the age of 13 and tried every course of medication available but although he experienced slight remissions, the acne continued to return.

In January 2001, it was decided that Jack should take a course of Roaccutane. It was his choice to take the drug. He discussed the situation with his family and knew that there was a potentially serious risk of major side effects such as depression, but with the support of his family, he decided to go ahead with the course. Jack was 6 ft 2 in by that time. He was the house captain of his rugby team and played rugby for the Old school under-18 team and, at weekends, for Blackheath rugby club. He organised sport and social events and was part of his school debating society.

Jack took the course of Roaccutane and everything seemed fine. On returning to his doctor, he was prescribed another course, which seemed to go fine until the last week of the course when the skin on Jack's lips started to fall away. Consequently, Jack finished up with a condition meaning that sunlight dried and cracked his lips, cold weather made them swell and water made the skin fall off. If he went to places such as pubs, the smoky atmosphere made his lips crack. By August 2002—a year later—he would go out only if he was wearing a mask.

Jack cannot eat normally because anything that comes into contact with his lips causes the skin to fall off. He cannot work to subsidise his activities because he never knows what his daily condition will be. His social life has been virtually destroyed. He is on permanent medication to try to minimise the permanent side effect of Roaccutane. He has seen two senior consultant dermatologists who both concluded that Roaccutane is to blame for his condition. Dr. Chu from Hammersmith hospital has publicly called for an inquiry into Roaccutane and its side effects.

Jack has been permanently disfigured as a result of taking the drug but other people have had their lives wrecked and some have committed suicide. The drug is a derivative of vitamin A, an overdose of which can have damaging effects on people's mental state. He was aware of those warnings and, thankfully, did not suffer such side effects but other people have. I have seen figures from the World Health Organisation that report 20,000 cases of adverse drug reaction reports relating to Roaccutane as far back as 1997. Figures for the United Kingdom show that, of 170 million prescriptions of drugs relating to acne, there were 239 adverse drug reaction reports, of which 135 related to Roaccutane—more than 50 per cent. There were nine suicides, eight attempted suicides and six cases of people indicating that they had a desire or intention to commit suicide. All those cases related to people who had taken Roaccutane. Of those 170 million prescriptions in the UK, Roaccutane accounts for just 12,400, yet every suicide-related case related to Roaccutane.

In the past year, I have tabled a number of questions relating to the drug but unfortunately the answers have not been forthcoming because the Medicines Control Agency has been undertaking a review on behalf of the European Commission. I contacted the MCA today and it has advised me that it has finished its review, has passed its report to the European Commission and is waiting for its conclusions.

I have discovered today by talking to the MCA that the review will be about not whether the drug should continue in use but what advice will accompany the drug when it is prescribed. I have chosen to have the debate ahead of that report not only because we have been waiting far too long for conclusions but because we need to try to influence the conclusions that the European Commission may come to on the drug.

I accept that there may be a place for Roaccutane in the treatment of acne sufferers but more needs to be known about the potential damage that it can cause. Roche, the manufacturers, will not accept that its drug caused Jack's condition. How many others is it denying whom we do not know about?

There are many examples that we do know about, however. Charles Bishop was the teenager who flew a plane into the Bank of America Plaza in Tampa. Hon. Members may recall that that happened soon after the 9/11 twin towers catastrophe. It was seen to be a copycat attack at the time but turned out to be by someone who had been taking Accutane, the United States equivalent of Roaccutane.

Congressman Bart Stupac's son BJ unexpectedly committed suicide on the night of his school prom at a party at his house. He was a young individual with a life in front of him. The description of him sounds very much like that of Jack. Luke Hassett finished up in a psychiatric unit having taken Roaccutane.

Today, I went on to the web to find out more information about the drug. I have discovered that it is available on the web. The website that I visited listed 200 countries from which it can be purchased over the internet. In the UK, evidence of prescribing for conditions for which the drug was not originally intended are rife.

In an article in *The Sunday Times*, a spokeswoman from Roche said:

"We have had external scientists and internal scientists look into the side-effects and we have found no causal relationship between Roaccutane and any psychiatric events, from depression or suicide."

The response from the company is denial and it is the most disturbing aspect of the whole affair. While it remains in denial of the potential permanent effects that

its drug can have, the suspicion about the safety of the drug will grow. The list of side effects in the advice that accompanies the drug is simply to cover its back from any legal challenge that may be mounted by someone who has suffered these side effects. Roaccutane should not be prescribed unless it is by a specialist dermatologist who has undertaken a pregnancy test in the case of a female, and there has been a thorough blood test and a psychiatric assessment of the patient concerned, including an assessment of any history of psychiatric conditions in the family. There is clear evidence that that is not taking place. A full inquiry into the drug should be carried out, and is well overdue. We need to determine whether it is safe to prescribe Roaccutane in the first place and, if we decide that it should be prescribed, practitioners need to set clear and enforceable guidelines for its use. Patients need to be warned of the drug's possibly permanent side-effects. The suggestion in the notes that I have read that all the conditions are temporary and that people will return to normal after they have completed a course of treatment is not sufficient.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister has listened to what I have said and to the case described by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle). If this situation continues and the European Commission does not come to a satisfactory conclusion in its deliberations on the drug, we will back on the Floor of the House debating this matter again. People cannot continue to be put at risk as a result of taking the drug without being given clear advice and information about its possible risks.

12.36 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Dr. Stephen Ladyman): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) on securing this debate on the prescribing of Roaccutane and on the efforts he is making on behalf of his constituent. He is a strong and persistent advocate. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) on the efforts that he is making on behalf of his constituent. I understand the distress faced by both my hon. Friends' constituents—their condition and the symptoms from which they are suffering must make things extremely difficult for them. Nothing that I say tonight diminishes the Government's sympathetic view of their condition. I listened carefully to my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham—I promise to read his comments in the *Official Report*, and shall make sure that all the officials in the Department involved with the issue read them as well. If there are points that I do not deal with today, I shall write to him.

Neither of my hon. Friends would want me to try to intervene on the Floor of the House in any dispute between their constituents and the makers of Roaccutane, and neither of them have asked me to do so. If they have not done so already, I am sure that they will both advise their constituents to seek appropriate legal advice. I will, however, try to address the general points that have been raised. I shall discuss the broad issues around the use of the drug, its prescription and regulation, and am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham for giving me the chance to update the House on these issues. I will also try to address the serious concerns that he raised about the safety of the drug, including the debilitating chapping and inflammation of the lips known as cheilitis.

Roaccutane is the brand name for the drug substance known as isotretinoin, which is the name that I shall use for the remainder of my speech. Isotretinoin is the active component of Roaccutane, and is an important medicine that has been on the market for about 20 years. Without in any way minimising the distressing side effects suffered by my hon. Friends' constituents, it is important to recognise that it has helped very many people during that time and has changed many lives for the better. I can assure both my hon. Friends that whenever this issue is raised in public, the Department of Health receives many letters from people whose lives have been changed for the better by the drug, and who want to make sure that we are aware of their experience as well as the negative experience of others.

Isotretinoin, as my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham said, is a derivative of vitamin A that is used for the treatment of severe and resistant acne. Acne is a common condition that affects about 80 per cent. of adolescents at one time or another and occasionally affects adults. Although it is not life-threatening, it can have a significant impact on the lives of sufferers. In its severe forms, acne can be extremely debilitating and distressing, and can cause disfigurement and permanent scarring. Many forms of acne will respond well to treatment with topical preparations or systemic antibiotics, but for severe and resistant acne, effective treatment options are very limited, and isotretinoin is one of the limited number of effective treatments available.

Isotretinoin has been authorised in the UK since 1983. It is available worldwide, has been used by millions of people, and is a highly effective oral treatment for the type of severe and resistant acne that I have described. It is important that hon. Members understand that all effective medicines have side effects. There is always the risk of side effects in some people, and unfortunately it is often impossible to predict which individuals will suffer a side effect from a medicine. A medicine will be issued with a licence for use in certain circumstances only if it is considered that, in those circumstances, the benefits of treatment outweigh the risk of side effects. The risks and benefits of isotretinoin were carefully considered at the time of licensing, and because of the known safety profile of the drug, it is licensed for use only in severe forms of acne that are resistant to other treatment.

Clive Efford: There has been an inquiry at Leeds infirmary, where a number of cases came to light in which people with mild forms of acne were prescribed Roaccutane. If it is decided that Roaccutane can be used, there must be stricter guidelines because it is not being prescribed in accordance with the licence issued back in 1987.

Dr. Ladyman: I understand my hon. Friend's point, but I emphasise that we issue a licence that describes the conditions under which the drug should be used. It is open to any clinician at any time to issue a particular

[Dr. Ladyman]

type of treatment to an individual if they think that it is in that patient's best interest. If clinicians depart from the licence conditions, they do so on their own responsibility because they believe that it is in the clinical interest of their patient. They must answer for that decision under the terms of normal clinical governance—in other words, what happens in those cases becomes the doctor's responsibility. Those are the only cases in which it is possible to diverge from the licence arrangements. I shall have my officials look into the case that my hon. Friend mentions. Unless the doctors involved can answer for their decision to depart from the licence conditions, they are in the wrong. That needs to be investigated and they need to answer for it.

I emphasise that when isotretinoin is to be prescribed in cases of severe acne, it should be used—this is another of the licence conditions—only when other treatments have been tried and have failed. It is a treatment that should be considered last, not first.

Since licensing, the safety of isotretinoin has been closely monitored by the Medicines and Health Care Products Regulatory Agency—formerly the Medicines Control Agency—with expert advice from the Committee on Safety of Medicines. Isotretinoin is a highly effective medicine, but it is widely understood that it is associated with some serious side effects, and these must be considered when the clinician decides to use it.

Most importantly, isotretinoin is extremely harmful to the unborn foetus and therefore must not be taken during pregnancy or when there is a risk of pregnancy. Other common known side effects include dryness of the skin and the lining of the mouth, nose and eyes. The dryness of the skin associated with isotretinoin can take the form of cheilitis, which is the cracking or inflammation of the lips, a condition that can become severe, chronic and debilitating in some patients. It sounds very similar to the symptoms experienced by the constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham. There has also been significant concern about the possibility that isotretinoin may be associated with depression and suicidal behaviour.

Isotretinoin is licensed only for use in severe forms of acne that are resistant to other treatment. That narrow indication is not the only restriction to its use in the UK. Isotretinoin can currently be given only by or under the supervision of a consultant dermatologist—one of the conditions that my hon. Friend said needed to be strictly adhered to. In addition, the supply of isotretinoin is restricted to availability through hospital pharmacies or specified retail pharmacies at the request of a consultant dermatologist. The intention of restricting prescribing in that way is that it is those health professionals with most experience and who are best placed to give patients advice about the important safety issues related to the prescribing of isotretinoin who are making prescribing decisions.

My hon. Friend referred to the internet, which is not a legal and licensed source for the drug. It might be available there, but I fear that many things that are not in our constituents' best interests are available on the internet these days.

To underpin the process, all licensed medicines have a summary of product characteristics. The summary, which my hon. Friend described, contains important information for prescribers. Licensed medicines are also accompanied by an information leaflet for patients. These documents are changed and new information is added as it becomes available. The patient information leaflet is an essential document if the patient is to be fully aware of the possible risks of treatment and make informed choices about their care. In the case of skin dryness and inflammation, there is clear advice to expect such effects and on how to relieve or minimise symptoms.

My hon. Friend mentioned that the leaflet contained no advice about permanent risk. I was not aware that that was the case, and I shall ensure that the people responsible for drafting the leaflet and other officials are aware of that concern. I shall have the matter investigated and I shall ensure that it is acted on if it is within my power to do so.

Clive Efford: I thank my hon. Friend for that statement. Many people are suffering permanent conditions as a result of having taken Roaccutane. That is the issue that is of most concern and the reason why I have initiated this debate.

Dr. Ladyman: If there is a risk of permanent side effects, they should be described in the leaflet. I certainly promise to ensure that that is looked into.

Despite the guidance in the British National Formulary about the narrow licensed indication for isotretinoin in the UK, its use is not always restricted to patients with severe and resistant acne. Ultimately, the clinical care of an individual patient is the responsibility of their doctor and it is an important principle that doctors can prescribe medicines outside the licensed indication if they consider that that is in the best interests of the patient. The doctor is responsible for the safe use of the product in those circumstances and is answerable under clinical governance rules.

Because of the harmful effects of isotretinoin during pregnancy, it has been the aim of regulatory authorities in Europe and worldwide to introduce measures to ensure that no one takes isotretinoin while pregnant. The summary of product characteristics lays down stringent conditions for use in women who are of childbearing potential. However, the current safeguards have not succeeded in preventing all exposed pregnancies, which has highlighted the need for further measures to be introduced.

My hon. Friend has also given me the opportunity to update the House on some important European work on the safety of isotretinoin. The UK and France have led a recent European initiative to harmonise the product information for the drug. The aim of the review was to get up to date and consistent product information for prescribers and patients across all member states. The procedure has also developed a set of important principles for nationally agreed pregnancy prevention programmes. The completion of the procedure is imminent, and the Medicines and Health Care Products Regulatory Agency is having discussions with key stakeholders to plan communication of these important new prescribing principles to health professionals and patients who use isotretinoin.

The UK lead in the European review has allowed us to ensure that the important restrictions on isotretinoin use that are present in the UK now are not relaxed and are taken forward in Europe. The UK input into the review has been informed by an expert working group of the Committee on Safety of Medicines. The group includes representatives specialising in dermatology, general practice, family planning and psychiatry.

I hope that I have dealt with all the points that my hon. Friend made. I assure him that I shall write to him if I have missed any and that I will take action on whether the product description should include information about possible permanent side effects.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at ten minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 18 September 2003

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

The Secretary of State was asked—

Small Businesses

1. **Mr. David Cameron** (Witney): What steps she is taking to encourage small businesses to increase employment levels; and if she will make a statement. [130814]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): We have given UK small businesses the best VAT threshold in the EU, cut the corporation tax starting rate to zero and created a sound and stable economy that has generated more than 1.6 million additional jobs since 1997. More people are now in work in Britain than at any time in our history.

Mr. Cameron: What would the Minister say to the small business people who come to my surgery each week and list the Government-inspired reasons why they no longer want to expand their work force? What would he add to that list, which includes the national insurance increase, stakeholder pensions, the working time directive, new rules for employment tribunals and the fact that businesses are now treated like benefit offices? Will he confirm that the rate of small business failures has actually trebled in the past four years?

Nigel Griffiths: The national insurance increase that the hon. Gentleman mentions occurred in April and the employment figures were published yesterday. The House will be pleased to note that since April, 63,000 more jobs have been created than lost. Indeed, he will be very pleased to note that in his own constituency, the number of unemployed claimants has fallen by 76, to less than half the figure for 1997.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): May I praise the vigour and energy with which my hon. Friend is attempting to increase the number of start-ups in areas such as mine, which has experienced enormous difficulties for some 60 or 70 years? But may I ask him to bear in mind—this has little to do with Government policy—the swingeing increases in employers liability insurance, which are genuinely affecting employment prospects in many companies in my constituency and elsewhere?

Nigel Griffiths: That is obviously a very serious matter, on which a statement was made in the House before the recess. A report was published in June by the inter-ministerial working group, on which I serve, and placed in the House of Commons Library. It included a number of findings and recommendations, and a second report is due in the autumn. I hope that it will address some of the issues—as we have indeed done—to ensure that no business is left without that vital liability insurance. I am very pleased to have worked with the Federation of Small Businesses, the CBI small and medium-sized enterprises council and other representatives of business to ensure that the insurance industry itself is addressing this issue. However, we are constantly monitoring the situation.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): The Minister will trumpet the latest employment figures, but what he does not tell the House is that many of the jobs to which he refers are not being created by small businesses; rather, they are jobs for Government-paid, pen-pushing bureaucrats. Does he believe that requiring small business employers to administer the Government's chaotic tax and benefit system and to become legal experts in every detail of employment law will make it more or less likely that they can continue to create jobs? Does he not understand that the accumulation of new employment regulations, often introduced with the best of intentions—to protect workers' rights—is now in danger of taking away their most basic right of all: the right to a job? Indeed, we can see that happening in Germany, France and Spain.

Nigel Griffiths: I prefer to be advised by Barclays than by the hon. Gentleman. Its recent survey points out that since 1997, 2.4 million new businesses have started in Britain, which is a result of the climate that we have established. If the hon. Gentleman wants to give lectures on bureaucracy, he has chosen the wrong place. Starting up a business in Britain now takes less than a day and costs less than £100; 10 years ago, setting up some businesses required 28 licences, registrations and certificates.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): That is all very well, but was my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) right to assert that the rate of small businesses going down the drain has trebled in the past four years?

Nigel Griffiths: I have in front of me the figures for deregistrations—such figures are the most valid measure, and were accepted by previous Governments as well as by this one—which show that the failure of businesses in the past decade or so peaked in 1992. Indeed, in no year of the Labour Government have the figures reached anywhere near the horrendous levels of 1992, when 226,000 businesses went bust. Of course, we support all businesses, and most businesses that fail do so for honest reasons. But as I have told the House before, the real figure is the 2.4 million new start-ups and the best survival rates for small businesses for a decade.

Horse Racing

2. **Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell): What discussions she has had with representatives of the British Horseracing Board about the Office of Fair Trading investigation into the control of British horse racing. [130816]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe): A number of written representations have been received from a variety of organisations in relation to that matter.

Chris Grayling: I represent one of the highest profile race courses in the world. My constituents will not suffer because Epsom will always be the home of the Derby, but those involved in racing are profoundly concerned about the impact of these proposals on the industry as a whole. Will the Minister ensure that the Office of Fair Trading report and any action taken as a result of it does not do irreparable damage to horse racing in this country?

Mr. Sutcliffe: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's interest in the matter and I understand that he represents Epsom. Clearly, however, he knows the rules of the competition regime that the Government have put in place, and that it would be wrong for me, as the Minister with responsibility for competition, to become involved in OFT investigations. I have worked closely with colleagues in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and have put forward the concerns raised by the industry and on both sides of the House. I am sure that the OFT will take them into consideration, but, at the end of the day, it is the OFT's decision. I should clarify that this is not a Government-inspired investigation. It came about because the British Horseracing Board went to the OFT to secure a decision on certain practices within the industry. I hope that, as the process continues, hon. Members on both sides of the House will make contact with the OFT to express their views.

Jeff Ennis (Barnsley, East and Mexborough): Is the Minister aware that there are currently 59 race courses throughout Britain, nine of which are in Yorkshire—my home county and his? Under the current Office of Fair Trading proposals, up to six Yorkshire courses could be closed in the next few years. Does the Minister share my concern and agree that a sport such as horse racing requires a certain amount of central regulation, particularly in respect of the fixture list?

Mr. Sutcliffe: Again I welcome my hon. Friend's interest in the horse racing industry. I know that he is co-chairman of the all-party racing and bloodstock group—although I am never too confident about his forecasts on some of the horses that he tells us about. Clearly, he is right that horse racing is prominent and a large employer in Yorkshire. However, the position is that the sponsors of the industry fall within the remit of the DCMS and the competition issues fall within that of the DTI. As I said, it would be wrong for me to influence the outcome of the OFT report in any way, but I am sure that all the concerns will be passed on to the OFT.

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): The Minister will be aware of my Adjournment debate on this matter later today. For now and for the record, is he aware of the letter sent to me by the Minister for Sport, which says

> "I share your view that full implementation of the OFT's rulings, as far as we understand them, may damage the fabric or integrity of the sport"?

That is quite a profound statement. Is he aware of his powers under section 3(3) of the Competition Act 1998, which states that the Secretary of State may at any time by order amend schedule 3 with respect to the prohibition by providing for one or more additional exclusions? Does the Minister not accept in general terms that sport should qualify for such an exclusion?

Mr. Sutcliffe: I look forward to debating the issue with the hon. Gentleman in greater detail later today, when I hope we can get to the heart of the matter. The letter that he received from my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport is entirely appropriate. The DCMS covers the horse racing industry and the hon. Gentleman has expressed his concerns. My responsibility in the DTI is for the competition regime and we are still awaiting the outcome of the OFT deliberations.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): Is the Minister aware that small but extremely successful national hunt courses, such as Perth race course in my constituency, are deeply concerned about what is being included in the Office of Fair Trading report? What words of comfort can he give to Perth race course that national hunt racing will not be a casualty in this process of change?

Mr. Sutcliffe: I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's point and I refer him to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport. National hunt horse racing—and, indeed, the welfare of all courses—is important. Clearly the words of comfort will have to await the outcome of the OFT report.

Carlton-Granada Merger

3. **Mr. Chris Bryant** (Rhondda): If she will make a statement on the proposed merger of Carlton and Granada. [130817]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Hewitt): The Competition Commission submitted a report to me on the proposed merger on 21 August. In accordance with the usual practice, I shall announce any decisions on the report when it is published. I have informed the parties that I aim to publish the report by the week beginning 6 October.

Mr. Bryant: My right hon. Friend will know that protracted negotiations are taking place between Carlton, Granada, Sky, Channel 4 and S4C about maintaining the free-to-air option on digital satellite. There is a real possibility that unless some swift resolution is found, people will not be able to watch free-to-air "Coronation Street", for instance, on Christmas day and Boxing day. I therefore urge my right hon. Friend to provide a swift resolution, along the lines that

she has suggested today, so that Carlton and Granada can sort out their business plans and make a significant contribution to sorting out the problem.

Ms Hewitt: I entirely share my hon. Friend's concern about "Coronation Street" on Christmas day, but of course long-standing arrangements enable ITV to negotiate as a network, and it is doing so. Regardless of any decision on the proposed merger—it would be wrong for me to comment on that now—it would in any case be necessary for the new provisions in the Communications Act 2003 to come into effect, which is unlikely to happen until the end of the year.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): My right hon. Friend will know of the excellent production values and the great creative talent that both companies possess, especially the Granada group, which includes Yorkshire Television. My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) mentioned "Coronation Street", but my right hon. Friend will know that "Heartbeat" is produced in my constituency. That programme is a great showcase for this country and brings in many tourists. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the merger will not compromise the excellent production values of companies such as Yorkshire Television, but will in fact enhance the showcasing of the wonderful county of Yorkshire?

Ms Hewitt: I know that my hon. Friend will understand that I cannot comment on the proposed merger or the report from the Competition Commission, which I shall publish. However, the whole issue of maintaining excellent quality production in the United Kingdom is an important theme in the Communications Act 2003, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and I have recently piloted through the House. I know that my hon. Friend will support us in putting the Act into effect.

World Trade Talks (Developing Countries)

4. **Mrs. Anne Campbell** (Cambridge): What assessment she has made of the impact of the world trade talks in Cancun on developing countries. [130818]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I made a full statement on the recent World Trade Organisation ministerial conference yesterday. The statement included an assessment of the impact on developing countries of our failure to reach agreement.

Mrs. Campbell: I share my right hon. Friend's disappointment that no agreement was reached in Cancun. Can she reassure me that there will be no going back on the progress that was made through negotiations, and that EU Ministers will not expect the Commissioner for Trade to press for agreements on investment and competition, which was one of the causes of the failure?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend raises an important point. As I said yesterday, if we are to make progress and reach the agreement that we should have reached at Cancun, all member countries will have to pick up from where we left off in Cancun, where we were closer to agreement when we left than when we arrived. I shall seek an early opportunity to talk to ministerial colleagues in the European Union and directly to Commissioner Lamy to ensure that the European Commission, in negotiating on our behalf, sticks to the position that we took—with the full support of the Council of Ministers—that we would no longer press for negotiations in the WTO on investment and competition.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): Could the Secretary of State clarify the report in yesterday's *Financial Times* that Pascal Lamy was contemplating moving to bilateral negotiations as a result of what had happened in Cancun? If we are trying to persuade the US not to take the bilateral approach, what discussions has she had with EU colleagues to ensure that that report is erroneous and that the EU will stick to the Cancun approach?

Ms Hewitt: The Commissioner not only made plain his commitment to multilateral negations, but he reflected the fact that the Council of Ministers will need to discuss our stance on bilateral agreements. Several countries would like bilateral agreements with the EU. Quite rightly, we have put all our effort and energy into the WTO talks and the Doha round, rather than into bilateral agreements. We all need to look at that matter, as one undoubted consequence of the failure to agree at Cancun will be that there will be more of those bilateral agreements, including between G21 members. Our priority in Europe should remain the strengthening of the WTO, and trying to get the Doha round back on track.

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West): I welcome the emergence of the G21 countries as a power bloc within the WTO, and the possible change in the balance of power inside that organisation. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that the Government will do all in their power to ensure that that development, and the possibility that bilateral trade talks might be opened with some countries, does not prejudice the prospects of the very small and underdeveloped countries that are not part of the G21 bloc?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend raises an extremely important point. There was a tendency in much of the early comment on the G21 group to assume that it spoke for the whole of the developing world. Not surprisingly, that was resented quite strongly by many of the smaller developing countries, not least those in Africa. Clearly, it is not up to us to decide what countries such as Brazil, China and India do in the future, but we will continue to speak up for the interests of the poorer developing countries. They had the most to gain from an agreement at Cancun, and from successful completion of the Doha round. We will continue to put their interests first in the work that we do, both on trade and on development.

Post Office

5. **Mr. Mark Simmonds** (Boston and Skegness): If she will make a statement on the take-up of the Post Office card account and its effects on the post office network. [130819]

The Minister for Energy, E-Commerce and Postal Services (Mr. Stephen Timms): I understand from the Department for Work and Pensions that by 5 September just over 1 million customers had requested a Post Office card account, and, from the Post Office, that 566,000 card accounts had been opened by that date. I expect the accounts, and the expansion of banking at post offices, to have a positive effect.

Mr. Simmonds: The House and the country will be relieved that postal workers have defied their left-wing leadership, but the Minister should be aware of the great concern that exists about the Post Office card account, in Lincolnshire and across the UK. What justification can the Minister assemble for the fact that it has been made virtually impossible for elderly and vulnerable people to remove money from rural post offices? Many of those offices have been rendered unsustainable, and that could rip the heart out of many rural communities.

Mr. Timms: The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong. The Government have invested £500 million in the technology for universal banking. Contrary to the predictions of Opposition Members, that was a successful IT project: it started up on time and is working extremely well. It gives the Post Office an opportunity to serve millions of bank current accounts, which was not possible in the past. That is a fantastic opportunity for post offices, and they are moving to take advantage of it.

I can tell the hon. Gentleman that well over 50 per cent. of pensioners—55 per cent. at the last count—who have received letters from the Department for Work and Pensions have requested card accounts. It is completely wrong to say that it is impossible for them to do so. Indeed, Postwatch has carried out surveys of those who have used the helpline. The results show that 88 per cent. of pensioners said that the advice was given to them in a clear and unbiased manner, and that 95 per cent. said that their questions were answered satisfactorily. There is a fantastic opportunity for the post office network arising from the Government's investment of £500 million. I hope that the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members will encourage local sub-postmasters to make the most of it.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that a major problem with Post Office accounts is that many elderly and housebound pensioners are unwilling to give their PIN to social workers who collect their pensions for them? What measures will he put in place to ensure that their accounts are secure?

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend raises an important point. We have been careful about the security of accounts. It has been arranged that a second card with a separate PIN will be available for use at a pensioner's local post office by a nominated person, such as a social worker. We hope that that will be a secure arrangement for the collection of money.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): The Minister will be aware that take-up of the Post Office card account in Scotland is severely constrained by the continued failure to secure agreement between post offices and clearing banks in Scotland. May I give an assurance that he will intervene to resolve that situation, which is creating ongoing problems for many of my constituents and for many people in rural Scotland?

Mr. Timms: All the major banks in the UK, including those in Scotland, have basic bank accounts that can be accessed at the local post office, so I do not think there will be a problem along the lines the hon. Gentleman set out. Of course, it would certainly be helpful if other clearing banks followed the example set by Lloyds TSB, Barclays and Alliance & Leicester in opening up all their current accounts to post office access. That would be most welcome. The fact remains, however, that every bank has a basic bank account that can be operated at a local post office.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): How many people are pushed into using bank accounts instead of Post Office card accounts because the closure of their local post office makes things difficult for them? At present, that is a problem at Coal Aston in my constituency. It would be a bad thing if people were put off the scheme and its provisions because they no longer had a proper post office.

Mr. Timms: It is important to bear in mind that people wanting to use their local post office can do so with a basic bank account and with several ordinary bank accounts, as well as with a Post Office card account. However, I have some good news for my hon. Friend about migration. The urban reinvention programme was built on the assumption that 80 per cent. of the business from a closing office would transfer to another local post office. The first evidence, from the 200 post offices that closed in March and April, is that the proportion migrating to another post office was even higher; the figure was 85 per cent. in March and 87 per cent. in April. A good and high proportion of people are going to another post office in their local area.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Further to that answer, can the Minister confirm that if bank customers are to be able to draw cash across the counter at the post office, their bank needs to have a banking services agreement with the Post Office, and that four of the leading banks—Halifax, Bank of Scotland, Royal Bank of Scotland, Abbey National and HSBC—are refusing to enter into such agreements? [HON. MEMBERS: "That's five."] Well, two of them have merged.

What are the Minister's ideas for persuading those banks to join the system, as, if they do not, all their millions of customers will, in effect, be lost to the Post Office?

Mr. Timms: As I mentioned a moment ago, all the banks to which the hon. Gentleman referred have basic bank accounts that can be accessed at local post offices. It is the case, however, that their other ordinary current accounts cannot currently be accessed at the post office, unlike the 20 million current accounts with Lloyds TSB, Barclays and Alliance & Leicester that can be fully accessed. The Post Office is in discussion with the other banks about signing such agreements with them, too, and I wish them well in that work. Increasingly, those banks' customers will want to be able to access their accounts at their local post office just like customers of Lloyds TSB, Barclays and Alliance and Leicester. That may prove to be the most effective lever.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): Will the Minister join me in congratulating members of the Communication Workers Union on exercising rights given by Conservative employment laws to turn down the call from their union leaders for a strike that would have been extremely damaging?

On the post office network, is it not the case that post offices are likely to close more quickly if the Post Office cannot reach agreement with the banks to enable benefit claimants and pensioners to receive cash across the counter? Coupled with the obstacles that the Government have put in the way of pensioners who want to open Post Office card accounts, does not that mean that vulnerable people are suffering and that the post office network is likely to contract even more quickly because of the Government's policy?

Mr. Timms *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister will not answer questions about the postal dispute, which has nothing to do with the matter before us.

Mr. Timms: I am grateful for your guidance, Mr. Speaker.

On the point about pensioners using post offices, I have already told the House that 55 per cent. of pensioners who were asked have already chosen a Post Office card account, compared to 28 per cent. of benefit recipients altogether. What that shows is that the Post Office card account is very attractive to pensioners and they are getting their Post Office card accounts as a result, but what is really important for the Post Office, particularly in the long term, is not to miss the much bigger opportunity of ensuring that customers who are familiar with using bank accounts can use their accounts at their local post office if they want to do so. The Post Office needs to make the most of that big opportunity.

6. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): If she will make a statement on recent progress with the urban network reinvention programme for the Post Office. [130820]

The Minister for Energy, E-Commerce and Postal Services (Mr. Stephen Timms): By the end of August, 492 post offices had closed under the programme. In response to observations by hon. Members and others, Post Office Ltd. intends to complete the programme now on an area-by-area basis. The areas will comprise groups of parliamentary constituencies; the Post Office will consult on a single plan comprising all the proposals in each area; and public consultation on each proposal will last for six weeks. The Post Office has also announced an acceleration of the programme: it now aims to complete the consultations on all its proposals in every area by December next year.

Mr. Robathan: It is the acceleration that I am concerned about. Following a parliamentary question that I tabled in April, I corresponded with David Mills, the chief executive of the Post Office, about paying bonuses to managers for closing down post offices as quickly as possible. Will the Minister confirm that the Post Office is indeed paying managers bonuses to close post offices? Is this the first time that taxpayers' money has been paid in bonuses to close down part of a highly valued public service in the teeth of strong opposition from those same taxpayers?

Mr. Timms: No, Mr. Speaker, that is not the case. There is no financial incentive for managers to close post offices. The hon. Gentleman has made that point on a number of occasions, but it is simply incorrect. Each closure involves a very careful process. There is thorough consultation, and we have given substantial funding to Postwatch to carry it out very carefully. Quite a number of the proposals have been varied as a result of that process. What is important, of course, is that it is I think widely accepted that the number of urban offices needs to be reduced to ensure a sustainable future for the whole network. That needs to be carefully managed, which is the aim of the programme, and I believe that it is succeeding.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): I welcome the change to an area-based approach to the reinvention programme because one of the problems has been that branch closures were often considered in isolation from one another, but will my hon. Friend speak to the Post Office to ensure that proper consultation takes place on the strategy? Local communities have to be involved because the benefits offered by the plan will be lost if local communities—rather than the usual suspects—are involved only in proposals to close branches, rather than in building confidence in the overall strategy.

Mr. Timms: I very much agree with my hon. Friend both about the benefits of the changed arrangements and about the importance of thorough and careful consultation throughout, particularly involving local communities, on the plans for an area. I will certainly ensure that the points that he makes are passed on to Post Office Ltd.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Will my hon. Friend ensure that the needs of vulnerable people in deprived urban areas remain paramount under the programme? Will he consider extending the support available to post offices and sub-post offices to enable them to increase the range of work that they undertake, to permit them to remain open in a viable way?

Mr. Timms: I very much agree with my hon. Friend that the impact on vulnerable people and people who are not very mobile is an essential element in reaching all these decisions. I think that she would agree, however, that a properly managed programme of this kind is

much better than the alternative—disorderly decline—because there has been a reduction in business and it is therefore important that we have a programme that ensures that network coverage continues to be effective throughout all areas. At the end of the programme, 95 per cent. of the urban population will still be within a mile of their local post office, but I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of ensuring that the needs of vulnerable people in each area are properly taken into account. Funding is available to improve offices, and I want to ensure that we make a success of that part of the programme, as well as the closures.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): Will the Minister take this opportunity to apologise to the people of Pagham for the closure on 18 August this year of the Pagham post office, and for the enormous inconvenience and expense that that is causing to many hundreds of elderly and in many cases infirm people, who have had to go to enormous lengths to find alternative post offices from which to collect their pension?

Mr. Timms: I can only say to the hon. Gentleman that I know well that this closure has caused a good deal of concern, and he has frequently been in correspondence with me about it. I have looked at the procedure that was followed, and found that there was a thorough consultation process, on the basis of which the Post Office reached the decision that led to the closure. Of course, every community will regret the closure of a local post office, but the reality is that as we were in a position in which over 1,000 urban post offices had 10 or more other branches within a mile, a process of rationalisation was necessary.

Electronics Industry

7. **David Cairns** (Greenock and Inverclyde): What estimate she has made of the number of manufacturing jobs in the UK electronics sector that have been lost to eastern Europe in the last five years. [130822]

The Minister for Industry and the Regions (Jacqui Smith): In the face of stiff global competition, UK electronic manufacturing jobs, particularly lower value-added ones, have moved to other parts of the world including eastern Europe. That is why the Government have set up, with industry, an electronics innovation and growth team to establish a long-term strategy for the sector to compete globally, exploiting its strengths.

David Cairns: I thank my soon-to-be right hon. Friend for her answer. May I tell her that in the last few months alone my constituency has lost several hundred jobs in the electronics sector to eastern Europe, with the prospect of more to follow? We cannot compete with the wage rates being offered in eastern Europe or China, and nor should we try, but the electronics sector has been good for my constituency and good for the UK economy over many years. What assurances can she give my constituents that this Government remain committed to a strong and vibrant UK electronics industry, and what practical steps can we take to ensure that good, high-paid, high-skilled jobs can be retained in Scotland and elsewhere?

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend has been an important champion for the electronics industry in his constituency. Rightly, however, he understands and emphasises the need to ensure that we concentrate, as the Government have said in their manufacturing strategy, on how we move those industries up the value chain to focus on higher-technology, higher value-added production and jobs. That is the task for the innovation and growth team, who are starting by assessing the global competitiveness of the electronics industry, but who will be developing a programme for the future development of the electronics industry and making specific recommendations to Government. I expect that to help with some of the encouraging signs that we are seeing in the electronics industry, which I was able to discuss yesterday with the Engineering Employers Federation. I would also expect that to impact on my hon. Friend's constituency, where, clearly, electronics, and particularly that more sophisticated work, is crucial to his constituents.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Only yesterday, my constituent, Kate Williams, e-mailed me to say that at the ripe old age of 21 she was concerned for her job. Are there any international treaty obligations, trade arrangements or codes of practice, in an increasingly globalised economy, whereby the Government are concerned to ensure that the impact on the countries that are taking those jobs is not to their disadvantage in the longer run? That applies not only across the electronics industry but in financial services, too.

Jacqui Smith: The hon. Gentleman, as we all are, is rightly concerned about the job and economic prospects for his constituents. The emphasis that we need to place, however, not only in electronics but more broadly in manufacturing—and the emphasis that this Government, in the first manufacturing strategy for 30 years, have placed—is on both the practical support and Government action necessary to ensure that we build our manufacturing industry on the basis of high-value-added jobs with high pay and high levels of skills. I assure the hon. Gentleman and his constituents that that is what we have planned and what we will do.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): Can my hon. Friend tell us what she proposes to do to help secure those more highly skilled jobs? One of the difficulties of the flight of jobs eastward has been that, in the main, they have not been of the highest order and skill content. The people who are left are not yet properly equipped to take on the kind of employment for which she has ambitions. In the interim, it is essential that we do far more in those particularly vulnerable areas to get the skill levels up. Although that is not exclusively the responsibility of the DTI, it is a matter on which she could surely act and lever more resources to get these people the skills they require to become potentially attractive employees.

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend raises a crucial point. When talking about jobs moving perhaps from assembly and straightforward manufacture in the

electronics industry to the configuration of systems and support for those systems, it is certainly the case that we need to focus on skills. That is why one of the key elements of the manufacturing strategy is the development of skills and why my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Trade and Industry and for Education and Skills published the skills strategy just before the recess. We shall focus on how we can ensure that there will be a better response to employers' needs and the delivery of skills for precisely the sort of workers about whom my hon. Friend talks. Specifically on electronics, SEMTA, the new sector skills council that covers electronics, was licensed in April. I know that it, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department for Education and Skills and the devolved Administrations in Scotland are working hard to ensure that we make the UK No. 1 for the supply of skills for information technology, telecommunications and electronics because that is how we shall make the electronics industry a success and provide opportunities for the constituents of my hon. Friend and others who work in the electronics industry.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The hon. Lady is quite right to point out the difference in wage costs, but that is not the whole picture, is it? There are more reasons why companies such as Siemens up sticks and move across to Germany and why Xarr in Cambridge moves to Sweden than only differential wage costs. That happens because the growth of this country's productivity since the Labour Government got in is only half that recorded when the Conservative Government were in power. We now find out from the European Union that our monthly wage costs are the second highest in the EU—Germany and France are cheaper than us. How will she reverse that damaging trend?

Jacqui Smith: The first thing that I shall not do is to take lessons on job creation from Conservative Members. However, they fairly highlight the challenge that the Government have taken up to ensure that we improve productivity and competitiveness for our manufacturing industries. As I have spelled out on our manufacturing strategy, we have not only outlined the problem but put in place macro-economic stability and supply-side policies, which the Conservative Government were unwilling to do. They will make a difference to our manufacturing industry, safeguard high-quality jobs and provide the wealth for this country that the Conservative Government so sadly failed to do in relation to the manufacturing industry.

Andy Burnham (Leigh): May I welcome yesterday's news that unemployment is at its lowest level since 1975 but urge the ministerial team not to allow celebrations to obscure the fact that severe problems exist in manufacturing, especially in areas such as Leigh? In August, the electrical components manufacturer Electrium announced its closure in my constituency, which will result in the loss of 160 jobs. That is the seventh major redundancy in the past two years in the manufacturing sector and, in total, more than 1,400 jobs have gone. Will my right hon. Friend speak urgently to the Northwest Development Agency to examine the problems in our local manufacturing base and, especially, to find out whether more help could be given to the manufacturers that remain, such as Barlo engineering in Leigh?

Jacqui Smith: I hope that my hon. Friend does not believe that we are complacent. I would like to characterise us as having a steely determination to ensure that UK manufacturing industry is able to come out of that situation in the face of significant global competition and challenges and be as profitable and significant for the UK economy as we know that it should. As I said, I spoke to the Engineering Employers Federation yesterday about its view on optimistic signs for the engineering industry and its strong view—with which we completely concur—that we need continued Government action on innovation, skills and investment to create the manufacturing industry that we all want.

My hon. Friend also raises an important point about the role of regional development agencies, which now have more funding, more flexibility and a more specific remit for working in the manufacturing sector. The Northwest Development Agency will play an active role in both safeguarding and creating high-quality manufacturing jobs.

Post Office

8. **David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire): If she will make a statement on recent progress with the urban network reinvention programme. [130823]

The Minister for Energy, E-Commerce and Postal Services (Mr. Stephen Timms): I refer my hon. Friend to my earlier answer.

David Taylor: Notwithstanding the Minister's earlier answer, does he not accept that the Post Office is conducting the network review in a somewhat confused, incoherent and clumsy fashion while the benefit payment hotline is without doubt coercing some card account applicants into considering direct payment instead? Does he therefore understand why so many of us fear that the present unacceptable rate of branch closure will accelerate unless and until the asset-stripping top management is replaced by those with a vision of a vibrant third-millennium Post Office?

Mr. Timms: I think it has been a rather good 24 hours for the Post Office management. I do not agree with my hon. Friend about the urban reinvention programme. However, I think that he will welcome the different arrangements that I have described, which will apply from hereon, because they will provide the opportunity for a strategic overview to be taken of the pattern of the post office network throughout an area, as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) said.

On the helpline, I told the House that the evidence is that pensioners are getting the information they want. They are finding it helpful. My hon. Friend will be aware that people are increasingly choosing to use bank accounts. Some 43 per cent. of benefit customers now do that—up from just 26 per cent. in 1996—and 60 per cent.

of new pensioners have already chosen a bank account in which to receive their pension. The Post Office needs to adapt to the new environment and new needs.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will the Minister confirm that no customer will be more than 1 mile from a post office under the urban network reinvention programme? What is the comparable figure for rural post office customers?

Mr. Timms: The requirement that we have placed on the Post Office is that 95 per cent. of urban residents should be within 1 mile of their local post office at the end of the process compared with something like 97 per cent. today. I do not have the comparable figure for rural post offices, although I shall send that to the hon. Lady.

World Trade Organisation (Cancun)

10. **Mr. Jim Cunningham** (Coventry, South): If she will make a statement on the World Trade Organisation negotiations in Cancun. [130826]

The Minister for Trade and Investment (Mr. Mike O'Brien): Yesterday my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made a statement to the House on the World Trade Organisation summit at Cancun. My right hon. Friend said that we need to renew discussions based on the concessions offered by delegates at Cancun.

Mr. Cunningham: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. I am sure he will appreciate that the situation is serious for the third world. In light of his answer, does he have a time scale for restarting talks with our European partners so that we protect the third world from the worst effects of the breakdown of the talks?

Mr. O'Brien: At Cancun a deadline was set of 15 December for a meeting of officials to resolve the issues not sorted out at the WTO summit. My right hon. Friend and I talked to Dr. Supachai, the director-general of the WTO, about how the UK can help to drive the agenda forward. We made it clear that investment and competition should be off the agenda. In addition, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have announced a new initiative to help developing countries to overcome problems in adjusting to a new trading environment. The UK will make a substantial input into the design and implementation of that initiative, so that will help. We are also providing extra funding to developing countries to assist them with the negotiations. In terms of a deadline, we are looking at 15 December, and the UK is doing all it can to help drive negotiations forward.

Ceramics Industry

11. **Ann Winterton** (Congleton): What assessment she has made of the competitiveness of the UK's ceramics industry. [130827]

The Minister for Industry and the Regions (Jacqui Smith): A strategic analysis of the sector was undertaken in 1999, and that study led to the establishment of the ceramic industry forum, which focuses on improving competitiveness in the sector, supported by £3.3 million of DTI funding. Ministers and officials also maintain close contact with firms and intermediaries in the ceramics industry through regular meetings covering a wide range of issues.

Ann Winterton: Does the Minister acknowledge that a major reason why the United Kingdom's ceramic industry has been better able than its European counterparts to withstand competition from low-cost manufacturers is the comparative flexibility of the UK's labour markets introduced, I hasten to add, by a Conservative Government? However, is she aware that ceramic firms in my constituency and, indeed, the British Ceramic Federation fear that that advantage is being severely diminished as a result of the Government's incessant implementation of added costs and regulations, many of the latter unrelated to the industry's purpose or, indeed, its impacts on, for example, the environment?

Jacqui Smith: The success of the ceramics industry probably also has something to do with the skills and dedication of the work force and the expertise of management. Nevertheless, the hon. Lady asked a question about regulation. As the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Nigel Griffiths) made clear in response to question 1, we take that issue seriously with respect to both new and existing businesses. However, as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development recently pointed out, under this Government, the UK is one of the most effective and efficient countries in which to do business. I have no doubt that that will continue.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

The Minister was asked—

Private Members' Clubs

16. **Mr. Robert Walter** (North Dorset): What plans she has to introduce legislation to provide for equality of membership rights in private members' clubs. [130833]

The Deputy Minister for Women and Equality (Jacqui Smith): It is unacceptable for women to be treated as second-class citizens in private clubs, contrary to the Government's principles of opportunity for all, and I know in this context at least, the hon. Gentleman's view of those principles. We have supported private Members' legislation in this area in the past, and we are keeping the situation of private clubs and sex discrimination under review.

Mr. Walter: I think that many Members will be disappointed by that answer, as I am not sure that the Government have supported private Members' legislation. On three occasions, I have introduced legislation in the House, and the hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. Dhanda) introduced a Bill in this Session that made no progress because of lack of Government support. In the other place, legislation completed all its stages and arrived in this House in the

last Session, despite the fact that it had the full support of the Government Front Bench in the other place. Can the Minister give us a clue as to whether the Queen's Speech contains legislation on the subject?

Jacqui Smith: The hon. Gentleman knows that, much as I respect his position on this issue, I will not give him any clues about what is contained in the Queen's Speech. Much as I share his concerns about this particular discrimination, the timing of the introduction of legislation is not always the responsibility of individual Ministers. I assure him that we have supported private Members' legislation and will keep this area under review. Subject to parliamentary time in future, there may well be opportunities for us to take action.

Maternity Provision

17. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): If she will make a statement on maternity provision for working women. [130835]

The Minister for Women and Equality (Ms Patricia Hewitt): Maternity leave and pay were increased in April 2003 as part of our new measures to help parents balance work and family life. All mothers can take 26 weeks ordinary maternity leave, and maternity payment has been increased to £100 a week. Because we have reduced the qualifying service for additional maternity leave, most mothers can also now choose to take up to one year off work in total.

Mr. Chapman: It has been argued that the proposals introduced by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to expand and standardise the provision of IVF in the national health service would help those women who choose to start a family after establishing their career. What is my right hon. Friend's view of the belief that IVF facilities could be of value in achieving equality in the workplace?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Clearly more women are choosing to postpone having a family, then sometimes discovering that they have an unexpected and extremely distressing problem of infertility. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and his colleagues are currently looking at NICE's draft proposals, and we at the DTI will continue to do everything that we can to support parents in balancing their work and family life.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): First, I wish the Minister a speedy recovery from what sounds like the Cancun cold.

Women returning to work after having a baby need to be able to achieve a good work/life balance. Six months ago, the Government launched an initiative to give parents with a child under the age of six the right to demand flexible hours. However, in a recent survey by KPMG, it was discovered that only one in 1,300 workers had taken advantage of those new laws. Can the Minister explain why the uptake is so poor?

Ms Hewitt: We are working closely with employers and trade unions to ensure that parents know their new rights and can take advantage of them, but the low take-up so far partly reflects the fact that the new rights have been in effect for only a couple of months, and the fact that, particularly in the public sector, but also in a growing number of private sector companies, a great deal of flexibility is already available. What we have done through the new legal measures is to strengthen the changes that are already taking place. We will go on doing everything we can—with the hon. Lady's support, I hope—to ensure that parents working in companies that do not yet offer those benefits of flexibility feel empowered to take up the new rights we have given them—against, I recall, the opposition of the Conservative party.

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): Is the Minister aware that despite the increase earlier this year, a survey of 60 countries showed that maternity pay in the UK is in the bottom quarter, and that a woman living in the UK and earning £15,000 a year would receive £2,458 over six months, which is just over half the EU average of £4,198? When does she expect the levels in the UK to reach the EU average?

Ms Hewitt: We have taken an enormous step forward in increasing levels of maternity pay and increasing the right of women to take maternity leave. In addition, we have introduced for the first time ever two weeks' paid paternity leave for new fathers. I note that the Liberal Democrats want to increase public spending. No doubt they will publish proposals for increased taxation to match that.

Employment Opportunities

18. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): What steps she is taking to increase the number of women employed in service industries; and if she will make a statement. [130836]

The Deputy Minister for Women and Equality (Jacqui Smith): It is a pleasure to answer the hon. Gentleman's questions twice in one hour. Action to make work pay and to help parents balance work and family life will promote employment opportunities for women across the labour market, including service industries. For example, 70 per cent. of those benefiting from the national minimum wage are women, and we estimate that the duty on employers to consider seriously requests for flexible working will enable 55,000 mothers to return to work.

Michael Fabricant: I thank the Minister for that answer. We will probably get on better in this second session than in the first one. Does she agree that the appointment of Barbara Cassani as the chief executive of the British Olympic Association bid is a good example of how women can play an important role in service industries? What steps is the Department taking to increase the aspiration of young women going into business not to go into service industries to work at

checkouts in places like Waitrose, or even, dare I say, into hairdressing, but to go into areas such as banking and the promotion of Britain?

Jacqui Smith: I share many of the hon. Gentleman's—

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield):— hairdressers.

Jacqui Smith: No, but I share his view that hairdressing is an important and honourable profession. We must be careful not to denigrate the areas of work that women go into, although we must make sure that they are getting proper training and proper pay. The hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) makes an important point about women in leadership positions. One of the issues that concerns us is how we can ensure that more women get into our boardrooms, where their contribution in a leadership role would be good for businesses, good for their profile, and as the hon. Gentleman points out, good for other women going into business and aspiring to the higher levels. The hon. Gentleman is right: we can certainly agree on that today.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Does my hon. Friend agree that this Government's record on increasing the availability of child care as well as introducing working tax credits has done more than anything else in recent history to improve the employability of women not only in the service industries, but in higher paid jobs in professional and manufacturing industries?

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. Of course, it is not only about aspirations for women to be able to enter the workplace, but about taking action, as this Government have been willing to do with respect to child care, the new deal for lone parents and partners, the child tax credit and the support that we are giving to women entrepreneurs, which will make a difference for women in the choice that they can make about whether they work. That is good for those women and our economy and businesses, and our society as a whole.

Women's Income

19. **Hugh Bayley** (City of York): What assessment she has made of the impact of the Government's tax credits and benefits changes on women's income. [130837]

The Minister for Women and Equality (Ms Patricia Hewitt): Changes in tax credits and benefits between 1997 and October 2003 will mean that, on average, men gain £1.58 a week and women gain £14.34.

Hugh Bayley: I am glad that the Government share my view that, when it comes to the welfare of children, it is important to transfer money from the wallet to the purse. What proportion of those receiving the new tax credits are women and what proportion are men? Now that we have had the opportunity to overcome the teething problems of the introduction of the new tax credits, can my right hon. Friend tell me how many men and women in the UK now receive them?

Ms Hewitt: More than 85 per cent. of child tax credit awards are being paid to women. Of course, that reflects the choices that parents themselves are making. While I agree with my hon. Friend's general point, I should add that there is a growing minority of families in which the father is the main carer of the child. It is extremely important that he should also have access to child tax credits and child benefit. We are now paying out child tax credits and other family tax credits to millions of families throughout the United Kingdom, all of whom have warmly welcomed this increase in their family incomes.

Business of the House

12.32 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): May I ask the part-time Leader of the House to give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Peter Hain): I am delighted to see that the prefix has returned, because it was omitted last week and I felt a little neglected.

The business for the week after the conference recess will be:

TUESDAY 14 OCTOBER—Remaining stages of the Crime (International Co-operation) Bill [*Lords*].

WEDNESDAY 15 OCTOBER—Opposition Day [18th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 16 OCTOBER—A debate on defence policy on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 17 OCTOBER—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week after will include:

MONDAY 20 OCTOBER—Remaining stages of the Courts Bill [*Lords*].

As the House will know, I informed the House yesterday of the date of the Queen's Speech. I intend to publish an annual calendar for this House for the new Session next month.

Mr. Forth: I am sure that the House will be particularly grateful for that last item.

Unusually, yesterday's Prime Minister's questions were almost completely free of porkies, obfuscations and evasions, so I think that we will leave them for another day. Following up what the part-time Leader of the House said about the date of the Queen's Speech, for which we are grateful, and given that it is relatively late this year, can he tell us how much pre-legislative scrutiny of Bills can now take place before the new Session? A great song and dance has been made about pre-legislative scrutiny. I am sure that it is welcomed in all parts of the House, but we would like a bit of substance from the Government about how much scrutiny will be conducted and which Bills we will see before the late start of the new Session.

When will the pre-Budget review take place? Is the Chancellor eager to come to the House and give us his review of the state of the economy? Perhaps we could get a date for that. Are the Government now going to set about prioritising their business ahead of 26 November to ensure that they have an appropriate amount of business, not least in another place, to honour the date of the Queen's Speech? I should be interested to get a glimpse into how the Government think that they are going to get their business through Parliament, especially through another place, while honouring that date of 26 November.

I wonder whether we could have a debate entitled, "Do Ministers care so little about MPs and Parliament that they neglect their duties in the recess?" I say that because a letter has fallen into my hands from a nice young man called Gerry Sutcliffe MP, who appears to be Minister for Employment Relations, Competition and Consumers. On 19 August, he wrote a letter to one of my colleagues that began:

"Thank you for your letter of 14 July".

It may seem unexceptional in this day and age that a Minister should take a month to write to a Member of Parliament—there is nothing unusual about that—but the really interesting bit comes next. This nice young man, Gerry, says:

"During parliamentary recess, Mr Sutcliffe is out of the office and unable to answer your query. Upon his return in September, he will ensure that your query is dealt with as swiftly as possible."

Does that exemplify the attitude of the Blair Government to Members of Parliament and to this House? Do Ministers no longer feel that they have a responsibility to man Departments through the summer recess or to give proper responses to Members of Parliament? If this letter is typical, what is the part-time Leader of the House going to do about it? Does he write to people saying, "I'm not around, so you shouldn't expect a reply"? I hope to be told that this was a regrettable slip and that it will not happen any more.

Has the part-time Leader of the House seen early-day motion 1700, entitled "Portcullis pension scheme and rights of staff"?

[That this House welcomes the introduction of the Portcullis pension plan, particularly for those on the staff of honourable Members who do not have existing pension arrangements, those in new employment, and those who have established that it offers better provision than their existing arrangements; but does not wish the staff of honourable Members to be compelled to join the scheme if they assess that it is likely to be inferior to their existing pension arrangements or is otherwise against their expressed wishes.]

It has already been signed by several Members—unusually, and significantly, of all parties—and it raises a number of important issues about our staff's pension rights. I am sure that Members on both sides of the House will have received representations on that, because we are getting ourselves into a serious position.

Having given the part-time Leader of the House's office notice that I intended to raise the subject, I want to ask the following questions. On what authority are employer contributions to individual pension schemes to be terminated, as is the intention? When were staff—not Members, but staff—properly consulted and informed about what is going to happen to their pensions? What provision is to be made to enable staff who would suffer financial loss from a change of pension provider to remain with their existing scheme? To give two examples, what will happen to someone who has their mortgage guaranteed by their pension or who has paid their fees up front and therefore cannot benefit from the reduction in fees that is claimed to be one of the benefits of the new regime?

I hope that the part-time Leader of the House will be able to give full and satisfactory answers to those questions. Many Members' staff are very worried and unhappy about the matter. It has been grotesquely mishandled thus far, and I hope that it is not too late to

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deal with it. At the very least, can implementation be postponed so that the situation can be properly sorted out?

Mr. Hain: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman back to the Dispatch Box. As a self-proclaimed technophobe, he boasted that he had never visited a website; when he launched the parliamentary press gallery website, he said that he hoped to get through life without ever doing so. It will be a mercy for the House if we can bring him into the 21st century.

Mr. Forth: Not a chance.

Mr. Hain: There we have it. That is what makes him such a delightful opponent across the Floor of the House.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about pre-legislative scrutiny before the next Session. As he knows, the Government have made a virtue of such scrutiny, and more Bills than ever have been subject to it. The practice increases year by year, as it will in the forthcoming Session.

I am not in a position to give an answer on when the pre-Budget review will take place. The right hon. Gentleman asked whether we would be frustrated in meeting the deadline of the Queen's Speech and whether legislation would complete its passage through the House of Lords by Prorogation. I am sure that the Lords will not wish to frustrate the will of the elected House and that both Houses will hold a genuine dialogue. We shall carefully consider any amendments, arguments and expertise. However, we are confident that we can complete our legislative programme in time for Prorogation before the Queen's Speech.

Given that the right hon. Gentleman is an outstanding parliamentarian, I hope that he gave the Minister for Employment Relations, Competition and Consumers notice of the matter that he raised. The episode happened in the middle of a difficult time for my hon. Friend, when his mother died. The right hon. Gentleman should not draw conclusions from the individual letter and case about the general pattern of Government.

The right hon. Gentleman properly raised the concerns that have been expressed about Members' pensions. [HON. MEMBERS: "Staff pensions."] I apologise: I mean staff pensions. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Some conversations are taking place in the Chamber. Staff pensions are important to me, too, and I want to hear what the Leader of the House has to say on the matter.

Mr. Hain: The right hon. Gentleman raised important points, which I shall note. I have offered to meet the trade unions and anyone else who has concerns, which I shall happily take up. However, I believe that some mischief has been made about the matter. Nobody will be forced to join the new scheme if they can demonstrate that they will be disadvantaged. People need to fill in a form to obtain proper information from their pension provider. There will be no question of a financial loss—that is not the purpose of the new scheme. Its purpose is to modernise pension arrangements and provide a more secure, better scheme for staff. If there are any concerns, we want to deal with them. I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for drawing them to the House's attention.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): May I strongly endorse on behalf of my hon. Friends the expression of concern in early-day motion 1700 on the pension scheme and the rights of staff? Whatever the Leader of the House has been briefed to say, I must tell him that staff believe that they have not been properly consulted. Unless there is some delay to enable that consultation—especially with the Secretaries and Assistants Council—to take place and an opportunity for staff to make representations, they will feel railroaded. It is a blot on the reputation of the House as an employer that consultation has not yet taken place.

What contingency plans has the Leader of House to ensure that the House receives an early statement on the outcome of the Hutton inquiry? I hope that he has carefully examined the comments that Dr. Hans Blix made yesterday and on the "Today" programme this morning. Is it not clear that we will need a statement from the Attorney-General on the adequacy of the advice that he gave the Government on the legality of going to war in Iraq? We need to know especially whether the Attorney-General was aware of the fragility of the 45-minute claim and whether he knew that the armaments mentioned were battlefield weapons that posed no threat to the United Kingdom or to British forces stationed in Cyprus. That is crucial.

The evidence that Dr. Hans Blix has presented blows to smithereens both the September and February dossiers. I hope that the Leader of the House acknowledges that it requires a separate statement from the Attorney-General, distinct from one on the Hutton inquiry. When does the Leader of the House expect hon. Members to be properly informed on those matters?

Mr. Hain: First, as the hon. Gentleman knows, staff pensions are a matter for the Speaker's Advisory Panel. The purpose of the change is to give staff a better pension. If individual members of staff have concerns, I am sure that the authorities will want to resolve them in favour of the staff. As I said earlier, my door is open. I believe, however, that this issue has been brought to the attention of the House in a manner that is out of proportion to the actuality on the ground.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the outcome of the Hutton inquiry. As I have said, I am sure that there will be a statement and, I hope, a debate on that issue. However, his remarks about Hans Blix sounded rather like an old gramophone record, and were full of puffed-up indignation. As he knows, the Intelligence and Security Committee concluded that the evidence provided to the Government and to the requisite authorities on the basis of which the dossier was drawn up had been properly dealt with, properly processed and properly interpreted. I prefer to listen to the evidence of the Intelligence and Security Committee than to Hans Blix, who was pronouncing on another matter entirely.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): The House will have noted that, in a speech to the

Press Gallery earlier this week, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House ruled out any review of the new sittings arrangements for the House for the lifetime of this Parliament. Will he accept, however, that a large number of Members feel that there is considerable scope for adjustment of those hours, including some of the Members who voted for them? Given that there is a powerful case building up for changes to be made, does he not think it unwise to rule out any adjustment whatever?

Mr. Hain: The House made a decision, rightly or wrongly, in October last year, to change the hours of its sittings. That was a decision taken for the rest of this Parliament, to be subject to review after proper assessment had been made of it. We are only a few months into it, frankly, and an early-day motion condemning it had already appeared within 14 working days of the change being made. We should take this matter stage by stage, and review it, but I am open to considering adjustments. For example, I think that there is a strong case for changing the sitting hours of Standing Committees; they probably sit too early. It is within the power of a Standing Committees to alter its hours, if they are putting pressure on—

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Ministers.

Mr. Hain: Actually, that is not the point. Ministers get up very early, and are on duty very early, as it is. The serious issue that has been brought to my attention by many Members on both sides of the House and by members of the Speaker's Panel is that officials of the House are perhaps having to prepare earlier than we would want them to. So if there is a question of starting Standing Committee sittings later, I am sure that we can make such adjustments. The terms of the motion passed on the fundamental hours changes, however, were that they should remain until the end of this Parliament, and I intend to respect that decision.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): Given that the Leader of the House is already developing a reputation for listening carefully to what is said in this place, will he think further about the comments that have just been made by the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth) and bear in mind the fact that many of us, on both sides of the House, think that to wait through a whole Parliament before reviewing these matters could be a mistake? We are already aware of the unintended consequences of the changes to the hours. Will the right hon. Gentleman therefore keep an open mind about the possibility of revisiting the matter before the end of this Parliament?

Mr. Hain: As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East—I am happy to repeat the point to the hon. Gentleman, whose views on this matter I respect—the fundamental principles of the hours change were decided for the rest of this Parliament. However, anomalies might appear as we go along, and adjustments might seem sensible—indeed, I have suggested one myself. I have been listening hard to that point, and I think that there is a lot of sense in it. Standing Committees have the right to vary their hours, and to start later and run later if that is what they wish to do. If there are any other practical changes that we could consider, I would be very happy to do so, but the fundamental principle was decided for the rest of this Parliament.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): We now have a Standing Committee on Regional Affairs, which is meeting after a gap of about 25 years. Given the Government's commitment to regionalism, would it not be a good idea to set up a Standing Committee for each of the eight English standard regions? We could meet to discuss regional affairs here at Westminster, but we could also travel to our own regions and discuss them there.

Mr. Hain: I know that that has been suggested, and we can keep it under review. I should like to see how the newly established Regional Affairs Committee works before we decide whether any such modifications are needed.

Mr. Andrew Mackay (Bracknell): The Leader of the House will know that, very courageously, the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) recently undertook an undercover tour of Zimbabwe. Her report, which has been widely circulated, shows that the situation there is deteriorating hugely under the dreadful Mugabe regime. The right hon. Gentleman has responded to me sympathetically in the past. Is it not about time we had a statement or a debate on Zimbabwe, preferably before the Commonwealth conference that will take place in Nigeria later this year?

Mr. Hain: I strongly agree that the Mugabe regime is dreadful beyond words, and is destroying a beautiful country along with, sadly, many of its people. My hon. Friend's report makes salutary reading for those who have found it possible to turn their backs on, or their eyes away from, the appalling way in which Mugabe is destroying his country. I will certainly draw the right hon. Gentleman's request to the attention of the Foreign Secretary and the Minister responsible for African affairs, because there is undoubtedly great concern in the House about what is happening in Zimbabwe.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will my right hon. Friend tell us how much the House is having to pay for the recall of Parliament at the beginning of September? What has been the total increase in staff costs, and what has been the cost of the interruption of maintenance contracts? Before pushing out of court any assumption that we should look hard at the changed rules on the hours, will my right hon. Friend understand that even after altering the times of their sittings Select Committees are finding it increasingly difficult to operate effectively? If Standing Committees altered their sitting times, Committee members would find it almost impossible to be in the Chamber at question time. There are now too many incursions into MPs' working time, and there is a bogus assumption of improvisation. It will not do.

Mr. Hain: I very much value my hon. Friend's counsel and her views, and have done so for many years; but her point about Standing Committees having to sit at times

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that clash with Question Time does not follow, as Standing Committees can vary their hours in order to sit at times when there is no clash, even given a later start.

One of my duties, which I take very seriously, is to uphold the will of the House. Whether people disagree with it or not, the House voted for a change in the hours for the rest of this Parliament, and I do not think we can keep chopping and changing every few months. As I have said, however, I am open to suggestions about modification of the hours and other arrangements.

I will certainly try to find the figures relating to the cost of our return in September. They are not at my fingertips, but I will write to my hon. Friend when I have them.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): What is the purpose of our sitting in September if the Government will not answer questions tabled for written answer on a priority basis on a named day during this period? I have tabled a number of such questions, including questions about the costs of policing the Labour party conference in Bournemouth and about the ravages of sudden oak death disease. Although that disease is apparently so important that it has attracted 80 Government inspectors who are going around gardens in England and Wales carrying out inspections, apparently the Government have no time to answer ordinary parliamentary questions about it. There is also the important question of whether the Secretary of State for Education and Skills will go to Bournemouth university and meet students to discuss top-up fees. Why can we not get answers to such questions during this important period?

Mr. Hain: That was a good try. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I am about to do so.

The hon. Gentleman should note that there was no demand for the House to be recalled over the summer recess. Why? Because everyone knew that we were coming back at the earliest opportunity in September. Year after year, however, there have been almost ritual demands for a recall.

Regular statements have been made to the House by Ministers over these two weeks. Indeed, one will follow business questions. Ministers have been here to answer questions from the hon. Gentleman and any other Members who might wish to table them.

The public do not understand how we can be in recess for 13 weeks, as happened with the old model. This time we have been in recess for seven weeks. I should have thought that would be enough even for the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Will my right hon. Friend give us an early opportunity to debate the need for Ministers to reply to letters from Members within a reasonable time? Will he, in particular, look into what happened to the letter I wrote on 12 June to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs about my constituent Mrs. N. Bromley? I have written twice to the Prime Minister about the case, and have tabled a question which is being tossed around between the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department of Health and the Food Standards Agency. After more than three months, I have still not received a reply.

Mr. Hain: I am very conscious that my right hon. Friend would not have raised the matter in such a way had it not been of deep concern to him. I am sure that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will wish to respond as soon as she can.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): May we please have an urgent debate in Government time on intended new housing development in the south-east? Given that, on the back of the Milton Keynes-south midlands study, the Government want another 59,000 houses to be built around Aylesbury Vale between now and 2031, but have not even begun to think about how, when and by whom the necessary accompanying infrastructure can be provided, does the right hon. Gentleman not recognise that a debate would provide a real opportunity for the airing of concerns about air pollution, traffic congestion, pressure on the health service and the implications for school places—all of which are matters of the most momentous significance to my Buckingham constituents?

Mr. Hain: The hon. Gentleman has plenty of opportunities to apply for debates enabling him to raise matters affecting his constituents, but I will certainly draw his remarks to the attention of the Secretary of State.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the health service, pollution, transport and a lot of other matters. The Government are investing more than ever before in all those "quality of life" issues and are dealing with them—by contrast with our predecessors, who cut and cut and cut, and made life intolerable for the hon. Gentleman's constituents, among others.

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): As my right hon. Friend will know, we are approaching the party conference season. Is he aware that the Electoral Commission is conducting an inquiry into party funding? Will he allow a debate, as soon as possible after its report, on an issue that is important to all members of all parties?

Mr. Hain: I will certainly wish to do that, because as my hon. Friend says, the issue is important.

It is often wrongly assumed that this is some new development, but public funding for political parties is a well established part of our structure, particularly in the House. For example, funding for the Conservative party has trebled from £1.1 million to £3.3 million: that is the extent of its support in the House. The chairman of the Conservative party attacks the principle of public funding, but last year the Conservatives received £200,000 more from taxation—from public funds—than they were able to raise on their own.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): When someone of the standing of Hans Blix says that the Government's belief in the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq

is akin to the mediaeval belief in witches, is it not time for an early debate on these elusive weapons, and on all the issues involved in the construction of what now appears to be a fantastic fable—that dodgy dossier?

Mr. Hain: When do we hear from the hon. Gentleman about the heinous crimes that Saddam Hussein committed against his people? Saddam is the only person whom I can think of in history—certainly in modern times—who killed 1 million Muslims. Indeed, at Halabja we are uncovering almost daily the unmarked graves of the 300,000 of his own citizens whom he killed during the Iran-Iraq war. The hon. Gentleman should be supporting the work of British soldiers in liberating the people of Iraq, instead of continually attacking the Government.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): May we have an early statement on the private treatment centres that will spring up in all parts of England? I think that Scotland is excluded because it turned them down. Is my right hon. Friend aware that nurses recruited to those centres will almost undoubtedly be poached from neighbouring national health service hospitals? What guarantees will exist to ensure that that does not happen, and will he also ensure that the unions involved in NHS hospitals are properly consulted before any of these centres are established?

Mr. Hain: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has addressed these issues in the clearest possible terms. There is absolutely no question of poaching or of riding roughshod over local health service organisation provision; indeed, the entire initiative has been developed in consultation with, and by agreement with, local health authorities. I would have thought that my hon. Friend, who is a doughty fighter for the NHS and for people's rights, would welcome the fact that through these projects and initiatives, the Government are massively increasing capacity to enable urgent treatment for our constituents, some of whom desperately need hip operations, for example. NHS patients will receive that additional capacity free at the point of treatment—a vital principle that the Conservatives plan to demolish through charges, privatisation and private health insurance.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Before the recess, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs made a statement on the outcome of the common agricultural policy, and I requested then that we be able to debate the impact on many of our constituencies of that important outcome. Will the Leader of the House agree to that debate?

Mr. Hain: I shall certainly draw the hon. Gentleman's request to the Secretary of State's attention.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I begin by declaring an interest, in that I am the patron of the Society of Registration Officers in England and Wales. The civil registration service has hardly changed since the 1830s, but it is just about to undergo a mini revolution as a result of the document published at the beginning of the summer entitled "Civil Registration: Delivering Vital Change". I understand that that mini revolution will be launched via a regulatory reform order, which will probably be discussed Upstairs, rather than on the Floor of the House. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, as this matter affects the lives of all of our constituents, such a debate should take place on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Hain: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his work on behalf of civil registrars; he performs a very important role. As an enthusiastic supporter of this initiative, he will know that the Government are modernising the entire process to make it in tune with people's lives today. I shall certainly bear his request in mind.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): May we have a statement from the Home Secretary, or perhaps one of the Law Officers, on the policing and judicial practice applied in the case of Mr. James Dowell, who found 15 youngsters vandalising his pond, and managed to detain three of them and force them to clear up the mess? He was subsequently arrested by no fewer than eight police officers for false imprisonment, received a sentence of 80 hours community service, and has been tagged for the next four months to make sure that he does not do it to them again. Would it not be good to get back to the time when the letters "PC" meant police constable, not political correctness?

Mr. Hain: I am obviously baffled by that case, but I shall certainly ensure that the Home Secretary knows about it. At least the citizen concerned was not sentenced to attend the proceedings of the Conservative party.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that when the Hunting Bill is significantly changed in the Lords, as it undoubtedly will be, the Parliament Act will definitely be used, so that we can have a ban on fox hunting in the lifetime of this Parliament? Is it not essential that the will of the elected House triumphs over a totally unrepresentative House of Lords, in which 92 hereditaries remain—for the time being?

Mr. Hain: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality made clear on 21 March last year the Government's policy on the Parliament Act, and it has not changed. This House voted overwhelmingly for a ban on cruelty to animals, which the House of Lords will, I am sure, wish to respect. I am sure that matters will proceed and that we can reach a consensual outcome. My right hon. Friend has made the Government's position clear, and we stand by it.

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): The Leader of the House will be aware of my constituents' great concern about continuing donations to IRA-Sinn Fein from America, a recent example of which was a donation by the Coca-Cola corporation. At the time of that donation, Mr. David Hill—who has been appointed as successor to Mr. Alastair Campbell at No. 10—worked for a public relations company, one of whose clients was the Coca-Cola corporation. May we have a statement to clarify the Government's position, whether the Prime

[Mr. Nigel Dodds]

Minister was aware of and approved of the current situation, and whether he agrees that donations to IRA-Sinn Fein by companies here or elsewhere are totally unacceptable, given its ongoing commitment to violence and its refusal to give up the machinery of terrorism in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Hain: I am sure that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will wish to take note of the hon. Gentleman's question.

Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): As my right hon. Friend rightly said, last week's Intelligence and Security Committee report nailed the lie that the Government had in some way doctored intelligence assessments. I refer him to a very important section of the report, which referred to a Joint Intelligence Committee assessment that was made in February, in the run-up to the war. It said that there was no intelligence-assessed link between the Iraqi regime and al-Qaeda and terrorism, and that the collapse of that regime would heighten the terrorist risk to us. Do the Government intend, in the spirit of publishing dossiers, to publish that assessment, and will he give the House an opportunity to discuss it?

Mr. Hain: Both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have dealt with this matter. The Government have never maintained that Iraq was involved with al-Qaeda in respect of the 11 September terrorist attack. However, we have always said that there was always a danger—we are beginning to see this happen—that Saddam Hussein's monstrous regime would link up with terrorists—*[Interruption.]* Of course, there was bound to be a danger that when the regime collapsed, different forces would seek to interpose themselves, as they have predictably done. But the real issue before the House was whether to leave Saddam in power, with his monstrous tyranny and ability to threaten the rest of the region and the rest of the world. We are proud that we did not duck that choice, and as a result Iraq and the rest of the world will be a better place in the months and years to come.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): May we have an early debate on today's report on gangmasters from the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee? If time cannot be found for such a debate, could the Leader of the House at least ask the Secretary of State to respond urgently to that report? He will be aware that gangmasters provide crucial casual labour to growers and producers throughout the United Kingdom, but that many of them are ruthless and are guilty of the grossest exploitation. Moreover, much Treasury revenue is lost and people are often put at risk, as I myself know from a tragic railway accident of 7 July. The report is hard-hitting and makes clear recommendations, on which the Government need to act.

Mr. Hain: The hon. Gentleman raises a very important matter, of which he has particular knowledge. I am sure that the Ministers concerned will want to act urgently on that report, and I shall certainly ensure that his question is drawn to their urgent attention.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Would the Leader of House consider having a debate on Royal Mail's intention to close down its air freight service at the Liverpool John Lennon airport on the grounds of an assessment based on faulty financial information? Is there a case for a general discussion of how public interest companies interpret their commercial freedom in relation to Government policy?

Mr. Hain: I think that we had a debate on those matters shortly before the recess, but my hon. Friend raises an important issue, which will no doubt be of concern to her constituents. I will ensure that the appropriate Minister—and, indeed, Royal Mail—is made aware of her question.

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): In the light of the motion carried in the Scottish Parliament on the detention of children at Dungavel and the deep concern expressed by members of the church and nation committee of the Church of Scotland, will the Leader of the House consider providing us with an opportunity to debate the matter as soon as practically possible? Is he aware that hon. Members on both sides of the House regard the detention of children as the unacceptable face of Scotland in the 21st century?

Mr. Hain: As the hon. Gentleman may know, that serious matter of great concern has been raised in Scottish questions. I am sure that the appropriate Ministers will note with great seriousness the hon. Gentleman's question.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I welcome last week's announcement that, as part of the White Paper discussions on the draft constitution, the Special Standing Committee will continue to meet during the intergovernmental conference debates. However, should the draft be accepted as it stands, given that some provisions have significant implications for the workings of Parliament? Will the Leader of the House find time in the coming months for a debate on the Floor of the House on the specific provisions that affect the workings of Parliament?

Mr. Hain: I am sure that that will be necessary at some point. I am in communication with the Chairman of the European Scrutiny Committee and others who are considering these matters. I think that my hon. Friend refers to the important advance for democracy represented by the new draft constitution, according to which national Parliaments, including our own House of Commons, will have the ability to vet any new proposals from the European Commission to assess whether they should be considered at the Brussels level or remain at the nation state level. That is an important step forward for democratic accountability between Europe and its member states. My hon. Friend played an important part in achieving it, but implementation in the House is ultimately a matter for the House.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): May I draw the Leader of the House's attention back to the points made

by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) and others about pension provisions for our staff? He gave the impression that the concerns have somehow been exaggerated or put up, but I suggest that that is entirely erroneous. Many members of our staff are very worried.

The Leader of the House gave the impression that his door is always open, but he needs to be more proactive than that. We will be away for about three weeks and I suggest that he calls a meeting, perhaps with the director of finance and others, as soon as possible to clear up any of our staff's misunderstandings and to give them some guarantee about their future and their pensions.

Mr. Hain: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that I sought merely to dismiss the concerns. On the contrary, those concerns—I have heard about some of them—are legitimate. The Speaker's Advisory Panel discussed the matter last week and is well seized of the importance of ensuring that everything proceeds smoothly and that staff's concerns are listened to. I shall obviously keep a beady eye on that process on behalf of the House, and I shall report back or answer further questions in the future when the opportunity arises. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the matter again.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): I am sure that the Leader of the House will join me in welcoming the outcome of the referendum in Sweden a few days ago, and I am sure that he, like myself, would want to ensure that, if the UK has a referendum on the euro, the UK electorate are as well informed as the Swedish people. Could we therefore have a debate not only on the single currency, but specifically on article 107? If it became law, it would become illegal for Parliament, the Assembly or local authorities to influence the decision makers, who are neither elected nor accountable, but merely a group of bankers.

Mr. Hain: The Swedish referendum on the euro was a matter for Swedes and the British referendum, if and when it comes, is a matter for Britons. We will do things in our own way according to the route map laid out by the Chancellor on 9 June, which will see increasing convergence between the British and eurozone economies. If, at the end of that process, the economic circumstances have fallen into place, we will indeed call a referendum and I am sure that we will win it.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): That route map set out by the Chancellor included a roadshow. I cannot believe that the Leader of the House, as one of the Government's leading euro enthusiasts, has not been invited to take part, so can he tell us how many events he has participated in since the roadshow was launched? That would scotch rumours that the roadshow does not exist.

Mr. Hain: The Treasury has already done 55 presentations around the country on the euro. I myself chaired—*[Interruption.]* Well, I was asked a question, and I am about to give the answer. I chaired a meeting of the Wales euro preparation committee in July—*[Interruption.]* Indeed, and I am going to chair another meeting of that committee next week. The truth is that this is a matter of live debate. The Treasury is consulting extensively around the country. In the end, Opposition Members can laugh and jeer, but their policy is to deprive the British people of the opportunity to vote on joining the euro, even if it is in our economic interest or the interest of our jobs and prosperity to do so. They all say "no"—never, ever—dogmatically and on principle. That is not a common-sense position. Ours is the sensible position: to prepare and decide when the economic circumstances are correct.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the New Testament, specifically to Luke, chapter 15, verse 7:

"I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."?

As someone who voted in favour of the reforms to the sitting hours of the House, I have had more than enough time to repent and reflect on my mistake. I heard what my right hon. Friend said about the decision of House applying for the rest of this Parliament, but the House has the right to change its mind. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House would, given the opportunity, seek to redress the damage. When will I have an opportunity to atone for my sin?

Mr. Hain: There are sinners and saints on both sides of the argument. I shall repeat a reply that I gave earlier: if my hon. Friend has any specific suggestions about adjusting or improving the position, my door is open. That is how to move forward, but I repeat that the House took a decision for the rest of this Parliament. Such decisions should not be lightly swept aside. They should be respected and it is my duty to respect them.

Andrew George (St. Ives): Can the Leader of the House give an assurance that we shall have an adequate opportunity properly to scrutinise regulations as they go through the House? I refer to the Animal By-Products Regulations 2003, which my right hon. Friends and I prayed against on 9 June this year and was debated in Committee this Monday. The Minister said that the

"40-day period has passed so annulment is not possible."—[*Official Report, Third Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation*, 15 September 2003; c. 14.]

I protested to the Chairman at the time that it is not within my gift to determine the date when these matters are debated. This is either an example of incompetence by the Government's business managers, or a cynical method of trying to manipulate the procedures of the House to avoid proper scrutiny. Can the Leader of the House give an assurance that we shall have timely and proper scrutiny of regulations as they pass through the House?

Mr. Hain: It is neither cynical—who would ever accuse business managers of being cynical—nor incompetent. I will look into the matter and I will write to the hon. Gentleman, but I reject the suggestion of ulterior motives that he ascribes to the episode.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the third report of the Health Committee, which was published earlier this summer, on the subject of sexual health. The report begins with a

[Mr. David Chaytor]

significant quotation from Dr. Helen Lacey, who is the consultant in charge of the sexual health clinic at Fairfield hospital in my constituency. She is concerned about the current crisis in sexual health and she tells me that my constituency has seen a 300 per cent. increase in the occurrence of certain sexually transmitted infections in the past four years. The burden of that increase often falls on vulnerable young women and is frequently caused by the reluctance of young people, parents and teachers to discuss those issues, so does my right hon. Friend agree that this House could set an example by holding a debate on the Committee's report at the earliest opportunity?

Mr. Hain: That is an important issue and I will look into my hon. Friend's request. I know of the fine work that is done in his constituency. We are all concerned about the matter, and I am grateful that he has raised it.

Constitutional Reforms

1.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. Christopher Leslie): With permission, I wish to repeat a statement made in the other place today by my noble Friend Lord Falconer of Thoroton about further reforms to the House of Lords, and on the office of Lord Chancellor.

The Government are today publishing two consultation papers on the next steps on House of Lords reform; and on the functions of the Lord Chancellor. Copies of both papers are available in the Vote Office. The papers form another significant part of the present phase of constitutional reform on which the Government embarked last summer, with the creation of a Department for Constitutional Affairs to take overall responsibility for the issues.

May I begin by apologising to the House because a report of the proposals appeared in a Sunday newspaper? I can assure the House that no one in my Department was authorised to speak to the press on the subject. It has always been the Government's intention to ensure that Parliament should hear first about the proposals.

I shall deal first with our proposals for further reform of the House of Lords. Last February, both Houses voted on the range of options for the composition of the second Chamber proposed by the Joint Committee on House of Lords Reform. Their lordships voted three to one in favour of an appointed House. In this House, there was no majority for any of the options. The Joint Committee, in its second report published on 9 May, reflected on the outcome of the parliamentary votes and concluded that

"simply to maintain the status quo"

in respect of composition was undesirable. The Government agree.

In those circumstances, we intend to make progress where we can. The Government therefore propose further reforms to ensure that we have a stable and sustainable House of Lords. It was never our intention that the remaining hereditary peers should remain members of the House of Lords for ever. When the interim arrangement was reached, as well as the immediate benefit of the agreement, we accepted the argument that the presence of the remaining hereditary peers would act as an incentive to further reform. That has not happened: there is no clear consensus in Parliament on the way forward. So the context for reform has clearly and significantly changed. The circumstances that gave rise to the original arrangement over the remaining hereditary peers no longer apply. The solution, which the remaining hereditary peers were there to help seek, is no longer available. The Government must act, and act decisively, to bring about stability and sustainability.

It is for the Government to act, but it is for Parliament to decide. It will be for Parliament as a whole to decide on the removal of the right of the remaining hereditary peers to sit and to vote. Therefore, the next step of our reform programme will be to introduce legislation, when parliamentary time allows, to remove the right of the remaining 92 hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords, thus completing that element of the reform process on which we embarked in 1997.

In moving on from the current arrangement, the Government wish to pay tribute to the contribution that those 92 peers make to the other place. Many of them are among its most active and effective members. The Government hope that Parliament might continue to benefit from the contribution of at least some of them should they be nominated as life peers in the future.

We shall set up a statutory commission to select and oversee appointments that are made to the House of Lords. It will build on the present non-statutory Appointments Commission, which itself represented a significant voluntary relinquishing by the Prime Minister of his powers of patronage. The statutory commission will be appointed by Her Majesty the Queen in response to an address from Parliament. The three major parties in this House and the Cross-Bench peers will be directly represented on it, together with a number of members selected in accordance with the principles of the Commissioner for Public Appointments in an open selection process. The Government will discuss with the Opposition parties how they might best be involved in the selection process. The Commission's funding and accountability arrangements will maximise its independence from the Government. The consultation document asks for views on various detailed aspects of those arrangements.

We propose that the functions of the commission will be threefold. First, it will decide on the number and timing of new appointments to the House of Lords. This will be a massive—and voluntary—diminution in the Prime Minister's influence over the membership of the Second Chamber. In making its decisions in relation to political appointments, the commission would be subject to two main guidelines. They are that the Government of the day should not have an overall majority in the Lords; and that appointments for the parties should have regard to the outcome of the previous general election. The commission will also be expected to provide that appointments to the Cross Benches should average 20 per cent. of appointments over the lifetime of a Parliament. The Commission's second function would be to nominate the non-party peers, and thirdly, it would vet the nominations for party peers for propriety.

In the meantime, the existing non-statutory Appointments Commission will continue its work, of which the Prime Minister has already expressed the Government's appreciation. The Prime Minister will invite it to make recommendations for new non-party peers until the new statutory commission is in place.

We also propose to bring the rules for disqualification from membership of the House of Lords, in respect of detention following conviction for an offence, into line with those for the House of Commons. We do not believe that the difference of treatment can any longer be justified. We therefore propose that in the future such peers will forfeit their membership of the House of Lords exactly as they would if they were MPs. In addition, they will be deprived of their peerage. The provision will have retrospective effect. Parliament is a privilege, not a possession. Such peers will, of course, be free to seek renewed membership of the second Chamber, by applying to the Appointments Commission or their party, as relevant, for nomination, just as former MPs can seek re-election.

We propose that life peers, like hereditary peers before them, should in future be able to resign their peerages and membership of the House of Lords. That is a fairer and more reasonable arrangement that will allow those who feel they wish to move on and no longer sit in the second Chamber the opportunity to do so.

Nothing in the proposals relates to the powers of the House of Lords. We are not proposing any extension of the role of the second Chamber. For example, the traditional role of the Lords in relation to Finance Bills is clear and works well, its powers being constrained by the Parliament Act 1911 and Commons financial privilege established by resolutions in the 17th century. I am sure their lordships would not seek to extend their powers, for example in respect of Supply. The House of Commons should and must remain pre-eminent in our constitutional arrangements.

On further reform of the House of Lords, we will continue to look for a way forward. We will discuss any possible next steps with the current Joint Committee and how it can contribute.

Taken together, the changes amount to a substantial set of reforms to the House of Lords. When added to our previously announced decisions to set up a separate supreme court, and to remove the office of Lord Chancellor, thus leading to reform of the office of Speaker, they will create a House that is significantly different from that which currently exists.

The Government are also publishing today a consultation paper on the reform of the office of Lord Chancellor. Work to bring to an end the multiple roles of the Lord Chancellor is already well advanced. The Secretary of State is formally inviting views on the Lord Chancellor's ecclesiastical patronage, his visitatorial responsibilities and other functions relating to specific charities, schools and other institutions.

The proposals the Government announce today are part of the programme of constitutional reforms that we have been pursuing since 1997. They will contribute to the further strengthening of Parliament. Alongside our earlier reforms of devolution to Scotland and Wales, the Human Rights Act 1998 and freedom of information, they will take their place in the shaping of our nation, to make the institutions of the state fit and responsive to the demands of our citizens in the modern world.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): I thank the Minister for making that statement, but I regret that it comes a week after its content appeared in *The Sunday Times*. That blatantly contravenes your continual rulings, Mr. Speaker, that Parliament should be told first. Indeed, I received my advance copy at only 11.45 this morning, and I had to ask for it. That is no way for a so-called Department for Constitutional Affairs to conduct its business. It began its life floundering in a farce and now treats the House with contempt. Anyone would think that the constitution of this country was the personal chattel of the Prime Minister and his cronies.

The statement reeks of dishonesty. It pretends that the Government are still seeking long-term reform and, in the words of the Secretary of State in his foreword, are looking to

"shape a consensus to make the second chamber more legitimate and more representative of our society."

[Mr. William Cash]

In fact, they are engaged in short-term political gerrymandering and cynical political arithmetic. No one believes what the Government say anymore. The more people see, the less credible the Government become.

The Government are not interested in delivering genuine reform. They have ignored the royal commission and pre-empted the Joint Committee of both Houses. It appears that the Joint Committee was not even consulted. The future of hereditary peers is not the issue. That was dealt with by Act of Parliament in 1999. No one has the right to sit in the House of Lords by virtue of hereditary peerage alone. It is absurd for the Secretary of State to call for consensus in his foreword to the consultation paper, when the Minister in his statement just now stated that there was "clearly no consensus" in Parliament.

The fundamental question facing Parliament is indeed the future of the House of Lords, its authority and the authority of the House as a whole. The Government's objective in the Labour party submission was intended to ensure that the House of Lords remains a

"distinctive, representative and independent chamber".

That is not what this consultation paper is about. No legislation can be introduced affecting the other place without opening questions that go further than the framework of that Bill. In this House we will face a choice.

The issue is the accountability of the Government to Parliament, and whether the Prime Minister will gain further control over the constitution, adding to his disgraceful refusal to give the British people a referendum on the European constitution. The Minister and the Secretary of State in the other place have said that Parliament must decide about the measures before it. We need to know from the Minister whether the Government will give the House of Commons a free vote on the Bill that they propose to introduce following this statement, and whether they will come clean on whether their real intention is to remove enough peers who would take the Government to the Parliament Act on an amendment for a referendum on the European constitution. That is the arithmetic.

After all, the Prime Minister has said that, for him, the European constitution is even more important than Iraq. This is a political statement, made by one party for one party. It is not constitutional reform. Principle has been abandoned. The Cook-Maclennan talks have been betrayed. This is not a step towards democracy but a fundamental shift away from it.

The Opposition have made our position clear in favour of more democracy and an elected House of Lords. The proposal for 80:20 was lost in the House by a mere three votes. These proposed reforms treat that vote with contempt.

As regards the other place, its legitimate expectations in 1999—when many of its Members agreed to withdraw, on the basis that 92 hereditary peers would remain under a parliamentary concession and not by hereditary right—have been disgracefully dishonoured.

Opposition Members do not believe that the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs—who deals in so many ways with how we are governed—should be in the other place. He should be in this House, not merely represented in the House of Commons by a junior bag-carrier who will simply do the bidding of the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister.

Why has the matter suddenly become so important? Most people in the country probably think that the other place works well. Is that not because the other place has shown its independence and won respect and authority, for example over issues such as trial by jury, media ownership, the snoopers charter and the fair conduct of justice?

Is it perhaps that the Prime Minister wants to remove 20 per cent. of the non-governmental peers? Is the Prime Minister arguing that the proper and legitimate amendments from the other place are regarded as abnormal obstruction of the Government's legislative programme? If so, I challenge the Secretary of State and the Minister to say so.

The Prime Minister is as dangerous as he is arrogant, and his Secretary of State is implementing this dishonest plan in defiance of principle. It is a cynical move by the Prime Minister, when he is in deep trouble, to draw attention away from his difficulties. The Government treat the issue of constitutional reform and their loss of votes in the other place as though Parliament had no right to interfere in their Bills or their plans. I remind the House that in 40 per cent. of the Divisions that they have lost this year in the other place, less than half of the Government's own peers supported them. The Government simply failed to convince the House. Indeed, the Government have lost 51 Divisions this year—the highest number since the 1970s. However, they would have lost only 10 if the hereditary peers were removed. That is the real reason for the policy.

What of the statutory appointments commission? We welcome it in principle, but we have heard about it for six years. When precisely will it be enacted? The Government no longer talk of broad parity with the main Opposition party but now only of

"not having an overall majority in the House".

Does that not mean that the Government will have a majority over the two main Opposition parties combined?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): That is the plan.

Mr. Cash: Indeed, that is the plan. It is the Prime Minister's plan as well.

As to the reform of the office of the Lord Chancellor, we discussed the matter when the previous statement was made, and we will debate it in future. However, one thing is clear. As the consultation paper states,

"the Lord Chancellor is after the Prime Minister the principle source of Ministerial advice to the Queen."

He serves the same function in respect of the Cabinet on all matters of constitutional importance. The removal of the office of the Lord Chancellor removes from the Cabinet historical and constitutional weight and authority when it comes to advice on constitutional affairs and maintaining the independence of the judiciary. The office has a degree of independence that the Prime Minister clearly finds impossible to reconcile with his obsession with his own power and control.

This Government have lost credibility. The Prime Minister does not want a democratic House of Lords but an appointed House of Lords that he can ignore. He dare not say so, but that is what these proposals mean. Constitutional reform should be in the long-term national interest, not what these proposals represent—a short-term fix. We shall oppose them for the shoddy manoeuvre that they represent.

Mr. Leslie: It is now clear that the Opposition support keeping hereditary peers in the second Chamber. That is disgraceful, and does no credit to the House of Lords. It is about time that we took steps to remove the remaining 92 peers who are there by virtue of their birth, and that is exactly what we intend to do.

Clearly, we have to respond to the situation caused by the votes in February, when no consensus emerged from Parliament. The Conservative majority in the other place voted by three to one in favour of an appointed second Chamber. No consensus emerged in the House of Commons. We need to move forward, where we can, to put the other place on a stable and sustainable footing. We can do that by removing the hereditaries, because the status quo is not desirable.

The hon. Gentleman raised a number of specific matters, and I shall investigate the amount of notice that he was given of the statement. It is entirely laudable that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister should seek to relinquish many of the powers of patronage that his office traditionally has held, in terms of the timing and numbers of appointments to the House of Lords, and in terms of the establishment of a statutory appointments commission. I am glad that the Opposition welcomed that element of the statement, but the hon. Gentleman then said that they will oppose the legislation that we intend to bring forward when parliamentary time allows.

The hon. Gentleman took all of three minutes to turn the issue into a European conspiracy; he feels that it is all to do with some European constitutional referendum, which reflects interestingly on the current state of the Conservative party. Abolishing the hereditary peerage is the right thing to do. Ensuring that the House of Commons has pre-eminence is the right thing to do. In the face of the lack of consensus, we need to make progress, and that is exactly what the Government will do.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): The statement and the consultation paper are economical with the truth. The Minister has just said that there was clearly no consensus in Parliament on the way forward. That is only partly true; there is a consensus in this House, although there may not be consensus between the two Houses.

The Minister has just said that this House must remain pre-eminent. There is a majority in the Chamber for a reformed second Chamber to be elected—[HON. MEMBERS: "No, there isn't."] There is.

The announcement is a double betrayal. First, it breaks the manifesto promises on which Labour Members were elected on two occasions and, secondly, it tears up the agreement that the hereditary peers would be removed only when the full reform package was in place. Liberal Democrats will thus support the removal of the remaining hereditary peers only when the full package is put before this House, and when it is accompanied by the promised introduction of elected Members to make the second Chamber "more democratic and representative"—words that every Labour Member signed up to.

The Prime Minister clearly regards the votes of Members of this House as unimportant. On 4 February, the majority of Members of the House—332, or more than half—voted for a majority of Members of the other place to be elected. They did not all go into the same Lobby at once, but that was their view.

The Minister is not listening to me as his colleagues are whispering to him, but he is an honourable man and he will remember that he supported the Prime Minister and the Lord Chancellor in voting for an all-appointed House. That option was substantially rejected—by 78 votes—so does he still think that the votes of the House of Commons should be pre-eminent? If so, the option that he and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State are currently proposing directly negates what the House voted for.

Every Labour Member, at two elections, supported a manifesto commitment to create a more democratic and representative second Chamber. If they vote for the Bill that is being suggested for the next Session, they will both be reneging on that promise to the electorate and deliberately ignoring the votes of this House on 4 February.

The Minister has just said that he wants stability and sustainability. Pull the other one! There is nothing sustainable about his proposition.

We now refer to the Department for Constitutional Affairs as "DECAF". It is living up to its name. The real radical reform originally intended by Labour Members and their Government has been sucked out of it and neither House will accept this unpalatable mess.

Mr. Leslie: What interesting mathematics the hon. Gentleman proposes. He says that, supposedly, there is consensus in this Chamber for an elected second Chamber. I do not know which version of *Hansard* he has been reading, but my tally of the votes suggests that only 272 hon. Members were in favour while 289 were against, which means that the House rejected the option of an elected second Chamber. It is clear that there was no consensus in this House on the way forward.

In the face of Parliament's decisions, what should the Government do? We need to make progress where we can. For the Liberal Democrats, of all parties, to find themselves in the ridiculous situation of supporting the retention of hereditary peers in the second Chamber is an outrage. I do not understand how they can call themselves Liberal Democrats. We need to abolish the remaining hereditary peers. That is what most ordinary people would demand.

It is important to underline the fact that the Government are taking steps to fulfil our manifesto commitments. We want a more legitimate and representative second Chamber. We need to move forward where we can. We are also proposing a statutory appointments commission. Those are steps

[Mr. Leslie]

forward. Of course, the door remains open for further reform, but we need to take opportunities, while we can, to remove undesirable elements of the status quo.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): My hon. Friend is a fair-minded man, so he will confirm that all the Government's previous proposals for reform of the Lords involved the abolition of hereditary peers. He will also admit that what distinguishes the package that he has just announced is that it is the first time that the Government have presented proposals for reform that do not include provision for any Member of the second Chamber to be elected by the British public.

May I warn my hon. Friend against the delusion that an independent commission will make appointments popular? During the two years when I was Leader of the House, we begged the Appointments Commission not to come up with any more names because when it did there was a public relations disaster. Does he understand that the reason for that unpopularity is that the British people find it offensive that they have no say on who sits in a Chamber that is passing laws on them?

On my hon. Friend's arithmetic, as he is a fair-minded man, will he also accept that the proposal for an all-appointed House got 235 votes and was rejected by 323 votes? That was a somewhat larger majority than I heard him mention a minute ago. Is not it the case that the all-appointed option received the fewest votes in the House and had the biggest majority against it? I confess that I am rather confused, so can my hon. Friend remind me why we consulted the House of Commons if we intended to go ahead with the measure that was least popular among Members of Parliament?

Mr. Leslie: My right hon. Friend was intimately involved in the decisions leading up to the votes last February. Although, as he is aware, no consensus emerged for an all-appointed second Chamber, an all-elected second Chamber or, indeed, any element of election in the second Chamber, it is clear that we must have regard to where we are now and what we can do next. We could leave the hereditaries in the second Chamber in perpetuity or we can take steps to remove that anomaly—that anachronism—and I believe that that is the right thing to do.

My right hon. Friend is correct to suggest that, at present, we do not propose to make changes in composition. The Government are not saying that this is the final stage of reform, but we must be conscious of the fact that progress has to be made and that is what we want to do. Appointments will need to be a feature for the time being, so the statutory appointments commission is a step towards greater legitimacy for those who sit in the second Chamber. That proposal was in our manifesto and my right hon. Friend was involved in its authorship.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): I accept that there was no consensus on Lords reform in this Chamber in February, but was that not largely due to the decision of the Prime Minister and some members of the Cabinet to abrogate all their previous commitments for a more democratic upper House? Has not that long-standing Labour commitment formally come to an end today? That commitment had lived on—there was even a commitment to the Wakeham report in the last Labour manifesto—but has not it come to a formal end with the words of the Leader of the House a few days ago that there would be a democratic method of appointment? Will the Minister tell his right hon. Friend that we have a word in the English language for "democratic method of appointment"? It is "elections". In the absence of elections to the upper House, will not we be left with a weaker upper Chamber in a weaker Parliament? In those circumstances, is not it ludicrous to speak of an overall reduction in the influence of the Prime Minister of the day?

Mr. Leslie: The right hon. Gentleman seeks to imply that the result of the vote in February was all the Prime Minister's doing. However, as he knows, there was a free vote. He suggests that we should have an all-elected or partially elected second Chamber. In that case, why did the Conservatives in the other House vote by an overwhelming majority for a fully appointed second Chamber? How does he propose to reach a consensus, to find a result, when members of his party in the other House are voting for appointment? We must have regard to the outcome of those votes and ensure that we can take steps forward. For the Conservatives to suggest that they want an elected element when their colleagues in the other place would prevent that very thing is to look in both directions.

Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): Is what my hon. Friend now proposes intended as an interim proposal? If so, how long will the interim period be? If it is only an interim proposal, what steps is he taking to put in hand the further reforms that he refers to and what machinery does he intend to invent for that purpose? May I ask him about a specific point? Almost everyone who has commented on Lords reform, from the royal commission onwards, has said that, even if we are just doing some tidying up, one thing that we need to do is to break the link between service in a second legislative chamber and the honours system. Will the proposals that he now offers us break that link?

Mr. Leslie: On the last point that my hon. Friend makes, the consultation document raises the issue of the link between the peerage and membership of the second Chamber, and we feel that that issue would perhaps merit investigation, but not until we find a consensus about composition. Indeed, that is precisely the point of his first question. We feel that it will eventually be possible to find some way through on the question of composition. We cannot say how long that will take, not least because of the muddled results that we had when Parliament voted on this issue. We want to create a stable second Chamber for the time being and to discuss with the Joint Committee the next steps that might lie ahead, and I look forward to those discussions.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): Can the Minister confirm whether a direct consequence of the Bill that he has proposed today is that the Government will find it easier to get contentious legislation through the second Chamber? If that is the case, how could he tell the House in his statement that the proposals will contribute to the further strengthening of Parliament?

Mr. Leslie: The right hon. Gentleman was a Secretary of State in an Administration who had an overall majority in both Houses of Parliament for 18 years, so for the consultation document to say that we no longer feel that it is right for any Government to have an overall majority in the second Chamber is the right way forward. We feel that that is the best way to progress, to ensure that we have balance and a fair system in the second Chamber. This is certainly nothing about ensuring that we have our business pushed through in any different way. The right hon. Gentleman should realise that, if that were the case, we would copy the previous Conservative Administration, but we reject the approach that they enjoyed for such a long time.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): As someone who served on the royal commission for a year, may I congratulate my hon. Friend on a statement that fulfils the Labour party manifesto commitment on the Wakeham report? What my hon. Friend has announced is fulfilment of the spirit and a large part of the letter of the report—namely, the establishment of a statutory appointments commission that is required to take account of the votes cast at the previous general election and the removal of patronage from the Prime Minister, plus the abolition of the 92 hereditaries. It is an extremely sensible statement; the Government deserve credit for it; and it is not in the least surprising that, when the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) was rejected at the last election, the Government's commitment in beating him is now being carried out.

Mr. Leslie: May I take this opportunity to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend and, indeed, Opposition Members for their role on the royal commission? He is right to say that we are taking steps to implement our manifesto commitments. Of course, it is a shame that we could not reach consensus in the House of Commons on the question of composition, but it is right to remove the hereditaries from the second Chamber and to establish a statutory appointments commission. How interesting it is to hear the disappointing response from Opposition Members, who will apparently oppose removing the hereditary principle from the second Chamber.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Why does not the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs understand that constitutions—even our unwritten one—have checks and balances, and that, when they are changed, the checks and balances have to be either maintained or replaced? He has already ignored the views of the judges that his proposals provide no means at Cabinet level to assert judicial independence. He now proposes to ignore the views of all the people in the country who have seen the Lords act as a check on an over-powerful Government and do not want the House of Lords to be changed, unless it is changed in a way that maintains that authority and that ability to challenge the Government.

Mr. Leslie: I do not quite know which document the right hon. Gentleman has been reading. The Government wish to see not only a second Chamber with no overall Government majority, but an appointments commission that will determine the timing and number of those appointed in that manner. The document also spells out the fact that the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs should have a role in protecting judicial independence. It is not true that the Government somehow want to blur the lines between the different branches of the constitution. Quite the contrary— we seek the proper separation of powers between the judiciary, the Executive and the legislature.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): May I direct the House's attention to the constitutional reform document in relation to the office of the Lord Chancellor, and say, as Second Church Estates Commissioner, that the Church welcomes the consultation document in relation to ecclesiastical appointments, parochial appointments, the Royal Peculiars and other ecclesiastical functions? The Church welcomes the proposals in relation to a disengagement of the Church from the state, rather than disestablishment, but may I ask the Minister to confirm that what we seek in relation to Church appointments is to give back to the Church what rightly belongs to it and to maintain for the state that which it is appropriate for the state to maintain?

Mr. Leslie: My hon. Friend is right to suggest that the consultation document on the office of the Lord Chancellor contains no proposals on disestablishment, but there are interesting tracts on ecclesiastical patronage, visitatorial rights, the Royal Peculiars and the chapels royal, which I know all hon. Members will want to look at in much more detail. There are questions about whether Ministers or perhaps the Church of England would be best placed to undertake some of those functions, and we will not allow some of those details to go without proper scrutiny and proper attention.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): May I gently remind the hon. Gentleman that, contrary to what he said at the outset of his answers, there is not a Conservative majority in the other place? Will he tell us what he proposes to do beyond reciting the apology that he gave at the beginning of his statement? Does he intend to look into how that statement came to be published in the newspapers some days ago? Has he considered whether the element of retrospection is complicit with the European Convention? How will the proposals improve Parliament's ability to hold the Executive to account?

Mr. Leslie: I do not know where the hon. and learned Gentleman's arithmetic comes from. If he looks back at the numbers in the different parties, he will see that the Conservative party is by far the most overwhelming party in the second Chamber.

As for the question about the reports in Sunday newspapers, as I said in my statement, they were certainly not authorised and we are investigating that matter. However, as with many issues, particularly those that are as large as this, it is not surprising that things leak out, but I deplore such leaks and I certainly hope that we can continue to make statements to Parliament first.

[Mr. Leslie]

It is right that we have the proper separation of powers and proper scrutiny of legislation, and I believe that the proposed measures will aid that in many different ways.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): May I urge my hon. Friend to open wider the door to further reform, given not only that an all-appointed House was the least popular option in this House, but that the results of the earlier consultation showed strong public support for a greater elected element? May I also ask my hon. Friend, given the divisions on this issue that undoubtedly exist across the House, whether there will be a free vote?

Mr. Leslie: We do not intend to introduce legislation that includes matters on composition precisely because we had the free votes that took place last February, when no consensus emerged. We had two choices to make: to do nothing and continue with the status quo, or to take steps to continue to make progress on reform, to remove the hereditaries and to introduce a statutory appointments commission. That is indeed what the legislation will propose.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Does the Minister accept that documents that suggest that the Anglican Church existed before the Reformation hardly fill one with confidence about the accuracy of their contents? Can he name any second Chamber anywhere in the world that has more accumulated expertise, experience or ability to hold the Government to account than the House of Lords? As he said that the new House of Lords will be significantly different, how can it be significantly better?

Mr. Leslie: It can be significantly better if 92 of its Members are not there by virtue of their birthright. The hon. Gentleman seems to suggest that if we remove those people who were there by virtue of that automatic ticket of inheritance, we somehow reduce the expertise or independence of mind of the second Chamber. He is mistaken in that. I believe that we can have a contemporary chamber that is legitimate and that can be more representative. If he scrutinises the proposals in the document with more care, perhaps he will find himself agreeing with it.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): My hon. Friend the Minister said that the Government intend to create a stable and sustainable upper House. By that, I take it that they intend to make stable and sustainable an all-appointed House, which, as has already been observed, was the least popular option. I stood on a manifesto that called for the upper House not only to be more representative but more democratic. I for one do not approach manifestos on a pick-and-mix basis. Will he therefore tell me what opportunity I will have, as a Labour Member of Parliament, to vote for a more democratic upper House if I am to be denied the chance this time to vote for any form of election?

Mr. Leslie: My hon. Friend must realise that the votes that took place last February changed the landscape significantly in a number of different ways. I believe that it is still possible, however, to move towards greater legitimacy for the second Chamber. The abolition of the hereditaries, an independent statutory appointments commission and making sure that those appointments reflect the shares of the votes cast of the previous general election, are a step towards a more democratic second Chamber. We do not close the door to future considerations on composition. It is just the next stage, not the final stage, but we must make progress while we can. I hope that my hon. Friend will recognise that we live in the real world and that we must be pragmatic about the progress that we can make, particularly given the lack of consensus that emerged in those February votes.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (North-East Hampshire): Does the Minister accept that this document does nothing to make the House of Lords more democratic?

Mr. Leslie: As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden), I believe that there are a number of ways in which greater legitimacy can be achieved for the second Chamber if we evolve from a hereditary to a more contemporary chamber. That is a step towards a more democratic House of Lords. If we remove hereditaries, we create a more legitimate Chamber. If the statutory appointments commission can reflect the shares of the votes cast or seats won at the previous general election, that, too, is a step towards a more democratic second Chamber. I accept, however, that hon. Members will have different views about it. It is precisely because there was no resolution in the votes in the House of Commons on this matter that we are where we are. I therefore believe that we must make those steps forward where we can.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Can my hon. Friend explain why he thinks that he can make progress with the proposals put to us today for the reform of the House of Lords when his proposal is the one that was most heavily defeated in this House?

Mr. Leslie: I hope that I have been clear in expressing the Government's views on future considerations on composition. We do not close the door to future decisions on how the Second Chamber should be composed. Indeed, we will discuss with the Joint Committee whether we can find a consensus and perhaps move forward. However, it was evident back in February, as all hon. Members will recall, that there was no consensus, and we hear arguments on both sides. Are we to do nothing, or are we to remove the hereditary peers and create a statutory appointments commission while we can, and try to reach a final stage at a later date?

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): Everybody knows that things did not pan out in February quite as had been intended, including those who may have opposed or supported an all-elected Chamber. That was partly because there were so many votes on offer, and a good number of people for whom this is not the most important issue in the world got somewhat confused between all the options. What the Government now propose is a take-it-or-leave-it single option. Why do the Government not offer three or four options—such as an

all-elected, largely elected or all-appointed Chamber—and put it to the vote? The Minister and the Government will thereby see that there is overwhelming support in this Chamber for a largely elected House. If the Government do not do that, will not the public be able to see that that side of the Chamber, or at least the Government seeking to lead that side of the Chamber, has now concluded that it does not want any kind of democracy in the second Chamber, and that this side of the Chamber offers the only way in which the public, who want it, can get it?

Mr. Leslie: I do not wish to give a history lesson to the hon. Gentleman, but back in February, the Joint Committee proposed seven options. Indeed, there was also an option on a unicameral second Chamber, which was defeated. An all-appointed second Chamber was defeated, an all-elected chamber was defeated, 20 per cent. elected was defeated, 80 per cent. elected was defeated, 40 per cent. elected was defeated, 60 per cent. elected was defeated and 50 per cent. elected was defeated. There was therefore no consensus at that time. Those options were chosen by the Joint Committee, members of which come both from this House and the second Chamber. It is therefore perfectly reasonable for the Government to respond in some way to that situation, bringing forward those reforms that are necessary and that can be achieved.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): May I congratulate my hon. Friend—*[Interruption.]* May I congratulate him on coming up with a solution that maintains the primacy of this elected House of Commons and gets rid of the last vestiges of power of the descendants of robber barons? Will he give me two assurances? First, will the statutory appointments commission be required to take account of geographical representation, particularly Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland? Secondly—*[Interruption.]* I am happy to stay here. Notwithstanding the great improvement in the composition of the second Chamber, will he assure me that we will not give it any more powers to scrutinise Finance Bills?

Mr. Leslie: My hon. Friend is clearly very popular in the Chamber, and I am glad that he provoked such a welcome to his question. I agree, as do both sides of the House—at least there is some consensus on this point—that the House of Commons should be supreme and that the elected Chamber should have primacy. When it comes to composition, however, we still have no consensus. On the statutory appointments commission and whether it would have regard to the make-up of society, the consultation paper proposes that one option could be for it to consider not just issues such as the balance of men and women, ethnicity and so forth but the geographic representation of the nations and regions of the United Kingdom. On his second point, I reaffirm the important principle that the House of Commons should have supremacy on financial matters. The privileges that we have had are well and long established, and I know that the other place will not wish to interfere with those important principles.

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): Is the Minister aware that for a great many of us who are genuinely and fully committed to reform of the other place, this proposal is a fudge that is the worst of all worlds? The core question is the legitimacy of the other place. As long as we can say that it is unelected and therefore illegitimate, it will simply not work. Will he not understand that there is only one valid appointments commission, and that is the people, through the ballot box?

Mr. Leslie: I think that the hon. Gentleman is in the unique position of having served in both Houses, so he knows a certain amount but not, clearly, everything that needs to be known about these questions. He expresses his view, and hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber express different views. Some prefer the composition to be more elected and some prefer it to be more appointed. His view did not prevail, however, in the votes that we had in the House of Commons—[HON. MEMBERS: "Yours didn't."] Nor did my personal view prevail, and I am quite prepared to accept that. What should we do? Should we move forward or continue to have hereditary peers in the second Chamber? I do not believe that that is acceptable and I hope that my hon. Friends and other hon. Members will agree.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): As the Government are in a mess over House of Lords reform and the Commons has rejected seven different options and given no steer on what should happen, is the Minister on the lookout for alternative ideas? Tony Benn wrote a pamphlet in the late 1950s, when he was known as Anthony Wedgewood-Benn, in which he suggested that the Privy Council should become the second Chamber. That would have the distinct advantage of sending all the right honourables along the Corridor and leaving the rest of us here to get on with some serious business.

Mr. Leslie: My hon. Friend seems to be bidding for a place on the Joint Committee. As I said, we are happy to discuss any proposals that come forward with the Joint Committee. I am not sure whether the former right hon. Member for Chesterfield would be best placed to devise a consensus across both sides of the House. The Government are not in a mess, as my hon. Friend suggested. The House of Commons remains divided, so we must make progress as we can.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Given that it is the Minister's misfortune to present the hypocritical sophistry that passes for Government policy on this matter, and in the light of his failure effectively to respond to the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) or the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden), will he have a last stab at explaining to the House how it can be democratic to proceed with the less popular option of appointment rather than the more popular option of election?

Mr. Leslie: By the time that the hon. Gentleman got to his question, he had raised a specific point on how we can step towards a more democratic second Chamber. Yet, we found ourselves in a situation in which neither the House of Lords nor this House would support such a move. We must ask whether the retention of hereditary peers would mean that the second Chamber would be

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more or less democratic. I believe that retaining hereditary peers, who are there by virtue of their birth, would be less democratic and that they should go.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): My hon. Friend will be glad to hear that I shall support the Bill on the ground that I do not want to go back to my constituents or local Labour party to tell them that I voted to keep hereditary peers. In February, I voted for a 100 per cent. democratically elected Chamber and a 100 per cent. appointed Chamber because I do not believe in the hybrid system. I went to hear the statement in the other place and Lord Strathclyde, the leader of the Conservatives, threatened to use hereditary peers to interrupt Government business because he did not agree with the policy. Does my hon. Friend agree that the killer comment came from Lord Marsh, who sits on the Cross Benches? He reminded the other place that the Conservative party had a majority in this House and the other House for 18 years yet did nothing about reforming the House of Lords, so we should take no lessons in democracy from Conservatives.

Mr. Leslie: It is interesting that Opposition parties have made not one proposal to try to rectify the balance of the political composition in the second Chamber or to suggest that there should be more Labour peers, who are in a small minority in the second Chamber. I heard Lord Strathclyde's comments and I trust that I should not interpret them as meaning that he would obstruct parliamentary business, because that would be inappropriate. It is possible to take steps toward a final stage and, especially, a consideration of composition, but for the time being, we must recognise that we are where we are and that we need to get rid of the hereditary peers. I am glad to have my hon. Friend's support.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): As one of those who has adamantly opposed any form of election to the second Chamber and is therefore intrinsically more sympathetic to the central thrust of what the Minister has said than many of his Back-Bench colleagues, may I tell him that I am not happy about the idea of the appointments commission either? Why would it be intrinsically better for the power of appointment to be taken away from the Prime Minister, who is democratically accountable, and given instead to a unaccountable and unelected commission that is currently composed of a building society grandee, a governor of the BBC and an activist from Islington?

Mr. Leslie: We want to create a new statutory appointments commission. One of our proposals is that the commission should make its appointments free from the Prime Minister's patronage or interference and that the number of appointments that it makes should reflect the numbers of seats won or votes cast in a previous general election. That would represent a step toward a more legitimate appointments process. I urge the hon. Gentleman to investigate the proposal more closely because, of course, it is supported by the Conservative Front Benchers.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Why can we not be honest and remind people that the Prime Minister made his position clear a week before the crucial February vote? He wanted a wholly appointed second Chamber, which is something that I repudiate. If there were a vote in the Labour party outside the Chamber, the overwhelming majority of people would vote for—

Mr. Foulkes: Abolition.

Mr. Prentice: If the party did not vote for abolition, it would vote for a wholly elected second Chamber.

Mr. Foulkes: Abolition.

Mr. Prentice: May I ask my right hon. Friend to let me finish? On the theme of honesty, I have in my hand the Labour party national policy forum consultation document on democracy and citizenship. It says, "We believe"—that includes people such as myself—that individuals should

"govern their society effectively through democratic institutions."

How can a wholly appointed second Chamber be squared with that aspiration to bring democracy to our institutions?

Mr. Leslie: My hon. Friend expresses his frustrations, which I think are largely channelled toward the lack of consensus last February, because if his opinion had prevailed, progress could perhaps have been made. All hon. Members expressed their views—he expressed his, I expressed mine and the Prime Minister expressed his—but a majority was not achieved for any of the options proposed at the time. We therefore face the question of whether to keep or reject the hereditary peers. I believe that it is right to remove them.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): I respect the Minister's attempts to argue his case, but Opposition Members and, especially, Labour Members, have pointedly made it clear time after time that it is to be welcomed if we take it for granted that we should get rid of the hereditaries. The argument then shifts to what we should do. Those of us who voted for an elected Chamber in February want another chance to have that vote. Why should I and other hon. Members not be given the chance to go for that option before the next general election? I have not heard a single argument this afternoon that has convinced me that I should be denied that right.

Mr. Leslie: With the greatest respect to my hon. Friend, we had a lengthy and detailed opportunity to resolve some of the questions in February this year and the House declined to resolve the matter. Should we spend our time constantly revisiting the issue, perhaps at the expense of other priorities? Our constituents want to us to consider public services and other constitutional matters too. We must have regard to the decisions that Parliament took on 4 February yet make progress on disqualifying Members of the House of Lords who are convicted of serious offences, on setting up the statutory appointments commission and on removing hereditaries from the second Chamber. Many of those commitments were in our manifesto, so we must be realistic about making progress when we can.

Mr. Anthony D. Wright (Great Yarmouth): We are losing sight of the moves that we have already made to

reform the second Chamber, on which the Government should be congratulated. I take on board the comments that have been made about this House's desire for a proportion, if not all, of the second Chamber to be directly elected, but I take issue with my hon. Friend's points about composition. He agreed with the comment in the Joint Committee's report that the status quo of the composition of the House of Lords was undesirable. Maintaining that composition should not be an option rather than merely being "undesirable" because this House's will is that the status quo should not be an option.

Secondly, the extended activities of the second Chamber have been mentioned and it has been stressed that the pre-eminence of this House must be uppermost in people's minds. Will my hon. Friend give another assurance that there will be no such extension in respect of financial matters, such as the Finance Bill, and that we will resist all calls from the second Chamber to extend its role in that way?

Mr. Leslie: I confirm that the Government oppose any diminution of our rights and privileges to constrain the second Chamber in respect of financial privilege. My hon. Friend quotes the Joint Committee report as saying that the status quo is undesirable. We agree with that. Of course, the hereditary element is a significant part of that composition, which is why we want to remove it.

My hon. Friend is right to say that we should recognise the great progress that has been made. We have already got rid of more than 600 hereditary peers, and my colleagues have had a significant role in achieving that. We have proposed a new Supreme Court, abolition of the office of Lord Chancellor and the establishment of a new independent judicial appointments commission. We have also given devolution to the nations and regions. Our constitutional programme is significant, but we still need to move forward. That is exactly what the proposals suggest.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Delighted as I would be to see the back of the hereditary peers, and intrigued as I am at the prospect of Jeffrey Archer not only being removed from the House of Lords but applying to return to it—that really would be a work of fiction—is there not an enormous irony? Not only are the 92 hereditary peers the only elected Members of the second Chamber, but my hon. Friend's proposal is the least popular option in the House, the country and the parliamentary Labour party. Is he still open to proposals to improve this measly measure so that, for instance, we can get rid of the equally illegitimate bishops, who should no longer sit in the House of Lords, and provide for a third stage of House of Lords reform?

Mr. Leslie: My hon. Friend is eager for more reform and we intend to provide it in our proposals. I underline that we do not close the door to future consideration of composition. We will continue to listen and respond to proposals and to discuss the deliberations of the Joint Committee with it to discover whether a consensus can emerge. This is not the final stage, but we have to accept that the decisions of the February votes provide us with a need to achieve a stable and sustainable House of Lords for the time being. That is basically what the proposals in our documents do.

Points of Order

2.23 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I raise Government abuse of Standing Order No. 22? It was clear from my exchange with the Leader of the House earlier that he is not prepared to protect the interests of Back Benchers on such a vital matter. You will know that as a result of changes in Standing Orders, the privilege of Members to ask priority written questions has been restricted to five such questions on any one day, yet Ministers, who hitherto said that they were so hard pressed that such a restriction was necessary, are not answering the questions on the named day.

There may be an excuse for that if the question is complicated, but why cannot straightforward questions—such as one on the costs of policing the Labour party conference in Bournemouth, the answer to which is in excess of £1.9 million—be answered on the day on which they are asked? I have just been in touch with the private office of the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. It is clear that the answer to a question that I tabled for answer today is not yet available. That question reads:

"if he will attend a meeting with students to discuss top-up fees when he visits the University of Bournemouth in October."

That is hardly an exacting question that needs a lot of research. The fact that it has not been answered is surely an abuse of the House. It shows that there is not much point in the House returning in the middle of September if Ministers are not going to respond to questions.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Mr. Speaker would clearly expect Ministers to respond in accordance with the Standing Orders of the House. The fact that the matter has been raised will mean that Mr. Speaker will consider the points raised.

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. A constituent of mine, John Tero, developed cancer while he was in prison and is now desperately ill. He was also the victim of a miscarriage of justice, which makes his position more serious. Because of grave concerns about the way in which he was treated, I referred his complaint to the Prison Service ombudsman. Bearing in mind the roles and responsibilities of ombudsmen, constituents and MPs, will you give a ruling on whether it was procedurally correct for the Home Office to make a statement to a radio station two days ago, giving the broad findings of the ombudsman's report, when, to my knowledge, the investigation has not been concluded and the complainant, my constituent, has not been consulted and is gravely ill?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Although that is not formally a point of order, Mr. Speaker is grateful to the hon. Lady for bringing the matter to his attention. I want to express Mr. Speaker's sympathy to the hon. Lady's constituent. Mr. Speaker would wish that the hon. Lady be given the opportunity to meet the Home Secretary to discuss the issues regarding the release of information from the ombudsman to the Home Office and its later transmission to the media before her constituent was informed.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. "Erskine May" describes certain words and phrases as unparliamentary. Hon. Members sometimes use such words in the heat of the moment and it is difficult for Mr. Speaker, you and your colleagues to keep track of that.

Earlier today, the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) used the term "hypocritical sophistry". I think that that is pretty near to something that would be ruled out by "Erskine May". In Prime Minister's Question Time, I have heard the Prime Minister use the words "deceit" and "lies"—rather, I have heard the Leader of the Opposition use the words "deceit" and "lies" in relation to what the Prime Minister has been doing. It would be useful to go over those exchanges to ensure that the "Erskine May" rules are being upheld. I am in no way criticising Mr. Speaker or you and your colleagues, but it is very important that we—in particular, the Leader of the Opposition—do not use unparliamentary terms.

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is important that all Members think carefully about their use of language. The comments to which the right hon. Gentleman referred were not directed at particular hon. Members. I am right in saying that Mr. Speaker would always ensure that the customs and traditions of the House are upheld.

Orders of the Day

Arms Control and Disarmament (Inspections) Bill *[Lords]*

[Relevant document: Third Report from the Defence Committee, Session 2002-03, Arms Control and Disarmament Inspections Bill (HC 321), and the Government response thereto, Second Special Report from the Committee, Session 2002-03, HC 754.]

Order for Second Reading read.

2.28 pm

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill concerns the adapted version of the conventional armed forces in Europe treaty—the CFE treaty—signed in Paris on 19 November 1990. The agreement on adaptation of the treaty on conventional armed forces in Europe, known more familiarly as the adapted CFE treaty, was signed by all states parties to the CFE treaty at Istanbul on 19 November 1999.

The CFE treaty limits the holdings of five categories of heavy weapons—tanks, armoured combat vehicles, artillery, combat aircraft and attack helicopters—by the 30 member states of NATO and the former Warsaw pact. It applies to the land territory of states parties in Europe. The treaty includes an important transparency and verification regime. It is seen as a cornerstone of European security and has resulted in the destruction of more than 50,000 heavy weapons in Europe. However, the treaty was negotiated at the end of the cold war and needed adaptation to reflect the break-up of the Warsaw pact and NATO enlargement.

The adapted CFE treaty was therefore negotiated and signed by states parties to the CFE treaty at Istanbul in 1999. It replaces the old Warsaw pact-NATO bloc-to-bloc system with national and territorial ceilings for heavy weapons. The adapted CFE treaty provides for greater transparency than the present CFE treaty through a substantially enhanced system of information provision. In particular, it increases the amount of military information that each of the 30 states parties to the treaty exchanges, and enhances the regime of inspection. The adapted CFE treaty includes provisions for new European states to join, and also has an enhanced inspection regime, including a new type of inspection that could involve a large area and would not necessarily be limited to military bases. Together with the fact that some parts of military sites are increasingly owned and operated by private companies, that means that we need additional legislation to allow access to non-Ministry of Defence-owned property.

The main provisions of this short, technical Bill amend the Arms Control and Disarmament (Inspections) Act 1991 to provide for the additional rights of entry to private land that are required to implement the additional inspection requirements of the protocol on inspection in the agreement on adaptation. On 3 February, the Secretary of State signed a memorandum confirming that the Bill's provisions are compatible with the European convention on human rights. That was subsequently confirmed by my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), who was then Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

The Bill also confers a power on Her Majesty to make further amendments to the 1991 Act relating to inspections by Order in Council, should they be needed to implement future amendments to the CFE treaty relating to inspections. During the Bill's passage through the House of Lords, the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee agreed that that level of delegation and control was appropriate. The Bill thus provides the legislation necessary for the UK to ratify the adapted CFE treaty quickly when the time is right. While the UK is committed to the treaty's earliest possible entry into force, our position and that of our NATO allies remains that ratification can only be envisaged in the context of full compliance by all states parties with agreed treaty limits, consistent with commitments in the CFE Final Act. As right hon. and hon. Members will be aware, those commitments are those agreed between Russia, Georgia and Moldova on the closure of Russian bases and the withdrawal of Russian troops and equipment from the territory of the other two states, which have not yet been fulfilled. We and other NATO allies continue to urge Russia to work with Georgia and Moldova to resolve the outstanding issues on the basis of the principle of host nation consent.

The Secretary of State will not bring the Bill into force in accordance with clause 3 until the Government are ready to ratify the agreement on adaptation. When the Secretary of State decides that the time is right to bring the Bill into force in accordance with clause 3, the Government are content to notify the House at least 21 days before their intention to proceed to ratification. I hope that the House will be able to support the Bill.

2.33 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): The official Opposition certainly welcome the Bill's objective, which reflects the desire of the whole House and the country for a safer world with fewer armaments, particularly those that no longer serve any strategic purpose. Having said that, I am a little surprised by the short time that the Minister took to introduce the Bill. Good as it is, it includes a number of things that stretch the official Opposition's good will a little and the charity of my colleagues a good long way. I hope that when the Minister responds to what is likely to be a short debate he will be able to demonstrate that our charity is not misplaced by giving us more specific assurances on a number of points than he provided in his opening remarks.

Sadly, I have a strange feeling that our debate—perhaps given our limited presence in the House, colloquium would be a more appropriate phrase—will not be leading the news broadcasts later. That is a shame, because the treaty that we are effectively adapting today has by any standards been a conspicuous success and something that we should celebrate. It has played a major part in building the peace and security of our continent, which we should never take for granted. The many violent events that have convulsed Europe and cost millions of lives in the last century, most recently in the Balkans, should remind us that peace is not the natural order of our continent. One of our prime duties in the House is to work for the greater security of our constituents, and today we are considering a matter of great importance to that security.

[Mr. Peter Luff]

This debate is inherently above party politics and, as was evident in the debates in the other place to which the Minister referred, there is a lot of common ground to be found. However, we will seek clarification of a number of points, and I am confident that the Minister, with his customary good humour and diligence, will be able to provide that. It is right to put on record the House's gratitude to the Select Committee on Defence for its excellent third report for the 2002–03 Session on the Bill. It was published in April, and is an excellent piece of pre-legislative scrutiny that genuinely focuses and informs our debate today. I am sure that, like me, the Minister is a strong believer in pre-legislative scrutiny, especially on technical matters such as the Bill, where some calm deliberation, ahead of the often more partisan nature of the processes involved in the Bill's passage through the House and Committee, can assist hon. Members. Such is the Defence Committee's third report, and I commend it to anyone wishing to understand the issues raised by the Bill.

I should also like to express my gratitude in preparing for this debate to the Library, for its excellent research paper. I do not know how often this has been done in the past by the Library or the Government, but the text of the Arms Control and Disarmament (Inspections) Act 1991, as amended by the Bill, is included in an extremely helpful appendix to the research document. The Government might consider incorporating such amended measures in explanatory notes to technical Bills in future. Frankly, the Bill as it stands does not make a great deal of sense. That is not a criticism of the parliamentary draftsman or the Government—the changes that the Bill will bring into effect are difficult to understand. The Library's approach of crossing out the bits in the 1991 Act that we are repealing and deleting is helpful, and assisted my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds) and I as we prepared for this debate. The Library therefore deserves special thanks.

The Minister rightly put the Bill in context, and explained how the original treaty placed limits on the numbers of combat aircraft, tanks, attack helicopters, armoured vehicles and so on. In fact, he rather undersold the case for the treaty which, I think I am right in saying, is probably the most comprehensive arms control ever agreed in history. It is less inherently fascinating than the discussion about nuclear weapons that tended to dominate the news headlines at the time, but the fact is that this vital treaty has provided a means of establishing a military balance in Europe.

First and foremost, it was an arms reduction treaty, which demanded that the contracting parties reduce their heavy weaponry and equipment by 50,000 items—a not insubstantial figure by any reckoning. Just as importantly, as the Minister emphasised, it was a conflict prevention treaty aimed at increasing transparency, building confidence, and reducing tension. It did that by preventing provocative and destabilising concentrations of military forces, and still does its work today, even unadapted, as it remains in force, pending the entry into force of the agreement on adaptation.

The fact such a treaty could be agreed reflected the mood of increased co-operation and good will between the two blocs towards the end of the cold war. Verification of compliance was achieved by inspections and the treaty's provisions were incorporated in UK law by the 1991 Act. The second CFE review conference was held in Vienna in May to June 2001, and made the following observations on implementation:

"The implementation of the Treaty since its entry into force in 1992 has brought positive results including significantly reduced holdings of Treaty-limited equipment and increased confidence through transparency and predictability involving conventional armed forces. The States Parties welcomed the impressive progress that had been made in implementing the Treaty, including the reduction of more than 59,000 pieces of conventional armaments and equipment, the exchange of about 6,000 notifications per year in addition to annual exchanges of information and the conduct of more than 3,300 on-site inspections and observation visits to verify compliance with the provisions of the Treaty and its associated documents. With regard to the Concluding Act on Personnel Strength, the States Parties noted with satisfaction that the personnel strength of conventional armed forces in the area of application had been reduced significantly."

That is all very good news, but not everything was perfect. The conference also concluded that

"in general the CFE Treaty was operating and being implemented in a satisfactory manner. However, there were a number of implementation issues requiring further consideration and resolution in the Joint Consultative Group.

The States Parties noted"—

I am still quoting from the conclusions—

"that certain numerical limitations established by the Treaty were being exceeded. The States Parties were informed that the excess, which had been declared to be of a temporary nature, had been decreased. They expect"

this was in 2001—

"that the remaining excess will be eliminated as soon as it is possible. They reaffirmed the importance of transparency with regard to the elimination of any excesses over CFE Treaty limits. In this context, they reiterated their commitment to full and continued implementation of the Treaty and its associated documents and their adherence to its numerical limitations."

Thus, there were reservations.

The rapid changes that followed the end of the cold war in 1990 could not have been envisaged at the time the treaty was originally agreed. We now know that those were of sweeping significance. I was one of the woodpeckers who attacked the Berlin wall in early 1990 with a chisel which, I remember, was, ironically, manufactured in the People's Republic of China. Little did we know what we had begun. The Warsaw pact collapsed, leaving only NATO as the military pact operating in Europe, and the USA as the single remaining superpower, which made necessary a great re-adjustment of strategic priorities and strategic thinking around the globe.

With reference to the Bill, the most important consequence of the end of the cold war was the disintegration of the USSR and the emergence of a host of new states—Czechoslovakia became the Czech and Slovak Republics, and countries such as the Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia and Armenia emerged as international players in their own right. Now a total of 30 nations are parties to the treaty.

As I am sure the Minister will agree, these changes made the control and limitation of conventional weapons in Europe no less important. Indeed, in some cases it has become more so, as out-of-area or former Soviet equipment needs to be accounted for more closely. In 1999, as the Minister told us, the agreement of adaptation was signed in Istanbul, but the 1990 treaty remains valid and takes account of the demise of the blocs, setting ceilings on a national basis, rather than a bloc basis.

One learns something all the time in the House, and I was intrigued by the table in the Library document, which sets out the national ceilings under the adaptation agreement. It is perhaps no surprise to discover that the UK has, under the national ceilings, an allowance of 843 battle tanks, 3,017 armoured combat vehicles, 583 pieces of artillery, 855 combat aircraft and 350 attack helicopters. France has rather more battle tanks than we do, at 1,226, but Armenia boasts 220 battle tanks and 220 armoured combat vehicles. To my surprise, neither Luxembourg nor Iceland boasts any. They have nul points in every category—no battle tanks, no armoured combat vehicles, no pieces of artillery and no combat aircraft.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): What about the Swedes?

Mr. Luff: They do not seem to have a national ceiling under the adaptation agreement.

Crucially, the Bill and the adaptation agreement provide for greater entry rights to private land under the inspections procedure. This is one of the issues on which we seek further clarification from the Minister, for despite the noble objectives of the Bill, it is a technical Bill and deserves scrutiny on specific points.

I turn first to the limits and burdens under the new agreement. I should be grateful if the Minister could explain the annual limit on inspections that can be carried out by one state in any given year. Equally importantly, given the tables on page 10 of the third report of the Defence Committee, does the Minister envisage that the increased liability under the 1999 agreement to host inspections under section VII, albeit with the proviso that some may be replaced by section VIII inspections, will result in an increased financial burden or burden of inconvenience to our defence establishment, or does he believe that the number of inspections carried out will remain well under the maximum limits in practice? I suspect that his answer will be the latter, so some evidence of the reasons for his conclusion would be welcome.

Similarly, what will be the impact on other parties to the treaty, especially the younger countries? There is a difficult balance to be struck between ensuring that inspections do not place an intolerably high burden on the host country, and ensuring that the inspection and verification regime is suitably strict and transparent enough to guarantee that all parties to the treaty are honouring their obligations. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the balance will be successfully achieved under the adapted treaty? I hope for rather more than a straight "Yes" from the Minister. Some explanation of the grounds for his optimism would be appreciated.

One of the most important issues in the Bill is the impact on the private sector. It is reassuring that in paragraph 18 of its report, the Defence Committee states that it believes that the position for private operators will not be

"significantly different after the Adaptation Agreement is implemented than before".

The Committee gives its reasons for that. It states:

"This is for a number of reasons: in the past less than half of the existing liability has been taken up; inspecting states will bear the cost of conducting additional inspections, and as new members join NATO the pool of other states who might wish to inspect UK forces is likely to diminish."

However, there is the potential for increased inspection of privately owned land, as the Government have acknowledged, if only because of the increased private sector role in defence matters. If my memory of my reading for the debate serves me correctly, we are discussing only matters that can be concealed behind doors of more than 2m in width. I believe that that appears in the agreement.

I do not wish to appear to be nit-picking, but I do think that the explanatory notes are a little over optimistic when they state:

"The Bill will have no impact on business."

In this context, I shall speak for a moment about Qinetiq, which has a geographically large establishment in my constituency, Mid-Worcestershire, at the former RAF Pershore site, which was a dispersal site for Vulcan bombers. The site has acquired unlooked-for fame as a result of Government policy in other very different areas, but it is one of more than 25 Qinetiq sites, of which at least two others are in Malvern in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Sir Michael Spicer), and they may all be affected by the Bill.

Qinetiq is the company in which the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency—DERA—was vested back in 2001. Since its establishment in July 2001, Qinetiq has taken ownership of these formerly MOD-owned sites, including training areas, testing sites and airfields. I know from my visits to the Pershore establishment that it is possible that inspections may be required there. Under the 1999 agreement on the adaptation of the CFE treaty, as the Library briefing paper notes, these will be defined as "declared sites" and thereby made subject to inspections under the Bill. The number of sites run by Qinetiq may well increase over the coming months and years. That, I imagine, is the Government's expectation.

Although I note that no private company or owners of a site have yet refused an inspection, I believe it is important that such companies do not risk falling foul of overly intrusive or demanding inspections through no fault of their own, but simply through an over-optimistic interpretation of the implications of the legislation. What steps have the Government taken to ensure that all those contractors, land-owners and other groups, such as Qinetiq, which could potentially be affected, are fully aware of the implications? What consultations have there been with such groups? How confident are the Government that they have got the assessment right?

I turn next to the Baltic and Balkan states. I find it interesting that they, particularly the Baltic states, are absent from the treaty. I understand that the fact the Baltic states are not parties to it has been a cause of concern to Russia in the past, given that it might permit

[Mr. Luff]

countries to station large amounts of conventional military equipment there, yet not be in breach of the treaty. As the Library note puts it, Russia believes the absence of the Baltic states from the treaty constitutes a loophole that could allow NATO to deploy large numbers of forces and equipment to a potentially threatening position, without reference to CFE limits.

Of course, we are pleased that the new agreement contains provisions for the accession of states that are not at present party to the CFE treaty. I understand, and the Minister may be able to confirm when he winds up the debate, that the Baltic states have indicated that they would consider joining as part of their accession to NATO. Could the Minister, when he sums up, set out what progress has been made in that respect and tell us whether any substantive negotiations have yet taken place? Could he also enlighten us as to the position on the Balkan states that are not parties to the treaty?

I shall speak briefly about Russia. In its helpful report, the Defence Committee stated:

"Because the Act would give the Government the ability to ratify the Agreement by Statutory Instrument, consideration of the Bill itself needs to be focussed on the question of ratification."

I am conscious that the House may feel that my remarks so far have not properly addressed the essential question. There are a number of extremely important outstanding non-compliance issues in relation to Russia, Georgia and Moldova, which I know my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds) will raise in greater depth in his winding-up speech. I simply say at this point that despite some progress, the on-going problems remain a matter of concern to the Opposition. The Minister should be aware that we will seek to explore those problems later in the debate. I hope that he will address them, as they go to the heart of the timetable of our ratification of the adapted treaty.

Mention of timetables brings me to what the Minister will be glad to hear is my last but one point. I should like to register my surprise that the Bill has taken so long to reach this House, especially as it completed its passage in the other place on 30 January this year. That time lag alone constitutes a compelling reason why we should be fully updated about what has happened in the past eight months. Given that recent days have not exactly been over-burdened with legislation, I am surprised that the Government have delayed the Bill so long. The conspiracy theorist in me asks why that is the case. Was it kept back merely to occupy us during this rather awkward September fortnight that the Government have landed on the House or is there some more substantial and genuine reason for the delay? I think that the House should be told, as the Bill has languished in purgatory for an extraordinarily long period.

My last point concerns the statutory instrument procedure, to which the Minister referred. The Opposition have reservations about the fact that the Bill contains powers to provide that future changes made by Her Majesty by Order in Council will be effected by statutory instrument and not primary legislation. It is in that specific regard that the official Opposition's charity is being stretched a little. We are looking for a rather more categorical reassurance from the Minister than he offered in his speech. Yes, the Government reassured the Select Committee on Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform, which expressed its contentment with their plans. In November 2002, now almost a year ago, it said:

"In view of the limited nature of the power and the fact that it will be subject to affirmative procedure, we consider that this level of delegation and control is appropriate."

My hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness will return to that subject, as well as to ratification issues, if he is lucky enough to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker. In essence, our position is that we regard the procedures proposed in the Bill as inadvisable, but not, on this specific and limited occasion, objectionable. We seek a reassurance over and above that which the Minister gave the House in his speech that the Government will not in future cite that exception to the general rule that treaty matters are matters for primary legislation as a precedent in respect of other treaties or modifications to them.

As the Minister knows, other more contentious treaties are in prospect, and they could also be subject to later revision. That revision might be significant in some people's eyes, if not in other people's. Opposition Members may judge such revision to be fundamental, even if the Government change their mind on that question. We remain of the view that primary legislation is the right way of dealing with treaties. I hope that he will confirm that that is the Government's view. I hope that the provision is the exception that tests the rule and does not break it.

The Minister referred to the Ponsonby rule, although he avoided that exact phrase. It is widely expected that the Government will embrace the so-called Ponsonby rule, and that appeared to be what the Minister said. It is an undertaking observed by Governments since the 1920s that treaties that have been signed and are subject to ratification are laid before the House for 21 days before being ratified. Indeed, the Government promised as much in their response to the Defence Committee in June:

"The Government is content to give a specific undertaking in the Second Reading debate on the Bill to notify the House at least 21 days in advance of its decision to proceed to ratification, to allow for additional discussion of the issues at that time."

I cannot immediately recall exactly the word that the Minister used on the Ponsonby rule in speaking about it towards the end of his speech, but it seemed to fall short of the wholehearted commitment that I thought we were getting in the Government's response to the Select Committee report.

Mr. MacShane *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Luff: I am delighted that the Minister has indicated dissent, as *Hansard* will say. There is clearly a wholehearted commitment to allow 21 days and I am grateful for that assurance.

I am still looking for one further reassurance in respect of how the Government will treat the 21 days. For example, I trust that they will not announce their decision to ratify on the first day of the Christmas recess, reducing from 21 to seven days the effective notice period for the House. As well as embracing the letter of Ponsonby, I hope that the Government will be content to embrace his spirit and give us 21 parliamentary

days—not necessarily sitting days, but 21 days during a full sitting period, or three full weeks—so that proper consideration can be given to the matter.

The Opposition believe that this is an important Bill, despite its being so concise. It reflects important international developments and also makes an important contribution to conflict prevention by reducing the number of weapons that could be deployed in Europe. It is necessary for the implementation of the 1999 agreement and for the treaty's ability to keep pace with developments. I am pleased that it has finally reached us. I hope that the Minister will be able to assist with the clarifications for which I have asked, but subject to reassurances from him, we certainly look forward to the Bill completing its passage.

2.55 pm

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): May I echo the comments of the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) in expressing surprise that it has taken quite so long for such a modest Bill to come to this end of the building from another place, considering the period that has now elapsed since it completed its stages there? None the less, it is an important measure and it is a shame that we can muster so few hon. Members in the Chamber to hear this debate and participate in it. We can only hope that in the highways and byways of Brent, to pick a place at random, people are discussing the issues as seriously as they should be.

The Liberal Democrats believe that the treaty is very important. The principle of inspections and verification is important to arms control. As my noble Friend Lord Wallace of Saltaire said last November in another place, the Bill represents a modest but useful extension of the treaty.

The original treaty has been very valuable. When we reflect on the sweeping changes that have occurred since it was passed in the international community and Europe in particular, we should perhaps accord it more credit for that stability than we are in danger of doing. Sometimes, I believe that we in this country and this House are in danger of forgetting the cold war and the effect that it had for a long time on the area covered by the treaty, from the Atlantic to the Urals. I am afraid that I cannot claim credit for physically helping to bring down the Berlin wall, as the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire did, and neither do I have the Minister's credentials in promoting the cause of democracy in places such as Poland and elsewhere in what is now central Europe. However, for those of my generation—if I may be so cheeky—it was an important development when the cold war and all the dangers that it posed was put safely in a new context. The treaty has been important in that regard. Our threats assessments tend nowadays to be slightly more focused on international terrorism, but as the hon. Gentleman said, Europe's tortured history demands that we should, in a more traditional context, continue to take issues of peace and security seriously.

In recent months, we have debated long and hard in this Chamber the enlargement of the European Union. The fact that so many of the countries that were originally parties to the treaty from the other side, if I may put it that way, are now to join us in the enlarged European Union is a great sign of progress. As that political situation has changed, the treaty should be amended to catch up with modern reality.

I do not want to repeat many of the valuable remarks that have already been made and highlight issues of disarmament that have been mentioned. I wish simply to ask the Minister for a couple of clarifications. One of the founding principles of arms control that underpins the treaty is mutual inspection. Last November, my noble Friend Lord Wallace asked Baroness Symons whether the treaty applied to United States bases in the United Kingdom or elsewhere in the treaty area. For whatever reason, the Baroness was unable or unwilling to respond to that point; perhaps the Minister would do us the courtesy of plugging that gap in our understanding.

The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire mentioned Qinetiq. I do not want to put words into his mouth, but I hope that he was not suggesting that it should get special treatment as a private institution. Given its unusual hybrid status, I understand that it may fear unreasonable intrusions, but it is not surprising that some focus should fall upon it. Will the Minister clarify how it fits into the process?

I echo hon. Members' concerns about ongoing non-compliance with existing treaty obligations, particularly by Russia—although I accept that the adaptation to the treaty recognised Russia's concerns about its border security in areas such as Georgia and Moldova. The Minister said that we continue to urge the Russians to comply. Will he tell us what progress is being made and how soon we may hope to find ourselves in the happy position of ratifying the treaty?

I reinforce what was said about the importance of Parliament having the opportunity to contribute to the debate once the Government have decided that they should ratify the treaty. To borrow the elegant phrase used by the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire, the statutory instrument approach is inadvisable, but not objectionable. Liberal Democrat Members—perhaps with more consistency, as we have been on this side of the House for longer than Labour or Conservative Members—do not like the principle at all. We must get a specific assurance from the Minister that it is specifically linked to this treaty and adaptation.

I have no desire to detain the House any further than has been necessary. Liberal Democrat Members believe that this is an important treaty that is sometimes not given enough credit for its contribution to our peace and security. In that spirit, we wish to see the Bill passed.

3.2 pm

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): Although the Bill is largely technical, and is certainly short, this has been an interesting and instructive debate. The issues addressed by the Bill are much broader than its specifics would suggest. It goes to the heart of the changes to the geopolitical landscape that have taken place over the past decade and a half and of the wider debate on arms controls and effective measures to help conflict prevention.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) said in his detailed and articulate speech, the world in which we live today has

[Mr. Mark Simmonds]

changed dramatically from that of 1990. It is therefore right that in 1999 the treaty on conventional armed forces in Europe was updated to reflect that fact. As my hon. Friend said, that has led to a reduction of 59,000 conventional armaments and some 3,300 inspections and visits. The new treaty recognises that the old blocs of the cold war are no longer so relevant. The Warsaw pact has gone, and NATO has assumed a more encompassing role, particularly in view of its planned enlargement to include former Warsaw pact countries. The 1999 treaty reflects that with the replacement of equipment ceilings for blocs with ceilings per state. I welcome that recognition that the bloc mentality is over, but I cannot but be puzzled that the Government, particularly the Minister, are still determined to forge the European Union into another bloc through the integrationist constitution.

I will not reiterate in detail the points made so ably by my hon. Friend, especially in relation to the need for technical changes to the inspections and verifications procedures. I would, however, like to evaluate what might be termed the Russian dimension, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend, by the Minister and by the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore). That is linked in many ways to ratification timings, and revolves around the principle of the free consent of host states to the deployment of foreign military equipment. Conservative Members have concerns about the Russian position in Moldova and Georgia, despite a Russian commitment to withdraw its forces from those countries by the end of 2002. In September 2002, President Putin told the United Nations Secretary-General that

"unless the Georgian leadership takes practical action to liquidate terrorists, and if bandit raids continue to originate from its territory, Russia . . . shall take adequate measures to resist the terrorist threat".

That does not suggest that as recently as this time last year President Putin envisaged that the conditions would be right for Russia to withdraw her troops. Although I appreciate that the situation in Abkhazia means that relations between Russia and Georgia remain tense, I am aware that some progress has none the less been made in reducing treaty-limited equipment levels to the required amount. I would be grateful if the Minister would tell us what progress has since been made and whether he is satisfied with efforts to resolve these issues.

Does the Minister have any idea when a UK inspection team might be able to visit the Gadauta base to verify whether it has been fully transferred from Russian control, as planned? Similarly, separatist disputes in Moldova complicate the situation there. That means that the estimated date for Russian withdrawal is now the end of 2003—a year later than planned—and it appears that even that time scale may have to be further extended. I understand that the mechanics of withdrawal are complex, especially as the aptly named separatist leader, Mr. Smirnov, controls the railways. Will the Minister update the House on any progress in that direction, given that it is now eight months since these matters were debated in the other place?

Contained within the Russian dimension is the question of armament allocation. The terms of the original treaty applied to the Russian army and land forces, but a loophole appeared to the effect that, for example, the transfer of motorised regiments to the navy could effectively remove them from inclusion in the matériels counted towards their ceilings. Does that opportunity still exist; or have changes since the original treaty and the new national ceilings effectively encompassed all matériel, regardless of the service to which it is attached?

I want to highlight a few other areas that were touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire and by my noble Friend in the other place, but still require updating and clarification from the Minister. Conservative Members have concerns about the powers that the Bill grants the Government to enact future changes to the treaty by statutory instrument. Baroness Symons offered a reassurance that such amendments would be subject to affirmative resolution. However, given that since the original treaty's enactment in UK law in 1991 it has needed to be amended in Parliament only very infrequently since, primary legislation allowing proper scrutiny once every 12 years or so does not represent an intolerable burden on the time of this House and is not something to which the Government should object. I am also concerned that such a procedure for amending treaties, although we will not oppose it in the Lobby on this occasion, should not be viewed as a precedent for amending other treaties.

I am uneasy about why this Bill is coming before us now. It has taken eight months to arrive, yet there appears to be no indication of the time scale that the Government are contemplating for ratification. I am concerned to discover that so far only Belarus and Ukraine have ratified the adaptation agreement agreed in 1999—and no NATO state has proceeded to ratification—although for most state parties the benefits of ratification would outweigh those of waiting for a resolution of the Georgian and Moldovan disputes. Are the Government determined to wait until that is resolved, despite its impact upon ratification timetables?

In addition to the Government's pledge that the matter will be laid before the House for 21 days before ratification, will the Minister tell us when he envisages ratification taking place, given that four years have already passed since the conclusion of the agreement in Istanbul? My understanding of the Bill's contents is that hon. Members are being asked to provide the Foreign Secretary with ratification powers that may last and be unused for years. The geopolitical landscape may have changed by the time the Foreign Secretary ratifies. Surely it is right for the House to have the ability to judge and deliberate on those matters in context when ratification occurs.

Does the agreement mean that our bases and facilities in Gibraltar and/or Cyprus will be subject to inspection by other parties to the treaty? Will the Minister clarify the interaction of territorial ceilings? Although I note that in most cases the two ceilings are the same, am I correct that equipment in areas that are not covered by the territorial terms of the agreement, for example, the Russian territory beyond the Urals, would remain covered by that country's national ceilings?

The debate has been important. Despite the technical nature of the Bill's provisions, the broader issues that are pertinent to the measure's background are significant foreign and defence policy questions. I am eager to listen to the Minister's response and clarification of important points that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire, the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale and I have raised. In the expectation that the Minister will offer adequate assurances, we are happy to support the important Bill and endorse the contribution of the 1990 and 1999 agreements to making a Europe a safer place.

3.11 pm

Mr. MacShane: With the leave of the House, I should like to reply to the debate. I congratulate hon. Members on solid contributions and the excellent work on the Bill. It is right to note that 59,000 major pieces of weaponry have been destroyed under the agreements. We may all take some credit for that.

Whenever the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) debates any matter with me, he makes an elegant, eloquent and erudite speech. We learned that he was a woodpecker, pecking at the Berlin wall. His nickname in the House should be "Woody" from now on. However, his speech was not wooden.

The hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds) managed to drag the Conservative party's European Union obsessions into the debate. I congratulate him on that; it is to his credit. The more the Conservative party shows its obsession and fanatical dislike of Europe, the happier I—and, I believe, the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore)—will be. If the voters of Brent, East are listening to the debate, they will doubtless take account of the Conservative party's obsession with getting Britain out of Europe when they cast their votes. *[Interruption.]* I did not want to talk about such matters, but I have to reply to the debate.

Let us revert to serious points. The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire was right to praise the work of the Select Committee on Defence. The document that it produced is good and the Committee is one of the House's best Select Committees. He was also right to draw attention to the excellent work of the international department of the Library. It does not receive the credit that its work merits. In my nine years in the House, I have found that the ladies and gentlemen who work there produce good documents and individual briefings of excellent quality for hon. Members. One great use is being able to examine documents side by side, for example, a treaty and the changes to it. That is a good way in which to explain matters to hon. Members and the public.

Several important questions have been asked, and I shall try to deal with them. If I fail to deal with any points that hon. Members have made, I hope that they will write to me. I simply want cross-party consensus on the Bill. The number of inspections was referred to. The United Kingdom currently has to undertake 18 and the number will increase to 24 if the new treaty is ratified. That is a reasonable number. The majority are in the United Kingdom and some are at our bases in Germany.

The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire asked about Qinetiq, which is an important private contractor for defence activity in the United Kingdom. Most of its managers come from the Ministry of Defence and they understand the obligations that are laid on not only this but other Governments. They accept that the inspection regime will have to be maintained. However, the number of inspections is not onerous and we have no evidence that they will impose a new business burden on the company.

We are confident that the Bill is compatible with the European convention on human rights. Article 1 of protocol 1 of the convention deals with protecting the right to property. However, the right is not unlimited and we do not believe that it will pose any difficulties to Qinetiq or other private companies.

I was asked why we were taking time to ratify. The answer is simple and the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness made it clear. The common position of all NATO member states is that we will ratify when we are satisfied that the other principal European states—of course, we mean Russia—are complying with the treaty's obligations. The hon. Gentleman was right to draw attention to the problems in Moldova and Georgia.

Inspection in Georgia has had to be put back until next year because Russia exercised its state's right to Georgian inspection. I raised the position of Moldova in Kiev on a visit to the Ukrainian Government on Sunday and Monday. We are worried about the position in Transnistria and the activities of Mr. Smirnov, including his failure to allow the proper dismantling of the Russian arms that are stored there. That is a cause of anxiety to Ukrainian and Moldovan Governments as well as to us and the Russian authorities. A region of Europe is under the control of a certain gentleman who is not prepared to operate by the rules of the treaty. That is why the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe is active there. As the Minister responsible for the OSCE's work, I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are seized of the position.

We have to discuss ratification with our partners. We want full NATO ratification—Britain should not go it alone. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Ponsonby rules will be fulfilled. Indeed, we go further because we are not considering sneaking ratification through. The treaty is important and Parliament, not only the House of Commons, should consider it. The advantage of the adapted treaty is that new states can join. As the Balkan states move closer to membership of the European Union or NATO, we hope that they will be ready to join. The treaty allows for that.

The United States is a party to the treaty and I shall write to confirm whether US facilities in the United Kingdom are declared sites under its terms. The hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale asked about that.

A point was made about the way in which to effect the treaty once it is ratified. Statutory instruments will be used to allow small, technical rules that apply to inspection regimes in the United Kingdom to be taken forward. With all due respect, I do not think that many hon. Members believe that primary legislation would be needed each time such changes were required.

Hon. Members were quite right, however, to draw attention to the increasing corpus of international law by which we are all now bound, and to the need for it to

[Mr. MacShane]

be properly considered by the House. In terms of legislation in this House, however, let us remember that we are talking about any aspect of a treaty that has been signed and ratified being transposed into domestic law. It is therefore reasonable for the Government to decide whether that should be done through primary legislation or statutory instruments.

Mr. Luff: The Minister's words have not given us quite the comfort that we were looking for on this matter. Would the use of statutory instruments be exceptional? Would the presumption be that they would not be used in treaty change legislation?

Mr. MacShane: I was not in the House during the great Maastricht debates, which are the most famous example of primary legislation carrying into effect a significant international treaty. I would find it hard to envisage the House accepting significant changes in domestic law derived from treaty obligations if they had not been properly debated in the House, but I am unable definitively to say what this or any future Government's position would be on international treaties when they are transposed into domestic law, whether by primary or secondary legislation.

I was asked about the Baltic states. As I have said, the new treaty allows new states to join, and the Baltic states are on the path to becoming NATO members. I assume that they will join other NATO members in examining ratification as and when we are satisfied that all parties to the original treaty—and now the adapted treaty—are fulfilling all its obligations.

I hope that that deals with most of the points that have been raised, but if any hon. Member requires further clarification, I shall be happy to write to them. The Bill will enable the UK to ratify the adapted CFE treaty quickly at the appropriate time. Once the adapted treaty has been ratified by all states and parties and comes into force, other states in the area of application will be able to join, thus extending the scope for co-operation on arms control throughout Europe and enhancing security and stability in the region as a whole.

The Bill is a necessary step in enabling the UK to ratify the adapted CFE treaty, but I want to assure hon. Members that legislation will not be brought into force until the time is right to do so—that is, when all states and parties have complied fully with agreed treaty limits consistent with the commitments contained in the CFE final Act. Again, I want to assure the House on the matter of the full 21 days. I do not want to give an absolute cast-iron guarantee, because I do not know where I shall be when the treaty comes for ratification. I do not know how many days might be included in a Christmas break or other break, but there is no evidence that this—or any previous or future—Government would seek to smuggle a treaty through. I know that those on the Opposition Front Bench would make jolly sure that that would not happen.

I hope that I have dealt with all the points raised in the debate. I thank all the hon. Members for their constructive questions, which have been important in clarifying matters. I hope that the House will now give the Bill a Second Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

Royal Assent

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Fireworks Act 2003

National Lottery (Funding of Endowments) Act 2003

Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Deceased Fathers) Act 2003

Northern Ireland (Monitoring Commission etc.) Act 2003

Local Government Act 2003

PETITION

Fair Trade

3.25 pm

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): I am delighted to present a petition, organised by Ms Mildred Sellers, Peter Bowler and David Tonks, of more than 1,000 residents of Knutsford, Wilmslow, Alderley Edge and the surrounding area.

The petitioners declare that they believe that the international trading system is heavily weighted in favour of the richest and most powerful countries; that in such an imbalanced world it is morally wrong to expect the poorest to compete on equal terms with the wealthiest; and that the trade rules of the world trading system must explicitly and deliberately favour the poorest countries if they are to reap the benefits of trade.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons call on the Government to do everything in their power to bring about trade justice.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Horse Racing

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Vernon Coaker.]*

3.26 pm

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): I am pleased to have secured this Adjournment debate on the Office of Fair Trading's investigation into the control of horse racing, and I am grateful to the Minister for staying behind to reply to it, and for his co-operation on this issue.

In my other role as a shadow Department of Trade and Industry Minister, part of my responsibility is for competition and consumers, but I am holding this debate as the Member of Parliament whose constituency contains the Cheltenham race course at Prestbury Park, which many people rightly consider to be the greatest race course in the world, although I have not yet seen all of them.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): The second greatest.

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend obviously disputes my opinion.

I have also been a follower of the sport of racing, particularly national hunt racing, for more than 20 years, so I have a personal interest in the matter. Having said that, I do not have a vested interest in it, in that I am not involved in any one aspect of the sport. For example, I am not an owner, trainer or breeder, or anything similar. I am just someone who loves the sport and who enjoys the odd flutter when I have time, although not usually too successfully. The point is that I come to the debate as a neutral.

The debate is urgent and extremely important to the sport of horse racing because the OFT has issued a preliminary notice that it believes that there are unacceptable restrictions on competition caused by the central control of the fixture list by the British Horseracing Board, by the central selling of data regarding details of races by that body, and by the setting of rules and orders by the Jockey Club.

It is a sad fact that the many factions in racing—the breeders, owners, jockeys, stable staff, trainers, bookmakers, race courses and so on—represent warring factions. The industry is well known for that. In fact, the former Home Office Minister, the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), who used to have responsibility for much of racing, once said to me, "Laurence, for all my experience of dealing with Militant in Liverpool, none of it prepared me for the racing world." I think we all know what he meant.

It must be said, however, that the OFT's preliminary ruling has served to unite almost the entire racing fraternity in opposition to its plans. Even the Minister for Sport is concerned about its proposals. In a letter to me dated 29 August, he wrote:

"I share your view that full implementation of the OFT's rulings, as far as we understand them, may damage the fabric or integrity of the sport".

That is a profound statement from the Minister.

So why is the OFT making these recommendations, and why is it looking into what is essentially a sport in the first place? Its concern should surely be for the consumer; yet in the last 10 years, attendance at race courses has increased by 21 per cent. The consumers of this sport do not seem to be unduly worried about the way in which horse racing is run. In the same 10-year period, the amount of prize money has increased by 64 per cent., the number of runners by 20 per cent., the number of horses in training by 19 per cent., the number of owners by 8 per cent., the number or races by 7 per cent. and the number of fixtures by 4 per cent. Those figures do not point to a sport that is in crisis or being badly or fairly managed; quite the reverse.

Even more important than those figures is the fact that British horse racing has integrity. The latest row in horse racing—I have to say that there are more rows in racing than there are rebellions in new Labour—is over whether jockeys should be allowed to use mobile phones. I will not get into that argument, other than to say that the Jockey Club's proposals may be an indication of how seriously this body takes the issue of integrity.

Does anyone really believe that rich people from abroad, such as the Maktoum family, would play such a large part in British racing if it did not have integrity? Would such people engage in a sport that was fragmented, as the OFT seems to suggest that it should be? At present racing takes place on almost every day of the year, and many evenings. There are never fewer than two meetings a day, and rarely more than four. The types of races run are carefully balanced, and prize money is systematically and sympathetically distributed. That is not just control; it is more than that. It is co-ordination—a co-ordination that attracts many people, including people from abroad, to the sport.

Even given that success story, however, the major players in the sport—especially the organisation charged with co-ordinating so much in racing, the British Horseracing Board—recognise that many things must change, and that further significant improvements must be made. That is why the BHB recently conducted a root-and-branch review of racing that recommends many changes. As the chairman of the BHB, Peter Savill, in his recent AGM speech said:

"The Racing Review Committee has proposed some significant changes to the racing product and the racing experience which will improve the integrity of the sport, establish a true meritocracy, strengthen National Hunt racing, put British breeding on a more level playing field with its Irish and French counterparts and increase consumer interest in the sport."

That demonstrates that no one in the sport wants to stand still; but the OFT recommendations threaten to throw the baby out with the bathwater. The chaos that would result from the absence of central co-ordination of the fixture list and an inability to set the rules and orders for the sport centrally could not possibly bring benefits to the consumer. It would be quite the reverse: in the absence of any ability to bring together the different strands of racing—all the disparate groups I mentioned earlier—and to set rules and impose discipline, the integrity of the sport would suffer. How can that act as a protection for the consumer?

The basis of the OFT's preliminary ruling is chapter I of the Competition Act 1998, which—here I quote from a letter I received from the OFT, dated 7 August—

"prohibits agreements that appreciably restrict competition in the UK, unless they deliver countervailing economic benefits".

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[Mr. Robertson]

I could respond to that in a number of ways. First, we are talking about a sport. No one has to engage in it, watch it or bet on it; that is all done voluntarily. It is not like buying bread, milk, potatoes or other essentials. This is a national sport, which should surely be governed by national rules. If I watch my home team, Bolton Wanderers, play football, they will be using the same rules that would be used were I unfortunate enough to have to watch Arsenal or Leeds.

Secondly, does anyone really believe that consumers would like to see not one national sport called horse racing, but a number of different race courses all with different rules and standards of discipline, with no co-ordination of the types of races run or horses attracted, all—as minnows—having to sell their own picture rights and data rights to the big bad powerful bookmakers? Are individual race courses, or consumers, likely to benefit from such a free-for-all? The chief executive of the Racecourse Association, Stephen Atkins—whom I met earlier this week—does not think so. Might not the OFT break down the supposed power of the BHB, as many people in the sport fear, only for that democratic body to be replaced, in effect, by an undemocratic cartel formed within the bookmaking industry?

Responsible bookmakers, many of whom are good friends of mine, do not want the OFT investigation to result in chaos. Indeed, a senior executive at Ladbrokes told me that recently, and it was Peter Jones, the chairman of the Tote, who helped me to put together this speech. I pay tribute the likes of Ladbrokes and the Tote for sponsoring so many races, most famously the Tote Cheltenham gold cup, which takes place in my constituency each year.

Thirdly, such central co-ordination of fixtures and rules, and of the collective selling of data rights, therefore delivers the countervailing economic benefits that the OFT requires. Fourthly, such central co-ordination protects the sport's integrity, which, where betting is involved, is crucial to its survival and ability to prosper. A free-for-all in the control of fixtures and rules could not possibly enhance the sport's integrity, so how could that benefit the consumer, whom the OFT is supposed to exist to protect?

As I have said, there is total recognition and acceptance throughout the sport that things must change, and many proposals are on the table. But changes brought about by heavy-handed demands from the OFT will seriously weaken, rather than strengthen, the sport as a consumer product. Virtually everyone throughout the industry fears, for example, for the future of national hunt racing if the OFT's proposals bring about the free-for-all in which they would surely result. Smaller tracks in particular would suffer. Such tracks, while being valuable sources of great entertainment in themselves, are also feeder courses—training courses, perhaps—for larger ones such as Cheltenham and Aintree. So could the wrong kind of OFT-inspired changes to the sport signal the end of the Cheltenham gold cup and the grand national, and could such changes bring about a shift away from racing on turf and towards racing on sand? Somehow, a dirt track would not fit too comfortably with the dresses and hats at Royal Ascot; it would seem rather incongruous. Such things are unthinkable but quite possible, as is significant damage to the rural economy.

So what can be done? I suggest that the OFT treat this investigation very sensitively. It should recognise that it is dealing with a sport, not a large and dominant business. It should recognise that British horse racing is respected and followed throughout the world, and it should attempt to understand racing's characteristics, which play such a vital role in holding the sport together. I therefore ask the OFT not to make heavy-handed proposals, but to recognise the changes already being proposed within the sport itself, and to work with its representatives, rather than against them. Only by doing that can consumers be both protected and well-served.

I hope that the OFT will be sensible, but if its final proposals are, in the Government's view, potentially damaging to the sport, I ask the Minister to use his powers under the 1998 Act to intervene. Clause 3(3) of the 1998 Act states:

> "The Secretary of State may at any time by order amend Schedule 3, with respect to the Chapter I prohibition, by . . . providing for one or more additional exclusions".

I suggest that sport should be such an exclusion.

I have to make this request of the Minister because it is impossible to question or talk to the OFT in this Chamber. It appears to be empowered to make decisions that could have profound effects on a national sport, and thereby on many people's livelihoods, without any reference to Parliament. It is therefore only reasonable for me to ask the Minister to intervene, if it is likely that the OFT will not take a reasonable and sensible approach.

There is a precedent for such action. For example, the Secretary of State provided for an exemption for public transport ticketing schemes, which came into force on 1 March 2001. Furthermore, the Government are looking sympathetically at the position on the exclusive pool betting licence as operated by the Tote. Quite rightly, they are likely to allow the Tote to retain it when the organisation is privatised, as the Government have pledged. I applaud the Government for their sensitivity in that respect because it is in the interests of racing and the consumer that the Tote retains its exclusive pool betting licence—and even other bookmakers agree. I am asking the OFT to show the same sensitivity and flexibility in dealing with racing as a whole. In the absence of such a compromise, I ask the Minister to exercise his powers as allowed under the 1998 Act.

British horse racing is a national sport admired by millions of people in this country and abroad. It is part of our heritage. Last weekend I had the pleasure of attending the 227th running of the St. Leger at Doncaster. The traditions of the sport are an integral part of it. Disraeli once described himself as a progressive Conservative, and I suggest that evolution, not revolution, is the way to improve the running, integrity and therefore the performance of horse racing to the benefit of all who take part in it.

The OFT has the responsibility of safeguarding the interests of consumers, and I am asking the OFT to do precisely that. I am also asking the Minister to ensure that it is done in such a way that it benefits consumers

rather than risk destroying the sport that so many of us love. Horse racing is the sport of kings, but it is also the sport of many ordinary people who are depending on us to get this right.

3.41 pm

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) on securing the debate. It takes some ability and skill—and a little luck – to get an Adjournment debate. The particular case that he has engineered reminds me of Napoleon when he was promoting various officers. He turned to those recommending various promotions and said that he did not want to know how good an officer was, only whether he was lucky. On that basis, my hon. Friend, in securing a debate in which we have up to two and half hours instead of the usual half an hour, would be a general in Napoleon's army.

I do not wish to gallop too heavily—if I can be forgiven the pun—over ground that my hon. Friend has already correctly and eloquently gone. I speak as joint chairman of the all-party racing and bloodstock group and we know that many people are deeply concerned about what could happen as a result of the OFT investigation into racing.

My hon. Friend referred to various factions within racing. The Minister, who is coming fairly fresh to the matter, will have gathered that those factions do not go warmly hand in hand on every issue on every occasion. Sometimes the hands are warmly round the throats of the others, but they all realise now that if they do not work together, the game is over.

There is no need for me to tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that a race course without any horses does not really have a point; and it is no good having a horse without a race course for it to compete on. Without trainers it will all get a bit difficult; jockeys might be needed as well. The idea that race courses can somehow run their own fixture lists and do their own data rights is a joke because there has to be some centralised arrangement whereby the information gets out to the public. Why? Because racing depends for a large percentage of its income on betting. Whatever we do, we must ensure that we do not upset the current arrangements. I am afraid that the OFT is approaching the issue as a bunch of innocents who have gone charging in. What upsets me is how the OFT seems to have started from a preconceived position; it now faces the embarrassment of trying to get out of it.

I shall quote briefly from a letter from the OFT, dated 8 May, to the chief executive of the Racecourse Association. It states:

> "The OFT will be examining the scope for further competition within racing as part of its remit to ensure that markets are working well . . . considering . . . how often they race . . . the type of racing . . . the prizes they can offer."

It continues:

> "At this stage, the OFT anticipates that increased competition would potentially benefit racegoers, punters and race horse owners. And courses should benefit from greater freedom."

The OFT assumes that change will happen and that the automatic consequence of its report will be a benefit to racing, but I suggest that the opposite is true.

It would be heresy to suggest that anything was greater than British racing, but in this day and age of world gambling—when information can travel round the world at the flick of a finger—the potential income is enormous. It pains me to say it but I congratulate the Government on the suggestion of a gambling Bill. If we could get a review of gambling right, the revenue for this country—which, after all, has lost its shipbuilding and other industries—from worldwide gambling could be enormous.

Why would people gamble on racing in Britain? After all, people can gamble by watching a television screen showing live races anywhere in the world. What makes British racing attractive? As my hon. Friend suggested, it is the integrity and honesty of British racing. Unless one is remarkably lucky or incredibly foolish, one does not expect to win money at racing. One expects to have some fun and occasionally come out ahead, and that is good. Before you took up your position of responsibility, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I suggest that even you had the odd shilling on a horse at Newmarket, although I do not expect you to confess to that from the Chair. We put our money on a race in Britain knowing that there is a better chance of it being a straight race—an honest contest—than anywhere else in the world. That is why huge amounts of money have already come to this country from the far east, where people are inveterate gamblers, and I want that to happen more and more.

If we start to break up the central data rights, how will the information be transmitted round the world? Will the individual race courses have to obtain the data rights to transmit races? I do not think so. Instead, the UK would start to suffer, because it was not providing world coverage from a unified and central source. Racing is like a many-legged chair: if one kicks away one of the legs, the chair falls over. It is crucial that we get it right.

My hon. Friend touched on the fact that racing is growing. More people are going racing than ever before, and more horses are being raced than ever before. Much of that is because the people who lead the racing industry at the moment have decided to move it forward into the modern market and the modern age. They are to be congratulated on that. They have not sat there, ossified and unchanging. They have been working at the problem.

The OFT has never run a business. I am puzzled about why it should consider that it knows more about running the racing industry than those who are actively involved. The assumption appears to have been that increased competition would have a variety of effects. I spoke to the OFT, offering the all-party committee's help and evidence, because I recognised that there was a difficulty.

The racing industry does not have independent participants. People are involved in race courses, horses, the British Horseracing Board or the Jockey Club, and therefore have their own factions. Answers from the industry therefore reflect a particular slant or colour. The all-party committee meets people from all sides of the industry, and we like to think that we view their presentations with a degree of independence.

In response to the offer made by me and my co-chairman, the OFT sent a letter to the effect that it would accept a written submission. We supplied that

[Mr. Richard Page]

submission, which concluded with our strong opinion that the OFT's proposals could cause race courses to close. We also predicted a move towards what I call the barn principle evident in the US. There, trainers ensure that horses race on only one course during their racing lives. Watching American racing is, with a few exceptions, the equivalent of watching paint dry. Most races are run on dirt, and are held in only one direction around the track. There is little of the colour, excitement or variation that is attractive to the world gambling scene.

We told the OFT that we foresaw the closure of a number of courses, and that the inevitable centralisation of racing activity around a few centres would reduce consumers' ability to attend meetings. I suggest that many hon. Members share that view, as does almost all the racing fraternity.

The racing industry should not be put at risk. I therefore endorse the call for the Government to examine their existing powers to see whether changes could be made, and action taken, to rein in what is being considered and proposed. When I expressed extreme surprise that the OFT report should have appeared in the middle of the review being undertaken by the racing industry, I was told that the BHB had asked for it.

When I contacted the BHB, I was told that it had wanted a reply a year ago. The board could not wait a year or more before starting its review, which is now under way, and it has already given presentations to the racing fraternity. I have a copy of its first presentation; it takes a comprehensive look at how racing can be made more exciting for all the participants, especially the public.

Unless we want to close racecourses, reduce the number of horses in training and put our opportunities on the backburner, the Minister must take on board what is being said to him today.

3.55 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate, as well as for the good fortune of my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) in securing it.

The House will be aware that I represent what is, in my humble submission, the finest race course in the world, on Epsom downs; it is the home of the Derby—Britain's greatest day out. Epsom is much more than a race course, however; it is a centre for training for people with various levels of success in the industry. It is thus an essential part of the whole racing world in this country.

I want to touch on a few of the points that my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) raised about the threat posed by the OFT report to the development end of the training industry—not the big yards and the division one players, but people who play an important part in developing new horses for racing. I was worried when I read the OFT report on the future of horseracing. I thought back to a subject that the OFT touched on only a few months ago: community pharmacies. As in racing, the OFT saw a market where none exists and tried to create a sense of diverse market forces in a conventional industry. It tried to impose on the pharmacy world—as it is trying to impose on the racing world—the structures of the supermarket sector. Racing is not like that; it is a sport.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: My hon. Friend referred to supermarkets, something that I did not mention as I thought there would not be enough time. Is there an analogy with the situation faced by farmers? These days, because farmers sell their milk, as individuals, to extremely powerful organisations they are impoverished. They claim that savings are not passed on to the consumers but are held up in the chain. Is there an analogy with what could happen in racing?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend touches on an important point. If the proposals go through, it is difficult to imagine that they will not play into the hands of a small number of commercial interests, almost certainly in the betting fraternity. That is where the change will come.

I strongly believe in the old adage, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it". Racing is not broke; it may need to evolve and develop, as my hon. Friends pointed out, but it is not an unsuccessful industry. Terrible injustices are not happening. Racing is working pretty well and is an asset to the nation. The trouble is that when organisations such as the OFT start tinkering there are unintended consequences.

In the early 1990s, for example, a report by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on the pub and brewing industry, which was designed to improve consumer choice and competition, led directly to the disappearance of thousands of country pubs. Small local pubs kept going only because of the tie—that slightly anti-competitive arrangement—and when it disappeared, so did they. We are concerned that the same effect will be seen in racing.

Racing does not involve only a small number of centres. Of course, I do not need to worry about Epsom. The race course pays for itself many times over on just one day a year. No doubt Cheltenham pays for itself in one week of the year. So the big racing centres—the international names—will survive and flourish, and it is arguable that they would probably do better if they had more meetings each year.

Of course, racing is now a truly national sport. Small race courses are to be found in far flung parts of the country, where racing takes place on a wild winter's day. Those race courses are an integral part of the industry, but they are the ones that will disappear. Those meetings will not happen, and racing will be concentrated instead in a number of larger commercial centres and lost in many parts of the country. But this is not just about race courses; it is also about the training industry.

My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire made an extremely important point about the smaller courses serving effectively as a feeder network for the bigger meetings. When people buy their first horse, the smaller courses are where they go to race. They do not turn up at Royal Ascot for their first outing; they turn up on a Tuesday in February at Wetherby. That is where those people who dabble in racing for the first time—those who perhaps buy an eighth share in a

race horse—go to see their horse run. The smaller, newer and developing trainers bring those horses into the industry and start to nurture them, and they hope ultimately to enjoy great success with them.

One reason why I feel so strongly about the issue is that Epsom's training industry is in a particularly challenging situation at the moment. It has declined over a number of years, partly because of the value of the real estate that it sits on. Not surprisingly, it is very tempting for those sitting on land and owning big houses inside the M25 to sell them at a large profit, taking them out of the industry. A training industry that once, perhaps 30 years ago, trained 500 horses trains only about 200 today. I have been working with many people in the local racing industry to try to find a way to reverse that trend by bringing new life back into the training industry in Epsom.

One of the things that I want to see is Epsom emerging as a training and development centre for trainers. We are talking about the possibility of setting up starter yards, where new trainers could lease blocks of 10 boxes, get into training for the first time with a few horses, begin to build a reputation and then move on—remaining in the area, we hope, but if not, going to another centre. But, of course, if the smaller parts of the racing calendar begin to be removed and the smaller courses start to be lost, the opportunity for the training industry in my area to build that starter and development role will be much diminished. The report concerns me greatly, as it seems to undermine what I hope will be an important part of the future of the training industry in Epsom.

Mr. Page: Hon. Members are looking at someone who used to ride out, first lot, for an Epsom trainer a long time ago when the horses were bigger and stronger and I was lighter, and I can only endorse what my hon. Friend says. Does he share with me the worry that, if the OFT recommendations go through and the number of trainers reduces, there will be no starter races around the country and no room for the trainers whom he wants to bring into the business to bring in new horses? There will be fewer horses and we shall end up with a power play between those people with a lot of money to buy very expensive, very good horses, and the thrill of the sport, which runs right through to the bottom end, will disappear.

Chris Grayling: I entirely endorse my hon. Friend's comments. To use an analogy, we are talking about the danger of creating a super league at the expense of the rest. There is no doubt that, if the top players in any sport are allowed to accumulate all the commercial benefits in that sport, the smaller players lose out.

Other sports have governing bodies, set guidelines and negotiate common commercial relationships in television or in other ways, and they then redistribute that money across the whole sport. We have seen the impact on some of the lower division football clubs when those central arrangements break up. The reality is that if it were not for the work done by governing bodies of cricket, soccer and rugby to push money further down the line all around the country, local clubs and local matches would disappear.

So why should horse racing be any different? Why should we suddenly say, "Actually, it's just a big business, it's operating in an anti-competitive way, so we must tear up all the existing arrangements and create a free-for-all." It makes no sense. Would the Office of Fair Trading go round and say, for example, "We insist for reasons of competition that Rangers and Celtic should be allowed to join the Premiership"? Surely that is a decision for the footballing authorities. Are we going to say that racing should somehow have a different relationship to competition authorities, and that they should have power over what happens in racing as a sport, even though it is inconceivable that they could have similar powers in other sports? It makes no sense.

There are other concerns. Both my hon. Friends have talked about the potential risks to national hunt racing. That would be a tragic loss, particularly in rural areas that will depend even more on local national hunt race courses when, as I fear that the Government want, the infrastructure of hunting disappears. That will cut a slice off the substance of those local economies. Were national hunt racing to go as well, which might be a consequence of the OFT's report, it would be even more damaging to those communities.

This makes no sense. The OFT is trying to do something in an area where it does not belong. It is trying to create the sense that a market exists or should exist in an area which I do not believe is all about markets. It will take away a sport and pastime from many parts of this country and will concentrate money and resource in a small number of locations in the hands of big players, and the small people will lose out—the small emerging trainers, the local race courses, and perhaps even the small on-course bookies who will have fewer opportunities to do their business.

What possible benefit could there be from the OFT looking after the interests of the big guys at the exclusion of the small guys in an area where it should not be in the first place? That is why this issue is so important, why it is right that my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury secured this debate, and why it is appropriate and, I hope, essential—as I hope that the Minister realises—that he watches over the shoulders of the OFT and that he does not let this happen.

4.7 pm

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Like my other hon. Friends, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) on securing this debate, and on the good fortune of securing it on the day when the Arms Control and Disarmament (Inspections) Bill passed its Second Reading at remarkable speed.

I must confess, as I do not write to my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury when I do so, that I am an annual visitor to his constituency, and almost an annual visitor to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling). Indeed, I am also a visitor to the constituencies of my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) and the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), who has an excellent race course and arguably one that competes with Epsom, certainly in my book.

[Mr. George Osborne]

I do not have a race course in my constituency, although I do have quite a few owners among my constituents, including Alex Ferguson, who is perhaps the most famous race horse owner at the moment—

Chris Grayling: Notorious.

Mr. Osborne: Or notorious, perhaps, as my hon. Friend suggests. I do not mind saying that, as he appeared all over my Labour opponent's leaflets during the last general election, and I am not here necessarily to defend his interests.

I confess that I have a personal interest in racing. That is why, when I saw the opportunity to speak today, I took it. I come from a family that has been involved in racing. My grandmother had a full-page obituary in the *Racing Post* when she died, my family business sponsors a race at Goodwood every year, and my uncle runs a bookmaker. Although I have no pecuniary interest in racing or gambling, many members of my family do.

I was alerted to the threat that the OFT report poses to British racing not by any of those family members—indeed, as half of them are in the betting industry, it would not have been in their interests—but by a lady called Mrs. Paton-Smith whom I sat next to at the Cheshire agriculture show in June this year. She is an owner, and she lives in the constituency of my neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien). Over lunch, she talked to me about the OFT report. I asked her to send me details, and she subsequently wrote to me enclosing details of what she feared the OFT report would do to the sport in which she participates.

She wrote:

"Without doubt this is the biggest threat to the conduct of racing that we can recall and we would be most grateful"

she was speaking for her husband as well—

"if you agree, if you could lobby the Government to prevent such a scenario emerging."

This debate represents a good opportunity to lobby the Government.

As one who is uninitiated in the intricacies of how racing is organised, I must confess that I was initially sceptical of Mrs. Paton-Smith's complaint. As a Conservative, I believe in freer markets and competition in principle and am instinctively against monopoly and restrictive practices. If one examines the proposals in the Office of Fair Trading report, they are superficially attractive. They would allow race courses to set their own fixtures and permit data such as television images to be bought directly from race courses. They would provide that the collective selling of the rights of racing was not acceptable and say that race courses should be able to set their own race programmes and prize money.

If one starts to consider the implications for the horse racing industry and looks under the surface of the OFT report to examine the unintended consequences that the changes might bring about, the full threat to racing becomes clear. My colleagues said that the OFT report would effectively dismantle one monopoly and replace it with an arguably more dangerous monopoly that would be run by the bookmaking industry, which is also my judgment. Rather than the British Horseracing Board setting fixture lists to ensure a balance of interests throughout the industry, the betting industry would effectively control which race courses were granted which fixtures, which races would be run and when they would be run. That is because, as Peter Savill, the chairman of the BHB said earlier this year, one can

"count on 2 hands the number of fixtures that can take place profitably each year without bookmaker funding."

One could probably count the Cheltenham gold cup and the Derby on those two hands but beyond that, as my hon. Friends said, hundreds of races would not be able to survive without the support of the bookmaking industry. The bookmaking industry is dominated by three bookmakers, and it would be able to pick and choose. New all-weather tracks are coming on line and there will be about 3,000 potential fixtures by 2005, but bookmaker demand for no more than about 1,500. The bookmaking industry would be in a strong position to pick the race courses at which its margins were greatest rather than those at which spectator enjoyment was greatest or that were most popular with sponsors or jumping enthusiasts. Let us be honest—I am not the MP for Lingfield—there might be a situation in which all-weather tracks ran races day and night at times that were convenient for punters in betting shops throughout the country. British racing would lose much of its character as a result. We would lose many of the listed races and much national hunt racing, which is such an important part of the rural economy and so important to rural parts of my constituency. As Peter Savill said in a speech that he made earlier this year:

"The OFT thinks it is helping racecourses to operate as healthy commercial enterprises when in fact its strategy, if allowed to be implemented, will result in a deterioration in the financial position of every single racecourse and racecourse group—without exception."

That represents a serious threat to the industry.

There are alternative ways of dealing with some of the genuine conflicts of interest and problems that the OFT report identified. Indeed, the British Horseracing Board has made several proposals on changing its function, removing itself from commercial activity or creating a separate entity that would commercially promote racing and negotiate with bookmakers. Indeed, the board's racing review committee has come up with several imaginative proposals to improve the integrity of support, to establish a better meritocracy, to strengthen jumping and, importantly, to put British breeding on a level playing field with our Irish and French counterparts.

In the past year, British racing has had record attendances, record prize money and a significant expansion of listed racings, for example. It has exciting plans for the future. Those of us who care about racing and enjoy going to race meets—even if we do not have a financial interest in racing or are involved in the industry—do not want the OFT report to wreck it.

4.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe): I congratulate the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) on securing the debate, which is a continuation of Department of Trade and Industry questions this morning. I also congratulate the hon. Members for

South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page), for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) and for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) on making informed contributions, reflecting their constituency backgrounds and their interests in the well-being of the horse racing industry. The debate provides a welcome opportunity to address an issue that is undoubtedly of interest not just to people directly involved or employed in the sport, but to many of the industry's customers, especially the large number of people who attend meetings, who choose to back horses or who simply enjoy watching the sport at home.

I would be the first to recognise that horse racing is much more than just a sport. It gives enjoyment and employment to many thousands of people in the UK and, as the hon. Member for Tewkesbury emphasised, it is a significant contributor both directly and indirectly to the UK economy. Substantial further income and economic activity is generated by the betting industry, as well as related activities such as stables and stud farms, some of which attract significant overseas income, as has been mentioned.

The sport today very much reflects the outcome of a continuing evolution, founded on its long and rich history. I hope that all parts of the sport continue to address and respond to changes in the surrounding world, as they have done in the past, because that is the best way to ensure the sport's future. I am not going to get involved in arguing about the best race course in the country, although if I did, I would add York to the list; nor am I going to get involved in discussing the merits of particular owners, especially as Sir Alex Ferguson is the manager of a team that I support.

I have noted the concerns raised by the hon. Gentleman and by others in correspondence and a variety of other ways. I am sure that the Office of Fair Trading will take account of those in its continuing investigation into the agreements. I fully understand the desire expressed in the Chamber and elsewhere to retain the essential character of the sport, but that must be balanced against the need for all sections of the business world to comply with the fair trading principles that underlie the competition legislation endorsed by the House. I must make it clear that under our framework of competition law, the decision on the matter is entirely for the Office of Fair Trading. It would be inappropriate for me as the Minister with responsibility for competition to intervene in its deliberations. Perhaps we should reflect on why we have reached this stage.

For several years, the issue has received much media coverage, some of it alarmist—the "end of racing as we know it" scenario. I do not include Mr. Savill in that. I read his speech and heartfelt thoughts about what might happen to the industry. Some of the coverage has been confusing, so perhaps it is worth clearing the air by setting out the background and explaining briefly the Office of Fair Trading's role before explaining the role that falls to the DTI.

To determine whether or not certain agreements complied with chapter I of the Competition Act 1998, a little over three years ago, on 28 June 2000, the British Horseracing Board and the Jockey Club notified a number of agreements to the OFT. For those less familiar with the detail of the 1998 Act, it might be helpful to summarise that chapter I expressly prohibits agreements that prevent, restrict or distort competition. The British Horseracing Board and the Jockey Club considered that those agreements, including the orders and rules of racing and general instructions, did not infringe chapter I and they sought a decision from the OFT granting negative clearance—in essence, seeking a clean bill of health for the agreements. In the event that clearance was not granted by the OFT, the parties sought exemption from the chapter I prohibition. It is worth stressing that the parties specified that the application was for a decision, not for guidance. When the OFT receives such a notification, it is its job to apply the Competition Act, no more, no less.

The applicants are required to state which provisions or effects of agreements might raise questions of compatibility with the chapter I prohibition. The parties duly provided a list that included a provision that the OFT has provisionally—I stress "provisionally"—concluded is an infringement of the Competition Act and cannot be granted an exemption. The OFT has also found a number of other provisions within the orders, rules and general instructions that it has provisionally concluded infringe the Competition Act, and cannot be granted an exemption. The OFT has advised the applicants of its provisional conclusions and the theoretical next steps to give them a chance to make oral or written representations, for instance to correct any factual errors or misunderstandings in the provisional conclusions before it makes a decision on whether to proceed with a final infringement decision.

I understand that the British Horseracing Board and the Jockey Club duly submitted a response to the OFT on 5 September. It is now for the OFT to consider those responses and determine whether or not to proceed with a final infringement decision. It is, however, worth noting that in such cases even after the OFT has issued a final infringement decision a full right of appeal would exist. It would therefore be open to the various industry respondents to challenge the decision. In such circumstances they would have a full right of appeal to the Competition Appeal Tribunal, which would be able to consider the appeal and hear the case again on its merits.

As for the role of the Department of Trade and Industry, I am sure that the hon. Member for Tewkesbury will understand that the matters being considered by the Office of Fair Trading fall within its ambit, so it would be inappropriate for me as a Minister with responsibility for competition to seek to intervene in its deliberations. However, the hon. Gentleman raised the Competition Act and the exemptions available to the Secretary of State. He cited the block on public transport ticketing schemes. I shall discuss this with him later, but my information is that that block exemption was made under section 9, not section 3, to which he referred.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: I would be delighted to meet the Minister to discuss that in more detail, but for the record, there are two ways in which exemptions can be granted under section 4—there are exemptions that the director of the OFT can recommend, but the Minister has the right to provide additional exclusions. My remarks may have led to confusion, but there are two ways in which items can be excluded from chapter I.

Mr. Sutcliffe: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. In the spirit of co-operation in which we have tried to proceed, we will look at that again, and I shall discuss it with him further.

[Mr. Sutcliffe]

As a competition Minister, it is not my role to be involved in the OFT investigations. However, I shall look at the role of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which has been mentioned by the hon. Gentleman and others, particularly the role of the Minister for Sport and Tourism, whose views are outlined in a letter to the hon. Gentleman. We must also ensure that the director general of fair trading is aware of the issues that have been raised in our debate, and we shall make sure that he is contacted.

The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell talked about other sports and the way in which they operate. The sponsoring Department for the industry is DCMS—the Minister for Sport and Tourism has taken a particular interest in this issue, and it is right and proper that he does so within the framework of his Department. I am in contact with him, and shall write to him about today's debate and make sure that he is fully aware of Members' concerns. The issue is of major significance to the industry, as horse racing is enjoyed, as has been said, by vast numbers of people, whatever their background, in every part of the country.

The OFT must conclude its deliberations, and the industry will have the opportunity to put its case. I am sure that hon. Members will continue to make their views known to me and to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport and Tourism. It is important that the right decision is reached in the framework of the competition regimes that we have introduced, and that we secure the industry's future.

The hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire spoke about the warring factions in the horse racing industry. I am aware of that from other sources. The various factions should realise that it is important that they come together. I believe the review will achieve that. We want a vibrant industry and fair competition. I hope the hon. Gentleman will accept my comments. We will wait to see what transpires and make sure that all the relevant bodies have the information and the serious thoughts that hon. Members have presented. I thank the hon. Member for Tewkesbury for raising the matter.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes past Four o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 9 September 2003

[SIR NICHOLAS WINTERTON *in the Chair*]

Diabetes

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Margaret Moran.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before we begin our proceedings, I welcome hon. Members back from the summer recess, which I hope was enjoyable and relaxing for them all. We now proceed to the first debate in Westminster Hall since the House rose for the recess.

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): Thank you for your kind words of welcome, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which we extend to you. We hope that you will have a pleasant two weeks, recuperate and then come back again. I am sure that that will do marvels for your health.

Diabetes is a serious problem, as was underlined recently by a distinguished academic scholar and medical adviser to Governments, Professor Sir George Alberti. He said that we are heading for one of the biggest health catastrophes that the world has seen. He was referring not only to diabetes in this country, but to the spread of diabetes across the globe. He warned that the financial and social burden of the disease will be intolerable if Governments do not sit up, take notice and act now, not tomorrow.

More than 300 million people throughout the world have impaired glucose tolerance. That is a condition that precedes diabetes in which our bodies struggle against the increasing amount of sugar in the calorific foods that we are now subjected to and consume.

There are two types of diabetes. Type 1 generally strikes young people without warning and leads to lifelong dependency on insulin. Type 2 is strongly linked to diet and inactivity. It is estimated that that applies to about 90 per cent. of cases. It used to afflict people from middle age as they put on excess weight—we do not want anyone to be terrified or feel guilty, so let us keep the guilt out of this—but it is increasingly diagnosed in younger age groups, which has rung alarm bells. The couch potato lifestyle, TV viewing, lack of activity and junk food consumption fuel the obesity crisis that is sweeping the US, the United Kingdom and, indeed, the world. In Britain, 1.7 million people have diabetes. A further 2.1 million have impaired glucose tolerance and are at serious risk of diabetes, which eventually, in the worst cases, can cause blindness, kidney failure, nerve damage and be fatal.

As Alberti pointed out, the number of people in the world with glucose intolerance problems is expected to rise from 314 million to 472 million by 2025. He reckons that about 70 per cent. of them will develop diabetes. About 194 million people—roughly 5 per cent. of the world's population—have diabetes. Alberti estimates that the number will soar in developing countries as the unhealthy diet and urban lifestyles of our affluent world are exported to the developing world. In some of our ethnic minority groups, diabetes is running at close to 20 per cent. and it is estimated that that will increase to 30 per cent.

Enough of statistics—the severity of the problem is clear to people here. We are increasingly seeing a nation that is overweight and less active and there is no doubt that a correlation has been established between increasing plumpness, less activity and an increase in the risk of developing diabetes. About half the adults in Britain are recognised to be overweight and obese. Diabetes is a diet-related disorder and in a place such as this, one does not need to look far to see the possibility of obesity creeping in as the five-star restaurants increase in number. We should feel guilty about that. Westminster is a place where red fatties mingle with yellow fatties and blue fatties and they seem to enjoy the lifestyle. We do not set much of an example.

The cost of diabetes is estimated to be 9 per cent. of the national health service budget. In 2000, that was £6 billion. There are regional differences, of course, but huge sums have been estimated for the diagnosis and treatment of the problems that diabetes brings.

Yesterday, the head of nutrition at the Institute of Food Research in Norwich made a statement on Radio 4. I have to declare an interest, as I am a non-executive director of the institute. Professor Sue Fairweather-Tait said:

> "The British population could miss out on opportunities arising from the current exciting era in nutritional science, including new tools for preventive health because there is no unifying champion for nutrition in the UK."

We certainly need social and political actions in this country to tackle the problem of the increase in diabetes. We need to think about how good the scientific evidence is and how to handle it. We do not handle scientific information in the best way politically—there was a debate last night in the House about fluoride. We reject some things and we talk about dissidents, but good, proper analysis and the use of research help to establish good policies and social actions. It is known that there is a correlation between the onset and continuation of diabetes and obesity. There should be policies on the nature of the foods that we eat. I do not want to be negative because the Government have addressed the problem in many ways, but a strategic approach across Departments is needed. The purpose of the debate is to ask whether we are playing at it or whether we are serious about tackling the problem now.

We must start with children. Children's commissioners were discussed in the House yesterday as well as the problems of the abuse of children and of the system ignoring them. What children eat is equally important because their health is at stake. For example, sweet drink machines are allowed in schools. The companies that make sweet drinks are clever: they give schools money and install the machines in the school, and that may correlate with the instance of diabetes. There are alternatives such as fizzy and natural water.

The Government have introduced their five fruit policy and are looking at all the other issues such as those involving the NHS. Nutritionists are giving people non-Atkins diets. There is now a national debate about the type of foods that people eat, but it is always conducted in a disjointed way. That is why some of us are now keen on the idea of a new commissioner. Sue

[Dr. Ian Gibson]

Fairweather-Tait was urged on the subject on Radio 4 I do not know whether it was Humphrys or one of the other nasty people that we all learn to love on Radio 4. It may be a bad day to have a commissioner, given that we have just had a debate about a new commissioner for children. I prefer to think of a food tsar or a fatty tsar somebody who would co-ordinate all the activities across Departments, as has been done in cancer services, to ensure that every voice was heard and that our health would not be affected by the diets to which we are subjected.

Sue Fairweather-Tait has discussed the controversial area of the responsibility that lies with the food industry, the manufacturers, retailers and caterers, bearing in mind that their primary business is to sell food to consumers and to generate profit, rather than to improve the health of the nation. When the Government attempted to recommend a reduction in the amount of salt in diets, the food industry resisted that move. We may have to consider legislation and incentives to encourage the industry to become more proactive. It would be unfair to say that it is doing nothing. McDonald's is offering portions of fruit in a pack, which contrasts with the burgers and so forth. At least an attempt is being made by some parts of the industry to look at the problem.

I said something about the cost to the NHS, which is serious. We need a nationally co-ordinated policy across the health service, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and so on. We should ensure that everything fits together. It is not impossible to induce people to eat differently and think differently about their bodies. It can be done. We go through phases ourselves as adults, but young people are particularly vulnerable to advertising. They need activity that does not simply involve putting shorts on once a week or bringing in a sick note from their parents to excuse them from running around the playing fields.

Sport should be made enjoyable and should build team spirit. It should also make young people think about their bodies, and how they can live well, exercise well and enjoy life to the full. We must ensure that the facilities are there. We need leadership here and I look to the Government for that as they started the process. I want them to recognise that a national nutritional strategy must be more than just a talking shop. It should bring all the parties and stakeholders together. It must have strong objectives, accountability, good leadership and an appropriate level of resources.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I suppose that I must declare an interest as someone who will not win the slimmer of the year award. The hon. Gentleman is a well known and distinguished scientist. Does he recognise that one of the problems for the layperson is that we get so much conflicting evidence, which can be almost sensational? We might hear on the "Today" programme, for example, that salt is good. The next minute it is bad. One minute red wine is good, the next it is bad. The public have become cynical about the information that they are given.

Dr. Gibson: That is true and it is not just about food that we get that kind of information. People get confused. Scientists cannot see things as black and white, yet the public are made to believe by the media that things are black and white. I am pretty sure that the sun will rise tomorrow morning in the place that it usually does, but a little part of me says that something might happen to change that. I do not want to make people panic, but who knows what can happen? The most difficult thing for scientists to say is, "We do not know. There is evidence for and evidence against."

At the end of the day people will judge for themselves. People live in a world where there are risks and they can make their own judgments on the balance of the evidence. Scientists must say, "We know this, we don't know that, but this is how we will find out." That is the purpose of this debate. The hon. Gentleman is dead right. In many areas of food science we do not know the answers. Not enough research is going on. Few research institutes in this country and the rest of the world are getting the funding to answer the questions. I will come to that in a moment when I talk about vitamins and the sort of research that we should be funding.

I said something about the joining up of Departments and the need to have some individual who pulls it all together—a tsar or tsarina—who takes the initiatives and brings the heads together to make it work. It has worked in other areas such as heart disease and mental health. When everyone from the patient groups right up to the consultants is brought together, they learn respect for each other and what they are trying to do.

I want to talk about vitamins and vitamin D in particular. I will do so in relation to type 1 diabetes in young children, because the subject correlates with many of the policies that we are trying to address in this country. Vitamin D is an important factor. It may not be the major cause of diabetes or many other illnesses, but it is a component in the chain that leads to it. Type 1 diabetes is becoming more frequent in every country the incidence of such diabetes has doubled in 20 years. The annual rate, which is averaged over 44 centres in Europe, is now estimated at 3 to 4 per cent, and the rate for the zero-to-four-years age group is 6.3 per cent.

A recent editorial in *The Lancet* asked burning questions. It suggested that the coming together of several public health initiatives may have reduced children's vitamin D intake. Many of us will recall being battered successfully with vitamin D to prevent rickets, and we also remember that, after the war, cod liver oil and orange juice—renowned in many music hall songs—were given to people, including the young, to prevent the development of illnesses. There is a history of supplying vitamin D, and I believe that it would decrease the risk of diabetes.

We are advised to keep babies and toddlers out of the sun to prevent skin melanomas, and that is right. However, we should consider the other part of the argument, which is that people receive most of their vitamin D through an indirect process involving the sun's rays—from a certain wavelength of UV. It is essential that people get sun. It is ironic that, although we have just had one of the best summers for a long time and been battered by the sun, many people in this country do not get much sunlight between October and March. If we are encouraged to remain out of the sun, the vitamins that the body produces by a complex process—the vitamin D pathway—will be suppressed

and we will not receive enough. Some evidence now suggests that diabetes is associated with such a phenomenon.

There are also biological and biochemical explanations of the effects of vitamin D on pancreatic cells. A mechanism involving the immune response, which is too detailed to address today, provides a basis for further research, and if there is a mechanism worth exploring, the public may want to know about it. Therefore, we must advise people on how long to be in the sun—it is simply part of the pattern of life and what we take into our bodies.

There is excellent evidence that a lack of vitamin D is associated with type 1 diabetes in young people. Ten thousand Finnish mothers and children took part in a study spanning 30 years, and diabetes development reduced by 80 per cent. for those given vitamin D in the form of cod liver oil in the first year of life. One isolated study is never enough but others have come to bear as well.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I am fascinated by what the hon. Gentleman is saying, and he is approaching the matter with his usual scientific expertise. If there is a correlation with access to the sun, is there evidence that in countries that have shorter days and do not have hot, sunny climates, there is a higher incidence of diabetes in children? That would support the prognosis that he is putting forward.

Dr. Gibson: The hon. Gentleman has predicted the next study. There is very good evidence that in Europe, China and other countries, the incidence of type 1 diabetes is higher at higher latitudes where there are fewer hours of sunlight. A series of papers has been published on that subject and although that is not in itself proof, it shows that the hypothesis has merit.

Iceland has an incidence of diabetes type 1 less than half that of Norway—which may be because of the high fish diet. A mixture of factors mingles together and must be addressed for each particular disease. It is impossible to say simply that there is just one factor—there are several factors and correlations. The research that has been done is the best possible without human trials, for which I argue that we must induce the Medical Research Council to consider investment.

Studies in Norway have shown that when mothers received cod liver oil during pregnancy, there was a marked reduction in diabetes in their children. There has been another study across Europe—a Eurodiab study—so there have been three different studies. As well as the correlation with latitude, another interesting fact is that of the children who develop diabetes, more are born in spring and summer than at other times of the year. That is because they are going through the "dark ages" during their development, as they emerge in the spring and summer, and have had less vitamin D induction in their bodies. Those results were found in studies in Scotland, England, Wales, Slovakia and Sardinia.

Alternative explanations have been proposed, such as viral infections. However, I propose the vitamin D hypothesis and say, "Prove me wrong." Let us do the work to establish whether viral infections cause the difference in different countries in relation to the time of year. Viruses tend to be used to explain anything. That argument is used, for example, to explain the incidence of leukaemia near Sellafield; it is said that people arriving from other parts of the country have brought in viruses. That is a reasonable hypothesis, which should not be dismissed, but it requires proper investigation.

It seems that we should be taking action on vitamins. I am in favour of undertaking medical research into that area. The Institute of Food Research in Norwich is examining the correlation between type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease. The immune response involved in that condition affects the development of the heart, and the institute is examining in detail the mechanisms that may be involved. Good research is being carried out in the UK on the correlation between diabetes and other illnesses, but in a piecemeal way.

Research could be undertaken on the levels of vitamins in the blood, on the effect of larger doses, and a trial could be carried out in which supplements were promoted in various parts of the UK. We could consider addressing the question of vitamin deficiencies in a similar way to that in which rickets was eliminated—by increasing the vitamin D content of margarine. Supplementation of milk and cereals could be encouraged through the partnerships that I discussed earlier. We should ask the chief medical officer—Sir Liam Donaldson—about the research that is being carried out on vitamin D supplements for pregnant women. Such research is being undertaken in the UK, but it is not focused on the correlation with diabetes.

Hon. Members will know that a welfare food scheme operates in the UK. I understand that that scheme is under review and I look forward to the results of that review. The Food Standards Agency is also examining those issues. The scheme is intended to provide vitamin D to pregnant women and infants, but the figures that I have seen in the preliminary report from the FSA show that such provision seems to be decreasing, because only those people on income support receive it. Therefore, a large swathe of young people do not have access to supplements of those vitamins, because of their social conditions.

I said that the welfare food scheme began in 1940 with the provision of concentrated orange juice and milk to pregnant and nursing mothers, infants and children under five. The scheme was universal, but has gradually been whittled down to people on income support. Those supplements—vitamins A, D and C—are now given as drops, not as cod liver oil and orange juice, which I miss dearly. People can buy such supplements at mother and baby clinics—and at chemists, if they think of it—but they need encouragement to do so. Resources must be made available for people to access those supplements, and to provide evidence that they are necessary. We must develop our strategy on vitamins and try to relate it to diseases such as diabetes.

I understand that the welfare food scheme is to be rationalised, and I hope that the Minister will comment on that. There have been reports that vitamin D supplements for certain groups of infants have been recommended as official policy but, at present, it seems that not all infants are receiving them. Will the Minister tell me what the Department will do to promote the provision of vitamin D supplements to mothers and infants, and whether it believes that that will be of benefit in terms of elimination of disease?

[Dr. Gibson]

There is also the problem of breastfeeding. Generally, breast milk is deficient in vitamin D, and so supplementation needs to be examined in that area. I do not know whether we will reach the same stage as the United States, where milk is supplemented with vitamin D. I believe that in the UK in the 1950s there was evidence of some sort of toxic effects and outbreaks of disease in infants. The data that I looked at were flaky and dodgy, but they again raise the question of the way science is handled. We need to penetrate the area more radically and consider thoughtfully how good the evidence is. That has not been done for some time and if the Food Standards Agency is doing it now, I beg it to get a move on. The increase in the incidence of diabetes needs tackling now.

We face tremendous challenges with food, obesity and exercise, including on the elements that we put into our foods and generating interest in food. Young people do not always know much about food; it is just what they get stuffed into them. Many hon. Members will have seen how much fast food constituents and their children eat, because of its convenience and the speed of their lives. At the other end of the scale, we have my friend Delia and her mates doing all the celebrity cooking as if everyone in their busy lives has time to use sun-dried tomatoes.

I almost said "sun-fried tomatoes", and some people do fry tomatoes, but when I visit Cromer on the north Norfolk coast for Sunday lunch in some exquisite little pub, they are not eating sun-dried tomatoes. As my wife said the other day, there is not one in sight. It is fish and chips that are being stuffed into everyone's mouths, and there are some wonderful fish and chip shops. They are not necessarily good for the diet, but they provide quick food. I am as guilty as anybody of grabbing a fish supper now and again. I was brought up on them, and they are pleasant.

Prevention is the way forward, particularly with diabetes. We must examine what is in our food and conduct research into vitamins and so on, and we need an organised strategy, with one individual at the helm. That would be a real contribution that would pull together many of our separate debates, as there are all-party groups on every different subject, but nothing pulls them together. When has the all-party food group ever talked to the all-party diabetes group? Members are also interested in vitamins, and we should institutionalise such all-party interaction. It would be important in co-ordinating people's thoughts and working with the Government to influence the food industry to take the problem seriously. People in the industry say that they are doing that, but when I meet them I sometimes think that they are just playing at it.

The explosion in diabetes that I mentioned earlier can be handled. Prevention is possible, and we should rise to the challenge.

9.57 am

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): First, I declare an interest as an insulin-dependent diabetic, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) on securing today's debate. For my sins, I am also the chairman of the all-party group on diabetes and the idea of a joint meeting with the all-party food group is a good one that we can perhaps develop. We have had some joint meetings with the all-party group on eye health and visual impairment, which was perhaps a more obvious connection, but the idea of another joint meeting is food for thought.

The Government have done some good work on diabetes in the past six years. The first move was to allow type 1 diabetics who use the pen injection system to have the needles on prescription instead of making them buy them. That has meant that many diabetics—about 350,000 nationwide—do not have to worry about getting needles. Government Departments tend to be resistant to change and one argument was that users would use a fresh needle every time that they injected themselves. That was probably true for children, because as skin develops, it should not be punctured with a needle that is not as finely sharpened as a fresh one. However, the costings that were made, and which delayed the decision, were based on the fact that everyone would use a new needle every time that they injected. Figures now show that the costs were far less than the Government originally predicted.

There is always a danger when talking about any disease of arguing that a new treatment or a new drug can save costs later. People certainly believe that there are cost implications. The money must, of course, be provided up front. In this instance, however, the Government provided a figure that was far higher than the final cost, which delayed the decision. That was not necessarily the Government's fault, but they did the right thing in the end by allowing prescriptions for pen needles.

Secondly, the Government took action to tackle discrimination against diabetic drivers. As usual, the European directive was interpreted differently by different member states. The United Kingdom recommended that there should be a complete ban on C1 and C2 driving licences for insulin-dependent diabetics. I am very glad that the all-party group on diabetes and other bodies and individuals managed to persuade the Government to reconsider that ban and to remove some restrictions from some categories of driver. A blanket ban could have had an enormous impact on people and threatened their jobs and livelihoods.

Tim Loughton: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman mentioned driving. One of my constituents drives vehicles for a living and was greatly affected by the ban. His diabetes was under control: he took all the medication required of him. He has benefited from the relaxation of the restrictions, but is still required to have regular medical checks, at his own expense, for something with which he has had no problem. We still have some way to go if we are to provide people who suffer from diabetes with a level playing field, given certain restrictions to which they are still subject.

Mr. Sanders: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. I cannot comment on any individual case, but we wanted an annual assessment of each individual rather than a blanket ban, and we achieved that. I am not sure that one can argue that we should do away with that annual medical now that we have it, although it could be altered to take account of age. Younger people

may have more control and may need to be assessed only every five years, but I do not believe that one can argue against an annual assessment for middle-aged people in their mid-40s and beyond. Incidentally, insulin-dependent diabetics are probably among the safest drivers on the road because their eyesight is tested every year and any problems can be detected annually.

The third good thing that the Government did was to produce the NHS framework for diabetes, on which I shall comment in a moment. There are, however, many outstanding issues, such as screening. It has long been argued that an enormous number of people have this condition. Diabetes UK estimates that probably up to 1 million people have diabetes but are yet to be diagnosed. They are therefore still to be put in a position where they must make some lifestyle changes to change their behaviour, or must adopt a regime that will help them with their diabetes and reduce chronic symptoms and the risk of complications later. There are pilot screening programmes, to which I am sure the Minister will refer. I hope that the results will show the benefits of having a screening system. The hon. Member for Norwich, North talked a great deal about the statistics, which are interesting. Several European countries have a much higher incidence of diabetes per 1,000 of the population than the UK. One reason is that people in those countries have been screened and the disease diagnosed, but the people in the UK have not. Direct comparisons between countries can therefore lead to the wrong conclusion.

Screening programmes present a danger that returns us to the argument about cost: if we screen people and find our missing million, there will be an enormous increase in the demands made not only on resources devoted directly to treating diabetes but on other NHS services such as the provision of nutritional advice, chiropody, eye tests and so on. The Government need to think that through, but costs should not be the reason for putting off screening, as the complications of diabetes are so much greater than the costs of helping a person to control the condition.

Another outstanding issue is employment discrimination. A study was conducted last year into employment practices and the fact that some diabetics still face discrimination in the labour market. There have been changes of policy in some emergency services, to the benefit of diabetics in the police force and the fire service who can now be accommodated in those services rather than losing their jobs. There are many examples outside those two professions of people facing discrimination in the workplace. A submission has been made to the appropriate Department, which we hope will be incorporated in future employment discrimination legislation.

Although I praise the framework, I am worried that, according to the Government's statistics, the number of type 1 diabetics will rise from 1.37 million to 1.759 million by 2010 and the figure may well be higher than that as it was obtained without screening. If nearly 2 million people have type 1 diabetes, the money that is being put into the national health service framework will not be enough. There is a danger that in trying to do what is right, resources will be overstretched. The service for diabetics has been patchy, and the great thing about the framework is that it tries to ratchet up the standard to provide a uniform level of service across the country. However, unless there are sufficient resources, something else will suffer. The number of diabetics requiring help therefore needs to be kept under constant review.

A worrying sign that has come to my attention is that general practitioners are rationing testing strips. In addition to having injections, diabetics are encouraged to test their blood sugar four or five times a day, for which they use the strips. Some type 2 diabetics, who are non-insulin dependent and control their condition with diet and tablets, are not being allowed as many test strips as they have had in the past. I suspect that some work has been done that suggests that people are testing too often, but a principle established by organisations such as Diabetes UK, other patient groups, and especially those in the medical profession who deal with diabetes, is that patients know best when they need to test and how often they need to monitor what is happening to them. A Minister to whom I wrote on the matter replied that what was being complained about should not be happening, and a copy of his letter was sent to Plymouth health authority, which is the one involved. I have not had any further feedback but I would be worried if there were similar restrictions elsewhere.

The hon. Member for Norwich, North cited the case for prevention. The future for treatment is more technological than pharmaceutical for type 1 diabetics—it is the development of the insulin pump, which the National Institute for Clinical Excellence says will help. The device is no bigger than a pager—I am not wearing a pump, it is a pager—and infuses insulin at small doses set by the patient throughout the day, giving a high degree of control. When someone's pancreas is working it is pumping insulin into them all the time. When they eat, it produces more insulin. The type 1 diabetic, whose pancreas does not work, must take it externally, twice or four times a day, and that clearly cannot be as effective.

The little pumps hold a prospect of much greater control. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence has concluded that they should be used only if everything else has failed: if the patient has trouble in using injection systems and the other regimes that can be brought together to help someone who has poor control. Very few people will be given insulin pumps on prescription.

I raise this matter now as a warning, because the pump will develop into a device that will not only infuse insulin but test blood sugar at the same time: it will function as an external pancreas. Such devices have been trialled in Europe and when they have been perfected, or when they satisfy everybody, the demand for them will be enormous. The Department should prepare for that, because it will have a big cost implication, but a corollary is that no testing strips or needles will be needed—although some devices will still be required. Insulin will still be needed. The pump itself will be an expensive piece of kit, but it could wipe out many concerns, problems and complications, if it proves successful.

I am grateful to the Minister, who is shortly to meet some diabetic nurses with me. One small point concerns the disposal of needles and lancets used for blood sugar monitoring. There is not very good information on this. Having been a diabetic for 10 years I suddenly learned

[Mr. Sanders]

that I should be putting my lancets in sharps waste disposal and not wrapping them and putting them in the bin. No one had told me that, and I had not picked up the information anywhere, although I consider myself fairly well informed about these issues. Some local authorities provide very sketchy services. Some local authorities are very good at collecting sharps bins from the homes of diabetics and taking the needles and other paraphernalia away, but others are not. I am glad that the Minister is prepared to talk to us about trying to obtain a consistent service across the country.

I want finally to pay tribute to Diabetes UK, the longest-standing patient group in diabetes. It does an enormous amount of good work on awareness and information. Its lobbying role is important too. Other organisations, such as the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, are concerned about type 1 diabetes and finding a cure. They are always trying to raise more money for that objective.

I thank the hon. Member for Norwich, North for initiating the debate. It is important to discuss the subject periodically, to assess developments. As I have said, the Government have done some good things, but enormous challenges and major outstanding issues remain to be dealt with.

10.13 am

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I thank you for your warm welcome, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I presume that in the coming two weeks we shall play pre-season friendlies, as we have not quite started the season yet. In that spirit, we can have a good kick around and see who the best players are.

I welcome the lead given by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) in the debate. No better person could be found to talk about the scientific rationale. What a pleasure it is, too, to follow the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders), who speaks from his own experiences and who is the leading light in the all-party group on diabetes. Although I do not want to take up much time this morning, I want to reinforce what both hon. Members have said.

We should congratulate the Government on the national health service framework, which has not featured as much as it could have done. That is unfortunate, because one of the criticisms that diabetes sufferers have always made, in my experience, concerns the extent of the postcode lottery affecting what support they receive. That point came out well in the remarks of the hon. Member for Torbay about insulin pens, which are a long overdue consolidation of what should be available to people. We also need to talk about moving towards using pumps and what we need to do to ensure that they are more widely available. That will be possible only if we understand that people should have access to them regardless of where they live, and certainly regardless of their means. That is what the national service framework should try to do, not just in this area but in other areas where we have embarked on this important venture to try to pull services together.

I speak from the experience of talking to members of an active diabetes support group local to Stonehouse, where I live, which is led by Liz Shipman and others. I have come to understand that a key aspect of diabetes, more than many other diseases, is the degree to which people can support each other and show that they can live perfectly normal lives as long as they take their medication and seek urgent medical help where necessary.

The support group always makes the point that the medical profession does not make the best use of it. It is worrying for anybody to be diagnosed with diabetes, but especially for young people and their parents and friends. Members of the support group feel strongly that it could be a valuable addition to the inevitable medical support, yet more often than not, people have found it difficult to access that support mechanism through general practitioner's surgeries. That is rather sad because the best person to help someone through the processes involved with such a life-changing experience is another diabetic. I am sure that the Minister will take that on board in her discussions with GPs and organisations. Such support is valuable, but there are few support groups around the country. If the need is there and is highlighted, more support groups may appear, which could be locked in through GPs' surgeries.

In preparation for the debate, I was pleased to receive a press notice from the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee about the help that it could provide to people suffering from diabetes, such as advice and monitoring, which it believes to be an important part of its negotiations with the Government in readiness for the new contract, which is estimated to begin in April 2004.

Pharmacists see themselves as playing a valuable role in helping with diagnosis and monitoring. Another criticism made by my local support group was that, for a time, it offered to test the general public on behalf of pharmacists to see who was at risk of suffering from diabetes. However, it all went wrong because of the usual problems of insurance against wrong diagnosis. We all know that early diagnosis and intervention are crucial whatever the age of the diabetic, but as the hon. Member for Torbay said, we must recognise that there are cost benefits and should not pretend that we can avoid the issue. We must have a mechanism for testing in the wider community, perhaps on a voluntary basis. I suspect that GPs are unlikely to want to do it because they are inundated with other tasks, but pharmacists may do it, with, I hope, the involvement of lay people. Obviously, one cannot just test people, give them the results and, if they are suffering from diabetes, pretend that they will be anything other than very worried. We must ensure that it is done properly. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take up that point, as it has been clearly highlighted in my area.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North went on to discuss the wider context: why the number of cases of diabetes is growing and what we should do about that. That wider context is important. Diabetes is, of course, related to what we eat and to our lifestyle. The Government are clearly right to emphasise the importance of fitness as part of lifestyle, and to try to prevent the sale of school playing fields and so on. The danger is that lifestyle and fitness are, unfortunately, areas that are stratified somewhat by class. If people can afford it, they will belong to a health club, but that would be the last thing that those with a lower income

would ever budget for. We have to ensure that where the state is involved, it does things properly, for example in schools and by providing recreational facilities in the community. We should be predisposed not to sell playing fields; we should encourage people to use them.

On the positive side, initiatives such as sure start, our work towards a co-ordinated policy ensuring that children have opportunities when they are young, breakfast clubs and after-school clubs can all come together to help. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North talked about the huge area of lost opportunity from the scientific point of view. I want to discuss the practical point of view. We still have only one professor of food policy in this country. I initiated a debate more than two years ago to find out whether the Government were moving towards co-ordinating some response to that matter.

The professor is the well known Tim Lang, who is not everyone's cup of tea, but who speaks his mind and has pointed out that for a long time we have not been progressing towards greater cohesion. He introduced me to the idea of functional food, which my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North mentioned. Last week in Gloucester, I was at Unilever, which I used to call Wall's, where they are talking about introducing an ice cream that is full of energy and health-giving products. If ice cream can be made healthy, presumably anything can. The industry is beginning to pay attention to the idea of functional food, and the Government need to do more.

Local food, organic food, and an intake of five portions of fruit and vegetables a day are not fads. They are a matter of genuinely trying to change mindsets and making people aware that what they eat will have an impact on their quality of life, if not immediately, then in later years. Those ideas will be the greatest way in which we can prevent a huge explosion in diseases such as diabetes. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will say how we can move towards greater co-ordination in that area, if not towards a full-blown food policy, which—talk about tsars—seems somewhat state led. We have to get across the message that the issue is important and is one that we ignore at our peril. The debate has been very useful.

10.24 am

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle): May I welcome all of us back? It feels very much like a new term. I congratulate the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) on his continuing success in obtaining timely Adjournment debates.

I am particularly pleased to be here because I did not know anything about vitamin D and its possible association with type 1 diabetes. I feel as though I have learned quite a lot this morning, so I should like to thank the hon. Gentleman very much. It would be especially interesting to follow up that area of research—the hon. Gentleman did not mention this, but Asian and Afro-Caribbean groups are particularly susceptible to type 1 diabetes and there may be a positive link, which chimes with what he was saying.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the fact that the diabetes time bomb that we seem to be sitting on is a worldwide phenomenon that is gradually coming to affect everyone everywhere and not only us. The issue might need to be explored from the angle of increasingly global food production and the role of the multinational food companies. They obviously have a part to play and it is important that companies such as Unilever—I hasten to declare that I have a sort of interest as my daughter works for Unilever—have a role to play in ensuring that the wider health issues are explored, not only for this country but for other countries.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) has more than adequately expressed his concern about the treatment of diabetics. He and others have referred to the discrimination that diabetics can suffer in both employment and social matters such as driving. The Government and the medical profession need to explore issues associated with undiagnosed diabetes, or we shall store up problems for ourselves and the public in terms of the extra costs that will result from late treatment. However, other hon. Members have more than adequately dealt with that subject.

The hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) mentioned support groups, which have an application beyond diabetes—for example, for sufferers of ME and other illnesses or conditions. Support groups give far more necessary information than the medical profession do. For instance, I was on tamoxifen for about two years before I found out from a support group that some of the side effects that I was experiencing were normal and that everybody else has them as well, so I thought, "I should have come to the support group sooner." Support groups have a role to play across a range of conditions. When primary care trusts are dealing with their very stretched budgets it is important that they do not remove the funding for support groups, as a few thousand pounds can have a great impact. I would therefore certainly support the hon. Gentleman in his view that support groups are often the best way for people who are experiencing a disease to get new information.

I want to focus on prevention and the wider issues involved with it. Although I was particularly interested in the vitamin D and type 1 discussion of the hon. Member for Norwich, North, it is important both to consider the wider lifestyle issues—exposure to sunlight, and so on—and to avoid a medical and pill-popping culture in which every illness is to be cured by popping another pill rather than by changing lifestyle.

I guess that it is received wisdom now that diabetes and other medical conditions such as coronary heart disease, stroke and some cancers are linked to over-high body mass. We are in danger of causing difficulties when we try to get over messages if we constantly refer to obesity, which has become a stigmatised expression and one that is not good to use when we are trying to create a no-fault, no-blame culture and to change behaviour without making people feel guilty about the way they are or the way they have been. Guilt will not change behaviour in the long term; it is a wish to experience a different lifestyle that will make people change. Obesity is not a particularly useful term. Over-high or excessive body mass may be better.

We know that poor nutrition—high fat and high sugar—and too little exercise from an early age are linked to excessive weight gain from infancy onwards. A number of nutrition and education factors have been explored today. We need a continuing programme of education and awareness-raising for the public as well as

[Mrs. Patsy Calton]

schoolchildren. We always say, "Start with the children", but they do not often control the family's buying habits. They may well control their buying habits at school, but they do not control the wider buying habits of the family. We must raise the awareness of the public as a whole on this issue, and the Government are doing some good things to raise awareness.

It is not enough to talk about raising public awareness alone. A number of initiatives from successive Governments and, indeed, local government have done nothing to reduce our couch potato characteristics. I think of the junk food machines in schools. I remember being appalled as a schoolteacher that a school should have chocolate and other junk foods in a machine in the main corridor and the fizzy drinks machines to which the hon. Member for Norwich, North referred. Schools are the last places where those machines should be put. Too many children are tempted to use the money that their parents give them for food at lunchtime to eat junk foods at break, lunchtime and mid-afternoon. They are getting a very different diet from the one that their parents think they are getting.

I have been asking questions about junk food machines in schools since I arrived in the House. The Department for Education and Skills regards that as a matter for local authorities and school governors. The problem is that with the funding for schools as it is, the profits from such machines are often paying for dinner ladies, so schools and local authorities face a very difficult decision. If they do away with junk food machines, they have to do away with one or more dinner ladies at the same time. We also need to worry about those issues.

Some schools still offer poor variety and poor-quality food. Superstore shopping has caused a change in buying habits towards more pre-prepared foods, which do not necessarily have the benefits of food that has not been pre-processed and packaged. That in itself has made a big change.

I realise that this may seem a little far-fetched, but I think that school league tables have played a part. Many parents believe that they have to get the very best education that they can for their children and that that includes putting them in a 4x4 in the morning and driving them to the school with the best standard assessment tests results. It is now rare for children to walk or cycle to school, which is one bit of daily exercise that they need.

The issue clearly goes wider than the Department of Health. We are talking about joined-up government, so that the Government realise, when they produce a particular policy, that it may have implications that they had never thought about. It is right that parents should be able to get the best possible education for their children, but the children could end up dying at 45 from a heart attack because they never walked anywhere. We have to obtain a better balance. I worry about how many children never see daylight. They go from home to school in the car and engage in practically no sport or physical activity.

With the demands of the national curriculum, many schools have reduced considerably the time spent on sport. When we talk of sport, most people think of team games, but they are not necessarily the way forward. Many young people do not want to take part in team games and prefer to be engaged in physical activity that they can pursue individually. I have occasionally covered for absent PE teachers and found that a third or half of the girls did not take part in lessons. They stood to one side, having not brought their kit. We may think that all children are getting an hour a week of sport, but even in good schools, not all of them are. There are some issues to be addressed about the lack of physical exercise that young people are engaged in and the policies that must be explored.

There has been much talk about congestion charging, especially in my local papers in the past few weeks. I wonder whether a half-mile exclusion zone around schools should be considered for each morning and afternoon to ensure that young people walk or cycle at least a mile each day. It would certainly please those people who find 4x4s parked in their driveways when they are trying get out in the morning. I am thinking especially about my own constituency, which has a real problem with the traffic that builds up around schools. The people who live in those areas simply cannot move in the morning because of the numbers of children being brought to school by car. It is a backward step, and I am concerned for the young people who engage in practically no activity, including getting to school in the morning.

A further issue is the low take-up of breastfeeding, which has suffered from the tolerance of the activities of baby milk manufacturers over the years. I remember being shown a breastfeeding film that was obviously designed to make a mother-to-be squirm, as the breast was exposed in various situations that, as a potential new mother, I was nervous about. I then found out that Nestlé was behind the film, and I thought that it was just possible that I was supposed to feel uncomfortable about breastfeeding. Some baby milk manufacturers have a lot to answer for, and in the past there has been poor Government support for breastfeeding. There are initiatives, which I would like to see rolled out across the country, but I believe that this House has ambivalent attitudes to that most natural and healthy of activities.

When the Government make new policy or take decisions on planning matters, they should take lifestyle issues into account. To be fair, the Department of Health has produced several documents and initiatives that have highlighted the importance of lifestyle choices and better treatment for diseases associated with excessive body mass and too little exercise. I think of "Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation", the NHS plan for investment and reform, the NHS cancer plan and the national standards frameworks for coronary heart disease and diabetes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must ask the hon. Lady to bring her remarks to an end soon. There are two further speakers—the official Opposition spokesman and the Minister—and she has only peripherally been talking about diabetes, which is the subject of this debate.

Mrs. Calton: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I apologise for having overstayed my welcome.

I have been grateful to visit the fruit-for-schools initiative in two primary schools in my constituency. That has been a good initiative and the children enjoy it. I hope that I have not been treating diabetes peripherally. The lifestyle choices and culture changes that need to be made affect areas beyond the Department of Health. I will draw my remarks to a close as I have taken up more time than I should.

10.40 am

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): May I echo your warm welcome, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to everyone in Westminster Hall? It was certainly warmer than the temperature here today.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson), who is a frequent initiator of debates. As usual, it has been most informative because he takes a scientific approach rather than coming up with the usual platitudes. Most of his speech was not directly about diabetes, but it was very relevant because it covered all those situations and conditions relating to its onset and proliferation—subjects that were mentioned in other speeches too. If the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) started to organise all-party meetings he would have to take in more than just the diabetes group, the food group, the sports group and the schools physical education group because diabetes affects so many different aspects of our lives. The hon. Member for Norwich, North encapsulated it all when he asked whether we are simply playing at it or whether we are really serious. His fatty tsar suggestion may not be taken quite so seriously, although the sentiment behind it was correct.

This is an important subject. The ticking time bomb of diabetes, as it has been called, is one of the biggest problems facing the health of our nation and the health service over the short, medium and longer term. It affects so many of our constituents. We have heard the figures: 1.4 million cases have been diagnosed but probably an equal number are still undiagnosed, which is perhaps more worrying. It is the fastest growing disease in the United Kingdom and is predicted to involve up to 3 million in types 1 and 2 diabetes by 2010. It carries serious complications such as amputation, blindness, kidney failure, strokes, and coronary heart disease. Diabetes sufferers are five times more likely to suffer from coronary heart disease. Most type 2 sufferers find out that they have diabetes only when they are treated for one of those complications. On average, they have had the disease for nine to 12 years before they are diagnosed. Diabetes sufferers can live, on average, 10 years less than non-sufferers.

As hon. Members have mentioned, there is a big ethnic impact. Around one in four Asian men over 60 suffers from diabetes. There is a much higher incidence among the Asian, African, Afro-Caribbean communities and, of course, among socially disadvantaged groups. Can the Minister tell us what has been done to help those groups? Internationally, more than 300 million people are at risk of developing diabetes, according to the International Diabetes Federation. As the hon. Member for Norwich, North mentioned, Professor Sir George Alberti recently said:

> "We are heading for one of the biggest health catastrophes that the world has ever seen . . . The financial and social burden of the disease will be intolerable if governments do not sit up and take notice now."

That is right.

The cost to the NHS is more than £5 billion—more than the £3 billion spent on alcohol or the £1.5 billion spent on smoking. Moreover, 40 per cent. of that expenditure goes on hospital care and at any time between 6 and 16 per cent. of hospital beds are occupied by people with diabetes. Particularly worrying is the impact on young children, as hon. Members have mentioned. Part of the problem lies in the confusing information about what is healthy eating and what is not. Is it healthy to stay out in the sun more? We are always told that it is not. Being in the sun may have a link with vitamin D, which has a link with diabetes, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out. We recently heard that it is not healthy to drink too much water, yet we were always told that we should drink more.

Yet more problems face the average punter. It is no wonder that everybody is confused as to what is and is not healthy. That is why a third of British children are overweight and we are heading towards the catastrophic figures that they have in the United States. One in 10 four-year-olds is diagnosed as obese, particularly young girls. The first cases of adult onset diabetes have recently been recorded in British teenagers, for reasons that hon. Members have mentioned. It is difficult to identify, as children often do not feel unwell on diagnosis of diabetes and do not feel that they have a medical problem. That emphasises the need for better education as to how diabetes can be controlled. It is crucial to tackle the subject urgently and early. It would be financial folly not to do so, and it would have an impact on the health of individuals that could be prevented by better education, better diagnostic testing and adapting lifestyles.

Diabetes is relatively easy to diagnose: a simple blood test has been developed in the US to detect it for up to 12 years. It is a simple procedure that can identify up to 75 per cent. of cases and can be used on patients believed to be at high risk. Will the Minister comment on the lessons that have been learned from America, and how such tests may be rolled out early in this country?

There are other problems. At present, 90 per cent. of hospitals do not have the recommended number of diabetes consultants or specialist nurses, more than a third of hospitals do not prioritise diabetes in their health improvement plans, and 30 per cent. of GP practices do not have a specific clinic for people with diabetes.

We welcome the national service framework although it was introduced late in the day, in December 2001, and it was not until January 2003 that the delivery strategy was published. Many shortcomings in the framework remain and the Government have failed to match their good intentions with meaningful action, although the NSF is a step in the right direction.

There are particular problems with the NSF. Many patients feel let down that it does not include national priorities and doctors have accused the Government of shifting the buck by passing targets on to primary care trusts. Many doctors will not meet NSF targets, as many practices do not even conduct basic monitoring. Fewer than half of diabetes patients have had their cholesterol measured in the last year; 25 per cent. have not even had their blood pressure checked; and 60 per cent. have not had their HbA levels measured. Many diabetes patients

[Tim Loughton]

are wandering around with uncontrolled hyperlipidaemia – that is, high cholesterol, the biggest contributory factor to myocardial infarctions – and unchecked hypertension, despite the fact that there are simple tests that could be used, relatively inexpensively.

Diabetes UK has criticised the failure immediately to find funding for the estimated 1 million people who have diabetes but are unaware of it. There is a failure to provide ring-fenced funding to deal with that, a lack of performance indicators and a failure to deal with staffing and training problems.

The move to create expert patients is a positive one but there are many questions to be asked. The Government's expert patients programme receives just £2 million per year, yet the costs of treating the UK's 1.4 million diabetes patients is £5.2 billion per year. Major investment is needed at the preventive stage.

The NSF is certainly not a panacea, but it goes some way to raising the profile of the problem and flagging up some methods of dealing with it. As it stands it is undeliverable, not least because much of the funding was left to primary care trusts, many of which are already in debt. The cost of treating sufferers is likely to double within the next eight years. According to Stefanie Amiel, an academic and clinician who specialises in diabetes at King's college London, although the NSF is a move in the right direction, there are many unanswered questions. For example, how is the service to existing patients to be improved while the numbers of those presenting with the disease continue to rise? What about the huge number of undiagnosed patients? Stefanie Amiel doubts the "prevention endeavour", saying that

"it's a long way from treating the illness".

How are we to bring about a national lifestyle change? The NSF needs to factor in the increase in the number of those with diabetes and the related costs. We will not lower hospital costs by strengthening diabetes care in the community, at least not in the medium term.

There are many other questions that the Minister may like to answer, although there is no time for that now, but I think that we all agree that diabetes is a public health disaster, and we need an early and detailed programme of meaningful measures to tackle the crisis. Spending money now on preventing and managing diabetes will save a lot of money in the long term, let alone a lot of angst and ill health for the increasing number of people who are being afflicted – at an increasingly early age – by type 2 diabetes. I hope that the Minister will deal with many of the questions and accept that the debate is an exercise not just in presentation, but in grasping the problem early and providing solutions to it.

10.50 am

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Ms Rosie Winterton): As always, it is a great pleasure to be in your hands, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sure that all hon. Members will agree about that, particularly in this first Adjournment debate after the recess.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) on securing the debate. While looking through some of the background papers I noticed some interesting initiatives on diabetes in the area of my hon. Friend's constituency. Perhaps I may invite myself there, as I should like to see some of them, and to discuss the subject more. In the light of what my hon. Friend has demonstrated he knows about the subject, I should find that extremely useful. I pay tribute, also, to his contribution in the associate parliamentary food and health forum.

I listened carefully to comments about the possibility of a joint meeting with the all-party diabetes group. I am meeting the group soon, and want to consider ways in which we could work together to raise awareness of the effectiveness of early screening for diabetes, among other things. I hope that we shall be able to work together at that meeting and discuss issues that have been raised here, as well as ways of working with Members of Parliament to raise the issue in their constituencies.

As the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) said, this has been a very informative debate. We are obviously in a Chamber full of experts, and House of Commons debates are always at their best when that is so. I do not have time to reiterate the figures that were given earlier, and I would rather deal with the action that we are taking, but we know that, as has been said, diabetes is becoming more common not only in the UK but throughout the world.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North referred to research on diabetes. Sadly, there are gaps in the research, particularly for type 1 diabetes. I should like to send my hon. Friend some of the research that has been conducted by the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition. Perhaps we can pursue the debate about some of the relevant ideas.

The extent of the problems of diabetes and, indeed, obesity was the reason we developed the national framework for diabetes. We involved clinicians, experts and people from Diabetes UK – which, again, I join the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) in praising – because we wanted to put together a framework that would set high standards which, with our delivery strategy, would bring about a consistent approach throughout the country. We believe that that can be done. We want high standards to deal with prevention, provide better care for people with diabetes, and help such people to manage their condition.

We know that to stay healthy and well, everyone with diabetes needs good and regular health care as good control of blood sugar levels can reduce the risk of serious complications and lengthen lives. That means prompt diagnosis, regular checks to identify serious complications at an early stage and treatment to control blood glucose and blood pressure levels.

The hon. Member for Torbay and others mentioned insulin and testing, which we can discuss with the all-party committee. To ensure that the NSF is delivered properly, in April we appointed a national clinical director for diabetes. Her task is to fulfil two early and important national targets: by 2006 a minimum of 80 per cent. of people with diabetes are to be offered eye screening for the early detection and treatment, if needed, of diabetic retinopathy. That will rise to 100 per cent. by the end of 2007 and to meet that target, we are putting an extra £27 million into digital cameras over the next three years. By March 2006, there should be a

register of patients with diabetes in all GP practices so that they can be offered the appropriate advice on diet, physical activity and smoking, and systematic treatment in education.

I will certainly consider the important point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) about support groups and how they can interact with GPs. To take up the matter raised by the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham, we will put into the NHS an average annual increase of 7.4 per cent. above inflation over the next five years and three quarters of that budget will go into the hands of primary care trusts. It is important that primary care trusts have the ability to decide what are the local priorities, but by matching national standards with the local priorities we can address some of the problems of shortages in the work force. Extra consultants are being recruited but there are other ways, for example, nurses having an increased role in the treatment of diabetes, and some important projects and pilots are being carried out to look into such matters.

Dr. Gibson: Will my hon. Friend say what investment is being put into the prevention of diabetes?

Ms Winterton: I was about to come to that matter. First, we want to foster healthier lifestyles and the Department of Health is leading on the development of a cross-government food and health action plan, which will pull together all the issues that influence what we eat: it will address food production, manufacture and preparation, access to healthier food choice and providing more information. The welfare food scheme is being reformed and the healthy start proposals will mean that we look at providing vitamins for low-income groups and also consider how we can give access to other foods such as vegetables, fruit and so on. With the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, we are also looking at encouraging increased physical activity through local exercise action pilots—LEAP—and other initiatives. Some of the results of the proposals will be published in spring next year; we are working on the plans at the moment.

I assure my hon. Friend that action is being taken on these matters. I was particularly interested in his comments about a food tsar. What we want is a good plan that addresses prevention, diet and the important issue of physical activity. We have a long-term plan to tackle the issue, particularly through the NSF, but also through healthy eating and other initiatives.

I hope that what I have said gives hon. Members some idea of the progress we are making on this important matter. We have some way to go but we are well on the way.

Packaging Regulations

11 am

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): Last summer, we had a debate in this Chamber on packaging and waste, initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien), whom I am delighted to see here today.

In this debate, I want to concentrate more specifically on the workings of the packaging regulations. Since the previous debate, we have received the report of the Advisory Committee on Packaging, which examined the future of the regulations. In July, a consultation paper was issued by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which largely endorsed the opinions of the advisory committee. The EU directive targets up to 2008 have also been clarified, and the Waste and Emissions Trading Bill, which was a partial response to the EU landfill directive, has been published. It is therefore appropriate to examine this issue now. It is also appropriate to examine it because the questions raised by the Waste and Emissions Trading Bill and the packaging regulations are connected, but the point that we have reached in considering those questions seems to prevent that connection being made.

The packaging regulations deal essentially with commercial waste—in this instance, packaging—but the Waste and Emissions Trading Bill deals with domestic waste, which may substantially include packaging. A good proportion of what is put into rubbish bins by domestic consumers is packaging brought into their houses as part of their consumption of goods.

The packaging regulations have been a substantial success in their own right. Since 1997, the rate of recovery of packaging in the UK has risen from 30 per cent. in 1998 to 48 per cent. in 2001, and the rate of packaging recycling from 27 per cent. in 1998 to 42 per cent. in 2001. In the context of that improvement, we should note that both the Waste and Emissions Trading Bill and the packaging regulations deal with targets. The current consultation paper sets out the next targets that should be reached for packaging. The new targets in the EU directive would require us to raise our game substantially, because 1.3 million more tonnes of packaging would need to be recovered by 2008. Moreover, we would need to meet sub-targets for categories of materials, as opposed to just a general target.

The consultation document also recommends that the increase must include more recovery of reusable commercial materials from domestic waste, but there is no mechanism for reaching targets for particular types of packaging in the domestic waste area, as required by the directive. British Glass, in a recent communication, says that local authorities can reach their targets for recycling and recovery of domestic waste without collecting any glass.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. May I draw his attention to a note from British Glass, which states:

"Under the UK's free market PRN system we are likely to witness a significant rise in the price of the glass PRN in relation to prices for other materials. This, in turn, will lead to a massive increase in obligation costs for our customers, the packers/fillers and the retailers."

[Mr. Bill O'Brien]

I wanted to make that point to my hon. Friend, because the matter is important to the glass industry, and the Minister should take note of what the industry is appealing for.

Dr. Whitehead: I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. It is important as a by-product of the targets for separate types of packaging that are being suggested for the future. The suggestion that packaging recovery notes for certain types of waste will increase considerably in price should be a proper concern when determining how the mechanism will work over the next few years. The point made by British Glass is therefore important.

The consultative document also addresses the issue of incineration. As a result of the European Court of Justice judgments and an EU position statement of 27 May on whether incineration constitutes recovery, incineration will have to make up a reducing component of those increased targets. However, the Waste and Emissions Trading Bill envisages an increase in the incineration of domestic waste. It is difficult to see how both could be achieved at the same time.

More is to come. The Waste and Emissions Trading Bill and the Government's waste strategy explicitly accept the hierarchy of waste; that is, the highest purpose is the minimisation of waste, then reuse and then recovery. The relevant packaging regulations, on the other hand, do not do so. They require companies that produce more than 50 tonnes of packaging at various stages in the packaging process and have a turnover of more than £2 million either to recover the packaging, which is to follow through their processes, or to purchase packaging recovery notes from whomsoever is recovering packaging to make up the difference.

I shall now make a bold claim: I have not done the two-year advanced course on the theory and practice of packaging recovery notes. However, I believe that I understand roughly how the PRN system works. Essentially, it is, or should be, a self-balancing market process. PRNs are tradable and vary in price according to the relative recovery performance of obligated companies; that is, if those companies are doing well, the price will be low because there will not be many takers, but if they are doing badly, the price will be high. That price hike benefits the registered recoverers, which are the organisations that take packaging and undertake recovery, because, at least in theory, they will have the proceeds from the sale of PRNs at higher prices to invest in better and more effective recovery processes. That in turn should aid the efficiency of the recovery process, which should theoretically drive PRN prices down over a period. I shall not go into the detail of consortium purchases and the obligations that are entailed, which is an entire sub-study course, but I have described the essential mechanism.

However, that is where the problems between theory and reality kick in. First, in order to assess liability, an apportionment of responsibility must be set out at each stage of the packaging process. There are four stages of liability in the system. A percentage of the liability must be allocated, sometimes somewhat arbitrarily. That may create problems for those who are involved in several stages and thereby seem to be repeatedly liable for the same processes, while on the other hand other organisations are let off free.

Secondly, there is some incentive to minimise. Retailers should theoretically put pressure on their suppliers to minimise packaging so that their liability for the purchase of PRN certificates reduces, but in reality that pressure exists only when the price of PRNs is high and, because of consortium arrangements, high over a long period of time. When PRN prices are low, as they are and have been over a period, no such incentive exists—one simply purchases a PRN and has done with it. Similarly, there is no pool of funding to improve recycling at the end of the process, so the system fails to encourage minimisation. In any event, PRN income does not go as far as to help develop markets for what is recovered.

Thirdly, there is a reverse incentive, which is to inflate the success of the obligated organisation in recovering its packaging, thereby evading the need to buy PRNs, even though the waste has not been recovered. There is some evidence that the low price is due to that inflation—a press release from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs this summer showed the results of an investigation into the recovery of wood. That is not necessarily due solely to the fact that fraud is taking place, but because the science of measuring is so inexact in a number of categories that higher claims of recovery are difficult to rebut and are, in effect, almost condoned by the system. It is fair to say that the resources that are available for policing the system—to measure, to prevent fraud and to chase up non-registered free riders—fall way short of the levels sufficient to deal fully with such issues.

The danger is that confidence in the scheme will evaporate: people will go through the motions rather than really work it, because they know that elements of it are not real. If they do take a free ride or inflate their contributions, they may well not be troubled at all.

Despite those problems, the system has made remarkable progress. My concern is not that the system does not work at all, but that because of its perceived inequities, the gap between theory and reality makes enemies of those companies that want to co-operate. I am also concerned that after the consultative document has been produced we will almost certainly proceed with a system that recovers but does not minimise, even though, according to Government policy, we live in a world in which minimisation is a priority and an imperative in waste management. In essence, I am not suggesting that we should have no scheme, but that we could have a much better scheme that embedded minimisation if we worked towards it.

One example encapsulates many of these contradictions. Pallets are ubiquitous in UK manufacturing and bulk retailing. They are literally the base on which almost everything is transported at various stages of manufacture, but especially to retail distribution centres. They are usually made of wood, but need not be. Some pallets entering the UK carry imported goods, but a sizeable proportion is moved internally on so-called blue pallets, which are leased pallets owned by companies such as CHEP and others.

Before the summer recess, I asked a parliamentary question about whether packaging regulations should cover pallets in particular. The Department's short

answer was that they already did. That answer is only partly true. It is true that in the case of pallets that are owned, an assumption is made that the first use is recoverable. An obligation is therefore incurred that amounts to one tenth of the waste arising from pallets because it is assumed that they will make repeated journeys. By and large, however, they do not. They probably last half as long as estimated, but the company can obtain credit by sending broken pallets to be chipped. As far as I can see, that recovery mechanism is inflated to start with. However, those companies whose processing involves packaging do not own blue pallets. Therefore, they incur no obligation at all. It is assumed that the pallets are returned to the lease company and in principle are infinitely reused. Proposals advanced as part of the consultation suggest that blue pallets should be treated similarly and incur a one-tenth obligation. However, blue pallets return to the company only in aggregate. Many are lost, damaged, informally reused or sent for chipping with other pallets.

A good symbiosis of recovery and reuse could be achieved by using recovered plastic to make pallets. Such pallets would reliably last much longer—perhaps 10 times as long—than wooden pallets. There is, however, a capital cost in making them, and since pallets carry almost no obligation under the regulations and will not incur any significant obligation in the future, nothing much will change, even if the consultative document recommendations are accepted. We will have a very leaky system with an inbuilt inflation mechanism, as DEFRA's July press release acknowledged. It may work well despite its shortcomings, but it could work so much better.

My plea is that we take the opportunity presented by the consultative document and adopt its proposals that elements of the system need to be placed on the statute book to develop modifications to the system, but bring it into line with the ambitions of "Waste Not, Want Not" and the Waste and Emissions Trading Bill. That could truly set us on the road to the practical achievement of the waste hierarchy that I believe we all agree is essential for future waste management.

11.13 am

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Elliot Morley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) on securing the debate. He made some important points on packaging, reuse and recycling, and responded to points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien). The Government have set themselves very ambitious targets. We also have obligations under various directives, as was carefully pointed out.

My hon. Friend made several points. He referred to the waste packaging directive and how it applies to the Waste and Emissions Trading Bill. That is a fair point to make. We acknowledge that our approach to household waste, which involves reducing the amount going into waste streams and reaching local authority targets, is important in moving towards our targets.

We accept that we need to do more work to relate the Waste and Emissions Trading Bill to the directive. As my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test will know, that Bill is going through Parliament now, and we must align those measures properly to get the best benefits from them. He is probably also aware that we have an Advisory Committee on Packaging. It is aware of the role of the Bill and I can assure my hon. Friend that it is currently considering how we can best achieve synchronisation between the two measures.

I appreciate my hon. Friend's points about separation of waste. He is right that there are individual targets for individual waste streams. Again, we take those seriously. The waste and resources action programme—WRAP—is charged with developing new markets and providing support for the development of recycling.

I take my hon. Friend's point about PRN notes, which have a value in the way in which they operate. I also understand his point about concerns in the glass sector about the high value of the PRN system. However, that can have advantages as well as disadvantages. Of course there is a disadvantage to the glass industry, in that there is a cost in relation to the value of PRNs, but the idea is that when there are limited recycling facilities, the value of the PRN notes will go up. That value then helps to develop the infrastructure for recycling through the inducements that it gives. We are seeing those benefits in relation to the glass sector, but I understand its concerns. I had a meeting fairly recently to talk about some of the sector's worries and ideas. There has been much good work in the glass sector and important advances have been made, but more needs to be done, on glass and on the separation of a range of other waste streams. My hon. Friend the Member for Normanton made that point.

Mr. Bill O'Brien: I appreciate the Minister giving way. I was making the point that in the present circumstances, the glass industry has one of the best records for recycling material, but in many instances the high price of PRNs, which has to be passed on to consumers, puts glass at a disadvantage on price measures compared with some other container industries. It is against that background that the glass industry wants to raise its concerns about the fact that we do not have a level playing field for those manufacturing containers involving glass and other suppliers.

Mr. Morley: I understand that point, but of course other industries are caught by the waste packaging directive. There is also the landfill tax. There are incentives and costs on competing industries, which they have to face. However, I take the point and we are trying to listen sympathetically to what the glass industry has to say. My hon. Friend is right that it has a good record on recycling glass, but there are weaknesses in the sector. The catering and pub trade, for example, have a very poor record on recyling glass, and there are one or two other sectors where more could be done. Nevertheless, that is not to say that the glass sector has not done a lot. Its commitment and the work that it does should be recognised, and I pay tribute to that.

My hon. Friend referred to incineration and the Waste and Emissions Trading Bill. I am not sure that it is fair to say that the Bill automatically assumes that there will be more incineration. He rightly pointed out that the Government have put in place a waste hierarchy. At the top of the hierarchy, of course, is minimising waste. The next, as we go down, is recycling, and then reuse. Incineration is low down on the

[Mr. Morley]

hierarchy, although it is above landfill. There are certain advantages to incineration. If it is applied properly we can, for example, recover waste. We can have combined cycle, where incinerators produce both heat and power. We can also get gasification. There are a number of methods for the thermal treatment of waste that can be beneficial.

Dr. Whitehead: The point that I was attempting to address, particularly in the consultation document, was that as a result of the EU opinion in May the likelihood of substantial incineration, which is presently being undertaken and counted as recovering waste and as therefore liable for the issue of PRNs, being allowed is diminishing; it will have to be replaced by other methods of recovery, not including incineration. At the same time in the hierarchy in the Waste and Emissions Trading Bill there is an element arguably a large one of incineration, which appears to be increasing.

Mr. Morley: It is certainly true that there is an element of incineration. I would like to come back to the point that we have a clear hierarchy of waste treatment and that incineration is low down on that hierarchy. My information shows that very little packaging recovery if we want to use the term recovery is carried out through incineration: the figure is something like 500,000 tonnes out of 5 million tonnes. The impact of incineration on packaging is small, and we need to look at the issues of reuse and recycling. It is certainly true that more reuse and recycling will have to take place, and I accept that point.

I accept my hon. Friend's suggestion that there could be a greater use of recycled plastics in things such as pallets. That is a very interesting suggestion. I have seen some technology used for plastics recovery. It was in south Yorkshire, and the company concerned is looking for outlets for the products that it is producing. Pallets could certainly be among them. Through WRAP, we have the facility to give support, encouragement and financial assistance to the development of new markets and new technologies, and one of those technologies is the use of recycled plastics. That is an area that we must address, in terms of separation and collection, as well as reuse, so my hon. Friend is absolutely right. He will also be aware that we are currently consulting on some of these points. There are proposals in the consultation paper to change the way that pallets are handled under the regulations. We are waiting for information on that.

I listened very carefully to the points that my hon. Friend made this morning, and I am sure that we will include his comments in the overall consultation on the proposed changes. Items not covered at the moment are generally excluded, rightly, because of the provisions for reuse. The proposals apply to wood and plastic pallets. He is right that there have been some questions about the figures for the reuse of wood, and we have adjusted those figures. That demonstrates that with regard to the targets for particular waste streams, we are careful to ensure that the figures and claims and the PRN notes are accurate and reflect the amount of product that goes into separation and recycling. It is important that we have a robust scheme that works and stands up to examination, and that is why adjustments have been made to the figures for recycled wood.

Mr. Bill O'Brien: Local government plays a very significant part in achieving targets. Will the Minister indicate what further assistance his Department can give to local government? I know that there has been some funding, but we need to do a lot more if we are going to separate the various cycles of waste, and local government can play a significant part.

I also wrote to my hon. Friend about plastic bags and the situation in Ireland, where the tax on plastic bags has reduced their number significantly. Is he doing anything to emulate that?

Mr. Morley: I shall take the latter point first because I have had a significant amount of correspondence on plastic shopping bags and the tax that was introduced in the Republic of Ireland. I make it very clear that I am interested in that sort of approach.

As a general principle, the Government have applied a range of financial instruments that are designed to be cost neutral overall but to encourage good practice in recycling. The landfill tax is an example of that. Money is recycled by promoting waste minimisation. That tax is designed to encourage the minimisation of waste going into landfill.

The issue of the Irish Republic is an interesting one, and I am currently looking into the figures on that. We are keen to work with supermarkets to encourage the use of reusable bags; there are good examples of that in our country. I am not sure if my hon. Friend knows that although the amount of plastic bags used in supermarkets in the Republic of Ireland has reduced the tax has some benefits the sale of black bin bags has increased dramatically. It appears that many people were reusing plastic bags, particularly for waste, and now that they do not have them in the house any more they are simply buying other plastic bags such as black bin bags. That defeats the object in terms of the analysis of the life cycle of plastics.

The figures need to be examined to assess the costs and benefits, and we are doing that. I have an open mind to this approach and if there is evidence that such approaches work and are beneficial, we should consider them, but we also have to look at the whole impact and the life cycle.

My hon. Friend the Member for Normanton also mentioned local authorities. It is certainly true that local authorities are key players in waste collection and waste minimisation, but they are not the only ones. A lot of packaging and waste is generated by industry and retailers, and they have obligations to deal with that.

My hon. Friend asked what help is available. We have the waste implementation programme that has been set up by DEFRA, which is designed to give advice and support to local authorities about good practice and the steps that they can take to minimise waste, and to share good ideas among local authorities. We also have a further two years of the national waste minimisation and recycling fund. That is a challenge fund with a considerable sum of money for which local authorities can bid for major capital investment.

I have recently been involved in launching several projects in London that have been jointly funded by DEFRA, the office of the Mayor of London and the London recycling fund, which also receives financial support from DEFRA. They have been putting some sophisticated waste separation in place, and there are other investments around the country.

We recognise that local authorities need assistance, which is available for selected projects, but there is wide disparity between the performances of the best and worst local authorities in waste minimisation and recycling. That is not acceptable, and we must focus on those local authorities that are not pulling their weight in meeting targets. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test will share that objective. He has made some very useful suggestions in the debate.

We have made good progress in recycling and in the recovery of package waste. By the end of 2002, we had 44 per cent. recycling and 50 per cent. recovery of packaging waste. That is up from 30 per cent. recovery and 27 per cent. recycling when the regulations came into force in 1997. That is a considerable increase in a comparatively short time. However, we are not complacent and we recognise that there is much more to do. We have a range of challenging targets and must concentrate on the waste separations and the individual targets for different materials: my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test is right about that. I will take his suggestions away, look at them and include them in our consultation. His input this morning has been helpful and constructive and I will respond in a similar vein.

11.30 am

Sitting suspended until Two o'clock.

NHS Dentistry

2 pm

Mr. Paul Marsden (Shrewsbury and Atcham): I am delighted to have this debate on such an important subject that causes so much angst among my constituents and, I am sure, those of many hon. Members. I have a declaration to make at the outset, which is that I have not seen an NHS dentist as a patient for more than three years. Before eyebrows are raised, I should say that I do not have particularly good teeth to boast about: it is merely that I cannot get an NHS dentist. I have not seen a private dentist either, and I am dreading the day when I shall eventually be faced with having to get one, because it is nigh on impossible in Shropshire.

The problem goes back some 10 years, so before Conservative Members get too excited about a lack of activity by the Labour Government, they should take some of the blame. Back in the early 1990s, changes were made to the contract between the Government, the Department of Health and NHS dentists. Back in 1992, there was an overspend of some £190 million, which resulted in the Department making unilateral fee cuts and a decrease of income of some 7 per cent. That led to a breakdown in the relationship between NHS dentists and the Department, which resulted in the exodus that we have experienced over the past 10 years or so. There are now 5 million fewer people registered with an NHS dentist.

We have now had six years of a Labour Government. The record from when that furore was going on back in 1992 is clear. The Labour party, as I remember quite well having had some inside knowledge of such matters, said in its 1992 manifesto:

"We will make sure every community has access to dentists, with the resources to provide full NHS cover. We will restore the free dental check."

Although we may have seen some changes in attitudes by the new Labour party and, ultimately, the new Labour Government, all the subsequent warm words of support for NHS dentists have belied what has happened.

In 1996, in the run-up to the general election, the Prime Minister said on page 180 of his book "New Britain: My Vision of a Young Country":

"If things continue as at present and more people reach for their cheque books to pay for private insurance I genuinely believe that the NHS will cease to exist as we know it."

He also said that a decade ago people would not have believed it if they had been told that they could not get an NHS dentist, only a private one. Straight after the general election he said:

"We will have a national health service restored to the basic principles of the British NHS—the health service that we founded". —[*Official Report*, 18 June 1997; Vol. 296, c. 304.]

I wholeheartedly agree with him—there should be delivery, at the point of need, of a free service, not one that is charged for. However, we have since had six years of excuses and broken promises.

In September 1997, the then Health Minister, the right hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn), said in relation to NHS dentists that

"inequality and inaccessibility must be tackled head on now as part of the Government's drive to modernise NHS services".

[Mr. Paul Marsden]

In 1999, another former Health Minister, the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), said that

"this Government is committed to providing high quality dental care to a greater number of people."

In January 2000, the then Under-Secretary of State for Health, Lord Hunt, said:

"The NHS of the 21st century must be built around the needs of the patient not the system . . . From next year, we want to see everyone able to access NHS dental services, no matter where they live".

So it goes on. One reply after another has been made to parliamentary questions, and one promise after another has been made, and all have failed. In September 2000, Lord Hunt said that

"the Prime Minister's commitment . . . to give back dentistry to all who need it by September 2001"

would be met. He added that the Government recognised

"that the traditional system is failing some patients and there are still too many patients who have problems finding an NHS dentist. That will change."

Three years on, we are faced with more promises. Just in the past month, Health Ministers have promised that finally there will be change.

I want to give a taste of the problems that people face in different parts of the country. In October last year, people in Rossendale queued for three hours to try to register when they found out that a new dental surgery was opening. In Blackburn, the primary care trust spokeswoman Janet Ledward recently said:

"We have a serious shortage of dentists offering NHS treatment."

In East Lancashire, the dental health consultant Dr. Gary White said:

"The biggest difficulty is that there simply aren't enough dentists being trained and that's a government problem."

It was widely reported that in July in Carmarthen, south Wales, 600 people queued in the rain around the block when they heard that Brynteg dental surgery was opening. Half were turned away. Surgery staff received abusive phone calls because people were so fed up at not being able to register. London has the worst registration level and some of the worst oral health. In Scarborough, John Renshaw, the chairman of the British Dental Association, said that the situation is "desperate" and is a problem in the south, the north, the west —all over.

Dr. Donald Mackenzie from Lymington in Hampshire recently wrote to *The Times*, on the basis of his 25 years' experience as an NHS dentist, that he was

"deeply cynical about the Government's sudden 'commitment' to NHS dentistry, after years of a totally obvious policy of deliberately pushing dentistry out."

A final example comes, of course, from Shropshire. My constituency is in the heart of Shropshire. I recently rang NHS Direct, the telephone service that is supposed to be the magic wand to solve all our ills and problems. I asked about NHS dentists. The lady was polite and helped as best she could. She asked for my name, which I gave, and then my address. As soon as I mentioned Shropshire she stopped me in mid-sentence and said, "Particularly bad area for dentists, Shropshire."

I asked whether I could find a dentist in Shropshire and she said: "You can't find an NHS dentist to register with as an adult in the whole county." I said, "Okay, I'll go further afield. How about south Cheshire?" We were struggling, but we managed to find one in Congleton, a wonderful part of the area, which I know quite well, having been born and bred in Cheshire. It is a lovely part of the world, but in spite of the enticement of travel to Congleton to see an NHS dentist, I do not think that patients in Shrewsbury should have to travel a round trip of 80 miles on rural roads to find one. There was none in north Herefordshire, either.

Matthew Green (Ludlow): As a fellow Shropshire MP I can tell my hon. Friend that until recently I had an NHS dentist—45 minutes' drive away in Worcestershire. Sadly that surgery has now closed its books, owing to the death of one of the dentists. The nearest one at which I could register my family is in Staffordshire. Many of my constituents have had the same problem.

Mr. Marsden: My hon. Friend echoes my comments. We face a massive problem in the west midlands. I heard it said that it is the same in Wales. It is the same all over the country. The lady at NHS Direct told me, "We've had hundreds of calls from people in Shropshire, all trying to register with an NHS dentist." It is an absolute disgrace.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I appreciate that on the hon. Gentleman's grand tour of the UK he did not cross the border into Scotland. In view of the great shortage of dentists, what impact does he think the closure of the Edinburgh dental school in 1992 has had on dentistry?

Mr. Marsden: I am no expert on Scotland, but the hon. Gentleman's point shows that this is a deep-rooted problem. It goes back many years. That closure exacerbated a problem that was already quite profound some 10 years ago. I shall speak about dental graduates later.

A few days ago I received an e-mail from a constituent. Mrs. Urquhart and her husband have just returned from the United States. Her husband is serving in the British Army. He has done four years in Germany followed by two years in the United States. She writes:

"I understood that dental care was going to be a problem on our return but I am incensed by the reality of the situation. I was given the name of two dentists in Shrewsbury who are accepting NHS patients. Both are only accepting under 18s—I will have to be treated privately . . . I believe that private health care should be a choice but I am being told that there is no choice available to me. We have been accepted onto our local NHS Doctor's list so why is the same facility not available for dental treatment?"

I concur with that. She continues:

"After 2 years in the US, I am a big advocate of the NHS. I believe everyone should be entitled to medical and dental treatment, not just those who can afford it—and yet here I am in exactly that situation, dental treatment for those who can pay."

I contacted Shropshire county primary care trust this morning and so this update is hot off the press. It says that

"some routine dental care can be offered to non-registered patients but the waiting time for routine care is 18 weeks at present . . . The Primary Care Trust has limited funding available for practice

development grants during 2002–03 . . . It has proved very difficult to attract new dentists into the area for either GDS or Salaried PDS posts. A recent dental workforce review commissioned from the University of Keele"

an authoritative source—

"found a vacancy factor of 25 per cent. for associate dentists in Shropshire, equivalent to about 20 unfilled posts."

We face a crisis in Shropshire and right across Britain. Registrations have fallen dramatically. The figures speak for themselves. In 1997 when Labour came to power 19,383,000 adults were registered. According to the latest figures, 16,793,000 adults are currently registered. My big worry is children. In 1997, 7,367,000 children were registered, but the figure is now down to 6,784,000. The future generation should be building a relationship with their local dentist, as they do with their local GP, and talking about ways to prevent tooth decay and gum disease, but they cannot do so. They are given a sticking plaster solution of dental access centres to get emergency care. That is not good enough.

Furthermore, since 1997 NHS patients have had to pay an extra £80 million in dental charges. That is a 20 per cent. increase in six years. A basic examination, a couple of X-rays and one filling will now cost £17.80. Most people simply put that off; they cannot afford it, especially those in socially deprived areas. It is not good enough for a Labour Government to say, "Well, we're afraid you will have to pay it; we have little sympathy for those who have to pay dental charges."

On completion of their studies, dental graduates are saddled with an average debt of £13,000, and 49 per cent. have to take part-time jobs during their studies just to make ends meet. Is it any wonder there is no throughput of new blood into the service? That is a ticking time bomb that will have an effect on oral health in the future. Many problems are being created now because of the lack of NHS dentists.

There are no exemptions for pensioners, save reductions for those on income support, although I acknowledge that those charges were railroaded through by the last Tory Government, who made pensioners pay. Likewise, there are a host of other small groups, such as prisoners, who are affected. They may be the forgotten people in society, but the Heath Minister's written reply on 4 July to my question on the matter stated that prisoners are now waiting for routine appointments between one and 55 days. That means that prisoners may have to wait for almost two months just to get an appointment. Many people in prison have been taking drugs, and when they start to come off drugs, one of the first things to hit them is the pain from tooth decay. They may not have been able to feel that pain for years, so they may not realise that they have problems.

We are shoring up enormous problems for children. When the Minister rises she will inevitably say that more money is being spent to tackle the problem, which is true, and I agree that the number of treatments is slightly up. However, people want to build up a relationship and have access to professional advice from someone whom they can get to know and trust because they see them every six or twelve months. At a dental access centre, the patient goes in and tries to describe the problem. Time is limited as the conveyor-belt system is designed to get people in and out quickly. I rang one in Shrewsbury this morning to ask how soon I could have a routine dental appointment, and was told that I could not be seen for 10 days. We have some great professionals in the service who do their best, but with the best will in the world, they will not be able to quiz me about my brushing routine or my diet, or talk to me about the problems they may spot in the teeth or gums. All they can do is to say that they have spotted where the problem is, and that they have to take the tooth out or plug the loose filling. They will not be able to build a relationship, which is so important, especially for children.

What do the Government propose to do? Out of a £1.2 billion budget, which will be handed over to the primary care trusts in April 2005, the Government say that they will give an extra £10 million to help out. On the face of it, that sounds like a reasonable sum, but to put it in perspective it is 0.0000008 per cent. of the budget that is currently available to provide NHS dental services. The Department of Heath's blurb sets out what the £10 million is for. It states:

"An NHS team, backed by £9 million, will support PCTs where access is most challenging, providing advice and guidance on best practice in increasing access and modernising dentistry locally to tackle longstanding bottlenecks where it is hard to find an NHS dentist. The remaining £1 million will assist PCTs . . . in preparing for the change."

That is derisible. It is an insult to say that that £10 million will start to deliver what we need. The British Dental Association says that it needs at least 4,000 dentists to be able to meet demand. The Minister cannot quibble with that. It is what the British people want. When they are given the opportunity, they seize it with both hands. They want to be able to register with an NHS dentist. They will go to the dental access centres for emergency treatment if they have to, but that is not the long-term solution.

There was an article in *The Sunday Times* last Sunday on the recruitment of 200 dentists from overseas. I am greatly alarmed by that prospect. Will we be plundering reserves of overseas professionals, many of whom come from developing nations that can least afford to give up their health care professionals to this country to service our NHS patients? As Ian Wylie, chief executive of the BDA, said:

"This is really a sticking plaster for dentistry. We should be investing in homegrown undergraduates rather than poaching overseas dentists, especially where there is under-provision of dental care in their home countries."

The outcome of all this is that we are being forced to take out private medical insurance for dental cover. People in deprived areas will not bother to take out insurance because they cannot afford it. For a family of two adults on level B—that is, people with relatively good teeth—the cost is £16.39 a month, which is about £400 a year. Two adults and two grown-up children in one family are expected to find £800 a year for basic cover. That is not good enough. It is a betrayal of Labour principles of many years to say to people, "We are going to force you to go private, because that is the solution to the crisis in NHS dentistry."

On 3 August, John Humphrys wrote in *The Sunday Times*:

"We have gone down the private road through default and that's not good enough."

We cannot blame the dentists. They have a choice: charging about £50 on average for an appointment in the private sector or receiving only about £18 on average

[Mr. Marsden]

in the NHS. Serious money must be invested. We do not need gimmicks from the Government in the form of small handouts, with the claim that they will sort out the problem. They will not.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The problem that dentists most often raise is that they feel unable to complete the treatment that they consider appropriate for the patient under the current NHS financing arrangements.

Mr. Marsden: I agree. I wait to hear from the Minister how the proposed changes through the PCTs will tackle the source of the problems that my right hon. Friend mentioned. There is incredible frustration because the professionals want to do a good job. They want to improve the whole population's health, but the system very often works against them. It is about time that the Government started to give them what they need so that they can deliver that service. The BDA estimates that some 200 new dentists need to come on stream every year.

We have paid our taxes and the increased charges in national insurance, but we have a threadbare system for NHS dentistry. Only emergency treatment is available. NHS dentistry is inefficient, because it doubles up for many treatments, so there is no chance of developing a relationship with a dentist. As a result, people's health, especially that of the poorest and most vulnerable in society, will be affected for the rest of their lives.

NHS dentistry is a broken promise. It now delivers a two-tier system that forces people into the private sector and into paying money for what should be a basic right. Labour should hang its head in shame.

Several hon. Members *rose*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Nicholas Winterton): Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), may I seek the co-operation of hon. Members? It is my intention to begin the winding-up speeches at 3 o'clock. Members will therefore realise how long they may have, if they are courteous enough to assist all those standing to contribute to the debate.

2.25 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I hope to be reasonably brief. In my constituency it is not possible to get an NHS dentist. In July, I raised the matter with the Department of Health, which sent me an encouraging letter saying that not only will NHS dentistry be given a considerable increase in its annual budget, but a working party, led by the chief dental officer, is suggesting field sites. I am not sure what a field site is: the phrase conjures up pictures of things that I do not want to think about in relation to dentistry.

There should be a significant move away from the present system of item of service contracts, but we are in an extraordinary situation where, although a quarter of the population, and many children, can receive NHS dental treatment, the rest of us cannot. That is quite frightening.

We must be clear. It is not a matter of suggesting that a long-term solution will provide a fully salaried service—that was suggested by the Socialist Health Association more than 30 years ago. We cannot continue to allow a profession such as dentistry to be treated as it is in this country. If it is true that the average dentist earns £60,000 a year without private practice, some would say that dentists are not among the most poorly paid. Some years ago in my constituency, there were no NHS dentists, and I insisted that some should be appointed. All that happened was that a practice ran for a certain time, and then the practitioners looked over at one or two of their colleagues who were extremely well remunerated and decided to accept private patients only.

Indeed, some practices will not accept even children as NHS patients. When I went to that practice in my constituency to discuss what it was doing, the dentist concerned said, "We need exactly the same remuneration as doctors and the same terms and conditions." I pointed out to him that on the door of his practice there was a notice that I thought had some relevance to his rates of pay. It said: "Even if you have received treatment in this practice, if there is an emergency, do not come here. Go to the local accident and emergency service of the NHS." In other words, the practice was not even providing emergency cover.

We must have a little clear thinking about what is going on in the NHS. It is all very well to receive a letter saying, "Of course we are concerned about dentistry in Crewe, but we have had a look at the website, and we understand that there may be some vacancies in Winsford or Northwich for your constituents", but neither area is easily reached by public transport, let alone the kind of transport that would get my constituents to a dentist's surgery when they need care.

It is much more important that we seriously ask the following questions: if primary care trusts are to be responsible for providing health care, who will tell them the terms and conditions on which people will be employed? Will those people be fully salaried? Will the PCTs have enough money to run the service efficiently? If not, what will happen to dentistry in this country?

I do not believe that anyone can run a health or dentistry service—or, indeed, any of the services provided by the professions supplementary to medicine—on the basis that if the going gets rough, people can always be told that they can pay to get the level of care that they deserve. That is not a responsible attitude, it cannot be defended, and it is not what I expect from a Labour Government.

Some of the problems inevitably stem from the fact that we are not training enough dentists. Certainly, we are not thinking clearly enough about what we do with the ones that we have. There is no use in saying that we are going to move away from piecework in dentistry if we do not actually do it. There is no use in saying that in future we want people who provide dental care for the whole population, unless we not only make it worth their while, but insist that the constant development of private care does not leech away the expertise that the NHS requires and leave large numbers of my constituents with no care at all.

There are two people to whom most women cleave with a violence that surprises the male of the species: the first is their hairdresser, and the second is their dentist.

The reason for that is that they create a relationship of reliability and trust. It is even worse when one's children find it impossible to receive NHS dental care. That is returning to a situation that existed when I was a child, when the level of oral care in this country was appalling. It was regarded as an act of God. If a person did not have the money, they could not receive the sort of dental care that was essential.

I am sympathetic to the difficulties that any Government face, but a number of urgent decisions need to be taken. The sums of money being spent on the dental service are obviously not producing the results or the level of care that we want or, to be frank, the level of expertise that is necessary. It is clear that the profession is concerned about its own terms and conditions, but it still has not succeeded in evolving a working partnership with the NHS that will produce the level of service that we all need.

It is all very well to say that a change, by handing responsibility to another part of the NHS, will alter the situation. That is unrealistic. Primary care trusts cannot create dentists if they do not exist. Dentists will be sucked from other parts of the world, and almost inevitably they will not be trained in this country and will come from countries with a lower standard of living—countries that are even worse served by dentists than we are. That is morally unjustifiable, short-sighted and absurd because it does not work. It did not work in the NHS, and it certainly will not work in dentistry.

In my lifetime the provision of sufficient professionals in health care has always gone through a feast and famine cycle. A Conservative Government decide we have too many doctors, so they cut down the number. We decide that we have to do something about it, so we create another way of training people, and then say that we have too many. That inability to match care needs to the number of people being trained and the rates and conditions of pay that they receive is a failure on the part of successive Governments.

I am concerned about what is happening in Cheshire. I do not know why people do not want to go to Shropshire; I would have thought that that was a rather posh part, as it looks rather nice. Usually, there is no difficulty in attracting health professionals to attractive places, but they are not quite so keen on Liverpool 8. Cheshire is getting into exactly the same situation, and it is not acceptable. Health care cannot be rationed by payment. If it is, we get into a situation that we have already reached in my constituency, where some people in need of long-term care no longer have a dentist. When they were told recently that a salaried dentist had been appointed, they were told not to tell anybody else because there would be such pressure on those facilities that the dentist would not be able to cope.

Politics is a difficult art, but on the whole people do not cast their votes on foreign affairs. I was brought up by a man who said that one can make a speech on foreign affairs for 45 minutes, and the first question that will be asked is, "Why doesn't the light at the end of my road work?" So if there is a little message that the Minister wants to take away from the afternoon's debate, I hope that it will be sensible. We need a salaried service to train people and to get dental care operating now—not in five or 10 years. It is an urgent problem and solving it must be high on the list for a Government who want to be re-elected.

People have a strange, old-fashioned attitude to their elected representatives. If we cannot provide what they want, they will look elsewhere. I do not intend dentistry to be enunciated as one of the reasons to get rid of a Labour Government—I can think of one or two, but I do not want dentistry to be one of them.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. May I make a plea for short speeches, please?

2.35 pm

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I congratulate the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) on securing the debate.

I will start with some basic information. In my constituency, 80,000 people are not registered with an NHS dentist. That is more than the total population of many constituencies represented in the House. That is not because mine is a wealthy constituency—its GDP is less than 75 per cent. of the national average—but because there is a crisis in dental services on the Isle of Wight that extends beyond a shortage of NHS dentists to a shortage of all dentists.

I raised that problem with the Isle of Wight primary care trust not long after I was elected, but the crisis has got worse rather than better. In February I received a letter from the PCT that said:

"We have successfully bid for additional resources to set up a new practice on the Island".

The then Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), wrote:

"I am aware that there are currently no NHS dentists on the Island who are accepting new patients . . . New patients wishing to access NHS dentistry in the surrounding area can obtain information on practices accepting adult patients from the dental helpline which is operated by the Personal Dental Service, part of the Isle of Wight Healthcare Trust."

Perhaps the hon. Lady did not realise that the surrounding area is not replete with dentists, except when they are sailing. People have had to go to Southsea, Portsmouth, Cosham, Southampton or Lymington to find dentists who are taking patients on to their lists.

In May, the PCT confirmed that it had been successful in opening a new dental practice in Ryde with two dentists, thanks to a grant from the Department of Health. I acknowledge that, but, within a fortnight, it was taking no further patients because it was full. Since then, not one, not two, but three dentists on the island have said that they intend to retire from practice within the next six months. My constituents do not find that satisfactory. One wrote:

"I have been advised by the Dental Helpline that I would need to travel to Portsmouth to see an NHS dentist—which is out of the question, as I have a two year old boy and a five month old baby to take with me."

Another wrote:

"They recommended that I telephoned the Dental Helpline . . . or NHS Direct . . . Along with several hundred other NHS patients I found it impossible to get through to the former . . . Several days later I gave up and tried the NHS Direct number, only to be given, guess what, the Dental Helpline number . . . Now, what kind of NHS is this?"

[Mr. Andrew Turner]

Another writes of her practice in Sandown:

"I received a letter stating that they no longer treated National Health patients."

That is not exactly the position; in fact one dentist has retired and they were unable to fill the place so they are not retaining those NHS patients. She continues:

"On telephoning the number given, I was told that the only dentist available was in Portsmouth or Southampton. I explained that I am disabled and can only go by car, and asked if the fares were refundable"—

those fares are £37 return by car to the mainland—

"I was told no. My husband was born on the Island and cannot work because he cares for me. What am I supposed to do? And what did we pay National Insurance for all our working lives if we cannot now get treatment"?

Alison Holbrook, the assistant social responsibility adviser for the diocese of Portsmouth, took a trip to the mainland with three borrowed young children to see what it was like. She describes it at length. She had to leave at 10.14 am. It cost her £18.75 to get from Freshwater to Ryde. They chose the hovercraft rather than the catamaran, because it is quicker and there is time for the connection. That was a good thing, because the train up Ryde pier from the esplanade left at 11.35 and the bus got in at 11.34. It cost them £19.95 to cross the Solent. They got to Southsea at 12.05 and walked for 25 minutes to the dentist. They had to pay £10 each to register with a new NHS dentist.

After lunch the group went back to the hover terminal for the 14.15 crossing. Alison says:

"Disembarkation from the hovercraft was delayed due to the sheer number of passengers and special equipment being moved into place for a disabled passenger. We had one minute to get the bus, when one of the children said they needed to go to the toilet. We missed the bus so ended up getting on our original intended bus, the 14.45 no. 7A to Freshwater . . . Arrival at Freshwater was 16.20."

The journey lasted from 10.14 to 16.20, and that would have applied whether the person had three children or one. It took six hours and six minutes—a whole day.

Mollie writes:

"I think the journey is a waste of time, because the bus took us 1 hour and 20 minutes. The Hovercraft took 10 minutes and then a 20 minute walk to the dentist . . . Going to Southsea is quite annoying because all that journey just to have a 10 minute check up on your teeth."

Harry writes:

"It took more than two hours from Freshwater all the way to Southsea. It was horrible."

They did not even see the dentist, because this was just an experiment.

My constituents do not want to be told that there is a dentist on the mainland. It is impractical to tell a mother with young children, particularly children at school, to take a day off school or a day off work to go to the mainland, particularly for repeat treatment. It is also an insult. It is an insult for the national health service to tell someone that a service is available when it is not available and is totally impractical. It is a particular insult when the Prime Minister said in 1999 that he would provide access to NHS dentists within two years.

I sympathise greatly with the Minister, who has been plunged into this from another Department. She sits here and shakes her head in disbelief at some of the points made by the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham. I sympathise with her, but she must find an answer.

2.42 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I congratulate the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) on initiating the debate, but I am afraid that his experiences in Shrewsbury are reflected across the border in Wales. Like him, I do not have an NHS dentist. I have been unable to register with an NHS dentist in Aberystwyth for more than five years. The sheer misery engendered by poor NHS provision in Ceredigion has been a real eye-opener for me in the last three years.

What I have seen is symptomatic of a much deeper deterioration in NHS dental provision. That is going almost unreported, which is why this debate is important. The Prime Minister's commitment, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), has been forgotten, iced over, glossed over and even spun. "You can phone NHS Direct"—that is what the Government meant by a promise of access to an NHS dentist.

In my constituency, NHS dentistry is already the preserve of the few, not the many. Just 31 per cent. of the population are registered with a dentist. That reflects a wider trend in Wales: just two thirds of Welsh children, for example, are registered with NHS dentists.

I can sense already that the Minister will say that NHS dentistry in Wales is now the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales, but remuneration and training are the responsibility of this place, and we have heard from hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber that remuneration and training are at the heart of the crisis in NHS dentistry.

The only response that the Assembly has been able to make is to provide grants to dentists to set up in, for example, rural areas, but as the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) mentioned, all that happens is that over time those dentists privatise their lists and become, in essence, private dentists with a very small number of NHS patients, if any. That is a complete waste of public money. It is a crying shame that we are throwing good money after bad, trying to support dentists going to rural areas when we know damn well that in two or three years they will be private dentists and we will have to repeat the same process all over again. I have received an immense amount of correspondence on the issue, like many other hon. Members. Last summer, I went out into the streets of my constituency and did a street survey to see what people were experiencing with NHS dentistry. Some of my constituents' comments, like those of the hon. Member for Isle of Wight, illustrate the situation.

A married couple in Cardigan said that they had phoned 20 dentists, who would take patients only if they agreed to be private. NHS Direct could recommend only one dentist in west Wales, and that was in Ammanford. That is a good day's journey away—I hazard to say that it is similar to crossing the Solent. One may only have to cross a river, but that is a long way away in a rural area. Mr. and Mrs. J. in Llanrhystud said that NHS Direct had suggested Barmouth to them. Anyone with any sense of the geography of Wales will

know that that is a ridiculous distance to ask people from somewhere south of Aberystwyth to travel for treatment. Somebody in New Quay was told that they could not register, and it was suggested that they go to Tenby or Llanelli. Those are distances of seventy or eighty miles that cannot —I checked that fact—be travelled in a day on public transport. One constituent of mine, an old age pensioner who needed to make two trips to have her dentures redone, was told to go to Brecon. That would have involved two overnight stays. Solutions are very slow to emerge.

The National Assembly, together with the Government, have considered access to NHS dentistry. The Health Committee's report of March 2001 holds the key. It said that the current remuneration system in the general dental service

"is at the heart of the access problem".

That was in 2001, and it remains the position today.

The awful situation in dentistry has allowed fluoridation to raise its ugly head once again. I am opposed to that. I made my remarks on the matter last night during the debate on the Water Bill—the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) was also present. It is interesting to note that the National Assembly Government suggested giving free school breakfasts to children. That was the platform of their success in the National Assembly elections last May—they would provide free school breakfasts for children, but there was no mention of cleaning the children's teeth after that school breakfast. That would do a damn sight more to improve dental health than fluoridating the children's water. Taking the coke machines out of schools would also help a great deal.

Like the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich, I feel that only a system of salaried NHS dentists can tackle the huge gap in provision that exists today. We need to consider the introduction of a bulk payment system, and remunerating dentists for the preventive work they undertake and not just the treatment that they carry out. Fluoridation is a cop out, and a tacit acknowledgement by the Government that their provision of NHS dentistry is failing the vast majority of people in this country.

2.47 pm

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I start by concurring with the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas). Fluoridation is the wrong approach to a difficult problem. I despair of the BDA. It is a membership organisation, so it could lead its members by persuading them to come back into the NHS. Let us not fool ourselves, the debate is about money.

What worries some of us is that the same debate could happen with respect to doctors and general practice. We must be aware of the problems that my dentist has spoken about to me. I declare an interest, as I am still with an NHS dentist. I shall not quote him, as he would probably be drummed out of the profession. He said to me from the outset that once people see the other side and the benefits offered by private practice—the fact that they can pick and choose their patients, the plans offered to them, and the hours they work—they will not come back again. It defeats the whole purpose of public service.

I have always believed that those in public service must accept that they have to make sacrifices as well as taking some of the benefits. One benefit is the belief that people still have—whether rightly or not, I do not know—that the public holds a person in greater esteem because they work in public service. That is not compatible with pretending that those in public service can get the rewards and benefits that they want.

I feel most strongly that the Government have a huge problem. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) always got the tone right. I receive more complaints about this health issue than about any other. Usually, an MP can sympathise and suggest to constituents ways in which they can work round the system, and can help them to tackle what is undoubtedly a very difficult problem. In reality, however, we must say, "I'm sorry, but that's just tough." That is what we get when we have a privatised system working out of the NHS. It is not acceptable.

The Government are not doing enough, and I worry that they are trying to create the illusion that they are doing something about the general dental service with dental access centres and salaried dentists. When dentists see what they can get by going private, they will leave. Only a small, dedicated group of professionals will want to stay in the NHS —or, dare I say it, those professionals who work in areas where they are unlikely to get enough private patients and who may see the benefits of the NHS.

That dilemma is faced not only by the Government but by dentists, who must make those sacrifices if they are to service the population of this country. Negotiations must now take place nationally and locally to try to fix this problem. It has been gestating for too long. We have seen what has gone wrong. I call on my hon. Friend the Minister to tell us what negotiations are taking place, what the cost is and if we are prepared to pay it. We must say to dentists, "This is what the Government are prepared to come up with. What are you prepared to sacrifice to come back to the NHS?" If they are public servants, they must realise that their obligation is to all their patients, not just to children. Concentrating on servicing the needs of children is a nice idea, but when they reach 18 their teeth are no longer of concern. That is unacceptable. We must make progress.

I despair at some of the packages that are presented to patients as though they are what they need. We all know that money is made not in dental care but on hygiene products and all the other things that come with them. They may be important, but they are not the point of a dentist. As my dentist says, a dentist's central concern is pain control. People need a dentist when their teeth are causing them difficulties. We must build prevention into dental care, but let us not fool ourselves that we are getting the icing on the cake. What we want are the ingredients of the cake, and to go back to the basics of good dental care. We are all aware that things will be much worse in the future if there is no preventive approach. I want to know from the Government what negotiations are taking place and what deal needs to be struck, so that we can get on and strike it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I call the next speaker, I should tell hon. Members that I want to get two more speakers in before 3 pm.

2.53 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): My hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) described the situation in Shropshire. I am glad that he raised that issue today, and am grateful to many other hon. Members for describing situations similar to the one in Northumberland in the Berwick-upon-Tweed constituency. The problem began to affect Berwick two to three years ago when dentists started to accept only children on the NHS. The situation has worsened, and it is now very difficult to register a child with an NHS dentist.

The initial argument was that patients could go to another town such as Eyemouth, which is not too far away. However, Eyemouth stopped accepting English patients in its dental practices. Dentists started to say, "You can go to Wooler, which is 16 miles away, or Alnwick, which is 30 miles away." The same situation began to develop there. A practice in Alnwick started to practise purely private dentistry. Indeed, it wrote to patients telling them about the virtues of Denplan and saying, "We should like to emphasise that your next appointment will still be available on the NHS. We look forward to discussing the changes with you." Some of those discussions took a hostile turn, especially those involving the patients who showed me the letter.

When the dentists were no longer available 30 miles away, patients were told, "The only thing you can do is to go to the dental hospital in Newcastle 66 miles away", but only emergency treatment is available there. As several hon. Members have said, the situation is unacceptable. It is like saying to someone in London that if they want to see a dentist, they should go to Rugby or Ipswich—indeed, the train services might be better—and that when they get there, they can receive only emergency treatment.

The method that the Government and the health care trust adopted to provide some immediate relief was to try to install a salaried dentist in the infirmary in Berwick, where there is room, and where accommodation has been made available. However, they had great difficulty in making the appointment. One senior, experienced dentist who thought of taking it on told me that he had been informed that if he were appointed, he could provide only emergency treatment, and not the dental care that he thought a patient needed. It would simply be a question of removing the tooth, or possibly repairing the filling, which, as a professional dentist, was not what he would want to do. He was being asked to make the wrong clinical judgment about what was right for the patient.

The dentist also explained to me that the rate of pay was £70 for a three-hour session. For an experienced professional, that is unreasonable—it is an inadequate rate of pay for someone who can provide a high standard of service and who will be called on in a fairly desperate situation. The health care trust has therefore had considerable difficulty in filling that post. People have been assured that there will be a dentist at the hospital, but they still see advertisements in the local paper seeking to fill the appointment.

When I raised that matter in the House on several occasions, the then Under-Secretary of State for Health, now the Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs, the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy), said that all would be well with the new legislation, because it would

"give primary care trusts the leverage to ensure local commissioning."—[*Official Report*, 18 March 2003; Vol. 401, c. 758.]

However, the leverage to ensure local commissioning has not solved the problem, which has a number of deep-seated, long-standing causes. One of those is the shortage of qualified dentists, otherwise we would not be seeking them from overseas. Reference was made earlier to past decisions that contributed to that shortage, such as the closure of dental training facilities in Edinburgh.

We cannot rely on long-term solutions for our constituents. It is unacceptable that people cannot register with an NHS dentist or obtain proper dental care. I look to the Minister to resolve the situation in my constituency and the other areas affected.

2.57 p.m.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I congratulate the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) on securing the debate. I also thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak, because I realise that this is a devolved issue—responsibility for both the NHS and dentistry has been devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

I should like to make hon. Members aware of the situation in Scotland, because the issue is UK-wide. I indicated earlier the problem that we have had since the closure of the dental school in Edinburgh. There are now two dental schools left in Scotland that produce, on average, 120 graduates per year. However, the demand is such that the system needs to produce 125 to 130 qualified dentists annually. Moreover, some of those who qualify go south of the border, and some go overseas. We tend to focus on the UK's recruitment of professionals from Africa and Asia, but some of our professionals go to north America to ply their trade.

The issue has been brought into focus in my constituency because, in the past couple of weeks, the last NHS practice in Dumfries decided to go private. The letter that it sent to all its patients caused me some concern because it stated that over the past few years there had been a steady erosion of Government funding. Even the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham would probably admit that funding has been provided, although perhaps not as much as people would have liked.

I took exception to that. When I wrote to the local practice to raise the issue, the reply stated that the problem started in 1992, when the Doctors and Dentists Remuneration Review Body recommended an 8.6 per cent. fee increase. That translated to a 7 per cent. fee cut, as it was 15.6 per cent. down. It is a long way back to recover that.

We talk about spin in society, and I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) that it is the day-to-day things that determine whether the Government are in favour with the electorate. In that context, people may think that solely the present Government are to blame, but hon. Members can see that successive Governments have not delivered the service that we want.

It has been said that 4,000 extra dentists are required, but what will happen if we manage to secure them without changing our current structure? If we do not change the fee structure, we will lose them too. We are not getting enough dentists through in the first place, but even if we could suddenly magic them up, we would lose them as well. Even if there was an attempt to change the structure, I am not sure whether we could get some of the other people back.

The system is financially driven, which has forced people away. My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) made that abundantly clear. Those who have left have seen what happens outside and will not want to come back. We need salaried dentists throughout the United Kingdom, and I want to hear from the Minister how we will tackle this serious problem, which means a great deal not only to hon. Members, but to the general public. We still have 35 NHS dentists in my constituency, but that is half the number that we want, and I worry when I see some of the criteria that must be met. Young people in full employment will get a dentist, but what happens to those who are unemployed? Those are the issues that need to be tackled, and like all hon. Members present today, I want an answer to the problem sooner rather than later.

3.1 pm

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): The fact that we have had a large turnout and an excellent debate is a reflection of how seriously people take this issue and how large they judge the problem to be. In preparing for this debate, I quickly looked up some of the figures, rather like one quickly brushes one's teeth before going to the dentist, even if it is the only time that one does it for several months.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): Speak for yourself.

Dr. Harris: The hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) is probably the only person who does not brush extra hard just before he goes to see his dentist because he is blessed with gorgeous teeth, as he keeps telling everyone.

The problem is that we do not discuss the issue often enough. It is not seen as mainstream NHS, when that is exactly what it is and should be seen as. We owe a great debt to my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) for introducing this debate, and for providing in its scope and detail one of the best introductory speeches that I have heard. He considered the history of the problem: the worsening access, the broken promises and the failure of policy. He then took us on a tour of the country—like the Consumers Association, the health *Which?*, and the Audit Commission, he has done that. We are grateful to him for giving us the opportunity to discuss some of the problems in such a structured way.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) reflected, as I shall, on how we have got to this position after six years of a Labour Government. The problem of access to what should be basic NHS care has got worse, and continuing initiatives have not tackled the problem. Ministers have given the impression that the problem is due to be tackled, but it has not been. The hon. Lady reflected that her party, which has a long and proud history of at least trying to expand access to NHS care and make it free at the point of delivery, may lose support and votes at the next election unless the Government act soon. Recent moves to give power to primary care trusts to provide NHS care are at least coherent with the need to ensure that commissioning for NHS dentistry services and acute and community dental services are considered together. If NHS dentistry access is defined as access and not registration, and people are still charged and therefore deterred from going, the point will have been missed and yet more expectations will be dashed.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) cleverly and amusingly showed what nonsense some of the access pledges are, expecting people to travel with or without public transport, as the crow flies, regardless of natural barriers, to receive NHS care when they are in pain or in an emergency.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) reflected on the problems in Wales and introduced the subject of fluoridation—the debate had been going 46 minutes before he did so. The Government must feel under pressure to make more progress on that issue, given their failure to provide holistic and preventive care in dentistry. Registration would be a means of doing so. The Liberal Democrats wanted to await the outcome of the York report and abide by its findings. Those findings were that fluoridation was safe, but that there was not sufficient, good quality evidence at that time to show that it is adequately effective. That is the authors' interpretation of the York report, although both sides of the debate seem to pray it in aid to support their position.

A fundamental question must be answered. Is it appropriate to fluoridate water, even if it is shown to most people's satisfaction to be effective and safe? Is that adulteration of the water supply going too far? I suspect that that will be left to a free vote, but we will not be in a position even to argue the principle until we see better evidence of the effectiveness of fluoridation. There are other mechanisms for improving dental health—including children's dental health—such as proper access to dental advice and to the best products, which will involve fluoride but not fluoridated water. The Government should allow a proper debate about fluoridation before introducing a Bill that has implications for fluoridation but does not necessarily tackle the principle.

The hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) showed that there are problems in a market-based system. Private dentistry is a private business. He is right: there has been a failure in the market. An interesting question is whether it would be possible to bring dentistry back into the NHS.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) demonstrated one of the many sneaky ways in which private practitioners increase their market share under Denplan. Is it appropriate for a dentist to glower over someone in their chair and say, "You are going to switch to this very good, affordable plan that suits me better"? There is a serious question about whether that is the best way to do it. It may be how the Whips in some parties work

[Dr. Harris]

in Westminster, but it is inappropriate for dental care. He also identified the problem of how long one has to wait for emergency treatment and how it is difficult for dentists who just do emergency work to provide effective and holistic treatment.

The hon. Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown) raised the problem of dental supply, which is critical to the debate. It is not rocket science, but Governments have been unable to provide throughput from dental schools to provide adequate capacity in the system and an adequate market, so that the NHS can compete with private dentistry. If private dentists' lists were only half full, because there were more dentists, they would be more willing to work with the NHS at whatever price was agreed. Can we get private dentists back into the NHS if the fee structure is changed? I believe so, but only by tackling the problems in the labour market.

I want to deal with some of the Government's broken promises, such as the broken promise to tackle health inequality. How can we have greater equality of health care when some people have to go private but cannot afford to, and when even those that can access NHS care have to pay charges that deter them and that they perhaps cannot afford? There are also problems of poor access, particularly for those who rely on public transport, because the Government's approach has been to provide access over distance, which is difficult when there is no public transport.

Another failure of the Government relates to prevention. As I and other hon. Members have said, we do not allow holistic or proper preventive care to be given. That is a significant failure of policy. If we can prevent dental ill health, it will be cost effective in the long run. It has been a failure of the market because of an inadequate labour force. It is a failure of choice for patients who are lucky to get any option at all in an emergency or a routine setting. For a Government who talk so much about choice, it must be very disappointing.

We should have an NHS that is free at the point of delivery, comprehensive and universal. Why should teeth be excluded? How can we have a system in which there are charges even for NHS treatment? The revenue raised from charges has risen by 20 per cent. in six years under this Government? When Ministers attack the Conservatives, they talk about an NHS that is free at the point of delivery. They should look to their own policies and practice, because it is not always free. Charges deter people, especially the poorest.

Are the Conservatives willing to apologise for the imposition of that contract in 1992, which everyone agrees started the problem, and for forcing pensioners to pay for dental checks? We must also ask the Government serious questions about the cost-effectiveness of their dental access scheme, because the cost per treatment is significantly higher by several factors than the cost of NHS dentistry by a GDS dentist. There are questions for both the other parties and for all policy makers? Will we have charges for NHS dentistry? I do not think that we should. We will debate this issue at our conference later this month. I hope that it will be the start of the debate and that other parties will also consider the matter.

3.11 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): One of the most interesting and obvious themes of all the contributions today, particularly those of my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) and the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), is the serious problem of access to NHS dentists in this country. Fortunately, my constituents do not suffer to the same extent as those in the Isle of Wight or in Crewe and Nantwich. We still have some good, dedicated NHS practices, and a number of the private practices in Chelmsford see children on NHS terms. Nevertheless, although we do not have the same scale of problem, there is still a significant problem of access to NHS dentists even in areas like Chelmsford.

My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight reminded us—I suspect that some hon. Members did not want to be reminded—of the great show of spin at the 1999 Labour party conference, when the Prime Minister, that master of spin, announced that within the next two years everyone would be able to see an NHS dentist. As the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) rather cruelly reminded us, we did not read the small print. Apparently, access to an NHS dentist in most cases means ringing NHS Direct and being sent half way round the country to try to find one.

Four years after that bold promise from a Government who are long on giving promises but short on living up to and realising them, where are we? The percentage of adults registered with a dentist in England has declined from 52 per cent. in 1997 to 44 per cent. at present. Fortunately, the decline among children is less; it has fallen from 62 per cent to 60 per cent. In London, which has the largest population concentration in this country, the percentage of adults registered with dentists has declined from 49 per cent. in 1997 to just 37 per cent. The percentage of children registered has declined from 51 per cent. to 50 per cent.

My constituency and others have seen a consistent and steady decline, so that 1.5 million fewer people are now registered with an NHS dentist than were registered in 1998. That does not take into account the vast number of people—millions—who cannot register with an NHS dentist even if they want to. Probably the most absurd and distressing recent example of the consequences of the shortage was that of an NHS dental practice in west Wales that decided to increase its number of NHS patients by 300. Hundreds of people queued in the streets of Carmarthen overnight, rather as they do outside Wimbledon, in an attempt to be one of the lucky 300 able to register with an NHS dentist. There were allegations that bribes of up to 500 per cent. were offered, although not accepted, to try to get that valuable registration. Hon. Members will agree that that is just not acceptable.

What is needed is greater access to dental services. The need for a short-term fix drives individuals to see a dentist when they have an acute dental problem and they are in pain, but there is much more behind the decision to go to the dentist. It is crucial that regular check ups are carried out. Whether they should be every six months or every 12 months is an argument that I leave to clinical practitioners; some people do not have the luxury of taking such decisions because they cannot get access to an NHS dentist.

A check-up is crucial not simply to check the health of an individual's teeth, but because it may detect other medical problems. Dentists can pick up conditions in a dental check up that are unrelated to dental care, which is an important contribution to preventive medicine. An early intervention in a patient's medical condition might help to cure or to alleviate their problems. That is why it is so important to minimise the inequalities in dental care and do more to enable people to see a dentist.

As the hon. Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown) said, finance is at the root of the matter. There is also an historical problem: ever since Nye Bevan set up the health service in the late 1940s, dentistry has been an add-on, not an integral part of the NHS as we understand it, with the principle that it is free at the point of use for all. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) wondered aloud about those discrepancies, and that is where they came from.

It is crucial that the money provided is spent cost effectively and efficiently to improve and enhance levels of dental care. If the Minister has time in her closing remarks, I would like her to explain how it will be spent, because there will be a fundamental change in the provision of dental care from April 2005, with commissioning through the PCTs. We still do not know exactly how the commissioning and the provision of services will be carried out, and we need to know. For example, the budgets will be cash limited, but how does the Minister envisage the commissioning being able to meet the requirements and the needs of the population in the local PCTs? How does the Minister think that PCTs will be able positively to encourage and increase the number of people who have access to NHS dentists rather than their having to rely on private dentistry?

There has been a problem with capacity in the dental service in relation to dentists and dental nurses. Will the Minister confirm that part of the problem is historic and is due to decisions taken in the 1970s that were based on then valid opinions and the closure of one of the dental schools. It is now clear that we need more dentists. We can of course seek dentists from overseas, but that is a short-term solution. What can be done and what is going to be done to increase the number of trainees so as to ensure that in the longer term we will have enough dentists and dental nurses to fill the capacity that the service requires in order to meet the needs of the population?

3.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Miss Melanie Johnson): I thank all Members who have contributed to this useful debate and especially the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) for raising the issue of NHS dentistry.

I stress at the outset that the Government are not complacent about the difficulties in NHS dentistry. We accept that the situation needs to be improved, which is why only yesterday in another place there was the Second Reading of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill, which will reform NHS dentistry for the first time since the establishment of the NHS. It is time for change in dentistry. We have recognised that and are taking steps, as a number of hon. Members mentioned, to make those changes.

The oral health of the population has improved enormously since the NHS was set up, and it continues to improve. However, I entirely accept that the improvement is uneven and that there remain areas in both inner cities and rural England where dental disease remains high. The Government are committed to reducing those health inequalities. Equally challenging is the fact that in some areas, people have difficulties in finding an NHS dentist. All of us are aware of such problems from our constituents, so it might be helpful if I make it clear that the Bill is not about maintaining the status quo, but about changing it. The provisions are designed to widen access to NHS dental services and provide a more up-to-date legal framework that will better allow primary care trusts to develop and plan those services strategically.

Under the new legislation, which provides a framework to take forward the "Options for Change" paper published in August last year, the PCTs are to be given new powers to provide or secure the provision of primary dental services. The existing powers under the National Health Service Act 1977, under which the general dental services are provided, are to be repealed to make way for new general dental service contracts between PCTs and dental practices.

However, the high street dentist—the general dental practitioner—is a self-employed independent contractor providing the services. Dentists can practise wherever they like and there are no restrictions. Provided that they meet the conditions of suitability, they have an automatic right to provide NHS general dental services. They can accept as many or as few NHS patients as they wish, and they can currently alter that commitment at will without reference to the PCT.

The key aim of local commissioning is to provide a greater degree of operational control for the NHS locally, so that planned services can be matched to the financial resources available. That would mean contracts for an agreed level of service over a fixed period to be delivered to agreed quality standards.

Following the publication of "Options for Change", the dental profession was invited to submit ideas for testing the proposals in that report. The response was overwhelming. There was a very positive attitude among members of the profession to the idea of doing things differently, and work goes ahead with dentists on 50 different sites to test the ideas. I fear that those may be some of the field sites referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). Some 20 of those projects will examine different ways of paying for the service.

We already have experience of nearly five years of local commissioning of dentistry under the personal dental services pilot programme, in which resources are devolved to the front line. Those pilot schemes now treat 750,000 people a year, and have shown what works well and less well. The so-called field sites will build on that learning. The proposals in the Bill will underpin a modernised primary dental service, provided through contracts between the primary care trusts and dental practices.

The hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham raised the issue under debate, and I believe that it was his local situation that led him to do so. I was pleased to hear that he accepted that it was a long-standing problem.

[Miss Melanie Johnson]

However, I also accept the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich that urgent action is needed.

I shall quickly outline the situation in Shrewsbury. The three-surgery dental access centre has been operational since 1999. Following a recent expansion programme, there are now seven further centres across the county PCT area. At those centres, salaried dentists employed by the trust provide the full range of NHS treatment. The current priority is to meet the demand for urgent treatment, although some routine dental care can be offered to non-registered patients. A number of other steps have been taken in the area, but time and the need to respond to other questions will not allow me to go into detail about them.

The key point concerns the work force, and we should recognise that that issue is difficult to address locally. It has proved difficult to attract new dentists into the Shrewsbury area for either general dental services or salaried posts in the dental access centre, and there are a number of unfilled posts in the county. The issue is therefore not necessarily as simple as hon. Members make out. The money is available to pay for the dentists, if we could only recruit them.

Mr. Marsden: I accept what the Minister says. I agree that the PCT will be in a better position to move things forward. However, the Government and the Shropshire PCT have shown a fundamental lack of urgency, and that lack of urgency is replicated throughout the UK. I am not aware that more money will be made available to begin to solve that fundamental problem. People out there are fed up with yet more promises.

Miss Johnson: Since April 1997, dentists' NHS fees have increased by 26 per cent., in line with the recommendations of the independent review body. Anyone would accept that that is a reasonable increase. This year, dentists have received, in addition, £33 million of commitment payments, under a new scheme that was introduced in 2000. There are, therefore, a number of steps being taken to improve funding. I accept that Opposition Members—and some Government Members—may still say that more money needs to be ploughed into the service. However, those Opposition Members who voted against the increases in funding to the NHS have little basis for making that point.

I shall briefly sketch the changes introduced in the Bill, and the effect that they would have. In future, the allocations to PCTs will include funding currently harnessed by their local dentists, and they will be required to spend at least an agreed amount, and more if their local priorities indicate the need. PCTs will be able to take those decisions and employ dentists in the way that I outlined earlier, in order to address the priorities of local provision. At present, the method of payment means that the funds—which, as hon. Members know, are non-cash limited—are spent only to the extent that dentists wish to carry out treatment on the NHS, so that will be a significant change. The reforms have the endorsement of the British Dental Association. I reiterate that a huge amount of extra funding has been provided for NHS dentistry by way of fees and extra money.

Many hon. Members raised the matter of work force planning. A review is under way and we shall report on it by the end of the year. It will include examination of the present age structure, the increasing number of women dentists and the impact of our reforms on contractual and remuneration arrangements. It is intended to make NHS dentistry more attractive to dental practices. Other issues, which no one has touched on, such as the skill mix of different professions in dentistry, are for the future. Many things need to be done, but as of 2002 there are nearly 18,500 dentists in England. That is an increase on the 1997 figure of 16,700-odd.

In response to the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), I point out that the matter in question is a devolved one, and apart from the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill, I cannot comment on matters in Wales.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister will have to leave her remarks there, although we congratulate her on trying to get so much into them.

Disability Living Allowance

3.30 pm

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): I am pleased to have the opportunity to introduce this short debate on disability living allowance, a benefit that is of value to many disabled people. Disability living allowance is paid to those who need help to look after themselves. The allowance has a care component, which is paid to someone who needs to be looked after, and a mobility component, which is paid to someone who needs help to get around. It is paid at different rates depending on how someone is affected by his or her disability.

To help answer the question whether one can get disability living allowance, the website of the Department for Work and Pensions asks potential applicants:

"Have you needed help for 3 months because of a severe physical or mental illness or disability, and are you likely to need it for at least another six months?"

That seems clear enough. However, all has not been plain sailing with the allowance and the Social Security Committee has commented on problems caused partly by court decisions changing the basis for eligibility but also by flawed administrative procedures which, it observed, fail

"in terms of simplicity and workability".

That is an understatement, and, what is more, it is not clear that things have improved since the Select Committee made that comment.

I should like to draw attention to the case of my constituent, Mr. Douglas Gowan, who lives in Hethersett in south Norfolk. Unfortunately, his case is complicated. The sequence of events is as follows. Mr. Gowan, who is English, worked in the United States for an American company called Amjet, which planned to buy a division of Vosper Thorneycroft in the UK. The decision to buy the UK business was taken in May 1999. The plan was for Mr. Gowan to return to England and run the newly-acquired UK business. Mr. Gowan duly sold his house in the United States and returned to the UK. By December 1999 he was a UK resident.

On 11 August 2000 Mr. Gowan had a very serious accident at Heathrow terminal 4, when he fell down two flights of steps leading to the Paddington express, sustaining very serious injuries, which led to massive swelling and inflammation. A doctor at the hotel where Mr. Gowan was staying took him in a wheelchair to St. Thomas's hospital, where he was refused treatment. The hospital said, wrongly, as it turned out, that he was not entitled to national health service treatment.

Although Mr. Gowan had a UK address by then, the hospital refused to recognise it because he did not have a current NHS number. Instead, with the help of a friend, Mr. Gowan went to the private Cromwell hospital, but that was cripplingly expensive, costing several thousand pounds a day. Again with the assistance of a friend, Mr. Gowan obtained a wheelchair-assisted flight to Milwaukee in the United States, where he still had some medical insurance. He was in a very serious condition and had to be stretchered off the aircraft. He was taken straight to Columbia hospital in Milwaukee.

Since the accident, Mr. Gowan has received extensive medical treatment and been seen by various specialists. He has been diagnosed with eosinophilic fasciitis with some variations. It is a rare neuromuscular disorder in which cells are activated to attack the immune system and the muscular control of the body. It is said to affect as few as one in 2 million people. There are periods of intense cramps and extreme pain, and sometimes what would be described in layman's terms as paralysis and total immobilisation. However, it is episodic. Mr. Gowan can lose the use of his legs suddenly, and fall down without warning.

It should be emphasised, since it is important with respect to what happened later in one of the disability living allowance appeal tribunal hearings in Norwich – there have been three such hearings so far – that Mr. Gowan had been habitually resident in the United Kingdom from December 1999 and that that fact is not contested by the Department for Work and Pensions or the Benefits Agency. When Mr. Gowan returned to England, he eventually applied for the DLA on 14 June 2001. The application was not recorded until 9 July 2001, but it is not now contested that he applied in June.

On Friday 17 August, Mr. Gowan was telephoned by a Dr. Alistair Purves, who said that he represented the Government and needed to make a disability assessment. He asked whether he could visit the following Sunday, 19 August. Mr. Gowan found it strange that a doctor should want to visit on a Sunday, but he agreed. When Dr. Purves arrived, he told Mr. Gowan that he did not have the proper forms with him, but he took notes on a plain paper pad. Dr. Purves made no physical examination whatever, but sat in an armchair while Mr. Gowan was on a sofa opposite. Dr. Purves asked questions, made notes and commented at some length on the inadequacies of the US medical system.

On 21 September 2001, Mr. Gowan was informed that he was "not entitled" to the DLA. Dr. Purves's report was enclosed with the letter. For the first time, Mr. Gowan saw what Dr. Purves had written. Let it be remembered that Dr. Purves had not brought the proper forms with him and had said as much to Mr. Gowan when he arrived. Immediately on receiving the form, Mr. Gowan could see that his name was misspelt, the entry for his date of birth was incorrect and the report said that he could walk

"800 metres in 5 minutes",

whereas in fact he had said

"80 metres once a day and it could take 5 to 10 minutes".

There were some 32 factual inaccuracies in the form.

There was a tick in the box that stated that Mr. Gowan had read the form, although of course he had not even seen the form before, let alone ticked any box. Even more seriously, there was a signature purporting to be Mr. Gowan's, although it was in printed, separated letters and was not in fact his signature.

Although I am jumping ahead in the narrative, it may help to explain that following complaints by Mr. Gowan about Dr. Purves's behaviour, including to the General Medical Council, the medical services division of SchlumbergerSema – the contractor that is responsible to the Government for undertaking medical assessments – launched a serious complaint investigation team on the case.

[Mr. Richard Bacon]

In a letter to Mr. Gowan on 17 July 2002, SchlumbergerSema stated:

"Medical Services has reviewed the performance of Dr Purves and will now be making a request to the Chief Medical Adviser within the Department for Work and Pensions to remove him from the list of doctors approved to undertake disability assessments".

In short, Dr. Purves was removed for cause.

Dr. Purves does not accept the very serious allegation that he forged Mr. Gowan's signature on the form. However, he does admit ticking the box stating that Mr. Gowan had read the DLA140 form, which of course he had not done.

A letter to the GMC from the Medical Protection Society on behalf of Dr. Purves, dated 18 October 2002, stated:

"Dr. Purves accepts that, while there was no guidance to state he should do otherwise at the time, it was nevertheless an inappropriate shortcut to tick the box indicating that the person under assessment had read DLA140".

That is a fact; it is not in dispute.

It is also not in dispute—I am jumping ahead slightly once again, but it is worth stressing this—that the Appeals Service accepts that Mr. Gowan did not sign the form. The chairman of the tribunal, Mr. McDonald, stated at the most recent hearing, on 14 July 2003:

"You may take it that we accept that you did not sign the DLA140 form".

To return to the sequence of events, after having been told on 21 September 2001 that he was "not entitled" to the DLA, Mr. Gowan filed for reconsideration on 2 October 2001. His request for reconsideration was denied on 3 November 2001, but no reasons were given.

On 4 December 2001, Mr. Gowan filed an appeal, which was heard in Norwich on 18 February 2002. His appeal was denied. However, at the hearing he was denied a chance to present witnesses or even to offer documentary evidence to the tribunal.

As the right to a fair hearing is one of the most basic rules of natural justice, and the denial of a fair hearing was plainly unjust, Mr. Gowan accordingly applied to the regional chairman of the Appeals Service, Mr. Robert Martin, who is based in Nottingham, for the decision to be set aside.

On 12 April, Mr. Martin set the decision aside, and gave his reasons for doing so. He said:

"It appears to me just to set aside the tribunal decision because of the non-receipt of these documents, which are likely to be relevant to the issues under appeal, especially as much of Mr Gowan's argument in the appeal itself turned upon the question of the adequacy of the medical evidence that was actually given before the tribunal."

A new hearing for the tribunal was arranged. Mr. Gowan was informed in a memo some two months beforehand that it would take place on 18 February 2003, by coincidence a year to the day later than the first hearing. He then received a letter of 29 January 2003, which stated:

"Your appeal has been allocated a hearing date for 18 March 2003."

Mr. Gowan naturally thought that that was slightly odd because he had thought that the appeal was going to be on 18 February. He telephoned the Norwich benefits office to check the date as he had his witnesses lined up for the date that he had originally been told. The Norwich office confirmed the date of 18 March 2003, and said that it, too, had received the letter. Mr. Gowan accordingly informed his witnesses, including the medical experts, that the date was now 18 March 2003.

On 3 February 2003, Mr. Gowan received a letter stating that the appeal hearing had been scheduled for 18 February 2003 and not 18 March, as had been stated. The letter concluded:

"I apologise for any inconvenience my error may have caused."

By that time, Mr. Gowan had told his witnesses about the new date and some of them were now unable to attend on 18 February as they had made other plans. The whole point was that the previous year he had not been able to present witnesses at the hearing. That was why the decision was quashed. It now seemed that he would once again be unable to present his witnesses.

Mr. Gowan asked for a postponement. On 12 February 2003, he received a letter that stated:

"The request for a postponement has been refused . . . The tribunal can decide the appeal even if you are not at the hearing. As you have asked for an oral hearing, you may consider it is important you are there."

At that point I decided, as Mr. Gowan's Member of Parliament, that I should attend the hearing with him, as it was looking alarmingly possible that once again there would be an unfair and unjust hearing.

The tribunal met on 18 February 2003 and adjourned the hearing to a later date, having issued directions regarding further evidence that was needed to enable it to reach a decision. I shall describe the directions from the chairman of the tribunal, which I heard myself as I was at the tribunal. Mr. Gowan was asked to provide within 14 days a list of witnesses and any dates that should be avoided, which he did. The Secretary of State was to report within 14 days whether the report by Dr. Purves containing his original assessment of Mr. Gowan's condition was still relied on and, if so, to what extent. To date, there has still been no report from the Secretary of State on whether that report is to be relied on at all.

Another direction was that there should be a complete bundle of appeal papers, prepared as one bundle. On the Friday evening before the third hearing, which eventually took place on Monday 14 July, Mr. Gowan received an incomplete and out-of-sequence bundle at 5.30 pm, and only then after numerous telephone calls and complaints.

Another direction was that the Secretary of State was to produce all documentary evidence relating to the original DLA claim and the new claim, including a report from Mr. Gowan's treating physician, Dr. Naftalin, which entirely rebutted Dr. Purves's diagnosis. Again, that still has not happened, even now.

The hearing was eventually scheduled for 14 July 2003, when the tribunal met again. I also attended that hearing. Strangely, the chairman raised a new point of law at the hearing as to whether Mr. Gowan actually had the right to receive disability living allowance, as it was possible that he did not meet the residency test. As I stressed earlier, the Department did not contest the fact that Mr. Gowan met the habitual residency test. That point was raised by the chairman at the last minute during the lunch hour. He produced a photocopied page

of the relevant regulation, but did not produce a second page on which the text continued to state the exceptions to the residency rule. The appeal was again denied and in July Mr. Gowan asked for the reasons to be given. That has also not been done.

Will the Minister explain why my constituent, Mr. Gowan, is being treated like that? As a matter of law, when a tribunal issues a ruling, is it binding on the Government, the Department and the Benefits Agency as well as on the appellants? The Government have failed to do what they were asked: they have failed to report within 14 days on whether Dr. Purves' report is reliable; they have failed to produce a complete bundle of the documents; and they have refused to produce all the documentary evidence relating to the case. Incidentally, the Department admitted at the hearing on 14 July that it knew about the letter of August 2001 from Dr. Naftalin that rebutted Dr. Purves' diagnosis. If the tribunals are binding, and the Government have to abide by their rulings, in the absence of Government compliance with them, can my constituent possibly present a fair case?

The disability living allowance is a valuable benefit for many people. It is possible that it is abused by some people, and as a member of the Public Accounts Committee, I understand the Government's concern to ensure that abuse does not occur. However, it seems to me that the system is not working—there is systemic failure. My constituent, who is currently suffering, is a genuine case who has been waiting far too long to receive satisfaction after an accident that took place three years ago.

3.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): May I first say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what a pleasure it is to be here before you again so close to the middle of summer? We are not quite used to sitting in Westminster Hall at this time of year.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) on bringing the case before the Chamber and setting out the chronology and his understanding of it. He clearly has a close, personal interest in the case and attended some of the hearings and I do not dispute the chronology that he has set out. I will do my utmost to deal with some points that he raised, but I am unsighted on some issues. I have a chronology of the case, but it is not as detailed as his and if I am unable to satisfy him on any points now, I will get back to him later to deal with them.

I concur with the hon. Gentleman's opening remarks about disability living allowance being a valuable benefit that provides for the extra costs faced by almost 2.5 million disabled people in Britain. I remind him that administering the benefit is extremely difficult. That is partly because of the design of the benefit and the fact that it is not totally medicalised; he might find that hard to believe in view of the circumstances that he set out. Its purpose is to establish the impact of the disability on the claimant and the need for extra care and mobility. That is not dependent primarily on the diagnosis of the condition, but on the evaluation of the effect that the condition has on the care and mobility requirements of the individual. That can vary widely between two people with exactly the same condition, which makes it inherently difficult and subjective to administer.

There is also the curse—although it is disappearing slightly—of dealing with the benefit in an almost totally clerical manner. Unfortunately, there is scope within clerical systems for things to go missing and for the wrong dates to be sent out. That happens far too often and is something that we are trying to tackle by modernising and improving our systems to cope with lots of very individualised information from different parts of the country. Getting that to where it needs to be in clerical form is not always as easy as it sounds. I am the first to accept that things sometimes go wrong.

I know from my past legal practice that once a case starts to go wrong, it quite often gets worse before it is put right. Listening to the sequence of events that the hon. Gentleman has set out, it struck me that this is such a case. Not only did the doctor turn out to be Dr. Purves who has resigned from medical services and is no longer used—

Mr. Bacon: It is true that, through the Medical Protection Society, Dr. Purves gave an undertaking to the General Medical Council that he would no longer undertake that kind of work, but the investigation by the serious complaint investigation team at SchlumbergerSema actually found that

"Medical Services . . . will now be making a request to the Chief Medical Adviser within the Department for Work and Pensions to remove him from the list of doctors approved to undertake assessments".

It was not merely the case that he resigned; he was removed from the list of those approved and removed for cause.

Maria Eagle: It may be pedantic, but he may have resigned just before he was removed. In any event, I accept that he was removed for cause. I would certainly not have liked that standard of service to represent what is on offer to disabled people who are seeking to obtain the benefit or to explore their entitlement to it. I fully accept that his standard of behaviour was completely unacceptable. It was good that he was removed, given what he had done.

The clerical administration of such a complex benefit has inherent difficulties. The volume of people that we assist with it—almost 2.5 million—and the amount we disburse, almost £7 billion a year, shows its value. To give the hon. Gentleman a sense of the scale of the task of my officials in trying to administer the benefit, there are some 700,000 claims, reviews and appeals a year with which to deal. It is inevitable that problems happen, although I do not seek to justify that.

The hon. Gentleman has set out a bad case that got worse. My understanding is that his constituent now has the higher rate of mobility component and the middle-rate care component, ordered from 14 January 2002. I accept that the application to which he refers has not been determined in favour of his constituent. It will relieve us all to know that Mr. Gowan made a further claim and that my understanding is that he is in receipt of higher-rate mobility, middle-rate care benefit following a later application, which appears to have proceeded smoothly. We are therefore dealing with whether his entitlement extended from when he applied

[Maria Eagle]

on 14 June 2001 to 14 January 2002, so we are considering the value to Mr. Gowan, apart from all the hassle that he has had, which I accept is extensive—

Mr. Bacon: That is absolutely right. Mr. Gowan is now in receipt of DLA. What is specifically at issue is the question of the six or seven months during which he was not receiving it, but should have been, on the basis of a medical assessment made by Dr. Purves that has been shown to be flawed in so many different respects that Dr. Purves was removed for cause from the list of those approved to undertake assessments. In the light of that, it is important that we understand whether the Government are relying on the report of Dr. Purves. One of the orders that the tribunal made to the Secretary of State was to state the extent to which the Government were relying on the report and it, together with various other orders, has not been complied with to date.

Maria Eagle: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's question. Were I able to answer it today I would do so now. However, my chronology of the case is not as detailed as his. I guessed that he might raise this issue today but I was by no means certain and I did not have the entire file sent to me in advance. I will look at it. I am not aware from my preparation for this debate whether directions made by the tribunal have been met by the Department. I will look into that and let him have our view. I do not doubt him. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman's constituent did not want the appeal to go ahead in the form it did at the time it did, but my understanding is that the appeal was heard and the disallowance was maintained and that is where it rests at present.

Mr. Bacon: My constituent was unhappy for the appeal to go ahead on 18 February 2003, because of the mess over the dates, which was not his fault. The Department admitted that it was its fault. He was fearful once again that he would not be able to present his witnesses. Indeed, the tribunal adjourned on that occasion because it found that it did not have the evidence required. I do not think that my constituent objected to the tribunal taking place on 14 July. We are interested in a question of law. If a tribunal makes a direction to Government to comply with certain requirements, how, in the absence of such compliance, can my constituent be expected to enter into a tribunal that is fair or just?

Maria Eagle: I am enough of a lawyer not to trade points of law across the Floor with the hon. Gentleman. My opinion about whether it might be legal would be my opinion. I am no longer certificated and so he could not take it as proper legal advice. I will none the less get back to the hon. Gentleman on this point. I hope that he will appreciate that I cannot do so today.

This debate, short though it has been, has been about a particular instance. I acknowledge that the hon. Gentleman prefaced his remarks with generalised praise for the benefit and the good that it can do. We do our utmost and strive repeatedly to improve our processes. When one listens to this kind of chronology one could be forgiven for thinking that we do not always do as well as we might, but many customers are content with the way in which they are dealt with by the Department. They often think that we do not deal with them quickly enough.

We are making extensive efforts using new technology to shorten claim forms to try to make them simpler and more workable. We are constrained to a degree by the law, the tests that have developed for establishing whether people are eligible for various care or mobility components and the ever-increasing complexity of the common law surrounding that. We are on quite a drive at present to simplify the applications both for attendance allowance, which is the care component equivalent for those over 65 and DLA, which has the addition of mobility component. We want to make the questions more relevant. We want my staff to talk to customers to trigger the relevant questions to ask, rather to than ask them questions that are irrelevant because they are not applying for one of the components.

As we go forward with this programme I am hopeful that we will be able to design better application forms that will be simpler, more understandable and more workable for those completing them. The overall aim is to get the entitlement to these benefits right quickly and to get the payments as quickly as possible to those who need them. I regret that Mr. Gowan has had a difficult experience with that first claim, and I undertake to write again to the hon. Gentleman about the point of law that I have been unable to answer. We shall see whether my lawyers will allow me to do that in the way that I want, but I undertake to get back to him about that point.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am grateful to the Minister for dealing with what was clearly a very complicated case. The House is grateful for her offer to write the hon. Gentleman when she has considered the matter further.

Housing (South-West)

4 pm

Jim Knight (South Dorset): I am pleased to have secured today's debate. Affordable housing is the biggest issue for many of my constituents in South Dorset and for many people throughout the south-west.

If, like me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you are lucky enough to have a decent job—I see that you do—and own your own home, albeit with a large mortgage, as I have, you only observe the problem of affordable housing. You may even benefit from it. In the past two years, the value of my property in Weymouth has increased by 50 per cent. That is great for those of us who own our own homes, but what about the rest? Dorset county council recently commissioned MORI to carry out a residents' survey. It found that 30 per cent. of people believed that the lack of affordable housing was the greatest single issue facing Dorset. It also found that almost half of Dorset families had a household income of less than £15,000 a year.

Some 70 per cent. of householders in Weymouth and Portland cannot afford to buy their own home. How can we sustain our communities if our young families cannot live in them? Last week, I carried out my own survey of residents in the village of Studland in my constituency. Affordable housing was the most important issue for 68 per cent. of them. We spoke to Charles Orchard, a 24-year-old who is still living at home with his parents because he cannot find affordable alternative accommodation. People such as Charles inevitably migrate to towns with cheaper housing, but sadly not for better pay. The average wages in Dorset are the same as those in county Durham. Our tourism economy does not pay well, nor does the care sector or agriculture. The high levels of seasonal employment mean that our unemployment statistics are misleading. Unemployment is high in the winter months when, ironically, the housing supply problem is eased slightly as some holiday lets and caravans become available.

Our low-wage economy contrasts completely with the housing market. We are very lucky in that we live in a beautiful environment. Our coast has world heritage status. All that is crucial to our tourist economy and for growing the seaside trade to a higher value. By increasing the length of the tourist season, we are encouraging more leisure tourism including walking, sailing and diving. However, that precious environment is also driving up the price of houses. The south-west is a very popular place to retire to. I referred to the £15,000 household income, which is accounted to some extent by the larger than average number of retired householders who have relatively low incomes but relatively low outgoings.

Not all pensioners are badly off. It is true that the falls in the stock market have hit most pensioners hard as private pensions have taken a serious blow. Low interest rates mean low income from savings, and inflation and council tax have hit those on fixed incomes very hard. Nevertheless, the relatively high spending power of those retiring to Dorset has combined with those buying holiday homes to create a high demand for our lovely houses in our lovely villages.

Naturally, we want to protect our environment. We have not wanted to build more houses to meet the demand, and prices have rocketed as a consequence. In turn, that means that land values for any development have soared. The planning system does not differentiate between land for executive development, residential development and affordable housing development. That lack of distinction becomes a major block in increasing the supply of affordable housing.

Inflation in the private sector then coincides with problems in the supply of social housing. The late 80s and 90s saw the sell-off of council houses under the right to buy, but that was not accompanied by any significant investment in new build. When I visited Church Knowle recently, the chairman of the parish council told me that only three out of 150 houses in the village are owned by social landlords. As we drove around, he pointed out all the other houses that used to be council houses until they were sold. They are lovely houses at lovely prices.

The same story is told throughout my constituency. Today, housing associations produce, at most, only a third of the new homes that the Government have asked them to produce to meet those inevitable regional targets. In my opinion, the proposal from the Tories, who introduced the right to buy for council tenants and who are, sadly, not here to listen to the debate—

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): Nor are the Liberals.

Jim Knight: Nor are the Liberals, for that matter.

The Tories want to extend the same right to buy to housing association tenants, which would only worsen the situation.

The vision must be that people in social housing and low-cost rented housing should have quality and choice. One of the worst things about the housing cases that I deal with in my constituency is that I know that if I can help influence the council to get one individual housed, it is at the expense of the next deserving case. I know that when a young family threatened with eviction come to see me, they are faced with the prospect of bed and breakfast. That is expensive and normally wholly inappropriate, but the council has little choice. Furthermore, once those people are top of the housing list, they must take whatever they are offered, regardless of schooling, work, transport links or the condition of the property. They have no choice, and once they have moved in, the possibility of transfer is slim. If neighbours moved in next to me and I could not get on with them, I might be able to buy somewhere else and move away from the problem. I have a choice; by and large, social housing tenants do not.

A dad in Worth Matravers—another village near Swanage—came to see me about school transport for his daughter to Swanage middle school. He is on working tax credit and his income is therefore marginally too high for the family to qualify for free transport to school. They live just too close to get in on grounds of distance, so they have to walk all the way to and from school, even during winter, for two miles on a perilous, unlit road with no pavement. Most of us would consider moving to Swanage if we could not drive; my constituent does not have that choice as he is a social housing tenant.

We are a long way from delivering the vision of choice and quality in housing. For now, we just need to try to meet the housing need that we perceive in the south-

[Jim Knight]

west. I was part of a delegation of south-west Labour MPs who had a meeting with my hon. Friend the Minister on this subject in July. He told us that our region has had a 30 per cent. increase in funding in this financial year and assured us that the recent Rowntree report that highlighted the problem for the south-west, and Purbeck in my constituency in particular, was forcing the Government to reconsider their priorities and the south-west in particular.

The sustainable communities plan, which was published in February 2003, set out the Government's vision for housing and the level of public financing for the development of new and refurbished affordable social housing during the next three years. Some £22 billion has been earmarked, but most of it is going to London and the south-east. My hon. Friend assured us that he would look at the situation again in the light of the Rowntree report. As he knows, I will be going back in a fortnight, having secured a second meeting, for him to meet representatives from the Dorset chief housing officers group and discuss Dorset's particular problems. I am grateful to him for his concern.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): My hon. Friend took part in the debate last year on affordable housing, on which the rural group of Labour MPs are publishing a paper tomorrow; that was a quick plug. From talking to my rural housing providers, I know that one issue that has gone down particularly badly recently is the proposal, which the Government are consulting on, to offer grants to developers with regard to social and affordable housing provision. Will he comment on the overwhelming view of the affordable and social housing industry that we should not offer any special grant assistance to developers?

Jim Knight: I was speaking earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Diana Organ), who unfortunately had to go to a Select Committee. Had she been able to come here, she would have made a similar point, as well as commenting on the growth of housing association properties that she has seen in the Forest of Dean in the past six years.

The Government have also legislated to end the 50 per cent. council tax discount for second home owners. There are many second homes in my area, and that significant change was welcomed by my constituents. Councils will soon be able to charge 90 per cent. of the full rate. I hope that that will achieve two things; check the boom in holiday home ownership, which has done so much to inflate house prices, and release money for investment in affordable housing and tackling rural deprivation.

I also pay tribute to the Government's work on planning and how planning can assist in tackling the problem. Increasing the amount of housing development on brownfield sites is important in protecting the countryside. Increasing the proportion of affordable housing within developments is also making a difference, but there is a long way to go. That is why I welcome the consultation by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on changes to planning policy guidance 3, entitled "Influencing the size, type and affordability of housing", which recommends allowing planning authorities to designate land in rural areas specifically for affordable housing within their local plans.

However, why stop at villages? Why not include market towns with populations of more than 3,000 and designated development boundaries? Rural towns have few brownfield sites and relatively low land values, so that where there is contamination or other extra development costs it is difficult to have a high proportion of affordable housing without substantial subsidy. However, policy directs those in housing need to those towns. People migrate from rural areas to rural towns, which adds to the housing need of those towns' populations. Such towns have suffered a great loss of previously affordable housing stock through the right to buy. It seems logical to allow planning authorities to designate land for development for affordable housing in those towns, as well as in villages.

In my constituency, sustaining the villages requires developments of one or two dozen affordable homes but that, collectively, will not meet the housing needs of the district, which is generated proportionately in the market towns themselves. However, planning authorities cannot currently generate the capacity to meet that demand.

I also ask the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to look again at a tariff system on all new homes or other commercial development, as suggested in the planning Green Paper. That would counter the evasion by private developers of the thresholds that require them to build affordable homes. A tariff system would generate money to invest locally in varied schemes to tackle that problem. More investment is needed, so I ask the Government to consider the needs of Dorset and the south-west region in the light of the Joseph Rowntree report "Can work—can't buy" that was published in May and to which I referred earlier. I also press local authorities to play their part.

Ms Atherton: My hon. Friend is making a powerful case about the problems that we face in the south-west. Would he care to comment on the situation of the Liberal Democrat Carrick council in my constituency, which last year failed to provide one affordable house in the district?

Jim Knight: I am not familiar with the details of Carrick, but if no affordable property is being built, the administration at that council should look carefully at the proceeds that it will get from being able to charge second home owners extra council tax, so that there is a resource to use.

In the survey that we carried out in Studland, 72 per cent. of residents wanted the extra money generated by increasing council tax on second home owners to be spent exclusively on affordable housing, not cutting council tax bills. No doubt local councils will call on central Government to increase their funding for housing in the region, but they will also have the opportunity, like Carrick, to put their money where their mouths are.

There are four other areas on which I would like the Department to reflect. The first issue is empty homes. I am told that there are 60,000 in the south-west alone. No doubt if we can bring those into use, it will make a

substantial difference. I should be interested to hear from the Minister how the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is working with councils to release those homes for affordable housing.

Secondly, I am interested in whether there is more that the Treasury can do. I gather that in the United States there is a tax incentive for property owners to rent out their homes. Given the attractiveness of property as an investment, we should consider whether capital gains tax could be waived or discounted if properties were offered to registered social landlords to manage as homes to let to those in housing need. Alternatively, the Treasury could consider a premium rate of stamp duty on sales of homes where the purchaser will not be using the property as their main home. The proceeds of that could then be reinvested in housing and we could offer some disincentive to the growth of second home ownership in those areas where it is particularly strong.

Thirdly, I ask the Government to explore new forms of shared ownership. The Minister will be interested to know that in Studland a 68 per cent. share in a shared ownership property was recently available. The cost of that share was £124,440, which is no longer affordable; great for the seller, but completely hopeless for the future. If the original conveyancing on that shared ownership property broke the link with the market prices, we could keep those properties affordable. Their resale could be restricted not only to local people, but perhaps to the retail prices index or the rebuilding cost plus any land inflation that had taken place in the meantime.

In summary, I ask the Government to acknowledge and prioritise the problem that we face throughout the south-west, to reflect that priority in a continued increase in resource allocations to the region and to be more radical in changing the planning policy, although, as I said, I welcome the moves that they have made. I also ask them to examine the potential for tax incentives and the conditions in property conveyancing to protect local people in areas where affordable housing is needed, so that we can build homes for people throughout the south-west.

4.15 pm

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Keith Hill): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) on securing the debate and on bringing this important issue to the attention of the House in a lively and thoughtful speech, which contained many ideas that will bear further consideration.

I am pleased to see that my hon. Friends the Members for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton), for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy) and for Stroud (Mr. Drew) are present, giving tangible expression to their shared concern about these matters.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset is right that the south-west is grappling with rapid house price inflation, which has occurred in a relatively short space of time in many places in the region. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that the south-west suffers the double impact of significantly higher than average house prices, and lower than average incomes. My hon. Friend has graphically described the consequences of that state of affairs for his constituents.

Dorset is a very attractive county, and many people are attracted by its quality of life. It has beautiful countryside, pretty towns and villages, and a breathtaking coastline of international importance that has been recognised as a world heritage site. That highly attractive environment means that it is not surprising that "in-migration" to Dorset is among the highest in the country. As a result, Dorset has experienced the second highest population growth among the English counties, and that trend is set to continue.

An increasing population adds pressures in several different ways; for example, on health and other local services. However, perhaps the most obvious consequence is pressure on housing, particularly when households with equity relocate to a county. We can see the impact of that in a variety of ways. House prices in Dorset have risen by more than 35 per cent. in two years. The average house price in the county is £193,795, which is well above the national average, and only slightly lower than the average for the south-east of England. Across the south-west as a whole, the average house price is £164,036, which is the highest nationwide, outside London and the south-east.

Another pressure on the local housing market, to which my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset alluded, is second homes. The percentage of dwellings in Dorset that are either second homes or holiday homes is more than four times the national average; in Purbeck and west Dorset they represent 5 per cent. of the housing stock.

The factors at play in Dorset are seen elsewhere in the south-west. The rapid growth in house prices is a product of increasing population and a generally successful economy in an attractive region. Overall, the south-west was England's fastest growing region in terms of population from 1981 to 2001. The rate of increase was more than double the national average. Population growth has been mostly in rural areas, and among people over 45 years of age. However, the overall picture obscures some drastic differences across the region.

Gross domestic product per capita in Swindon is just over £18,000, whereas in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly it is just over £8,000. Average house prices in the Cotswold district are nearly 2.5 times those in Plymouth. In some local government wards in the south-west, mean house prices are eight times the level of mean incomes. The unfortunate flip side of that state of affairs is that the regional homelessness figures showed an increase of 23 per cent. between 1990 and 2000. In 2001–02, the south-west had the third highest proportion of homeless people in England—5.3 per thousand.

In the light of those circumstances, I want to reassure the House that the Government are fully aware of the challenges and difficulties that are faced by many places throughout the south-west, which is a region of huge diversity in its economy and environment. The Government share my hon. Friend's concern about the housing pressures facing Dorset and the south-west in general, and I shall outline some of the measures that we are taking in response.

The Government are spending more money on affordable housing. My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset has mentioned the statistic: in 2003–04 we shall provide no less than a 30 per cent. increase in funding under the main approved development programme for social housing. That amounts to £20 million extra for housing in the south-west, bringing the total to £81 million. That will deliver about 2,000 more affordable homes for the region in 2003–04.

[Keith Hill]

Affordable housing is a big concern in rural areas and the south-west is the most rural of all England's regions, with 93 per cent. of its area classed as rural. Over half the population lives outside major urban conurbations. A key issue for the region is the provision of sufficient housing to meet increasing demand in its rural communities, particularly for local people who cannot afford high house prices.

The White Paper "Our Countryside: The Future—A Fair Deal for Rural England" sets challenging targets for the provision of affordable housing in rural settlements of fewer than 3,000 people. In the south-west, we aim to deliver 350 new affordable homes in villages in 2003–04, and to increase that to, on average, more than 380 per year in the following two years. I shall certainly reflect on my hon. Friend's suggestion that we might widen the scope and role of the affordable housing scheme in market towns, but I can offer no guarantees on that.

Another key action by the Government that will help the housing situation in the south-west relates to planning. The Government's planning policy guidance note PPG3 seeks sufficient, better designed homes to meet housing need. PPG3 requires that we must build compact developments in towns and cities as a priority. PPG3 promotes well designed housing developments that do not waste land and a more sustainable approach to housing planning, which requires better integration of new housing with transport and other community infrastructure and services.

We have to ensure a better mix of housing that reflects the needs of everyone, not just the market for large detached housing. On 17 July I issued a written parliamentary statement relating to changes to PPG3 to widen the range of housing opportunity in terms of size, type and affordability. I welcome my hon. Friend's support for that initiative. My proposals underline the Government's determination that the planning system must facilitate the provision of new homes in the right place—focusing on brownfields first, but using greenfield land where appropriate—and at the right time, to meet planned numbers. My proposals will help to deliver more affordable housing without affecting overall housing numbers, and a better match between a community's housing needs and supply.

Although we have been mainly concerned today with the quantity of housing provision, it is important to say a few words about quality. My hon. Friend is probably aware that the Government have set a challenging target for all local authority and housing association homes to reach a decent homes standard by 2010 and we are working closely with providers to ensure that that target for social housing is met, and that the £19 billion in arrears for repairs to social housing is at last dealt with. We have also set a target to increase the proportion of private housing in decent condition occupied by vulnerable groups.

The House should also be aware that we are working with local authorities to end families being housed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation except in emergencies, from March 2004, and to sustain the reduction in rough sleeping, so that from 2002 it remains at or below two thirds of the 1998 level.

In 2002–03 more than £2.6 million of additional funding will have gone to 10 local authorities in the south-west to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping: Bournemouth, Plymouth, Bristol, Exeter, Gloucester, South Gloucestershire, Salisbury, Kerrier, Restormel and Christchurch.

We are delivering up to 460 homes for key workers in health, education and the police service over the three-year period to 2003–04 through the starter home initiative, which will ensure the continuing provision of essential services in the years to come. Beyond 2003–04, investment in key worker housing will depend on regional priorities and contributions from Departments and/or employers.

The mention of regional priorities brings me to a further important development in Government policy. The Government recognise that one size cannot fit all regions. We in London cannot, and should not, set out a prescriptive approach for all the issues facing the south-west. It is important that the south-west owns the agenda and seeks its own solutions. That is why we have set up the regional housing boards, to give each region an opportunity to identify its key housing priorities and to create its own response within a coherent national framework.

The south-west housing body has just prepared its first housing strategy for the region. I shall respond formally to its document in due course, but I am pleased that it has promoted a debate with an impressive range of stakeholders on the future of housing in the south-west.

It is important that the region owns its solutions, so the Government are providing the framework and resources to enable regional stakeholders to deliver more and better housing. We know the challenges all too well. Dorset has one of the fastest growing populations in the country, which is making it more and more difficult for local people on moderate incomes to find a home of their own. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset that the housing needs of the south-west are firmly in our minds, just as much as those of all the other regions in the country.

My Department's key objective is sustainable communities in all regions. Today's debate has been an excellent opportunity to reinforce the Government's commitment to a better future for the south-west, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this important subject and permitting me to set out the Government's policies in response.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes past Four o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 10 September 2003

[MR. PETER ATKINSON *in the Chair*]

Accident and Emergency Provision

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

9.30 am

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Peter Atkinson (in the Chair): Order. Before the hon. Gentleman begins his remarks, may I say that I am not a Deputy Speaker. I am simply the Chairman or Mr. Atkinson.

Dr. Pugh: Thank you, Mr. Atkinson. I apologise. I now see the name on the Table.

I have two cases to plead before the Minister—a specific case and a general theme. I am sure that other Members will want to describe their own parallel experiences and add their analysis to the debate. My objectives are quite specific, but I hope that the debate will range more widely than my speech does.

We all accept that accident and emergency departments, which we used to call casualty departments, are probably the most unpredictable and varied sector of modern medicine. They must be ready to field almost anything. They must deal with all ages, all ailments and all sorts of complaint, physical and mental, from the extraordinarily severe and life-threatening to the trivial and, at times, irritating. The key element of any accident and emergency department is that the patients go to it mainly because they require immediate attention and assurance. That is why the Government have stressed the importance of gauging waiting times in different facilities, and have set targets for them in their assessment of accident and emergency provision.

Although our attention is focused on targets, success must be measured to some degree by waiting times and other factors, such as a low rate of re-admission. We must assess the effectiveness of accident and emergency departments in some way. However, the unpredictability of accident and emergency—the fact that anything can happen—has led to several calls in the health service for increased training of staff, and for centralisation and the closure of small units that may be less competent at dealing with the full range of cases thrown at them.

Smaller units lack the full complement of specialists waiting in the wings, should something go amiss or happen out of the ordinary. However, centralisation comes with a price. Patients may have a longer journey, and may experience a delay in finding the reassurance that their problem is not out of control, or that it may not be as severe as they first thought. Centralisation increases social exclusion because more remote facilities mean longer transport journeys and more dependence on public transport, which may not be available. Not everyone has a fast and reliable car.

Statistics show that 75 per cent. to 80 per cent. of the through-put of A and E is standard, unsurprising medicine that is usually fielded well in any A and E department. Only about 1 per cent. of cases daily are extreme and life-threatening. However, physicians know that things can always go wrong, and I am sure that they would sooner treat patients wherever possible in omnicompetent, large A and E departments and accept the minimum risk, should things go wrong. In this age of medical litigation, one can understand their perspective. However, the vast majority of A and E clients have no need of such an omnicompetent A and E department and generally would rather have a more local facility.

There is a tension that the Government well recognise. That was evident in their recent document "Keeping the NHS Local: A New Direction of Travel", which says several important and encouraging things, such as:

"The mindset that 'biggest is best' . . . needs to change."

It advocates a "closer to home" model, and discusses evidence that "small can work." It talks of helping local communities to "broaden their options," and it focuses on redesign rather than closure of facilities and relocation. Importantly, it speaks of implementing changes

"with people, not for them."

and mentions "clinical networks" and "telemedicine links." It also discusses using imagination, thinking differently and involving the community.

I am sure that many people, particularly those with small local hospitals, found the document in many ways to be encouraging, thought-provoking and excellent. It gave comfort to many people who may have feared the total erosion of local services and the total domination of doctors' concerns.

I hate to use the words "producer interests". That is not my language for talking about public services, but I make the point that although doctors have the interests of patients in mind, they are also fully conversant with their own interests. For example, consultants would probably generally prefer that their patients travelled rather than they did because, by and large, they are busy people.

Other factors work against that document and the spirit of it. The agreement on junior doctors' hours constrains what hospitals and accident and emergency departments can do. When the working time directive kicks in, it will affect different specialisms differently. I understand that paediatrics will be affected less because a large number of paediatric specialists are female and have families to attend to, so they are currently unlikely to be working over the hours limit. The training standards and concepts of the royal colleges, which are raised all the time and justifiably so, also work against the document.

There is mixed evidence of differential clinical outcomes between smaller and larger units. Another pressure, to which it may be unkind to allude, is that NHS executives and others running NHS hospitals may gain more prestige from running larger units than a plethora of smaller ones. There is a balance to be struck, which the Minister and the Department of Health recognise. When that balance is wrong, the consequences are quite dramatic. There are scores of case histories to demonstrate that.

[Dr. Pugh]

On 17 August, 3,000 of my constituents marched to the local hospital to present a local petition against changes in accident and emergency provision and other changes, which was signed by nearly 14,000 people. In my constituency, the community is at loggerheads with its major health provider. The local council's overview and scrutiny health committee is currently constructing a report in reaction to that, which I expect will soon be with the Minister. I do not think that it will be entirely comfortable reading for the hospital authorities, but it will provide a good deal of evidence, which the Minister might well like to consider.

In my constituency, there have been angry public meetings and scores of stories in the local papers, including poignant human stories about real people who have suffered real trauma precisely because of the confusion surrounding the way in which accident and emergency cases have been dealt with.

I will expand on the problem. We are now implementing the 1999 Shields report on reconfiguring local hospitals. In effect, it recommended a division of spoils between two hospitals, Southport hospital and Ormskirk hospital, which had been merged into one trust by the previous Government. The report concluded that maternity services, children's services and children's accident and emergency should be situated in the neighbouring town of Ormskirk, outside and away from my constituency, Southport. The traffic was not one-way. A number of facilities that were previously in Ormskirk were to come to Southport, including eventually, though not yet, accident and emergency services for adults. So the proposal was that adults go down one road to hospital, and children go in the reverse direction.

The one issue that has lit up public interest and incensed people most is children's A and E. In 1999, when the first proposal was made, I led the opposition to the changes. I am completely unrepentant about that. I said at the time that the myth of the ever-mobile patient and the static doctor was embodied in the proposals. I want to put on record that I am still opposed to the proposals, root and branch. In 1999, protest about the issue was mild, compared with the present situation. There are three reasons for that.

First, the original report recommended that Southport retain some in-patient paediatric provision. That was in the original report submitted by Professor Shields, but was removed by the then Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham). Secondly, the original report recommended that Southport A and E staff should have paediatric training. I am not sure that that has been implemented. Thirdly, there was a fatal ambiguity in the report as to what would happen to patients under the age of 16 who were self-referred, or referred by their parents, to Southport, as opposed to being taken by ambulance. There was much debate in 1999 about blue light ambulances rushing down the road from Southport to Ormskirk. That was contentious in itself, but there was an underlying supposition that if a parent turned up with their child at an accident and emergency department in Southport, the child would be treated.

I think that everybody recognised at the time that there would be problems. Southport and Ormskirk, for those who do not know, are linked by a winding and largely agricultural road, which is often blocked and suffers influxes of traffic at certain times because Southport is a holiday resort. A prime example would be last weekend, when there was an air show on Saturday and Sunday and it was simply impossible to move at any speed along the road. The case that I am making is not my own; it was embodied in the original Shields report. Shields explicitly recognised that in any reconfiguration of services, the road was an issue. I see that the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) is in his place. He and I have worked hard to advance progress on the road and I would welcome anything the Minister might do.

Last time I initiated a debate on the subject, in December 2001, the then Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears) said:

> "The hon. Gentleman's constituency has two good local hospitals but pretty poor road links. I understand that the proposal to upgrade the A570 is in fact the number two priority on Lancashire county council's transport plan, and I hope that even if it is not the top priority, being second will mean some action fairly soon."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 4 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 66WH.]

The action that the hon. Member for West Lancashire and I wish for is that, when the Lancashire transport plan is reviewed by another Department, there will be a wide acceptance that health should be a contributory issue in the progress of the development of that road.

I initiated a debate on the road link in 2001, and the Minister was reasonably bullish about what may be achieved to mitigate the problems. However, the problems have been compounded by insensitive implementation. That is the accusation that I am making—perhaps it should be called an allegation. Perhaps the hospital authority would want to say something about it. I think that it would be widely agreed among informed people that the hospital has not done very well at implementing or defending the proposal on accident and emergency.

When the Minister receives the scrutiny and review report he will see evidence of very poor integration. By that I mean that there is little evidence that the ambulance service has been properly and thoroughly consulted and that the demands on it have been weighed, given that some people who previously would not have moved between hospitals will now be moved. There is some concern about the sudden increase in cases—particularly surgical cases—being received from Ormskirk at the neighbouring children's hospital, Alder Hey, often after being sent from Southport to Ormskirk. Many of my constituents have spoken of being turned away at Southport and sent to Ormskirk, and then being sent on to Alder Hey, because Ormskirk could not field the complaint. It is not only Southport residents who complain—rightly—about that. It would appear that Alder Hey is not delighted, either.

There has been no progress on the linkage between the hospitals, which was mentioned in response to my previous debate by the then Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health, the hon. Member for Salford. She talked about the development of telemedicine and the use of imagination. I have not seen a massive

amount of telemedicine, and have found little in the way of imagination. We are dealing in this context, and perhaps in others, with a fundamentally confused set of protocols. In the present instance they relate to children's accident and emergency services, but I should not be surprised to find similar confusion in evidence elsewhere.

For the benefit of hon. Members who do not know about this, Southport district general hospital serves a community of well over 100,000 people. It is not a small cottage hospital. It is modern, highly equipped and purpose-built, and it has an A and E department, yet it offers nothing to parents and children. In fact, it has a sign repelling them. Worried, anxious parents with their children must, no matter what the complaint—unless it is so severe that the child must be stabilised in some way—leave their town, where there is a district general hospital and an accident and emergency department, and go to a currently unbuilt and partly understaffed facility in another town. I understand that elsewhere there are even longer journeys to get to A and E, but in some respects what I have outlined takes some beating.

I have asked the Minister whether he could think of parallel instances in other areas in which a fully-equipped A and E department includes no facility for children. I am not sure whether I asked the Minister who is present today, but I certainly asked the Department of Health to give me statistics about that, and I was told that they were not collected centrally, so I sent a researcher to spend a great deal of time phoning a range of hospitals. I found extremely few parallels—perhaps one or two. Many A and E departments had no paediatric unit, but none the less admitted children and dealt with children's complaints.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): The hon. Gentleman is raising some interesting points. In my constituency it was proposed three years ago to close the paediatric facilities at Epsom hospital, which would have led to the absurd situation of a parent who had been in a car crash with their child arriving at the A and E department and being admitted and kept in overnight, while the child could not be admitted. That was defeated by the weight of medical and public opinion—medical opinion in particular—so I suggest that the hon. Gentleman should involve local doctors in his campaign. I suspect that they may think that the state of affairs is very unsafe.

Dr. Pugh: The hon. Gentleman's intervention was extraordinarily helpful, but I can cap that story. In my neck of the woods, if a parent and child are in an accident halfway between Southport and Ormskirk, the child, in distress, will be taken to the accident and emergency department in Ormskirk, and the parent, because there will be no A and E, ultimately, in Ormskirk, will be taken to the one in Southport. That is the kind of incident that was cited in the debate on the Shields report, and I thought that it was bad enough, but things have evolved. The situation is, if anything, worse.

To answer the hon. Gentleman's point about medical opinion, having canvassed the GPs in the area, I found them divided on the changes, with the balance against. While it has not always been easy to assess medical opinion inside the hospital, I have not necessarily found every medical expert, including the royal colleges, agreeing with my side of the argument as unequivocally as I would wish. I think that they are wrong, but as I am not a medical practitioner, it is difficult for me to say why they are wrong.

I want hon. Members to imagine how it feels for an ordinary person, with a traumatised child, experiencing a major problem, to drive—it might not have been necessary to summon an ambulance—past a purpose-built A and E unit and on to another town. I also ask hon. Members to empathise with the situation that could occur in west Lancashire, where adults might find themselves in similar circumstances. In that area, there is at least the redeeming possibility of a minor injuries department. In Southport, there is nothing.

The system is not what was originally consulted on, it is not humane and it is not intelligible. It has hardly a defender in the town. The Minister might consider that I have already rehearsed the arguments presented by the royal colleges. However, even the royal colleges cannot defend the unintelligible, and the protocols at Southport A and E are unintelligible.

The situation is as follows, and I defy hon. Members to explain it clearly. The hospital authorities say that no child will be turned away—they are not as cruel as that—but that children who turn up will be triaged and only critical cases will be taken in, treated and stabilised. However, when they are asked why ailments that are standard but worrying for parents cannot be treated, they state that that is not within the competence of ordinary A and E staff, as such staff cannot adequately differentiate between minor, serious and critical cases and those that have to be dealt with immediately. That is a slur on ordinary A and E staff. They are said to know and not to know the difference between critical and non-critical childhood cases.

Although there are doctors present, the Minister, like me, is not a medical doctor. However, I know from his background that he will have more than a passing regard for logic, and the position adopted by Southport and Ormskirk NHS trust is incapable of clear expression. I refuse to accept the unintelligible, and I ask the Minister, who knows about seaside towns as well as logic, to think about the circumstances of families in Southport and of visitors to the town who, reporting to the local A and E department with their children because, for example, they have cut themselves on the beach, are told: "Hop it. Get over to Ormskirk."

Having been through such things before, I do not expect the Minister to wave a magic wand today. Nor do I expect him to rush into any sudden commitment. What I want is for the Minister to listen—not to me, as he has done that for long enough, but to my constituents, who are sensible, ordinary, non-political people, and to other hon. Members, whose constituents' case histories might parallel those of mine—and to help us to get the balance right.

We in Southport cannot sustain a situation in which a progressive health agenda is hijacked by a guerrilla war between the community and its hospital. There are better things for people to do than to row with their local hospital, and better things that can exist than a dispute between hospital doctors and their patients. There are signs that the local PCT and the local strategic health authority recognise that, and there are also signs that

[Dr. Pugh]

imagination may be stirring. All I ask the Minister to do is look, take counsel, review and, where possible, reverse those changes.

Broaching a general theme—I did say that I would talk about general issues as well as the specific issue—I conclude by drawing on a matter that has dogged the debate over my constituency, which is the position of the royal colleges. The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health and the Royal College of Physicians will often go so far as to specify an ideal set of requirements from the medical point of view. I am sure if one were to ask about children's accident and emergency, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health would say that it would sooner have a system where every accident and emergency facility had 24-hour paediatric consultants on site, rather than on call.

Those are all ideal standards and they are subject to an important clause—all things being equal. Things are rarely equal and guidance is rarely absolute. The point to be borne in mind is that the royal colleges are not representative of medical concern in total, but they do have an eye on issues that the public do not have in their frame, such as medical litigation and the regulation of their profession. Although they are important bodies to consult, they are not necessarily disinterested and they are not always comfortable with every forward change. I do not want to lapse into any unfortunate talk about producer interest, which my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) and I agree is a completely improper way to discuss public services. The ball falls in the Government's court when striking a balance, and not in the court of the medical authorities.

I applaud the Government's increase in the number of trained paediatric staff and paediatric nurses, their encouragement of flexibility with regard to nurse practitioners, their encouragement of enhanced status for accident and emergency staff, and their preaching of the doctrine of clinical networks. They can have that for free—it is a wholly good move in the right direction. If we are to get the balance of accident and emergency right, all views, including those of the public, must be weighed seriously in the balance. Doctor does know best when it comes to ailments, but the best doctors—I hope that this applies to the Minister—are the best listeners.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Peter Atkinson (in the Chair): Order. Front Benchers' contributions start at half-past 10, and three hon. Members wish to speak before that. With a simple mathematical division, that means about 10 minutes each.

9.57 am

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): I will try very hard to keep to that. I want to use the case that was raised by the hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) to illustrate the problems of running smaller hospitals and of reconfiguring, or rationalising—whatever the appropriate euphemism is for what goes on. I thank the hon. Gentleman for opening the debate and for the rational and sensible way in which he has presented his case.

The hon. Gentleman and I share a hospital trust. The hospitals—they were formerly separate—are on two sites six miles apart, with one in Ormskirk in west Lancashire and one in Southport. The trust operates with two different strategic health authorities, two different primary care trusts and two different ambulance trusts, because its two halves are in Lancashire and Sefton. Putting west Lancashire and Southport together, we find that Ormskirk is around about the centre of that catchment area. Skelmersdale and Upholland are on the eastern edge of the area, next to Wigan. That is the most densely populated part of the whole area—about 50,000 people live there.

It is important for the Minister to bear in mind the fact that the main road, the A570, also links Skelmersdale to Southport, so anyone travelling from Skelmersdale to Southport for adult A and E must pass through the middle of Ormskirk, which is one of the worst traffic bottlenecks in the north-west. Debate about an Ormskirk bypass began in the 1930s, but it seems that we are still no closer to getting one.

The hon. Member for Southport and I inherited a long-standing problem that has created enormous public concern ever since the debate began about the amalgamation of the former Ormskirk, Formby and Southport hospitals. The debate began seriously in about 1993. I came into Parliament in 1992 and have spent part of my time during the whole of that period wrestling with the agonies of a hospital in difficulties. Public concern grew enormously at the time of the Shields review in 1998 and 1999, to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

For years, there were outraged discussions about hot and cold sites, and a tendency for the proponents of each site to attack those of the other one, which I am pleased that politicians tried to prevent most of the time, with some success. There were threats that patients would leak out of the district to other areas such as Liverpool or Greater Manchester if the amalgamation went ahead. In fact, many GPs in west Lancashire campaigned actively and said that they would send their patients not to the newly amalgamated hospital but eastwards to Greater Manchester.

After all that, Sir Robert Shields put together a report that was endorsed by the then Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), and approved by the then Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn). The report was endorsed—uneasily, perhaps—by the communities concerned and by their political representatives: the predecessor of the hon. Member for Southport, my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas), local councils, community health councils and me. In outline, the compromise placed all children's services in a brand new centre in Ormskirk hospital.

Dr. Pugh: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the councils. I believe that the record shows that Sefton council opposed the changes—collectively, on a range of issues but, specifically, on transport links. It asked to meet the then Minister but was not granted an audience. Sefton council was opposed to the proposed changes at the time.

Mr. Pickthall: I am sure that that is true, and it is true also of West Lancashire district council, which did not want the changes and fought vigorously against them for a long period. However, the Shields report put together what seemed to most people a compromise that gave something to each side by not benefiting one site entirely at the expense of the other and by trying to work with the grain. However, I understand the hon. Gentleman's comments.

The compromise, which placed all children's services in a brand new building on the Ormskirk site, recognised that the vast majority of children in the overall area were in the traditional catchment area of Ormskirk hospital, particularly Skelmersdale. The services include children's A and E. On the other hand, adult acute services – surgery and, coming shortly, acute medicine and adult A and E – were to go to Southport. Despite all the flaws that the hon. Gentleman has analysed, we could, with difficulty, accept the compromise. I speak for West Lancashire.

There were other reconfigurations in the amalgamation, but the A and E, the children's services and the adult's services going to different sites were the main ones, and those that have caused all the dismay in my constituency as well as in the hon. Gentleman's, especially among people in Skelmersdale and Upholland, who have to travel through the middle of Ormskirk to get to the hospital in Southport, unless they take an enormously circuitous route.

Thanks to huge efforts by the national health service in the area and local politicians to explain reasons and problems, public understanding has been largely secured, if not public support. That was helped at my end – the Ormskirk end – by the primary care trust and the trust agreeing, originally at my suggestion, to build a minor injuries unit in Skelmersdale, where the main concerns were. As I understand it, a parallel minor injuries unit project is mooted for Southport, to meet at least some of the concerns expressed. That is only in the discussion stage, but in my view is a likelihood. The driving force behind all the change was the concern of the Department of Health and the royal colleges that each hospital was too small to guarantee a satisfactory or even safe service. As has been explained, that was compounded by problems with junior doctors' hours and the working time directive.

Shields's brief was to take all those problems into account. In all the public debate that ensued, the Lancashire ambulance trust – I cannot speak for the Mersey Regional ambulance trust because I do not know about that – was reassuring. It attended all the meetings and reiterated that it could manage the new situation. As I understand it, there have as yet been no problems getting people to and from Southport and Ormskirk. The situation now is that blue lamp and acute medicine services are, as we speak, being concentrated in Southport and maternity and paediatrics in Ormskirk, where they will shortly be housed in a brand new state-of-the-art building; it is not far from completion. That has cost many millions of pounds, for which I thank the Government, and I hope that the Minister will find time to visit it when it opens.

Recently, a group has arisen in Southport that has woken up to the fact that those changes, which have been staring us in the face for four years and with which the hon. Member for Southport, I and many others have been grappling, have taken place. So politically astute is that group that it wrote to me and to many others in Ormskirk asking us to support the removal of children's services from the hospital in Ormskirk, a very unlikely request.

I can say something that the hon. Gentleman perhaps cannot easily say. The removal of children's services from Ormskirk, to be placed in Southport, which the group proposes, is daft and will not happen. Part of the group – I believe that it has a provisional wing – opposes the proposal to put a Southport minor injuries unit in place. If ever there were a place that would suit such a unit, although I suggest this humbly because it is not my patch, a seaside resort with millions of visitors would seem to be it.

In my remaining two minutes, I shall raise a couple of general issues that arise from the problem.

Dr. Pugh: I would hate the hon. Gentleman to blight the thousands of people who have campaigned against some of the changes in Southport. I am a member of the group that has written to him, but I was unaware that the letter had been sent to him.

Mr. Pickthall: Indeed it was, some time ago. I was very interested by it. My constituency is undergoing a rationalisation of its hospitals. At the same time, it is undergoing a review of its schools to remove surplus places, which will result in the closure of several primary schools. It is hard to judge which of those arouses most concern and, I must say, most local hysteria – there is some of that. There is a tendency to extrapolate. It is well known in Ormskirk that the Government intend to turn Ormskirk hospital into a BUPA hospital and flog it off. It is wonderful where these ideas come from. It is important that all involved in the process speak rationally, and explain and listen carefully, without jumping on some of the local bandwagons.

Hospitals and emergency provisions are changing. Specialisms are becoming more special and vastly more expensive. Many expertises are in short supply. Some reconfiguration is inevitable, therefore, and must be managed with enormous care and some give and take. Areas such as mine, which is bordered on three sides by major metropolitan areas with huge hospitals, some of which are only 20 minutes away, cannot easily sustain small, local general hospitals. Compared with many areas in the country, journeys of six to 10 miles amount to virtually instant access. People think nothing of travelling six miles across London to a particular hospital. People in your constituency, Mr. Atkinson, may well think that a hospital six miles away is fairly convenient.

To secure a comprehensive and modern maternity, paediatrics and children's accident and emergency department such as the one being built in Ormskirk is substantial compensation for additional journey time. Paramedics in ambulances play a pivotal role. They make the crucial initial stabilisation and decisions about where to go for the best possible treatment. One ambulance officer told us in a public meeting that people in an ambulance are far better off being taken to the right place than being taken to the wrong place and having to be bounced off to somewhere else.

[Mr. Pickthall]

The development of telecommunication—in our case, there are already links with Alder Hey—and of NHS Direct provide new alternatives for children as well as adults, dealing with serious and light problems. The minor injuries units will offer further alternatives.

The matter is important and affects many other constituencies and areas in the country, but few have the complication of being in two different authorities for almost all purposes. It is a difficulty, but the compromise reached by Sir Robert Shields seemed the best that could be arrived at in community and social terms at that time.

10.12 am

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest): I congratulate the hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) on securing this crucial debate, which is near to my heart. I will relieve the Minister of any worries: I will not speak too much about local affairs—I will say just a little.

I absolutely agree that the ball is in the Government's court. Like the hon. Member for Southport, I welcome the Government's commitment to real consultation. That is expressed time and again in "Keeping the NHS Local". The establishment of overview and scrutiny committees and the reconfiguration panel are welcome. It is interesting that the first time that the reconfiguration panel was used, in Kent, it came down on the side of patients and citizens. The hon. Members involved must be awfully careful not to be seen to be defending their own patches, because that is exactly the sort of divide-and-rule technique that has been used in our part of the world.

Conventional consultation, as the Government have spotted, completely misses the point. There was a useful article in the *Health Service Journal* just last week referring to the current consultation on Barnet and Chase Farm hospitals. The hospitals are only five miles apart, yet the pressure has been taken out of the process by guarantees that both accident and emergency departments will remain. There is a crucial sentence in the article—at long last, somebody is realising that access means entirely different things to patients and to health service managers:

> "To a manager, 'access' means waiting times, but to an elderly person without a car, it means bus and train services to the hospital."

To the elderly, access is purely and simply about distance and time, and the ease of getting there.

It has been hinted that we are approaching a collision. We have the needs and desires of patients and citizens on one side, and the clinical professions saying what is safe and possible on the other—and the Government are right in the middle. The citizens' wish is to travel for elective surgery, for which they can plan; they do not mind going to the best place for the operation because they can plan for it. However, they want bread-and-butter emergency treatment to be available near to them.

I shall refer briefly to Kidderminster in order to demonstrate to the Minister something that I suspect he already knows—if one takes three virtually equal accident and emergency departments, each with between 43,000 and 45,000 patients per year, and shuts one, the other two will be overloaded. That is particularly so if the one that is shut is left with a minor injuries unit but without a doctor, because it will not be able to treat anyone who may need admission. It will lead to queues in A and E departments and to demoralised staff. That was clearly demonstrated by the ambulance service's mileage: one month before the hospital was downgraded, it was 8,000 miles, but 12 months later it was more than 24,000 miles—a step of three times. The medical assessment units put in to take the load off A and E departments do not altogether work if the remaining hospitals are stretched. Only this week—it is referred to in today's papers—local medical assessment units have had to close.

There is a big myth about telemedicine. If a patient who lives in the wilds of Manitoba cannot be moved, telemedicine can be set up to a major hospital, which can take a surgeon through an operation he has not done before. However, experience of telemedicine here is that the machinery is often down and that the people at the far end are often too busy to respond. In my constituency, telemedicine is used less and less.

Turning to the clinical profession, I agree with the hon. Member for Southport that, by and large, doctors like the slightly easier life of working in a big unit. However, although it is much easier to provide a safe service in such big units, there has to be some compromise. I believe that the Government are working hard on the problem. Indeed, I am sure that the Minister takes a copy of "Keeping the NHS Local" to bed every night, because it is so important. It shows that the Government are thinking really hard about the alternatives.

For instance, the European working time directive will make it difficult to maintain many A and E departments. The Government are trialling four solutions in different parts of the country, all of which will retain a certain amount of local emergency work. I am waiting to see the details of the local emergency centre planned for Canterbury and to discover exactly how effective that will be.

The European working time directive is a time bomb waiting to explode. I would like for a few moments to impress the extent of the problem upon hon. Members. Of hospitals that serve fewer than 150,000 people, several have A and E departments. They include those in Bassetlaw, Grantham, Banbury, Weston-super-Mare, Halton general hospital in Runcorn and, I am afraid to say, Mr. Atkinson, the hospital in Hexham. As for hospitals with fewer than 150 beds, according to my sources, 36 apparently have A and E departments, including the Montagu hospital in Yorkshire and hospitals in Llandudno, Bridlington, Newark, Clacton and Louth. I could continue. There is a threat not only to services at those hospitals, but to services at some large units that are close together, which face problems because of the European working time directive. Shrewsbury and Telford are close together, as the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) knows, and we have heard about Ormskirk and Southport, but Falkirk and Stirling, Wakefield and Pontefract, Cheltenham and Gloucester, and Watford and Hemel Hempstead are also threatened. There is a time bomb waiting to explode.

The Government's job is to provide what patients need and desire and to make it possible for clinical staff to deliver a safe service in those circumstances. Compromises are necessary, but local people need bread-and-butter, local emergency services.

10.20 am

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): I congratulate the hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) on securing this debate and on his substantial contribution to it. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) whose comments enable me to curtail my comments because, inevitably, he and I have a similar perception of the issues he raised. I am sorry that he had to curtail his comments to enable me to speak, because his expertise provided a useful contribution. I echo what he said about consultation and keeping the NHS local.

We recently had an unsatisfactory consultation exercise in south Worcestershire, which led to the downgrading of the minor injuries unit at Evesham community hospital. Thanks to a corrected parliamentary answer, something I had not received before, I understand that that consultation was probably illegal, having been conducted during a local government election. I am grateful to the Department for correcting its earlier answer.

I want to make two basic points. Accident and emergency departments are often misused by us, the patients, and over-centralised, as the hon. Members for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) and for Southport said, but they are often put under excess pressure for other reasons. I am making no criticism of local accident and emergency staff. My son was treated at the Worcestershire Royal hospital only a few months ago for a suspected broken back, and the quality of treatment he received was remarkable. That was a genuine emergency to which the hospital and the accident and emergency service responded magnificently. I am glad to say that he sustained only severe bruising, but he had to walk many hundreds of yards with a severely bruised back to the car park, because there is totally inadequate car parking provision at the hospital—but that is another matter.

I broke my finger some weeks ago when boarding a fishing vessel as part of the armed forces parliamentary scheme. On reflection, I should have gone to the accident and emergency department of Worcestershire Royal hospital, but I did not. The fracture set badly and I cannot get my wedding ring off, which I am sure my wife is pleased about. The psychology is interesting. I was not prepared to go and wait six or eight hours, which is common in accident and emergency departments for routine injuries such as a broken finger. I should have practised what I preach and gone to the minor injuries unit at Evesham community hospital, but I did not think to do so. I regret that mistake, because of the problem I now have with my finger—particularly as I am left-handed—which has lost some of its strength and, more significantly, because minor injuries units have a huge role to play is removing an unnecessary work load from accident and emergency departments.

The tragedy is that the minor injuries unit at Evesham community hospital, as a result of the botched consultation by the primary care trust, has been downgraded and has lost a staff member. That has serious consequences. The former matron wrote to the primary care trust to object to the proposal, but it has been implemented. The primary care trust argued that not enough people used it—I freely admit that it is not used enough—and that it could not justify two permanent members of staff. I suggest that the correct solution was to promote the unit more effectively to take pressure off the accident and emergency department at Worcestershire Royal hospital and probably even the Alexandra hospital at Redditch. However, that was not done and the unit was downgraded, which I fear is the first stage of its total abolition. Minor injuries units have a huge role to play in supporting accident and emergency departments. It is a tragedy that that is happening in Worcestershire, and I suspect that the pattern is being repeated elsewhere in the country.

The hon. Member for Wyre Forest also referred to medical assessment units and their important role. The unit at the Worcestershire Royal hospital is a great success and we all welcome it, but sadly it has closed twice during the summer—once in August and once on Monday this week. South Worcestershire primary care trust sent out a fax on Monday 8 September, which was sent to me by a local GP, stating that the hospital was

"requesting four hours of respite for their Medical Assessment Unit."

It is respite care for the health service. The fax concluded:

"Patients requiring urgent medical attention should continue to be sent to the accident and emergency department where they will be tended to as normal."

I have, of course, talked to local GPs, who say that their response was to send more people to the accident and emergency department. The problem was not solved; it was transferred. I do not know whether that has been repeated elsewhere in the country, but the pressures on the medical assessment unit are clearly unacceptable because it has had to close twice during the summer and early autumn, when there are no epidemics, emergencies or crashes on the motorway. There have been no systemic problems, but it has had to close down twice—once for two hours and once for four hours. What will be the impact on the accident and emergency department if we get a flu epidemic in a bad winter?

To his great credit, the former Secretary of State for Health acknowledged that the Worcestershire health economy lacks capacity—a point made by the hon. Member for Wyre Forest. Problems are inevitably created when an accident and emergency department is closed. The capacity problem is made worse by Government targets, which distort local decision making. For example, we would not have downgraded the minor injuries unit at Evesham; we would have upgraded it and promoted it better. However, the primary care trust must meet specific targets laid down by the Government, so it had no choice. I feel sorry for it.

It is a question not only of Government policy and capacity but of ensuring that the accident and emergency departments are used properly. Many of our constituents are confused by titles such as minor injuries unit, accident and emergency and casualty—a word that they still know very well. What are those titles all about? We must work towards a better definition of the use of accident and emergency departments.

[Mr. Peter Luff]

When I made a similar speech commenting on the lack of capacity in the local health economy, the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) said that it was outrageous, because I would deter parents from taking children with temperatures to their local accident and emergency department. I replied that children with temperatures should not be taken first to accident and emergency. Yes, they might have meningitis, of which their temperature might be a worrying symptom, but they should start elsewhere in the system.

Parents should probably start with their pharmacist—a much under-used resource. Pharmacists could take pressure off accident and emergency departments. They should talk to their GP. They should talk to NHS Direct, which the hon. Member for West Lancashire referred to. I have my reservations about that organisation, but it is there. It would be better to discuss the case of a child with a temperature over the phone rather than rushing to an accident and emergency department, which denies other people with more threatening conditions access to treatment. GPs have out-of-hours centres, which are better places than accident and emergency to take that kind of ailment. There are also minor injuries units and medical assessment units.

Accident and emergency departments are often confronted with problems that are not medical. Such problems are the concern of the local education authority, the social services department or even the police. We must educate people to use accident and emergency departments better.

We are suffering in our county from a genuine double whammy. There is a systemic problem of people misunderstanding how to access the health service appropriately, which clogs up accident and emergency departments in Redditch and Worcester. Worryingly, ambulances have been queueing outside our accident and emergency department, where six to eight-hour waits are not infrequent. The fine staff in the health service generally, and certainly in our county, deserve better from both the Government and patients.

Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS trust has a fine new chief executive, who has a strong team of clinicians beneath him—some might say above him. Both the state and the citizen have a role to play in ensuring that all accident and emergency departments are used properly and serve the people effectively, and that is certainly the case in our county. I hope that the Minister will find ways to address the serious capacity problem in our county. As we approach the winter, I am fearful of what I will see in our local accident and emergency departments.

10.29 am

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) for allowing us an opportunity to debate accident and emergency provision. I applaud the expert way in which he has led the campaign locally, and the rational and effective way in which he has put his case today. He raised some serious questions for the Minister to answer, not least about the logic of the proposed arrangements. Since it was a Minister who altered the Shields report, the Government must take responsibility under current arrangements for the decisions that have been made, and be accountable for those decisions to local people and to the numbers of visitors to A and E departments in tourist destinations such as Southport.

We had a helpful contribution along the same lines from the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall), and a characteristic contribution, in its expertise and research, from the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor), who drew attention to the implications of some matters that I shall turn to later, including the working time directive. The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) made some important points about the appropriate use of A and E services, which I shall also touch on.

The Government have raised expectations of having accessible A and E departments. They have focused on A and E services under the term "modernisation", which is sometimes a euphemism for interference, although not always. They have also raised expectations by calling a document "Keeping the NHS Local". Many hon. Members have already referred to the sentiments expressed in that reconfiguration document. It leads people to believe that they will be able to access their NHS locally, without some of the problems that we have heard reported in this debate. Again, it will be up to Ministers to defend the standard of service about which they seek to raise expectations when they title documents in such a way. The Government have an alternative: they could call a document "Look, we have a problem here", with regard to the number of doctors per head of population, the European working time directive and the pressure from the Royal Colleges, rightly or wrongly, over critical mass and training. However, they have chosen to stick with the language, "Keeping the NHS Local", and they will need to defend that.

The biggest threat to patient care and to the lives of patients in emergency situations is not the particular configuration of A and E departments, although that is postulated as a factor, but the capacity of our hospitals and, for the sickest patients, the continuing shortage, relative to need, of intensive treatment unit beds. When we heard of the tragic case of the child being ferried around in an ambulance between various hospitals in the north of England a few years ago, the key point was the shortage of ITU beds, not the configuration of A and E departments. Far too much can be made of whether there is adequate back-up of consultant staffing. For the sickest patients, we need to ensure that we have adequate numbers of ITU beds and adequate escorted transfer arrangements.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southport quite rightly said that there were general issues to consider. Those include the impact of the European working time directive and the need to ensure adequate training for junior doctors in all hospitals, not just smaller units. Sometimes their training is worse in larger units because they are there simply for service purposes. Another issue is the changing gender ratios in the medical profession, which will mean that, overall, doctors who have been considered full-time will be spending some time working less than full-time. There are questions over whether there could be too much status attached to working in large units and not enough research opportunities in partnership for those in smaller units.

I shall spend most of my time today questioning the Government on their approach on targets. The Minister will have heard before my concerns, which I have been raising for six years now, over the way in which they have imposed targets on the health service that work against the best interests of patients and of the service. It would appear that only when the targets are going in the right direction is it in the interests of Ministers.

The Government have imposed targets on A and E departments. The 12-hour maximum wait, which is curiously defined as being on a trolley, and the four-hour target for processing people through the department both use the wrong measures. Even if those measures are not applied as brutally as the Government suggest, with their, "You are a failing hospital; you are a failing manager; you are failing your staff if you do not meet those targets", there is no doubt that they are applied and measured wrongly. That concentration has damaged patient care and distorted clinical priorities. The 12-hour target is not a target from presentation at A and E to finding a bed but between a decision to admit and being denoted to be in a bed; and a decision to admit can be taken many hours after patients arrive at the department, even if they obviously require admission.

When is a bed a bed? That depends on whether the target is about to be breached. The morphological changes that one sees at the 11-hour stage is either the stuff of science fiction or the manipulation of the measures in such a way as to make them practically worthless. The Government declared in advance that they were going to measure the performance of A and E departments during the last week of March, and they gave hospitals ample time to clear the decks so that they could be seen to be meeting the targets.

I raised the matter with the previous Minister, now a Constitutional Affairs Minister, the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy). I asked him at oral questions on 3 June 2003 whether he was embarrassed about the number of trusts that were forced to meet the target. At columns 2 and 3, I quoted a BMA survey showing that a majority of respondents in A and E departments felt that the measures taken

"had distorted clinical priorities . . . and many said that waiting times for patients with the most serious conditions had increased."

I pointed out that the survey also showed that

"patients were being rushed through A & E, inappropriately admitted, or transferred to the wrong department."

Believe it or not, the Minister's response was that the BMA had surveyed only 30 per cent. of its members. In fact, the survey was of 30 per cent. of A and E departments. For the first time in polling history, it seems that sampling 30 per cent. of a large and appropriate population is not felt to be satisfactory. That will be news for the Labour party's polling operation, which probably manages to poll about 0.003 per cent. of the population before saying, "This is what people want." It is astonishing that the Minister should say that the wrong 30 per cent. had been sampled and that everything was hunky-dory for the other 70 per cent.

Next we see the operation of spin, because the Government recognise that the targets are now associated with negative publicity. What did the Minister say? He said that it is not a target but a "milestone". The target has been rebadged as a milestone. I think that hospital staff see it more as a millstone, as it shows that the Government's policy of being "tough on trolleys, tough on the causes of trolleys" is detrimental to the work of accident and emergency departments.

There is now increasing evidence—it was mentioned in the newspapers only this week—that some patients need to stay in A and E, in a lit area with expert staff and resuscitation facilities, while they are being stabilised, especially if they are unconscious. I put it to the Minister that they are not going to protest about the relative discomfort of being in A and E, but instead we see the dangerous practice of transferring critically ill patients to beds on side wards in the ophthalmology department instead of being allowed to be stabilised by A and E departments. That makes A and E departments more like processing units than a speciality of medicine. No wonder morale is so poor.

Certain cases really need to be dealt with in A and E departments, such as people who have overdosed on alcohol and who need to sleep it off in A and E so that any underlying illness or condition can be assessed. If they are put on the wards, not only will they disturb other patients, as can be imagined, but they will not receive the neurological observation that they need. The Government need to drop this whole target culture, and in particular the targets that they have imposed on A and E departments.

There has also been talk of A and E units being run as private ventures. I do not think that the Government can be held responsible for what entrepreneurs do, but it is wrong to assume that they will not create problems for the NHS. They will cherry-pick patients who are not so sick that they require ambulances and will take staff from the NHS—and they will take a higher proportion of staff than they will take patients.

Mr. Paul Marsden (Shrewsbury and Atcham): I am all in favour of diversity in health care provision. However, the NHS should be free at the point of delivery. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a danger that patients could be turned away from private A and E clinics or forced to pay money that they cannot afford for services to which they should have a right?

Dr. Harris: Private A and E departments will find it difficult, because although they are offering a £29 initial service, the price will rise steeply if other investigations are required. I do not know what they will do with people whom they find to be ill but who cannot afford or do not wish to pay the additional amount; they will have a difficult job.

The European working time directive creates huge pressures on the Government, and they need to be clear about how they will tackle the problem. They have said that they will not seek an extension, but they have to recognise that there are implications for either the viability of departments or the quality of care delivered in those departments. It could pose a big threat to local services, and we want to hear answers from the Minister.

10.40 am

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Given the problems that we have heard about, it is ironic that we are having this debate at a time when record amounts of money are going into the NHS. One is forced to ask what is going on and why.

[Chris Grayling]

I congratulate the hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) on having secured the debate, which provided an opportunity to raise important local and national issues with the Minister. There have been two themes. The first was local hospitals, smaller units and the future of the A and E departments in such units. We heard about a number of constituency issues, and I crave the indulgence of the Chamber in putting some of my own to the Minister. They illustrate problems that affect many Members of Parliament, and reflect the unease within communities about the future of the health services on which they have depended for many years.

The second theme, highlighted by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), was the way in which staff in our A and E departments are let down by the Government's determined target, or milestone, culture. In accident and emergency departments, we see the NHS at its best, saving people who are seriously ill and putting them back on the road to recovery. Those are the first steps towards turning round situations that may be critical. The staff in A and E departments are fine professionals and do not deserve to have their work distorted, as is happening now, by a Government obsessed with numbers.

Nowhere is that obsession more evident than in A and E. In the past 12 months, the four-hour target has been at the heart of the target culture in the NHS. That is not wrong as an aspiration. None of us wants to see patients waiting for a long time in A and E departments. However, in conversation with health care professionals, we Members of Parliament hear how the target is distorting clinical decisions. A few weeks ago, I spoke to a consultant in a diabetic clinic, who holds an out-patient clinic every week. Sometimes, seriously ill patients need to be admitted quickly to hospital, but it is necessary to phone the A and E department first to ensure that nobody has been waiting for close to the four-hour limit, as they must take priority. That has nothing to do with health or with urgency of care needs. The need is to meet the target.

This time last year, we experienced the absurd situation of ambulances queuing outside A and E departments so that the four-hour wait figures for those departments were not damaged. The departments accepted patients only when they were ready to do so, and people had to wait outside in ambulances until they were taken in. That was ludicrous. Then, as the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon pointed out, there was the absurdity of the last week in March. With one week to meet the target, not surprisingly, hospitals threw in the kitchen sink in order to keep their stars and their reputations. Those that did not, suffered. I think of the example of a hospital on the south coast that lost star ratings because it behaved properly and followed conventional norms, and did not try to distort what it was doing that week.

In the words of the president of the British Association for Accident and Emergency Medicine,

"There is a feeling of panic out there at the moment. All sorts of quick-term fixes are being tried. Money appears to be no object, with staff being recruited and paid whatever necessary for the measuring period."

That is nowhere near a proper and appropriate way to run a health service. Unsurprisingly, most hospitals met, or were close to meeting, the target. The figures, however, were highly dubious. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest that figures have sunk back to previous levels.

I was fascinated by the figures given to me by the strategic health authority in my area, which showed that throughout most of the first part of this year, the average achievement throughout its hospitals was that some 80 per cent. of people attending A and E get away in under four hours. In week 13, however, the figure went up to 88.4 per cent. We know that it has come down again since then.

The British Medical Association and the medical profession have been outraged by this absurd and disgraceful situation, which Ministers defend in the House of Commons. I do not blame the Minister, who is new to the job of Minister and was not in position when that was happening at the start of March, but I say, as did the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon, that it must not be allowed to happen again.

The BMA's response to the 30 per cent. of its members who took part in the survey is clear cut. An A and E consultant said:

"I am appalled to see how A&E departments have been forced into taking extraordinary measures for a week-long period just to meet political targets. It is completely immoral of the Government to claim that it is raising the standard of performance in the NHS when this is how they measure it. It is quite wrong for patients' expectations to be raised in this way."

He went on to say that

"the Government's obsession with waiting times is nothing more than bean-counting."

That culture must change. Will Ministers undertake to change the obsession with targets? Can we release our professionals from the burden that they must carry? Let us allow them to take clinical decisions in their own hospitals without having to worry about whether they are meeting the numbers target for that month.

The second and equally important issue, which the debate has already touched on, relates to the European working time directive, its potential impact on smaller hospitals and the changes taking place in them. The hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) was right to highlight the time bomb, as he called it, represented by the working time directive. There are smaller accident and emergency units throughout the country. We heard from two Members from Worcestershire and two Members from west Lancashire whose constituencies have accident and emergency units that face reconfiguration or closure because of the working time directive. It is costing hospitals millions. They need to employ doctors that the market cannot provide.

I was grateful, in an ironic way, to the chief executive of my local NHS trust, Epsom and St. Helier, who is about to leave his post. In what I can only describe as a stunningly ill-judged decision, he made a public statement, on behalf of the clinical service partnership representing all the local NHS bodies, that he aims to reconfigure services in my area. He chose to issue the statement without telling anyone, and attacked everyone who is challenging the plans. That was very foolish, and it will cause significant problems for the process after he has gone. He did, however, let the cat out of the bag, for which I am grateful, because the process is being advertised as an enhancement to local services.

The chief executive's statement is headed, "Don't be bullied into second best!" The revealing element, however, is the fourth paragraph, which states:

"As the Working Time Directive comes into force there will not be enough doctors to go round. In future, we will require eight to ten doctors to cover the same shifts where we currently have four or five. So it makes sense not to spread them too thinly by duplicating some services unnecessarily."

That means that throughout the country, including west Lancashire and Worcestershire, as we heard from the hon. Member for Wyre Forest and my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), and in Epsom and Ewell and Hertfordshire, where great debates are taking place, smaller hospitals will lose their accident and emergency departments, either full-time or part-time. I say to my constituents that it is likely that in the next few months Epsom hospital will lose its 24-hour cover for proper surgery and accident and emergency, as a consequence of the changes that the directive will bring about.

The directive is costing the NHS millions of pounds. The medical profession describes it as a disaster. It is reported that even the Prime Minister thinks that it is one of the worst pieces of legislation to come from Brussels, yet the Government appear to be doing nothing to stop it. If, in the next few months, the Government cannot find a way to mitigate the directive's impact on the NHS, the consequences for local A and E departments, as well as other services, will be disastrous.

10.50 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Dr. Stephen Ladyman): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) on obtaining the debate, which will, I know, be of great interest to his constituents. It is also of great interest to me. I declare a small interest: I am one of the products of the Ormskirk hospital maternity unit. Whatever other criticisms the hon. Gentleman may level at that institution, it produces damn good sturdy stock.

I shall, if hon. Members do not mind, deal largely with the specific issues that the hon. Gentleman raised about Southport A and E. It is fair to use the limited time that I have to do that. If I have time afterwards, I shall deal with the more general issues, which there will, I do not doubt, be other opportunities to debate.

The reality of modern medicine—the way in which we must meet its demands—will increasingly mean that we have to consider the reconfiguration of hospitals. That will be a continuing process, not something that we do once, after which everything will be right. We shall have to find the best ways we can of carrying out consultation and making decisions on the basis of that consultation, covering all the aspects of the matter that have been raised, such as clinical safety and locality, to meet the demand for a high-quality clinical service.

We heard in the debate, particularly from the hon. Member for Southport and my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall), the range of opinions that are encountered. My hon. Friend showed us a picture of how a community engaged over a considerable period in consultation, led by an expert report by Professor Shields, and clawed towards a compromise solution with which, perhaps, many people were not 100 per cent. satisfied, but which met the need for a safe, high-quality service; met, broadly, the local community's needs; and answered many of the concerns of the different people in the community. Reaching such a compromise is an incredibly difficult process, and I congratulate my hon. Friend and those who, when the compromise was reached, were prepared to say, "Well, maybe it isn't exactly what I would have come up with, but it is a compromise. It meets all the demands and has come about as a result of a lot of local discussion and consultation."

On the other hand, the constituents of the hon. Member for Southport obviously feel very upset about part of what has been decided, and are not able to accept that final position. However, sooner or later, the Government and the local health authority must say, "This is what we are going to do. We shall try to make it work." We have reached that stage in Southport and Ormskirk, and we believe that the solution meets the demands of the local population.

I have always said in debates in this Chamber and in the House that I am accessible; I hope that I am a listening Minister. I make the hon. Member for Southport the one promise that he asked me to make—to ensure that everything that he and my hon. Friend spoke about will be reviewed. We shall take a fresh look at the matter, and make sure that the local health trust does too, in the light of his comments. We shall proceed from there. However, I cannot promise that, having listened to him today, I shall unwind all the decisions and take a completely different, fresh view.

The hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) touched on some of the difficulties that we must consider in making decisions. They include locality, clinical safety, the working time directive and the need to maintain high standards of training, which we are told can really be offered only in large centres. He said that someone has to find a compromise, and he is right, and we must set our priorities on the basis of clinical safety.

I offer this suggestion to *Private Eye*, which runs a cartoon called, "Sights you seldom see". When someone appears on television to say that service in the local A and E department has failed their relative, one will never see an Opposition MP leap up and say, "Yes, but that's all right. We had to make a compromise when we were reconfiguring the local hospitals, and we compromised clinical safety, but that's okay, we won't blame this Government for it." We must ensure that clinical safety is a clear priority in making decisions. Often, that will mean that smaller services have to move, and that will always be unpopular with local communities. That is a hard choice that we in government find ourselves having to make, whether we like it or not.

Having said that, I undertake to listen very carefully to all the concerns about the Southport situation and ensure that they are all thoroughly reviewed. I also highlight the fact that the reconfiguration is not taking place without resources, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire pointed out. It will include a major investment in the local hospital and require the provision of state-of-the-art facilities that will raise the standards for all adults and children in the area. It will produce a sound, clinically safe and very high-quality service, to which people in both constituencies are entitled. If we can do that as well as meeting the points

[Dr. Stephen Ladyman]

raised by the constituents of the hon. Member for Southport, we will. However, at this time, we have not found a solution that meets the needs of both parties and reaches the compromise that the hon. Member for Wyre Forest seeks.

Among the more general comments that have been made, the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) raised an excellent and constructive point, with which I agree. We must find a way of helping people better to determine whether they should go to accident and emergency facilities, a minor injuries unit, a doctor's out-of-hours service, their own GP, NHS Direct, or, as the hon. Gentleman said, a pharmacy. People need to consider which of those perfectly valid options is appropriate at the time.

The hon. Gentleman is right: too many people turn up at A and E units when, clearly, their problem is not the sort of emergency that needs to be dealt with there. We must look for a way to guide people in the right direction. The Government are aware of and trying to deal with that.

The hon. Members for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) and for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) mentioned targets. I shall spend just a few seconds talking about targets. What are they? They are a management tool by which we distil the wishes of the general population. We do not pluck targets out of the air and decide to impose them on the national health service. Instead, we ask ourselves what people want from our NHS. What direction do they want it to take? What important factors do they want addressed? Waiting times is an obvious one.

Dr. Harris: Have the general public been asked whether they want a maximum waiting time of four hours, even if it means that the health of more ill patients will be threatened by doctors pursuing the maximum waiting time for the most stable cases?

Dr. Ladyman: If the hon. Gentleman had waited for me to finish, I would have dealt with that point. The public tell us that they want to be seen quickly in accident and emergency departments. We find a management target that we can give to local trusts to encourage them to put sufficient resources into their accident and emergency departments to deliver on the wishes of the public. That is what the targets are for. There would be a world of difference, if the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon and I were to turn up tomorrow in an accident and emergency unit, and the doctor were to say to him, "You need to stay in this unit for longer than four hours—

Mr. Peter Atkinson (in the Chair): Order. Time is up. We must move on to the next debate.

Energy Efficiency

11 am

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I am grateful for this opportunity to raise the important issue of the need for energy efficiency in the commercial sector. It is a great pleasure to be speaking under your chairmanship for the first time, Mr. Atkinson. I am particularly grateful that the Minister of State will be replying to this short debate, because that shows the importance that the Government attach to the issue.

The issue was last raised as long ago as January 2001 by the hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) in an extended Adjournment debate. I hope that I am not quoting him out of context. He said that energy consumption in offices had been generally neglected and that the rate of growth in energy consumption was

"three times greater in the commercial sector than in the domestic sector."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 23 January 2001; Vol. 361, c. 215WH.]

Replying to that debate, the former Minister for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Oldham, West and Royton (Mr. Meacher), recognised that

"We need a major shift in the way that energy is used in commercial buildings".—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 23 January 2001; Vol. 361, c. 229WH.]

Little progress has been made in the intervening 32 months. Energy efficiency policies and programmes have focused on the domestic and industrial sectors and have tended to overlook the important commercial and service sectors, which represent about 17 per cent. of total energy consumption. By way of comparison, it is interesting to note that, whereas energy consumption has halved in the past 30 years in the industrial sector, and is down by almost 10 per cent. in the public sector, in the commercial sector it has grown by more than two thirds—the figure is something like 68 per cent.—and Department of Trade and Industry projections suggest that there will be a further rise. That is an urgent situation that must be dealt with quickly. There is real cause for concern if we are to meet our targets for carbon dioxide emissions.

In the commercial sector, offices are a significant contributor to energy use, but I think that the Minister will agree that they also offer the greatest potential for savings. Offices tend to be the same, unlike industrial processes, so if we can identify a significant cost potential, it will be much easier to put that into a policy, which will be more effective. There is cost-effective potential for savings in the commercial sector that can be readily identified. If we can get the large companies and businesses, which have more office space, on side and active in promoting energy conservation in the commercial sector, that will have a great impact.

The rapid growth in energy use in offices is due to a number of factors. Office space has doubled in the past 30 years. There has also been greater use of air conditioning as well as heating in the past three decades. Another obvious point is that there has been a tremendous increase in information technology equipment. That is why there has been a huge explosion of energy consumption in the commercial sector.

The Association for the Conservation of Energy—an organisation that I salute, and that prompted me to raise these matters—under its director, Mr. Andrew Warren, published a report in March that estimated:

"Using readily available and cost effective technologies, up to 2.5 megatons of carbon could be saved."

As the Minister will confirm, the Government anticipated in their November 2000 climate change programme, and repeated in the February 2003 energy White Paper, that six megatons of carbon savings annually must be achieved by the business and public sectors by 2010. If we can successfully tackle the problems in the commercial sector, that sector alone could deliver almost half the savings required. The other half—the public sector—involves hospitals and schools, but not exclusively.

The European Parliament and the European Council approved the EU directive on energy performance of buildings in January. That comprehensive directive in part concerns where omissions can be made from the energy performance policy. I have three anxieties about the directive and I would like three assurances from the Minister. The first concerns listed buildings. We should remember that, while many of the 500,000 such buildings are of architectural or historic interest, they include quite a few buildings in the commercial sector. My first job as an architect was based in a listed building—a very fine early Georgian building.

The directive gives allowances to listed buildings that do not meet energy efficiency requirements where, in meeting the requirements of the directive by installing energy efficiency equipment, the character or appearance of the listed building would be unacceptably changed. It would be helpful if the Government sent the right signal to the owners of the 500,000 listed buildings by saying, "You have to show us that it would be damaging to your listed building if you were to put in energy saving equipment," rather than, "You don't have to do anything because you own a listed building." Have the Government estimated the proportion of those listed buildings that will be outwith the requirements of the directive?

The directive gives a dispensation to temporary buildings. It has also been over-generous with its definition of a temporary building as a building with a planned time of two years or less. That is far too long. Our landscapes and urbanscapes are littered with portakabins, and the qualifying period ought to be reduced from two years to, say, six months.

My third specific comment on the directive concerns industrial processes. It refers to "industrial buildings and offices", which is unclear. Will the Minister please ensure that offices in the industrial sector cannot be included in the dispensation?

I have a query about energy performance certificates under article 7 of the directive. As the Minister knows, certificates must be displayed in any office of more than 1,000 sq m, which, in my imperial-preference language, is about 1,000 sq yd. Buildings of more than that size which are visited regularly by the public—that is an indistinct phrase—must display the certificate. I welcome that because it should lead to significant improvement in energy performance in larger buildings. However, the directive also states that

"other relevant climatic factors may also be included."

I hope that the Minister will look at that to see whether, in the United Kingdom, other climatic factors will be included.

This subject is necessarily complicated and I want to finish by posing a series of queries to the Minister. If he cannot deal with them all in detail now, which is understandable, I will be pleased to hear from him after the sitting.

I can see how, under section 2 of the Building Act 1984, it would be possible to incorporate requirements under the building regulations not just for new build but for refurbishment of owner-occupied properties. It is more difficult to see what legislation exists to facilitate certification for rented properties. I do not want to go too deeply into the rented office sector, but clearly there is a problem when someone owns an office or commercial property and rents it out. There is no incentive for the tenant to put in the energy-saving equipment—why should he? I am not attacking landlords, because there are very good landlords as well as tenants, but a landlord may say, "Well, I'm receiving my rent, so what incentive is there for me to spend a lot of money to create energy savings?" The rented sector needs careful examination.

Similarly, article 8, which deals with the inspection of boilers, and article 9, on the inspection of air conditioning systems, are relevant. Is the Minister convinced that the Government have the right under existing legislation to require the inspection of boilers and air conditioning systems in rented properties?

My final point is that, despite the directive, building regulations, the Building Act and much other legislation, energy conservation is so important that we need primary legislation to fulfil the requirements of the EU directive on energy performance of buildings and other directives.

I know that space in the Queen's Speech is at a premium, and many Ministers will be disappointed because they cannot get their pet legislative proposals into the Government's programme. I want to be constructive, so I would like to make a suggestion. I hope that the Minister will say—of course he cannot confirm that today—that he will make the most rigorous representations to the Cabinet and his ministerial colleagues to include space for primary legislation dealing with energy conservation. If, by chance, they cannot find room for a Bill, will he look favourably on the possibility of legislation being made available to a Member who is lucky in the ballot for private Member's Bills?

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): The other alternative is to use the regulatory report process, which can help Departments to achieve changes in primary legislation using a different route.

Sir Sydney Chapman: As ever, the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. White) makes a valid point. There are other ways of doing this. I have only once been lucky in the ballot for private Member's Bills, in my very first Session in 1970. I had a Rural and Urban Environment Bill, which bit the dust because of a lack of time. It was to do with listed buildings, trees and other such things. *The Guardian* reported it biting the dust by saying "Trees bill axed". I am going to put in for a

[Sir Sydney Chapman]

private Members' Bill in the next Session. Perhaps, as it will be one of my last Sessions in this place, I might be lucky—or luckier.

There is a need for primary legislation. I hope that that might include a requirement for larger property owners not just to provide energy certificates, but to carry out improvements for energy conservation when the properties are sold, let, re-let or subject to a rent review. I had the great privilege of attending the World summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg, just over a year ago, in my own right as chairman of the Environment committee of the Council of Europe. I had a little competition to find out whether we were sure that we were getting over to our constituents—we all have the best and most far-sighted constituents, which is why we are here—what sustainable development is, and to find out how many of them know what it is. The competition was for somebody to give the best definition of sustainable development in as few words as possible. I came up with a seven-word definition, which I am still waiting to hear bettered. It is "Conserving Earth's finite resources for future generations". That is a major undertaking and we have realised almost too late that we are squandering many of the world's finite resources. We have to turn the tide, and one way of doing that is not just to talk globally but to act nationally and in our own homes and offices to ensure that we achieve sustainable development.

11.18 am

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Elliot Morley): I, too, would like to say how nice it is to see you in the Chair for this debate, Mr. Atkinson.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) on his contribution. I thought that it was helpful and constructive and addressed a range of important issues. I can assure him that the Government share his concern in relation to commercial buildings. I share his admiration for the work of the Association for the Conservation of Energy, and he might be interested to know that the Carbon Trust has supported some of its recent reports. That is a good example of how money raised from the climate change levy supports energy conservation.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the office sector has continued to increase in importance. It is of course vital that we continue to address energy issues and, as he said, to ensure that energy is used as efficiently as possible. Energy efficiency is the most cost-effective way to cut our carbon emissions.

We all know that we have signed up to some very important targets in the Kyoto agreement and that we also have national targets. Those targets are demanding but important, given the need to reduce CO_2 emissions. All sectors must play a part in that, including the commercial sector.

In the Energy White Paper, the Government committed themselves to publishing an energy efficiency implementation plan setting out in greater detail how to meet the challenge. DEFRA is in the lead on that, but we are working closely with other Departments, the devolved Administrations and bodies such as the Carbon Trust and the Energy Saving Trust through the sustainable energy policy network. I will set out what the Government are doing and respond to some of the points raised by the hon. Gentleman.

Commercial offices are responsible for only 2.5 per cent. of the UK's non-transport carbon emissions. We must view the matter in perspective, but of course we cannot ignore what is a big and expanding sector.

There are four main instruments designed to tackle CO_2 emissions in the non-domestic sector. First, there are the building regulations, which are due to be revised in 2005. The hon. Gentleman touched on that subject, and I will look at some of the points that he quite rightly raised. The best builders could do better, which we have been encouraging them to do for some time. In the Energy White Paper, we announced that the better building summit and the sustainable construction working group will extend a challenge to all builders to raise their standards. We also declared our intention of raising standards on building regulations over the coming decade, having learned from the standards in comparable European countries and having looked at the best standards that we can apply in this country.

Secondly, there is the climate change levy, which has been in place for more than two years. Customs and Excise is currently conducting a study of its effectiveness in delivering environmental improvements. The Carbon Trust receives money from that levy. Several of the trust's programmes are designed to tackle energy use in the commercial sector, including offices. They include the provision of advice, information and loans through the action energy programme, the low carbon innovation programme, and enhanced capital allowances—the third instrument—which reduce the cost of buying carbon-reducing products from an approved list.

Finally, there is the European directive on the energy performance of buildings. The hon. Gentleman described those provisions and how they will allow member states to have discretion on the buildings that they may choose to exempt from the requirements to set energy performance standards. In response to his questions, I can reassure him about our intentions. Obviously, we want to see what comes from the detailed developments and consultation that are in prospect on that and on all the other articles. I understand that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister takes the view that any exemptions should fall in line with the current building regulations.

The hon. Gentleman raised a number of detailed points that I will try to answer. First, there is the issue of historic listed buildings. The energy efficiency provisions in part L of the building regulations apply to all historic buildings, but reasonable provision depends on the circumstances of each case. For example, we would not expect Windsor castle to put UPVC double glazing in. Nevertheless, an awful lot can be done to improve energy efficiency, even in old and listed buildings, such as modifying central heating systems, draughtproofing and insulation. I live in a listed building and have upgraded the central heating and improved the loft insulation and the draughtproofing, which has had an effect. Old buildings with thick walls are often cool in summer and warm in winter, so they are good on energy efficiency.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the percentage that would be affected. It is not possible to calculate the exact percentage until there has been more careful consideration of which regulation should apply to which buildings. That is being considered and the figure will be available in due course.

The hon. Gentleman raised the subject of temporary buildings, which are in fact classed as those remaining in place for not more than 28 days. I can reassure him that the Government do not accept the two-year rule and that, as far as we are concerned, after 28 days the building regulations will apply.

Part L does not apply to industrial and commercial processes that consume energy, nor to that part of the building's environmental energy consumption needed to convey waste heat to the outside air. However, industrial and commercial buildings are not exempt from the building regulations unless they are controlled by other legislation. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that, even in industrial premises, there is no reason why the regulations should not apply to office accommodation. That makes absolute sense, but the wording is not clear and we are looking to clarify it.

The hon. Gentleman also described how article 7 requires building energy performance certificates whenever buildings are constructed, sold or rented out, and said that, in certain circumstances, it calls for building owners to display certificates prominently. The article also gives member states discretion to call for additional information to be displayed on the certificates about the building's internal climate. Interpreting the requirement to display information is proving difficult, and officials are in the process of seeking advice from the Commission and other member states. Again, we accept that that is a reasonable point. It will be interesting to see what officials discover in those discussions, but how we implement the directive is a matter for the UK, taking account of what it legally obliges us to do and the constraints placed on us by other policies for better regulation.

A separate issue is what information such certificates should convey. I understand what the hon. Gentleman said, but it may not be practical to convey the range of temperatures and other climatic parameters encountered and expected in larger buildings, which commonly accommodate many different types of activities. Nevertheless, we shall give consideration to those desirable points.

We intend to implement article 8 primarily through the provision of information. However, we shall also consider the energy and safety benefits of regular inspections for fuels with a higher potential for soot formation, the build-up of which could lead to incomplete combustion and the production of carbon monoxide.

The hon. Gentleman reasonably expressed concern about how quickly and by what means the Government intend to bring the directive into effect. Article 15 requires us to transpose all the requirements into UK law by 4 January 2006. We announced in the Energy White Paper that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister would take the lead in implementing it, for the good reason that the requirements fit well into the framework of the building regulations. We believe that many of the requirements can be implemented through changes to the existing building regulations without having to make changes in primary legislation.

Section 1 of the Building Act 1984 applies to construction work for new buildings and refurbishments on whatever scale, although, as the hon. Gentleman said, section 2 may need extending to oblige building owners to carry out regular inspections of boiler and air conditioning plant. The European Communities Act is likely to be the most appropriate way to implement those parts that cannot be implemented through existing legislation. However, I assure the hon. Gentleman that we will consider whether his suggestion of using a private Member's Bill could be a viable alternative. We shall certainly consider all ways of implementing the directive as quickly as possible. I know that the routes of private Members' Bills are often rocky, as those who have been involved in them over the years know well, but it is a sensible measure that would command widespread support.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I am very grateful to the Minister, and thank him for the way in which he is treating the matter. Let us hope that this debate is the beginning of a dialogue, because the issue transcends normal party politics.

One of the reasons why I was pleased to have been successful in gaining the debate today is that the week after next is energy efficiency week. The debate is a good curtain raiser for that most important event.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and his timing is most fortuitous.

I shall certainly look carefully at the hon. Gentleman's speech to ensure that all the points that he raised have been addressed; any that I have not had time to answer will receive a written reply. We in government must look to our own performance. We must also look at heating and cooling product standards. We recognise the importance of energy efficiency overall, which is why I welcome what the hon. Gentleman had to say. His suggestions were constructive, sensible and helpful, and I intend to ensure that the Government respond in kind. Such proposals will be an advantage, not only in terms of our commitment to sustainability but because efficiency savings make good sense for the commercial sector itself.

11.30 am

Sitting suspended until Two o'clock.

Seaside Town Regeneration

2pm

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): I welcome this opportunity to debate seaside town regeneration, and begin by recognising the good work that the Government have done in helping such towns to regenerate themselves. I shall ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider three proposals. The first is the establishment of a resorts taskforce, perhaps followed up by a resorts trust similar to the trusts established for coalfield communities. The second is the establishment of a Minister with overall responsibility for seaside regeneration, and the third is parity of ring-fenced funding for seaside towns with that ring-fenced for coal, steel, rural and inner-city communities over the years. I shall draw on examples from my constituency to show the need for co-ordinated action.

The current Government have done much to help seaside towns. Most notably, in my area, they have achieved objective 1 status for Cornwall, west Wales and the valleys, Merseyside and South Yorkshire—although I do not think that there are any seaside resorts there. I pay particular tribute to the Secretary of State for Wales, my boss, who, when a junior Minister in the Wales Office, agreed to the redrawing of the objective 1 boundaries at the eleventh hour to include Denbighshire and Conwy. As a result, the towns of Prestatyn, Rhyl, Kinmel Bay, Towyn, Colwyn Bay, Conwy, Llandudno, Llanfairfechan and Penmaenmawr have been able to access objective 1 funding.

The Labour Government's attitude to securing structural funds for areas experiencing economic decline sharply contrasts with that of the Conservative Government, who refused to apply for EU structural funds, and took assisted area status away from many of our towns. I also congratulate the Labour Government on issuing new directions to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I did not intend to make a political point, but as the hon. Gentleman has done so, I congratulate the Conservative Government on giving assisted area status to the Isle of Wight, and express my regret that it was taken away by the Government of whom he speaks so movingly.

Chris Ruane: It was probably redirected to the Isle of Wight from my constituency, which suffered a loss of £40 million.

On the Heritage Lottery Fund, under the previous Government, £12 million was given to the Churchill family for the Churchill diaries, and £5 million went to developing the playing fields of Eton. When the Labour Government came to power in 1997, they altered those rules and said that money from the Heritage Lottery Fund would be dedicated to places with architectural merit and areas of poverty and decline. As a result, Denbigh and Rhyl in my constituency will both receive approximately £6 million to regenerate their high streets and commercial centres.

The Government have also expanded the further and higher education sectors, and as a result, my home town of Rhyl has its first ever college; the second biggest town in north Wales had always been denied one. Unemployment in my constituency has dropped from 4,500 under the previous Government to 900 people in 2003. The Government made west Rhyl a policing priority area 18 months ago. That was one of only five pilot projects in the UK, and Rhyl was specifically chosen because it was a seaside town. Through co-ordination and co-operation, crime levels in the west ward of Rhyl have dropped by almost a quarter—24 per cent.—in the past year.

However, despite those success stories, towns such as Rhyl and Prestatyn in my constituency, along with 43 other principal seaside towns around the UK, have specific structural problems that have not been addressed in a co-ordinated way.

Dr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown): I would like to pick up that point. Does my hon. Friend agree that, despite all that the Government have done so far, which is welcome, there is a continuing need to bang the drum for the special problems of seaside towns? They are exemplified in my Brighton constituency. Visitors get an impression of prosperity and economic activity when they see the seafront, which obscures all the problems that we face, including urban deprivation in large enough measure to have a new deal for communities; homelessness, which is some of the worst in the country, and the largest number of drug deaths; very poor housing in the private sector, and intense housing need. Yet, again and again we have to convince people, even those in our own Government, that seaside towns have problems.

David Taylor (in the Chair): Order. That was rather a long intervention. If hon. Members keep interventions short, there is a greater chance of everyone who wants to speak being called.

Chris Ruane: I agree with every word spoken by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner). One of my recommendations, which I hope will have the support of seaside MPs from all parties, is that we need a dedicated Minister responsible for seaside regeneration. Many Departments are currently involved in seaside regeneration. Usually, the Minister with responsibility for tourism responds to these debates. With all due respect to him, I am particularly pleased that the Minister with responsibility for regeneration is responding today. Seaside issues usually form just a tiny part of the role of the Minister for Housing and Planning, a tiny part of the Home Office Minister's role and a tiny part of the role of the Minister responsible for licensing houses in multiple occupation. There is no co-ordination to deal with the issues that face seaside towns.

I do not necessarily believe that all the 43 principal seaside towns will regenerate themselves around tourism. Some will, with 100 per cent. regeneration centring around tourism. All 43 towns will probably have an element of tourism in their local economies in future, but that is not necessarily so. Coal communities have not regenerated themselves around coal. Steel communities have not necessarily regenerated themselves around steel. I am, however, pleased that a Minister with responsibility for regeneration is responding to today's debate. That is welcome.

Whatever happens in our seaside towns around the UK, the jobs that we create must suit our local population, bearing in mind that by 2010 50 per cent. of

our young people will be graduates. We need jobs in our seaside towns that will attract and keep those graduates. We are looking for high-skilled, high-paid jobs, even if they are in the tourism sector.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): Having described the relatively beneficial climate that the Government are delivering, not only in his constituency but in Scarborough and Whitby and right around the coast, does my hon. Friend agree that the key partnerships that will deliver new jobs, vitality and regeneration must be born out of community partnerships and a local feeling that there has to be a better way for communities that are on the fringe of the mainstream? I am pleased to support my hon. Friend's plea for the taskforce and the initiative from a Minister.

Chris Ruane: I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution. I shall expand on his points later.

All seaside towns will have a sizeable tourism sector, but it will not necessarily be as great as it was 20 or 30 years ago. The solutions for seaside towns will involve co-operation between many Departments. That is why a Minister with specific responsibility for seaside towns is needed to co-ordinate, monitor progress, commission cross-departmental research and spread best practice.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I am very surprised to hear the hon. Gentleman say that he does not think that the regeneration of seaside towns will come mainly from tourism. Given the fact that the problems of seaside towns have come from the run-down of tourism, and that statistics show that on average 33 per cent. of a seaside town is devoted to tourism, hotels and restaurants, surely tourism will be the major leader in all seaside town regeneration.

Chris Ruane: That is an issue for the local community to decide in light of the local economy. In my home town of Rhyl, there used to be 900 hotels, guest houses, holiday flatlets and bed and breakfasts; now, there are 50 or 60, and we are not going to get back to having 900. The traditional two-week seaside holiday has by and large disappeared. We have to develop new markets and look to the future, not to the past.

Other Departments will play a key role in the regeneration of seaside towns. Previously I mentioned policing, which is a major issue in those towns. As I said before, the west ward of Rhyl was selected as one of five policing priority areas, and we have had great success through co-operation and co-ordination with a whole variety of agencies in the town. I would want the seaside Minister to have strong connections with the Home Office on such matters.

Rail services are likely to be a key issue for many seaside towns; I point specifically to Blackpool, Great Yarmouth, Cleethorpes and Llandudno. Many such towns grew up around the rail network in the 1840s and the 1850s. With the decrease in services in the 1960s under Beeching, and more recently, we must ensure that the rail connections are kept for those towns—not only the connections between the conurbations, but transport within and around those seaside towns. In my constituency, in which 65 per cent. of people do not own cars, people cannot access the 2,500 high quality jobs on the St. Asaph business park six miles away and they cannot readily access the 1,000 jobs in Glanclwyd hospital five miles away.

We need to work together and to come up with creative, innovative ideas to connect people who have by and large been cut off from where the quality jobs are. I am holding a conference in my constituency to tackle the issue in two weeks' time.

Mrs. Betty Williams (Conwy): Does my hon. Friend agree that a good example of how partners can work together to succeed was the foot and mouth outbreak? At the beginning of the outbreak, the only people receiving the attention of the country and the world were the agricultural community. Some of us realised very early that the tourism industry was also going to suffer, because footpaths were being closed, and that attention had to be turned to the people in the tourism industry as well.

My hon. Friend asks for more partnership. As we are talking about ring-fenced money, will he join me in asking the Minister to ensure that if, God forbid, such a crisis happens again, the tourism industry receives attention early on rather than two or three weeks later?

Chris Ruane: I welcome that intervention from my hon. Friend. I will deal specifically with the grants made available in Wales after the foot and mouth crisis later.

A key role for any Minister responsible for seaside tourism will be in higher and further education because many seaside towns have traditionally had a low skills base; they do not have the skills base to attract new jobs, or to maintain existing jobs. That is why, as I mentioned, Rhyl college in my constituency is key to the regeneration of Rhyl and Prestatyn by expanding and supporting existing industries and the service sector, and by making sure that people working in the tourism sector are properly trained. We must look to the future, see what jobs are on the horizon and train for the future, not just for the here and now; in my area, that involves training for the optoelectronics industry based at St. Asaph business park.

A problem shared by almost all seaside towns is that of HMOs. As I mentioned, there used to be 900 hotels, guest houses and holiday flatlets in Rhyl; the vast majority no longer have a role in tourism. Many have been bought on spec by landlords living as far away as London and Birmingham, who have no interest in their tenants or in the town and its people. Their only interest is in maximising their profits or, to quote Cyril Roberts, a former housing chair of Rutland borough council, "making money out of misery." That has led to a concentration of poverty in particular wards in certain seaside towns, where landlords pack as many tenants as possible into substandard accommodation.

Such accommodation does not benefit the tenants, local public services—police, fire, education or health—or local people. The only beneficiaries are the landlords, who pick up their cheques courtesy of the British taxpayer. We need to tackle the issue of benefits. Careful thought has to be given to what the HMOs can be used for and what grant regimes can be put in place to support schemes. In the past 20 years, money has flooded in to Rhyl to improve the housing stock. However, the HMOs have remained as such and have gone back to their former condition, because no thought was given to diversification.

[Chris Ruane]

What could the houses be used for? We would find a wide range of answers if we thought laterally and creatively. I urge a carrot-and-stick approach: grants should be made available for HMOs, but there should also be inspection, so that landlords understand the message: "Here's the grant. Convert or we'll come after you." The approach needs to be that bold. We should take the themed approach that I have suggested to my local county council. For example, all grants going to a certain district or street could be used to convert HMOs back into family accommodation and to create parks with swings and slides—a nice living environment—so that families return to the area. Alternatively, we could say that a certain street will be a "voluntary sector street", with shared communal facilities, or designate another "quality accommodation street." There should be grants and there should be inspection.

There is good practice around the country. In Conwy, representatives of the police, the fire service, social services, the education department, the Benefits Agency and the environmental health department meet regularly. They lay their cards on the table and discuss premises that are giving trouble and, invariably, the same two or three premises are mentioned. Then, they are able to go in mob-handed to sort those places out. However, even that approach is a bit hit and miss. We need a national licensing scheme for HMOs that leaves nowhere for slum landlords to hide. I urge the Minister to take back to her Cabinet colleagues the message that we should ensure that such a scheme is in the Queen's Speech this November.

My hon. Friend might also take back a message for the Lyons committee, which is considering the feasibility of relocating 20,000 civil service jobs out of London into the regions. I was informed yesterday that that committee will only consider towns with a population of 100,000 or more for the relocation of a Government Department. Of the 43 principal seaside towns, only nine will qualify. We have until Friday to make our submissions. I shall pursue the matter, and I ask the Minister to intervene to ensure that the seaside resorts that have been neglected for 35 years get their fair share of the cake.

We should consider not only public sector investment in towns but whether our seaside towns are getting their fair share of the public bodies that generate wealth by creating secure, steady, white-collar jobs. Again I use as an example Rhyl, where four public bodies are pulling out of the town centre and relocating to the St. Asaph business park. The central division headquarters of North Wales police should have been located in Rhyl, but sufficient land could not be found for it. Clwyd and Alyn housing association, which is supposed to be a social landlord, was located in the west ward of Rhyl, the poorest ward in Wales; that was great, but it has now left for the St. Asaph business park. The Denbighshire health board, which is supposed to look after primary care, is not located in the west ward of Rhyl, which has the poorest health record in the whole of Wales, but in the St. Asaph business park.

That is the wrong message for public sector bodies to be sending out. What message does it send to the private sector if there is a public sector flight out of the town? I hope that the Minister will take up the point with the Home Office—I will be taking it up with the National Assembly. Instructions should be sent to public services that they should not relocate their headquarters or their personnel from any fragile community without a full assessment of the impact on it.

Lawrie Quinn: Does my hon. Friend agree that the migration or absence of high-skills jobs in seaside community economies compounds the spiral of decline, because the very best young people who go away to get degrees elsewhere in the country simply do not return to the coast? That compounds the stress that many people who work in the social services and health services find themselves under. Does he agree that our towns have ageing populations because of the economic decline that he describes?

Chris Ruane: I concur with everything that my hon. Friend says.

The trend that I describe is a double whammy for our community. It has not only taken high-quality jobs out of our seaside town, but those public bodies now take up valuable space in a business park that is now completely full. There is now no opportunity to create new jobs through inward or domestic investment. A Minister with responsibility for seaside towns, be it in the National Assembly for Wales or in Whitehall, could monitor these trends and, as I say, could intervene and modify or even stop them.

I have dealt with the public sector, but the private sector will create the bulk of new job opportunities in seaside towns. Far more could be done to increase the number of business start-ups in seaside towns. The small and medium-sized enterprise base is low. I refer again to my home town of Rhyl. Not many people know this, but Rhyl happens to be the birthplace of two of our best known high street shops—Iceland and Kwiksave—which were born of an entrepreneurial spirit that existed in that town 30 or 40 years ago. That entrepreneurial spirit is currently dormant. It needs to be brought to life once more. Rhyl, with a population of 27,000, had 24 new company start-ups in 2000, whereas Ruthin, with a population of 5,000, had 44 new company start-ups—a massive difference. Local authorities, regional development agencies and the HE and FE sectors working with the local population and private enterprise can have a huge impact on start-ups.

We should consider best practice for start-ups, especially those involving young people. The Prince's Trust usually deals with people whom the banks have knocked back and gives them £5,000 start-up funding. The key thing that it gives them, however, is a mentor who can help them to develop their business. The trust has an 80 per cent. success rate. In addition, a great deal more could be done to expand the intermediate labour market in seaside towns. There are excellent ways of attracting the economically inactive back into the work force. If the post of Minister for seaside regeneration is created, expanding the SME base in seaside towns will be a critical job for whoever holds it.

The long-term decline of the British seaside towns during the past 35 years has gone largely unnoticed by Governments. Unlike coal, steel and rural communities,

seaside communities have not had on their side powerful unions that can commission research or exert political pressure. Seaside towns are literally on the periphery of the country. They are not consolidated in any one area, and their political voice has been diluted as a result. To counter that lack of political voice, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Marsden) set up the Labour group of seaside MPs six years ago. I congratulate him on his sterling work in the group, and especially on the document that we produced "Supporting Seaside Towns", which would form the perfect basis for a seaside regeneration trust or taskforce. The document promotes an holistic approach to seaside regeneration. I am sure that my hon. Friend will expand on that.

The third issue is the funding that will be required to help us to regenerate our seaside towns. Last year I asked my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer for a breakdown of the specific ring-fenced budgets for coal, steel, rural and inner-city communities. He gave me an impressive list—one of which, as a Labour MP, I am proud—totalling £4 billion. There was £380 million through English Partnerships, for coalfield regeneration; £90 million for the Coalfield Regeneration Trust; £60 million through the Countryside Agency for rural programmes; and £120 million from the regional development agencies for rural developments. For the new deal for communities partnership there was £2 billion, and for neighbourhood renewal there was £440 million.

Those are impressive sums, and we in Wales have gone beyond that. When 3,000 steel industry job losses were announced by Corus last year, £92 million was put on the table to help steel communities. Foot and mouth hit Wales particularly hard, and £65 million was allocated to rural communities. I mentioned Kwiksave earlier: in 1998 1,000 jobs were lost in the seaside town of Prestatyn, yet the help that was given to the Kwiksave workers amounted to £250,000. I do not say that coal and steel communities should not benefit: they should. However, I ask for a level playing field, parity, and political recognition of the problems that we have faced, which have gone unrecognised for the past 35 years.

If seaside towns are to be regenerated, ring-fenced funding comparable to that allocated to the other areas that I have mentioned needs to be set aside. More than 3 million people live in the 43 principal seaside towns. Those towns have experienced long-term decline over 35 years. Their plight has been largely ignored. I ask the Minister to do all that she can to rectify that and to look positively on my three requests: for the establishment of a seaside regeneration trust, for the appointment of a Minister for seaside regeneration, and for the allocation of sufficient funding to regenerate those towns.

Several hon. Members *rose*

David Taylor (in the Chair): Order. Five hon. Members want to catch my eye in the 34 minutes remaining before I intend to call the three Front-Bench speakers in this important debate. If the hon. Members will confine their remarks to a suitable time, they will all be called.

2.26 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): In my relatively brief, eight-minute speech, I intend to talk about the present and the future. For the second day running I intend to praise the Government. I shall return to type next week, but credit must be given where it is due. When debates began in this Chamber some years ago, I obtained a debate to which the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Janet Anderson), who was then Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting, replied. She was extremely helpful, and I know that the Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), will be as helpful today as she was when she was a Minister at the Department of Health.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane). Except when he was knocking the Conservative Government, I agreed with much of what he said, especially about HMOs. Like him, I hope that the Queen's Speech will contain something to deal with the problem nationally.

We all know what the problem is with seaside resorts. It used to be expensive to travel abroad. The Brits have always moaned about the dodgy weather here, but it is now inexpensive to travel abroad. This year's experience may alter things—we have had unbelievably good weather and people may return to British seaside resorts for their summer holidays—but we must deal with the present situation.

Southend-on-Sea, as one of the 43 premier seaside resorts, suffers the same difficulties that all hon. Members present for this debate are concerned about. I thank the Government for the support that they are giving Southend. We have been delighted by the number of Ministers who have visited Southend. It is pretty convenient, at 40 miles from here, but we are grateful none the less. I shall end my brief speech with a request for just a little more help.

We in Southend have 4.4 per cent. unemployment, which is more or less double the rate for Essex as a whole. In addition, just as things were starting to look good, the cliffs began to slide. That has been a major difficulty for Southend. Where is the money to come from for restoration? We have a huge, very heavy bandstand where tea dances were traditionally held in the summer. It will be difficult to relocate that, but perhaps if I write to the Minister she will be able to come up with some ideas. Approximately 12.5 per cent. of Southend's work force is involved in tourism-related activities, so Southend is very heavily dependent on the tourism sector.

I am delighted that in August the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister announced a £29.6 million funding package. Southend, through public and private finance, was allocated, potentially at least, a decent share of what we were told would be £2 billion. We know that the Deputy Prime Minister intends to deliver 120,000 new homes, but we certainly cannot take them in Southend, because there is no land and areas that were empty have already been built on. We are commited to about 250 new houses. The Deputy Prime Minister also spoke about creating 18,000 jobs in the Thames gateway.

I am very grateful for Southend's £29.6 million. It will be spent on the regeneration of Pier hill, the 250 new houses, infrastructure development for improvements

[Mr. David Amess]

to the Rochford business park near Southend airport, and, most excitingly, development of the university campus. We are determined to make Southend a centre of learning. The various projects centre on South East Essex college. We are working with the university of Essex. We also have many tourism projects under way, and new hotels are to be built.

We can all argue about which is the best seaside resort in the United Kingdom, but I know it is Southend. We have the longest pier in the world at 1.3 million miles—

Mr. Andrew Turner: Million miles?

Mr. Amess: I am sorry, I meant 1.3 miles. That was a slight exaggeration, Pinocchio-style.

We have the finest ice cream in the United Kingdom—Rossi's. We have Adventure Island playground, which is a bit like what they have in America; we have the Sealife centre and the Kursaal, and the wonderful Cliffs pavilion. In addition, we have seven miles of shoreline. However, there are problems. The hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd talked about the money that his area had obtained from Europe. At the time when I secured a debate on the issue, one ward in my constituency, Westborough, was excluded from that funding. I hope that the Minister will help us to gain extra help for Westborough, which wants to become a village; I also hope for help for Westcliff community centre.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Does my hon. Friend accept that, although the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) was fortunate in that parts of his constituency abutted an objective 1 area, which was relatively easy to extend, the Isle of Wight does not abut an objective 1 area—indeed, it does not abut anything—and the Government found it impossible to extend objective 1 status to it? My constituents feel that that rule is very unfair.

Mr. Amess: I agree with my hon. Friend and I hope to visit the Isle of Wight in October, when I shall see the difficulties at first hand.

In the 30 seconds that remain to me I want to ask the Minister kindly to consider what help can be given for the Palace hotel, which we hope will be used by our new university. We would like a regional college for vocational skills and will need extra money for that. We very much need help with our fisheries project. My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) and I gave evidence at the London gateway inquiry; I can foresee terrible difficulties in terms of the effect on the Thames estuary if that huge project goes ahead.

Finally, I am concerned about Sir Michael Lyons's public sector relocation project, which the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd mentioned. Southend depends on Her Majesty's Customs and Excise being located there. If we were to lose that, it would have a devastating effect on the town. I thank the Government for what they have done so far, and look forward to the help that they will be able to give us in future

2.34 pm

Mr. Gordon Marsden (Blackpool, South): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) for obtaining this debate and also for his indefatigable work since his election in raising the profile of seaside and coastal towns. That work has been shared by many members of the Back-Bench group of seaside and coastal Labour Members of Parliament that it is my privilege to convene.

On an all-party basis, I also pay tribute to the work of the British Resorts Association. I happen to have the title of president of that association, but all the real work is done, on a day-to-day basis, by a very small secretariat led by Peter Hampson. Indeed, I pay tribute to the work freely done by councillors of all parties and by officials across the country including this year's chairman, Mr. Les Byrom.

Reference has already been made this afternoon to the work of the seaside and coastal towns group in producing the document supporting seaside towns. I will refer to that, and to the specific proposal for a seaside regeneration trust and taskforce, later. However, much has already been done for seaside and coastal towns. Perhaps I could add to my hon. Friend's list. Many seaside and coastal towns, my own included, have benefited from the operations of the neighbourhood renewal fund. Increasingly, there is potential for business improvement districts. Blackpool has been cited as a pilot for business improvement districts. That is a real way of engaging the private sector in the improvement and regeneration of seaside towns.

Will the Minister take one point back to her colleagues? At the moment there is no mechanism in the proposed pilots for business improvement districts for the freeholders to contribute and participate. That, it seems to me, is a weakness. It has been raised by the Chairman of the Broadcasting Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) who is not here today but is chair of the all-party group for town centre management issues. It is an issue that should be looked at again.

Despite all the good things that the Government have done and, indeed, the funding by lottery organisations such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd referred, many problems remain. One of them is a statistical problem. Seaside towns are not only peripheral, but they are highly variable in the employment, accommodation, and everything else that they offer. That can mean that, taken on a constituency basis, pepper pots of extreme deprivation within seaside towns are not recognised by the Office for National Statistics or, indeed, by some of the other agencies involved.

The figures are stark. Many coastal towns are classified in the 100 most deprived areas in the UK in the index of local deprivation. In 1996, eight of the 20 worst deteriorating districts in the UK according to the index were in coastal towns. We need to bear that issue in mind when discussing regeneration. I am sure that the Minister, given her particular responsibilities with regard to social exclusion, will want to bear it in mind as well.

Recently there has been a major and significant report by Sheffield Hallam university on the seaside economy. One of the things that that report has shown is that,

although seaside towns are bearing up better than was expected in terms of maintaining employment, particularly in the tourism sector, in-migration to seaside towns is outstripping local employment growth, leading to a continuing imbalance in seaside labour markets. There is extensive joblessness, or under-employment, in seaside towns. That is beyond recorded claimant unemployment. One has to think only of the seasonal nature of seaside towns and of the fact that many people often have to do two or three low-paid and low-skilled jobs to keep their family going. Any regeneration policy and activity needs to take that point on board; it needs also to take on board the fact that we need a targeted and focused approach to be successful.

Regeneration must benefit residents as well as visitors. Too often, the balance has not been right, and that has led to local divisions that have hampered regeneration. Blackpool, for example, got its first publicly built sports centre only after electing a Labour authority in the 1990s. If we do not get it right – this applies to resident-friendly design as well as to the detail of balancing project finances between the needs of residents and visitors – we shall regenerate on contentious foundations. As my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith) said at a recent Treasury-led seminar, her town centre must be made good and fit for residents to live in before investment in new attractions or infrastructure will have a lasting chance of sustaining new markets and visitors. We should always bear that in mind.

Seaside towns put a strain on the services provided by local authorities and agencies, particularly because of their skewed demography; they have a higher than average number of elderly people and a higher than average number of younger people, often with low skills and low employment prospects. That is particularly true for hospitals, social services and education. For instance, Blackpool has between 12 million and 15 million visitors a year and, as I said to the Minister in one of her previous incarnations when I was pressing the case for a new scanner at Blackpool Victoria hospital in another Westminster Hall debate, those pressures affect services for local residents as well as for visitors.

Such pressures affect all doctors, from those in general practice to those in mental health. An interesting survey in *Doctor* magazine last year pointed out the pressures and strains placed on doctors in seaside towns. Some of those issues are only just beginning to be addressed by local government funding formulae. Some welcome changes have been made, but we need much more because the drain on local government funding affects the ability of local councils to introduce tourism and regeneration initiatives.

Regeneration needs to be underpinned by adequate planning and up-to-date powers and structures. My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd referred to the control of HMOs, and I entirely endorse everything that he said. We need a draft housing Bill in the Queen's Speech to incorporate a national framework.

The Chamber may not be surprised to hear me refer also to the liberalisation of gaming and of casinos. Casinos, not least in Blackpool, have the potential to regenerate employment in the area because of an increase in the number of visitors. To be successful, however, proper planning powers and a strategic approach are necessary. That is why I welcomed the August announcement on restricting such liberalisation to casinos of a certain size.

Over and beyond that, regional development agencies and councils have to consider tourism and seaside needs as part of an overall strategy. Some are doing it far better than others. We should also be aware that, unlike Blackpool, not all seaside towns are unitary authorities and that they are therefore dependent on the views of other organisations.

We need action across government. That action should demonstrate the diversity of needs, and to do that we require the voice of a seaside regeneration trust. It does not have to have an enormous new pot of money. By examining existing government work and the adequacy of current regeneration projects, it could act as the champion for the development of seaside and coastal towns. However, it is crucial to monitor and assess the effectiveness of the various initiatives being undertaken by Departments. That is why the coalfields taskforce regeneration trust has been so successful; and that is why I believe a seaside regeneration trust would be successful.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

David Taylor (in the Chair): Order. Sixteen minutes remain for Members to catch my eye. I ask those who are called to speak to bear that in mind.

2.44 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I agree with so many of the contributions that have been made this afternoon that I do not propose to replicate or duplicate them. However, I must challenge the point made by the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess). His ice cream may be the best in England, but Cornwall is another country.

I want to touch on another point. While congratulating the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) not only on the way in which he introduced the subject but on his long-standing interest in it and on securing this debate, I also want to congratulate the House of Commons Library. It is now producing an excellent debate pack for debates of this sort. I do not know whether all Members have had the benefit of reading it, but I am particularly struck by the wisdom of the first paper, which starts as follows:

"The debate on Cornwall's lack of affordable homes for local people reached boiling point this week when it was revealed that houses in some coastal areas have more than doubled in the past two years. The news, contained in the nationwide listing of property price increases in seaside towns complied by Halifax estate agents, brought a furious reaction from North Cornwall MP Paul Tyler."

Now, I am an equitable person, so I can tell the Chamber that it was not a furious reaction, except in this sense. The regeneration of our coastal towns, particularly in the south-west, is being completely hampered by the lack of affordable housing. There is no point even providing in Cornwall the full-time, full-year employment that I have been working for throughout my political life if we cannot also ensure that those who are going to work in those towns can find affordable housing. It is not sufficient, for example, simply to try to impose an additional council tax burden on those who

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

have second homes. Only when we have planning control over the conversion of a full-time residence to a second home will we be able to give those communities the chance of retaining a reasonable number of homes for local people.

The right to buy was a disaster for these towns, but their ability to survive in future will depend on the continuing availability of a housing stock at a rent and price that people can afford. Unless the rent and purchase price are within the scope of local incomes, we have not a hope of regenerating the employment prospects of these towns. My Liberal Democrat colleagues, most notably my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders), and I have been arguing this issue for so long with the Deputy Prime Minister that I hope that the Minister will recognise this afternoon that this is a particular and very serious problem.

There is some good news, however. I, too, will pay credit to the Government because, frankly, the previous Government did not seem to want to know what was going on in the coastal towns that I represent. The "Shifting Sands" report, which has not been referred to, was very useful and it was commissioned by English Heritage and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment. We have to provide a quality product. The hon. Member for Southend, West made that point very forcefully. We have to provide a quality product that can compete Europe-wide and worldwide. One way to do that is to make the places that we represent along the coastline of Britain more attractive. As everyone knows, North Cornwall has the most attractive coastline not only in the United Kingdom but in the world, so there is not a problem with the natural advantages of coming to North Cornwall. However, I worry about investment, private and public, in the built environment. This new report is extremely helpful from that point of view.

Again, I give credit to the Government for their response. As the hon. Member for Conwy (Mrs. Williams) said, the foot and mouth disaster hit coastline areas such as mine as hard as it hit inland, but help was not available so quickly. However, I give credit to the Government. The market and coastal towns initiative provides a mechanism to assist, and it has advantages over some of the traditional ways in which local communities have been helped because it is very much bottom-up. It is all about local initiative. If there is one point on which I disagree with the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd, it is that I am not convinced that the man in Whitehall or, as I would say to the Minister, the woman in Whitehall knows best in such matters. The more we can give opportunity for local initiative and respond to that and match it with serious funding, the more successful we will be.

My only concern with the initiative is that it tends to concentrate on the larger centres of population. I have in my constituency the worldwide surfing centre of Newquay, but I also have some smaller coastal towns such as Bude, Tintagel, Port Isaac and Padstow, which are famous in different ways. They are not going to benefit in the same way as some of the big towns. Although Newquay, which is here in the list, has one of the worst unemployment rates for 2002—we are addressing that successfully with some effective initiatives locally—some of the smaller towns also suffer. My concern is that local initiatives must be given as much flexibility as possible and the opportunity to develop in their own way for their own circumstances and communities. Yes, let us have a dedicated Minister if that will help, but let us not have this top-down approach, but a bottom-up one.

I particularly want to take up the point made by the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Marsden). The British Resorts Association, of which he is a notable ambassador and with which I am also involved, has been effective in galvanising local communities to do their own thing and not just to accept what Whitehall has said. The biggest single way in which we can assist those communities is to ensure that, when they can both meet the requirements of residence and extend their season, nothing should be put in the way to prevent that. Full-time, skilled jobs and a quality product must be the aim.

2.50 pm

Mr. Alan Campbell (Tynemouth): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) on securing this important debate, which provides an opportunity to reflect not just on the problems of seaside towns, but on the progress that is being made. It is almost unique to take part in a debate in which hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber acknowledge that.

My constituency includes Whitley bay, which, according to the Sheffield Hallam definition, is the principal seaside town between north Yorkshire and the Scottish border. It is a town of some 37,500 people and to a lesser or greater extent has similar problems to those outlined today. The explanation that is often given is the change in the annual week or two-week family holiday. That is a contributory factor, but on closer reflection there are other causes of the problems.

As well as those structural changes, important as they are, it is important to recognise that seaside towns suffered disproportionately from the big recessions of the 1980s and 1990s. Colleagues who do not represent seaside towns faced complaints, but those of us representing seaside towns in particular faced complaints about the number of for sale and to let signs and the number of charity shops in the high street. Seaside towns must attract people, and local residents were concerned that the wrong impression was being given.

The fact, not just the impression, of a stronger local and regional economy, helped by a particularly good summer, has created the feeling in places such as Whitley bay that perhaps we are turning the corner. We do not know whether that will be a long-term effect, because if one swallow does not make a summer, one summer does not make a strategy. However, although the structural problems remain, there are signs that seaside towns may be turning the corner.

It was announced yesterday that a long-awaited new shopping mall in Whitley bay has started. It was promised more than a decade ago but is being delivered only now. The local authority cabinet, which is a Conservative cabinet—I want to avoid accusations of political point-scoring—was due to make the decision yesterday on which developer will be given the task of

developing the Spanish City site, and earlier in the summer it was announced that the Government would provide £7.5 million to improve the seafront and to put in some of the infrastructure for the private sector developer.

The Sheffield Hallam study shows that seaside towns have seen a rise in employment, which in many cases is at least the same as elsewhere in the country. More spending power in the high street, low interest rates and rising property values mean that Whitley bay is now a good place in which to invest, and I hope that people will do so. To that can be added the regeneration of the public sector infrastructure with two new first schools—controversially, they are being built close to the seafront—investment in the people who will teach in those schools, the increase in the number of nurses and local and central Government employees, a disproportionate number of whom choose to live in seaside towns because they are nice places in which to live. Public spending is an important factor in the regeneration and redevelopment of seaside towns and there are signs of that.

I want to focus on the balance between public and private regeneration. I welcome and encourage private sector developers, but local government and central Government should retain a role. I shall give a couple of illustrations. First, the Sheffield Hallam study showed that some seaside towns are changing what they offer and are finding a niche in the market. For Whitley bay, that means less emphasis on the annual family holiday and more on the evening economy. If one books into some hotels, one is more likely to find oneself among people on a stag or hen night than among people on a family holiday. That is not to be pushed away entirely, because it brings money into the town and people then develop hotels, bars and restaurants—that is welcome. However, the downside is the tension between residents and visitors over matters such as drink-related antisocial behaviour. A balance must be struck.

Secondly, private developers are too often trying to cash in on rising house prices. As such, development projects often mean a lot of houses, and they will change the architecture and nature of seaside towns if we are not careful. Local government and central Government have a role. I endorse entirely what my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd said about ring-fenced funds. We need a resorts taskforce, and the idea of a Minister has much to commend it.

Another part of the jigsaw, the regional development agency, is underperforming in my region. We need a coastal strategy that includes coastal resorts, which are part of the regional economy. Fishing communities also need help, but I am sure that we can build on the progress that has been made.

2.56 pm

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): Like others, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) on securing this important debate and on managing to raise the issue at Prime Minister's questions today. That was a marvellous trailer for a marvellous debate.

When I saw that the debate was scheduled for today, I cast my mind back to August 1996, which must have been the only time that Cleethorpes has appeared on the front cover of virtually every national daily newspaper. A one-man regeneration whirlwind in the form of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who is now the Deputy Prime Minister, descended on Cleethorpes and brought with him most of the national media. That certainly gave a mini-boost to the local economy that day. I do not think that as much fish and chips and ice cream has ever been sold. The story is there for everyone to see, and I am included as well.

To be fair, Ministers have visited: my hon. Friends the Members for Rossendale and Darwen (Janet Anderson) and for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells). However, such visits are few and far between. I believe that many Ministers do not really appreciate the serious nature of the problems in seaside resorts. When people visit on the weekend, they see the wonderful bustle of the seafront at Cleethorpes. Like others, we have a marvellous sandy beach. We also have a steam railway and the east coast's answer to Alton Towers in the form of Pleasure Island. Unlike the seafront in the constituency of the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess), Cleethorpes has the shortest pier in Britain, but one can walk almost to the Netherlands when the tide goes out.

It is a marvellous place, but, as others have said today, behind the few hundred yards of seafront there exists phenomenal deprivation in seaside resorts. The statistics show that 10 of the 14 electoral wards in north-east Lincolnshire, of which Cleethorpes is part, are in the top 30 per cent. of the index of multiple deprivation. I live in the ward of Croft Baker, which is the heart of the resort. It is in the top 20 per cent. of the most deprived. Other wards in the local authority also come in very high. One comes in in the mid-200s in the list of more than 8,000 electoral wards in the UK. That deprivation exists. We have more people unemployed, more people permanently sick and more people with disabilities. Young people drift away to universities in other parts of the country and do not come back.

It was mentioned that house prices are rising in Cornwall. House prices are not high in north-east Lincolnshire. My neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell)—Grimsby and Cleethorpes go together like fish and chips—said in *The House Magazine*:

"house prices are so low you could afford to buy a house for your stay. It will be cheaper than a London hotel room and you'd end up with an investment property."

However, low house prices per se do not bring regeneration. The fact that our house price base is low means that landlords who have been milking the property markets in some of the towns in Yorkshire tend to want to sell those properties and move people into resorts such as Cleethorpes. Those people are being shifted, and that is leading to many problems in the housing markets in our areas.

As has been requested many times this afternoon, we need a coherent strategy pulling together the multiple problems that affect seaside resorts. If it were any other industry, the problems would have been addressed long ago, but because the resorts are dotted around the coast of Britain they have been overlooked. I hope that Ministers will do something. I issue a challenge to the Minister. Her Pontefract and Castleford constituency is probably just under an hour from Cleethorpes. She just needs to go down the M62, on to the M180 and stop

[Shona McIsaac]

when she sees the sea. She can bring her children and enjoy the day, but she can also take a look behind the seafront and see some of the severe problems that exist in our seaside resorts. Another Yorkshire MP said to me that he thought that there was deprivation in the mining communities in Yorkshire, but he had not seen anything like the deprivation he noticed when he visited Cleethorpes.

Vera Baird (Redcar): My hon. Friend was verging on a subject that I want to mention, briefly, in connection with Redcar, which is the other seaside resort between north Yorkshire and the Scottish border. Does my hon. Friend agree that a problem that we have shows that the real difficulty is the lack of a conceptual grasp of seaside towns as a whole? We have a super new town centre and it is a great attraction. The trouble is that mobility patterns have altered, so that peripheral streets at the bottom end of the high street now have 19 empty shops—I counted last Saturday. Seaside towns are quite poor and peripheral. They do not have the money in the local economy to sustain themselves through change such as that. The situation is self-perpetuating and just gets worse.

David Taylor (in the Chair): Order. The intervention is rather long. Will the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) respond and wind up as rapidly as possible?

Shona McIsaac: I totally agree with my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird). She has certainly added to the debate and illustrated the nature of deprivation in resorts.

I hope that the Minister will come to Cleethorpes—a nearby resort—to see the problems. I am sure that, if she does, she will appreciate the sheer strength of feeling among those who represent coastal areas, who know that something must be done to stop the decline.

3.3 pm

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): I congratulate the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) on securing the debate. I entirely agree with him about ring-fencing and the need to create a level playing field. He gave the example of Corus, where 3,000 jobs were lost and £90 million paid. In my constituency, 4,300 jobs have gone—I am talking about Nortel high-tech industry—and not a penny was paid, although people were helped through the Employment Service into other work.

Most of our seaside resorts are Victorian in character. Their original infrastructure was created by the Victorians. They grew greatly at the time of the development of the railways as a way of enabling people from inland areas to visit the coastline. Things improved as the working man, and later the working woman as well, were allowed holidays. Statutory holidays helped to develop the British coastal seaside resort. Things changed in the '60s, almost at the height of that development, after people gained more employment and holiday rights. The jet engine came on stream, which guaranteed people decent holiday weather by taking them to the Mediterranean at a relatively reasonable price. That industry has got bigger and bigger, and families who used to have a two-week bucket-and-spade holiday in Bridlington, Torbay, or Blackpool, now enjoy the same holiday in the Mediterranean or even Florida.

The whole industry has therefore had to change and adjust. One way it has been able to survive is through people gaining more holiday rights—in many cases, people take a second holiday at a UK seaside resort. The transport infrastructure has improved, which has enabled people to reach holiday resorts more quickly, but it has also meant that they tend to stay for shorter breaks. They no longer depend on the coach or train service that took them down on a Saturday and did not allow them to escape for the next week or two. Today, they go down, and when it starts raining they leave the hotel and go home.

The whole industry has changed, and that has resulted in less money spent by tourists staying in local economies. That point should be emphasised. Today more tourists are needed to generate money that stays in the local economy than were needed in the '60s. Not only are tourist numbers down, but the value of that industry to the local economy is far less than it used to be. Holiday resorts have responded. They have tried to find new attractions, they have invested in their infrastructure, and they have looked for new products and improved existing ones.

The resorts constantly face trends that go against them. The 1960s holidaymaker who stayed in a guest house, which supported a family for 12 months a year, will today come down for a few days, go self-catering and possibly stock up in a Sainsbury's, a Morrison's or a Marks and Spencer's. Visitors do not spend their money in family-owned local businesses. When people went out in a town in the 1960s, they would go to a local restaurant or pub. Today, they spend their money in a branch of a national chain of restaurants or pubs. All the time, less money from tourism stays in the local economy, and that has a big impact on average incomes.

The Fothergill-Beatty report concentrated on unemployment and totally missed that vital point. We have been conditioned to think that unemployment is a dreadful thing—it is, but low incomes depress areas as well, and coastal communities face the problem of low incomes. There can be 100 per cent. employment, but if people are all in part-time jobs they are not earning the money that they used to. In many of our seaside communities, incomes are well below the national average, even if unemployment is only slightly above the national average. The Government have to recognise that and do something about it. It is the single biggest issue.

The Fothergill-Beatty report tended to concentrate on the right statistics but to draw the wrong conclusions. It seemed to take the fact that lots of people want to migrate to coastal towns as a good thing. We tend to accept that: people move to the south-east, the area is popular, house prices increase and therefore the area has a booming economy. However, the type of people who move to coastal areas—as the report identifies—tend to be those who are economically inactive or winding down economically. They are not thrusting entrepreneurs with high qualifications who want to create wealth. They migrate to enjoy the natural environment. There is nothing wrong with that, but the report turns it into a

positive, when, in fact, it creates problems—it does not solve them. Migration is not, as the report suggests, a positive factor.

What do seaside resorts need? They need their problems to be recognised, which Ministers have begun to do. They also need support. Yes, some grants have been tweaked to help, and yes, word can go out to RDAs that some of the single regeneration budget funding should be skewed towards seaside resorts—I do not know whether that happens in every region. No specific grants are available for local authorities. The Government say, "Well, we have got some European funding." However, communities qualify for European funding irrespective of the fact that they are on the coastline. That is more spin than substance. Specific grant funding is required to help those communities to increase their incomes and economies.

Vera Baird: I intervene to emphasise the hon. Gentleman's point, which returns to the need to view seaside towns as a whole entity. Redcar, for instance, does not have a swimming pool, which is absurd for a seaside town of 40,000 people. No state agency will help us with that project because if one divides the population of the borough by the number of pools, on the face of it there are enough. State agencies do not see that such an amenity is absolutely imperative to a seaside resort. The want of a clear conceptual vision must be pursued.

Mr. Sanders: I cannot but endorse the hon. and learned Lady's comments, speaking as somebody who represents an area with a population of 126,000 that does not have an all-weather running track. We miss out with those grant regimes that do not consider applications holistically.

We are discussing what is behind the façade of palm trees and deck chairs. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) said, housing problems can be acute whether house prices are high or low. If house prices are high, local people cannot afford to purchase because they cannot compete with the people migrating in.

We have a problem with absentee landlords. Many social problems, such as antisocial behaviour and drug abuse, occur in areas of private sector rented accommodation where there are absentee landlords. We have an acute shortage of social housing. More money must be put into the Housing Corporation and housing trusts in order to put that right. We need investment in training, even better transport links and, above all, improved infrastructure to build on what the Victorians gave us and to make those communities vibrant, successful and prosperous in the future.

3.12 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I am delighted to catch your eye, Mr. Taylor. Surprisingly enough, I have one thing in common with the Minister: she and I are the only two Members present for the debate who do not represent seaside towns. I do not have to be nice to the Government because I have nothing to lose if they fail to give my town any money.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) on securing the debate, which has been extremely useful. Seaside towns have not been given enough attention by Conservative Governments or by the Labour Government, and there is a lot more to do. Seaside towns can learn a lot from each other's best practice. I do not agree with everything that the hon. Gentleman said, and I may return to that point if I have sufficient time.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) and the hon. Members for Blackpool, South (Mr. Marsden), for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) and for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) on their speeches. I have not forgotten the hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell), who is nodding his head.

I was delighted to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West praising the Government, although I hope that he will revert to type soon. I also hope that he manages to persuade the Government that his constituency should get the Palace hotel, that his fisheries project should be supported and that Her Majesty's Customs and Excise should relocate to Southend, West, in which case he will be delighted that he has attended the debate.

As many Members have said, many national problems affect seaside resorts. The hon. Member for North Cornwall briefly referred to the paper, "Shifting Sands", commissioned by English Heritage and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment. The opening paragraph admirably sums up the debate:

> "As an island nation, our relationship to the border between land and sea is unique and deep rooted. Seaside towns share many similarities with their inland cousins, yet remain fundamentally different: climate, remoteness, ageing and transient populations, changing demands, balancing the needs of day-trippers with residents."

That sums up what many hon. Members have said regarding our 43 principal seaside towns. I have spent a good portion of my life in north Norfolk, near Sheringham and Cromer, which are not on the list of 43 principle towns, so it is clear that many other towns need to be considered, too.

Statistics show that seaside towns are often small and diverse. There are 1.3 million people in our 43 principal seaside towns, and such towns tend to be small; roughly half have a population of fewer than 50,000. The excellent statistics prepared by the Library for the debate show that 32 per cent.—almost a third—of the 1.3 million people in our seaside towns are, as one would expect, connected with distribution, hotels and restaurants.

I would have thought that in most, if not all, seaside towns, an increase in prosperity will be led by an increase in tourism. That is why they must be made into attractive places that people want to visit. That includes people in this country, many of whom take a holiday—and particularly, nowadays, a second holiday—to a seaside resort. Also, we need to encourage more inward tourism from abroad. The Government can play a greater role in that. Tourism is now the world's largest business. It employs many people, particularly at the lower-skills end of the spectrum, and so should be taken more seriously by the country.

I should like to plug my area at this point. I do not represent a seaside town, but my constituency, the Cotswolds, has a crucial interest in tourism. I invite all

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

hon. Members to go there; we like lots of visitors and tourists. Indeed, I am sure that every other hon. Member here likes people to visit their seaside town.

I do not have many minutes left, but I could not conclude without mentioning some problems that seaside towns have in common with the rest of the nation. I agree with hon. Members who said that regenerating seaside towns is a cross-government, multi-agency problem, but I criticise the Government for having so many different regeneration schemes. The problem is that no one knows what they all are. Statistics show that many funds are underspent, because people do not know what they are. I ask the Government to consolidate those schemes and promote them further, so that everyone can benefit from them. That would be a major step forward.

I also agree with those who say that we need to increase education and skills, not only in seaside towns but for the rest of the country. That does not necessarily mean sending everyone to university—the 50 per cent. target is suspect—however, there are vocational and other courses that people in seaside towns should have the opportunity to take. Education, and persuading people with skills to stay in their home seaside town, is important.

Many have mentioned the lack of affordable housing, which particularly affects seaside towns. The hon. Member for North Cornwall, who is chuntering in the background, mentioned the problem. Unfortunately, the homelessness statistics that have come out today make pretty dismal reading. The number of homeless households with dependent children increased by a massive 8,000 between 1997 and the last quarter of 2003. The statistics show that the number of those in bed-and-breakfast accommodation almost trebled between 1997 and the second quarter of 2003; and, more worrying, that the number of unintentionally homeless in priority need has continued to rise from 102,430 in 1997 to a staggering 129,320 today. Indeed, the Select Committee report on affordable housing said that we now have the highest number of homeless households that this country has ever had.

We need to be building more affordable houses, and more houses throughout England and Wales full stop. We have the lowest number of housing starts at any time since before the second world war. We need to address those problems, and consider how we can build more affordable homes, because young people wanting to get on the housing ladder are simply priced out of the market in a lot of seaside resorts, especially those in the south.

I am surprised that the hon. Member for North Cornwall did not mention what he has said often in the past: that in the south-east and south-west the affordability gap—the gap between what people earn and what they have to pay for a house—is widening alarmingly. The problem is not so bad in some places in the north. That makes it very difficult for young people to buy a house in the area where they were born and where they want to live.

Finally, there is an issue of funding. As well as consolidating their regeneration schemes, the Government should consider other factors. In 1999, there was a problem because the partnership investment programme and gap funding was withdrawn by Europe. I want to hear from the Minister whether that funding has now been fully restored to the various projects to regenerate not only our seaside towns, but inner cities. Has the gap been plugged? We want to make sure that, where necessary, seaside towns get investment. It is clear from the statistics produced for today's debate that where there is a thriving seaside town, there is net inward migration—there is a relationship in that the more thriving the seaside town, the more inward migration, growth and employment there is. That is surely what we all want to see.

Seaside towns play a vital role in tourism in this country. We need to pay more attention to them and encourage people to think that a holiday by the seaside is the best possible thing they can do for their health—provided they do plenty of walking by the sea when they get there.

3.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Yvette Cooper): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) on securing this debate and on choosing a subject that is of such importance not only to his constituents but to many people across the country. I also thank other hon. Members for their excellent contributions this afternoon. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Marsden) and many other hon. Members here on their work as part of the seaside and coastal towns group of MPs. They have undoubtedly done much to raise the profile of seaside towns and the complex issues that they face.

We know that many seaside areas face common problems and issues. First, peripheral location can be reflected in weaker transport links, which can lead to problems in attracting new businesses, especially manufacturing, and inward investment. Secondly, changing trends in tourism, as described in some detail by the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders), have moved faster than local infrastructure. However, visitors still flock to the British seaside. In a summer such as the one we have just had, the British seaside comes into its own. Nevertheless, people seek different kinds of accommodation and breaks. Often, the accommodation provided has been historically developed and does not suit the expectations and demands of tourists today.

Thirdly, as many hon. Members have said, employment in seaside areas is often seasonal and low paid. That can lead to a low and variable skills base with problems in retaining and upskilling staff over time. That is one of the reasons why the Government are backing the establishment of the sector skills council for tourism. Fourthly, seaside towns attract a comparatively large number of people from the young and old age groups. That, combined with a high commuting population, can lead to high levels of non-employment and reliance on local authority services.

Those issues were explored in depth in the recent Sheffield Hallam report, which was conducted by many of the same people who were in the original coalfield taskforce. They examined 43 large and medium-sized

seaside towns, and their report is a welcome analysis, which will help all of us to understand and tackle the problems of coastal areas. Two main things came out of the report. First, the traditional economic base of the seaside town is very much in place: significant numbers of visitors still go to the British seaside. In 2002, UK residents made 33.7 million trips, which were worth £4.6 billion. We have to recognise the changes in the nature of tourism, which remains a significant industry.

The hon. Members for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) and for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) both gave a strong account of the delights for tourists in their constituencies. I will refrain from discussing the merits of the different ice creams from the different areas, but if the hon. Gentlemen want me to sample the ice cream from their constituencies, I would be happy to do so. I would also be happy to visit the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac).

The nature of tourism has changed, but we should nevertheless be optimistic about the prospects for tourism in our seaside towns. The second important point made by the Sheffield Hallam report was that, unlike coalfield and other traditional industrial areas, seaside resorts have experienced strong population growth, not an exodus of people. Between 1971 and 2001, net inward migration to seaside towns increased their population of working age by 360,000; people want an attractive and enjoyable living environment.

However, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South made an important point: although there has been job creation in many seaside towns, inward migration has often outstripped that job creation. That can lead to problems of non-employment and under-employment, although the Sheffield Hallam report makes it clear that seaside towns as a whole do not suffer from a spiral of decline. Nor should we write off seaside tourism; that is important.

My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury held a seaside town seminar for MPs from all parties on 1 July, following a request from my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South. On 18 September, an official seminar, in which many different Departments will be represented, will be held to discuss the Sheffield Hallam report; I believe that my hon. Friend will be chairing that seminar. The Chief Secretary will host a further seminar in December. Given that so many hon. Members have raised funding issues, and given the discussions in the run-up to the 2004 spending review, I can certainly say that the right host has been chosen for the seminar.

However, I would sound a note of caution on the issue, raised by many hon. Members, of ring-fenced funding. We get pulled both ways; every group or organisation wants ring-fenced funding for their area or concern, but equally everybody argues that we should get rid of ring-fenced funding and give local areas and organisations more flexibility to make local decisions about the way in which resources are spent. We are keen to promote greater local decision making, particularly by regional development agencies.

We recognise that there are significant issues that seaside towns have in common; we also have to recognise that there is a wide variety of issues. My hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes talked about the housing problem facing her constituency—low housing demand and its consequences. Meanwhile, the hon. Member for North Cornwall referred to high housing demand and high prices. So seaside towns also face very different issues; it is clear that there is not a one-size-fits-all solution. For that reason, we are not convinced that a seaside trust would be an appropriate vehicle to manage the difficulties faced by such towns. However, I am keen that we should continue to look at the issues and have further discussions with the seaside group of MPs.

We need to ensure that regional development agencies, which are well placed to take a local strategic look at the problems facing seaside towns, continue to work with regional tourist boards and with local councils. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell) that local authorities are a critical factor, and have an important role to play. We need to ensure that they look not only at tourism issues—which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Mrs. Williams) says, are extremely important—but at other areas of employment and job growth as well.

The social exclusion unit is conducting a project that is looking at the barriers to jobs and enterprise in deprived areas and at some of the huge variations that exist between areas. One of the area studies that it is doing is at a seaside town; I will ask the unit to look particularly at whether there are seaside factors involved in the wide variation in employment and non-employment levels.

Hon. Members have made a series of important points about housing, particularly about the HMOs, which I do not have time to address, but I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd that we need licensing of HMOs. We want mandatory licensing for HMOs that are of three stories or more and occupied by five or more people, and we want to give powers to local authorities to take further action. There is obviously a wide range of issues in seaside towns that need to be addressed. The broad programme of regeneration and neighbourhood renewal programmes that we have in place across the country forms an important building block, but clearly we have further to go. I look forward to working with seaside MPs to determine what further steps we can take.

Keynsham and Paulton Hospitals

3.30 pm

Dan Norris (Wansdyke): May I say how nice it is to be here under your chairmanship, Mr. Taylor? I was not expecting to see you today. It is an unusual situation for us to be meeting here in September. It would not previously have been possible for me to air my constituents' concerns at this time of year. I am very grateful for the changes in the hours and sitting dates, not least because this matter would otherwise have gone unnoticed in this place.

This issue is about fairness, not favours. I want to stress that. It is a justice issue. To allow the Chamber to make sense of it, I shall explain something of the local situation in and around my constituency. The Bath and North East Somerset primary care trust, which is responsible for the decisions about Paulton and Keynsham hospitals that are the subject of today's debate, covers north-east Somerset, which is largely made up of about 80 per cent. of my constituency, as well as Bath. Although that forms one area, there is a distinct difference between how Bath operates and how Bath people see the world, and how north-east Somerset operates and views the world.

One of the most notable factors is that the north-east Somerset part of my constituency covers a very large area—as large as the neighbouring Bristol constituencies and Bath put together. There is a great difference in geography and in how people see the world and relate to it. It has an older population than average, and some of the proposals relate to older people. They have a resonance that might not be understood if one did not know how the population of my constituency was made up.

My constituency has, by and large, an affluent population. Unemployment is incredibly low, and was the lowest in the country six months ago. I think that I am right in saying that that is the first time that a Labour constituency has had the lowest unemployment in the whole country. It still remains very low, but there are areas of significant poverty. It is to people in those areas that Keynsham and Paulton Memorial hospitals are most valuable. If there are great distances to cover and one cannot easily afford to travel, they are all the more important.

I want to stress something that people will not understand without a local knowledge. The hospitals have great emotional resonance and importance for local people. Keynsham hospital is well known to many of my older constituents, not least because they remember it as being on the site of the old workhouse. In some respects, it strikes fear among the very oldest. Paulton Memorial hospital was established to recognise the needs of the mining community. It is centred in the heart of the former north Somerset coalfield area. Although the last pit closed 30 years ago this month, the miners whom I saw at a reunion on Monday were full of their concerns about the hospital. They know how important it is to that community, and what great service it has given over many years, not only in my lifetime but in previous generations.

This is not in any sense a criticism of the Government, because there is a perfect understanding in my constituency that the decision, on which I shall elaborate in a moment, to make changes that are in effect cuts to the local service has been made by the local primary care trust, Bath and North East Somerset, which is made up of local appointments and people who should well know the area and the reaction that there will be to the proposals—although I fear that they do not. For example, there is a complete understanding that the Government are investing hugely in the health service in my local area. Bath and North East Somerset primary care trust is to receive £40.7 million over and above what it had been allocated—some £12 million this year, £14 million next year and £14.7 million the year after.

Because such huge and welcome Government expenditure has resulted in extra staff and other improvements, there is consternation and disbelief that there could be any talk of cuts in local hospitals. That seems incongruous with what is seen as the good work of the Government, for which people voted in two successive general elections, and it causes puzzlement and concern. There has also been a welcome for the many millions of pounds of investment in local education.

On top of all that, there has been a particular welcome for the investment that has recognised the toil of and pain suffered by many former miners in my constituency and the surrounding areas. Wansdyke has just received £1.3 million in compensation for emphysema and related issues. That is something that people welcome and understand: they recognise that such huge investment is important, and there is no question but that they appreciate the local NHS staff. What is difficult to understand is my area's unique honour: two hospitals, Bath royal united hospital and Bristol royal infirmary, with its associated trust hospitals, both got zero ratings in the Government's listings. Local people do not perceive that as meaning that they are not doing good things; they recognise that they are clinically excellent and do some wonderful work. By and large, they welcome the scrutiny that went into the compilation of the figures and statistics—they long suspected that things were not of the standard that they should have been—and they recognise the importance of transparency. Unless a problem is identified, it cannot be dealt with.

Having said that, they also appreciate the work of local NHS staff, and that of the extra doctors and nurses who have been available since 1997. They understand that cancer treatment has improved significantly in the locality. Both in-patient and out-patient waiting lists have reduced a great deal, which is very welcome, as they were not satisfactory for a long time, and they also know that since last summer nobody has had to wait beyond the prescribed period of 12 hours on a trolley in Bath. That was not the case in past years, so there is great admiration for the work of NHS staff, not least those in Paulton and Keynsham, who have a good reputation and whose high standards are valued.

However, there is great anger and intense and passionate feeling about the proposals to cut services at hospitals in my constituency, which would involve Paulton's losing six beds and Keynsham 10, and the relocation of Keynsham clinic. People are concerned

because they recognise the good work that is done there, but most of the anger relates to the bed cuts rather than to the relocation; they understand the need for change, provided that it means better services in the future.

There is also a worry that services to older people are under threat. Most of the population in Wansdyke and north-east Somerset is older than average. People also feel that there is an attack on mental health services and respite care services. Many carers are totally dependent on the respite care provided by the hospitals in one form or another. There is distress about the proposals because people had understood that when the new primary care trust came into being it would address mental health issues, issues for older people and respite care. Despite the opening up of communications, and the understanding that there would be proposals to make cuts if that were deemed necessary to balance the books, they did not expect soft targets to be hit. We are talking about the most helpless people in our communities and, along with the bed cuts, people are mystified as to why they should be targeted in that way. Having attended all four public consultation meetings, I know that they are not persuaded by the plans allegedly to maintain the standard and quality of service by new methods, not least care in the community.

You probably remember as well as I do, Mr. Taylor, that a Government of a different political persuasion set out on the care in the community road many years ago, thinking that it would bring cost savings, but it turned out to be a more expensive way of doing things. I think that, by and large, it was a better way of doing things, but it was not a mechanism for saving money. People are not convinced by the arguments put by the primary care trusts that the moneys that they want to save by making bed closures and other changes will fill the shortfall, although some of the money will be redirected to care in the community; people want to ensure that standards remain the same or, better still, that they improve.

I started by saying that there should be fairness and not favours for my constituents. They are aware of the overspend of £15 million, and they recognise that one has to balance the books. They do not want extra money, over and above their fair share, and they recognise that they are getting a lot more now, in line with many other parts of the country, which is right and just. However, if the books have to be balanced, they believe that the overspend should be corrected where it occurred. That was not in Paulton or Keynsham. Indeed, two thirds of that £15 million overspend took place in or around Bath royal united hospital. My constituents are rightly asking why the remedy is not being targeted at the place where the overspend occurred. The books must balance, but why should good hospitals that did not run up a deficit pay? That is to overlook the main culprit.

There is a history of poor management in relation to the Bath NHS trust under its various names over the years, not least the fact that it was so poorly managed at one time that three chief executives were salaried. Indeed, one of them was successful in obtaining £200,000 for unfair dismissal for being sacked while ill. An awareness of such figures when compared with saving beds does not go down terribly well with those whom I represent.

Consultation meetings are a great forum for people to express their feelings—they are an important part of the process—but it is fair to say that some of the meetings have been quite stormy. I think that people have not been personally angry at the members of the trust, and although it might sometimes have felt like that to the chief executive, I assure her that that is not the case. However, it is a measure of the intense passion and feeling that has arisen. As a result, the chief executive sometimes thinks that it is being suggested that she does not care and that she is being cold and calculating. I do not believe that to be the case. I have found her to be accessible and prepared to talk at length about her plans. I am not convinced by the plans, although they have some merit because the books have to be balanced; but a range of other cost-cutting options that would be fairer and more just would not have created such a strong public reaction among my constituents.

In one matter, however, I am critical of the Government. I do not expect the Minister to share my view, but when the Government appoint primary care trust chairmen, they should be as partisan as necessary. One of the reasons for the current difficulty in the Bath and North East Somerset primary care trust is that the chairman is not of the same political persuasion as me or you, Mr. Taylor, and the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) is his leader. This Government are clearly committed to extra expenditure, to reform and to a set of values. After all, the Labour party, my party, created the NHS and wants to ensure that it becomes even stronger and better. It is therefore very difficult for many local people to comprehend how someone of a different political persuasion can, in all integrity, properly accept the thrust of Government thinking and want Government policies to be implemented. Clearly there is disagreement, although I respect their right to hold their own views.

We should reconsider how we appoint people to become chairmen of PCTs. There is nothing wrong with appointing people of the same political persuasion as the Government and being straight and open about it. People would understand that completely. They would not like it, however, if someone's political persuasion were somehow hidden or disregarded when it was an important factor. We should know that everyone is pulling together and working together in the same way. That issue has caused consternation among local people.

It did not help that the chairman of the trust missed the first three of the four consultation meetings. Of course, he may have gone on a well-deserved holiday. Who would not want someone to have a holiday in the summer? However, PCT chairmen presumably want to support their staff in the difficult proposals that they are presenting to the public, so when they know that a consultation meeting is coming up and have a choice about the times and dates of consultation meetings, surely they would want to be there to defend them and to explain, even to enthuse, if they felt so minded. I can say, in all charity, that not being present at the first three meetings was not the best way to win friends and influence people. I hope that he will be present at the final meeting in my constituency, so that he will have been present at two out of five meetings at least.

[Dan Norris]

The strength of feeling is best illustrated by petitions that have been collected in my constituency. At the risk of boring hon. Members, I will read them out, but promise that I will do so quickly. I penned the first petition myself, on behalf of the Wansdyke Labour party. It states:

"We, the undersigned, are deeply concerned by local plans to reduce the number of beds at Paulton and Keynsham Hospitals at a time when the Government is providing £40 million extra funding over the next three years to improve the NHS in our area.

We urgently call upon the Bath and North East Somerset Primary Care Trust to reconsider its ill thought out plans to cut hospital beds, at a time when extra Government funding means there should be improved NHS services."

That petition was also taken up by the friends and users of Paulton hospital, who have done great work in collecting signatures.

The second petition was undertaken by a local newspaper, the *Somerset Guardian*. I thank Joanna Roughton, its editor, for running it. It says:

"We, the undersigned, strongly believe that there should be no cuts in the number of beds or staff at Paulton hospital."

Another petition, undertaken by another local publication, *The Journal*, says:

"We oppose the closure of beds at Paulton and Keynsham hospitals, and other proposed economy measures, at a time when there is increasing NHS funding."

I thank George Donkin, its editor, for running that petition.

I want briefly to thank others, such as the friends and users group and everyone involved with it, especially Tony Clements, Mavis Ditte and Sue Padfield. They spent much time on their petition over the summer. I am very glad that it was a good summer, as they were outside for a great deal of time collecting signatures. I mentioned the local editors of the relevant media in and around Paulton. I also thank the local councillors, who have been part of an action group to fight the proposed cuts, especially Keynsham councillors Adrian Inker and Hilary Fraser and Paulton councillors Hattie Ajderian and Brian Barrett. They, too, did tremendous work over the summer with the ward constituents. They have been a source of advice and help to me, for which I am grateful.

I also thank members of Wansdyke Labour party, and all the other people unknown to me, many of whom have worked so hard to collect what is now approaching 10,000 signatures. That is roughly one in six of all my constituents. I am sure that it could be much higher with enough bodies to collect the signatures. It is certainly the biggest petition that I have received since becoming a Member of Parliament in 1997. It is fair to say—I am bound to be subjective—that the issue has created the most intense feeling in my time representing the people of Wansdyke.

The issue is about fairness, not favours. Local people do not want to be let off any financial impediment that would otherwise come their way. They recognise that if there has been an overspend the books must be balanced, but they want the balancing to occur where the overspend took place, which predominantly means the Bath royal united hospital. The Bath and North East Somerset primary care trust has not weighed that up in its proposals to make cuts.

I believe in devolved decision making. Bearing in mind my proviso about the appointment of chairs, primary care trusts are a good way of making important local decisions in the NHS, but many people—in my view they are wrong—feel that the consultation is a sham. It is not a sham, and I am quietly confident that there will be a compromise because of the strength of local opinion, which is expressed through petitions, public meetings, letters and phone-ins to radio stations and various other media. There will be a compromise, but I ask the primary care trust to be careful not to jump out of the fire and into the frying pan. There may be a strong public reaction if it keeps beds open but changes their purpose.

3.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Miss Melanie Johnson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wansdyke (Dan Norris) on securing the debate. I have listened to and appreciated his comments, which he has expressed with concern and passion, about an issue that matters to people in his constituency and thereabouts. I should also like to take this opportunity to join him in paying tribute to all the staff he mentioned in the local health economy. They are obviously committed to the improvement of the local NHS and also to the provision of services to patients.

I shall discuss the local issues in a moment, but it is important that we acknowledge the pressures on the NHS not only in my hon. Friend's constituency but throughout the country. We want not only to increase capacity but to raise clinical standards. We do not want more of the same; we want a radical re-examination of the best ways of providing services for patients both now and in the future.

The NHS plan sets out a challenging 10-year programme for the reform of the NHS. In that context, it is worth saying that far-reaching changes are often necessary to provide the best possible services for patients. We must ensure that services are accessible and flexible and we therefore want to design services around the needs of patients. As part of that modernisation programme, many economies and organisations in the NHS are considering changes in how they organise their services with stakeholders.

Hospital services must change if we are to continue to fulfil patients' needs and to improve access. Services cannot and should not remain static for ever. They should be responsive to local needs and to the changing opportunities for developing services. Local providers of health services have a responsibility to live within their means. My hon. Friend sketched out the balance between those two issues at play in this situation.

As my hon. Friend knows—I will not go into this in great detail—it is obviously for the primary care trusts in partnership with strategic health authorities and other local stakeholders to determine how best to use their funds to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling health inequalities and modernising services. They are in the best position to know, because they are closest to the local community.

In my hon. Friend's constituency, the local PCT, Bath and North East Somerset, is recovering from a £15 million deficit, and I appreciate the concerns that he has expressed on behalf of his constituents. The local

strategic health authority, the Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire strategic health authority, has worked closely with the whole health community to make the necessary savings. Savings are required not only from community and primary care but from the acute sector. My hon. Friend emphasised fairness, not favours. The whole health community needs to tackle the problems that it faces together. That is why the local PCT has published the consultation document, "Living within our Means", which identifies how it proposes to make the savings.

The consultation ends at the end of September. I assure my hon. Friend that local stakeholders have been involved in the process, and he knows that full well from his own close experience. Since the document was published, the PCT has engaged in wide consultation and there have been 30 to 35 meetings with specific interest groups. He has been active in attending many meetings on the subject himself.

My hon. Friend is right to say that the proposals in the consultation document include a reduction of 23 beds across three community hospitals. I recognise the interest in and love for those community hospitals that he expanded on. The plans also include expanding the PCT's hospital at home scheme, and working with social services and other partners to reduce the length of patients' stay in community hospitals to speed up discharge and get people back to their own homes, which is where most of us would rather be at the end of the day.

The PCT has been running the hospital at home scheme since 2000. It provides 24-hour cover, seven days a week and has been extremely successful. External evaluation of the service, which focused on the patient experience, has also been positive. The Commission for Health Improvement considered the scheme on a recent visit to the PCT in March and commented favourably on the extended service.

By extending the hospital at home service, the PCT is confident that it will be able to meet at least some of the needs that are currently being met in community hospital beds. Obviously, under the consultation arrangements, all those hospitals will still exist. It is simply the number of beds that is at issue.

The model of care proposed should provide a much more personalised and local service, tailored to the individual patient. That is in line with our policy on intermediate care, particularly for elderly people. Intermediate care is not an optional extra. It is central to the modernisation agenda. There could be slight confusion concerning both the modernisation agenda and the budget deficit. There may be attractions to making the changes in any event. I recognise that people must be more sceptical when there is a deficit, and that is probably part of the difficulty with considering the case and its issues objectively. That is not surprising.

Returning to the local health economy, it is only fair to say that I acknowledge that Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire strategic health authority has inherited serious financial and performance issues. I was pleased to hear the account of the performance of many parts of the NHS. However, Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire is one of the most challenged strategic health authorities in the whole of England. I am pleased to say that in order to assist the strategic health authority to manage the considerable financial pressures that it faces, an additional package of financial support has been agreed.

I recognise the pressures that the strategic health authority is under, but I repeat that our policy is that PCTs, in partnership with the local NHS trust and the strategic health authority, decide the priorities for the NHS locally. That is where local knowledge and expertise lie, and it is not appropriate for Ministers to decide on that direction of travel and how services should be configured. We have made that clear, and I know that my hon. Friend accepts it. It is right that the local NHS should deal with that. I hope that, having secured and driven forward the debate, he will continue to work with the local NHS, as I know he will, to build a better future for the residents in his area.

Whatever decisions are reached locally will involve full and public consultation, and the passion and expression of views that are a part of that. They will be made after much consideration and healthy, open debate.

I hope that hon. Members will understand that it is not appropriate for me to comment further on the issue, in case, following the local process, that pre-empts any future ministerial decision that may be necessary. However, I assure my hon. Friend that the Department and Ministers will continue to work with the local NHS to review the progress of the local economy, to ensure that the difficulties faced continue to be manageable and that changes to the service are in the interests of patients.

David Taylor (in the Chair): The current debate has finished slightly early and a Division is expected in the House, but as the opener of the next debate and the Minister are present, I am obliged to ask the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) to commence his remarks.

Flood Defences (Lewes)

4 pm

Norman Baker (Lewes): I am sorry to be here again, as I am sure the Minister is, to speak on a matter that I had hoped we had, if not quite put to bed, at least sorted out in a way that would provide good progress for our local community.

The Minister will be only too aware of the terrible floods that hit Lewes in 2000, which we believe were the worst in the country. They were certainly among the worst, and—there is the Division Bell.

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

4.25 pm

On resuming—

Norman Baker: I was musing on the fact that the stop-go arrangements that have characterised the beginning of this debate are not too different from the stop-go arrangements that have characterised the provision of flood defences in Lewes. I said during the half-minute or so that I had at 4 o'clock that the Minister knows only too well that the Lewes floods in 2000 were, if not the worst, certainly among the worst in the country. He visited Lewes, and I am grateful for the interest that he has continually shown in the matter.

The Minister may remember not just houses but upstairs bedrooms that had been flooded—the sight was unbelievable. Obviously, the floods caused huge distress and inconvenience to people living in Lewes. In some instances, they were out of their houses for almost two years. The feeling in Lewes is very much that such floods must never happen again. At the time, the Deputy Prime Minister spoke about a wake-up call. I am here to ensure that the Government have not gone back to sleep but are continuing to try to provide flood defences for Lewes.

People are particularly concerned, given that after the 1960s floods there was, apparently, a similar determination to do something about flood defences, but it ebbed away. In 2000, people recognised that the opportunity after the 1960s floods to improve the defences had been lost, and they are keen that the same mistake is not made again.

As a matter of fact, people in Lewes do not want to talk about floods and would rather put them behind them. They want to come together and move on with their lives after the unfortunate, unpleasant and stressful incidents that happened to them, but they cannot move on as they want to because the situation remains fragile. Yes, they are back in their homes. Yes, they are getting insurance cover now, and I thank the Minister and his colleagues for all the work that they did with the Association of British Insurers to help bring that about. Yes, the Environment Agency and the flood defence committees have produced plans that, by and large, the people in Lewes are happy with, but there is now a real concern that flood defences will not be provided.

The Minister may think that that is over-egging it, but that is what is circulating in my constituency. The local paper, *Lewes Life*, ran the headline "Anger as Government scraps flood schemes" a couple of weeks ago. I hasten to stress that that is not coming from me but is what is being said in local papers. Naturally, the people of Lewes are getting very edgy.

They are made even more edgy by the suggestion that has come from meetings with the Lewes Flood Action Group and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs officials and in comments from the Environment Agency, that a solution may be found for part of Lewes but not for all of it. It would be very unfortunate if that were to be the case. When the town of Lewes was flooded, it pulled together very well as a community. People say to me that the community response and the way in which people helped others were similar to that in the second world war. People expect a townwide solution to a townwide problem, but instead they are offered cells.

The Environment Agency has done its best and has produced plans that will, if enacted, deal with nearly all the town. As the Minister knows, it has not been able to justify action in some areas: the Landport area, which is mostly council housing—there is a possibility that the district council could do something there—and Malling Deanery and New Malling, where there are a few houses. There are a few odd patches that are outside the main Environment Agency scheme, but the scheme, for which I am thankful, should deliver flood defences in Lewes. However, it now appears that it may not happen.

There will almost certainly be flood defences in Malling and probably in the Cliffe cell, but from the information that I have been given it seems unlikely, or at least highly debatable, that flood defence schemes will be produced for the other cells: town centre, west, the Talbot terrace area, North street, and so on. That is very serious. People would once again have the spectre of flooding hanging over them, with no relief in sight. People deserve better than that, after the horrors they went through and the promises that they thought the Government had given.

Insurance companies have, with the Government's help, been quite supportive. The insurance problem has, by and large, gone away because of the schemes; people are being asked to pay a lot more, but can mostly get insurance. However, that problem will recur, because if the insurance companies think that the schemes are off the agenda, they will simply pull the plug. We must not let that happen.

I could spend some time listing constituents who are worried about the matter, but I refer to Minister to just one group, in Lewes new school, a private, progressive school that has had coverage in the national papers for the education style it provides. It is in the Talbot terrace area. The school was badly flooded shortly after it opened. It has scrambled to get itself back together again, with a great deal of parent and community effort. It was flooded by up to 4 ft of water for three days during the 2000 floods. In a letter to me, dated 9 September, its representatives gave their view:

"If the Environment Agency does not flood-proof the Pells"—

that is in the Talbot terrace area—

"we will be caused distress because:

It is unlikely that we will be able to renew our, or get any, insurance as the current coverage is contingent on the Environment Agency installing flood measures for our area.

The ongoing stress of the threat of winter flooding will be intolerable on our small school, especially as predictions are that more flooding is likely to occur as a result of global warming"—

the Minister will recognise that as a genuine concern—

"and we understand that flooding of the Pells area is more likely if other areas like Cliffe High St. are protected."

The idea of dealing with flood defences in cells is divisive and nonsensical. I hope that the Minister will say that we will move away from the cell culture to a common community defence standard for the town. Why is there such a cell culture, and is the Environment Agency in favour of it? Has it made representations to say that it should be replaced? My indication, from national conversations, is that the agency does not like the cell culture. I am not convinced that the Minister does, either, although perhaps he will say he does. So who does like it? The Treasury, which wants to control funds? If so, why not say so in the open, so that we can deal with the problem?

It is invidious and inappropriate to have a cell culture, particularly if, by providing defences in one part of Lewes, the risk in other parts is increased, because the floodwater has to have somewhere to go. Will the Minister say directly whether the provision of flood defences in one part of Lewes will worsen the flood risk for parts that are not protected? If the answer is yes, it would suggest that the cell approach is completely wrong, and that in itself is justification for a common community defence standard in Lewes—and indeed in similar towns throughout the country. What is the DEFRA view on cells, and will the Minister answer my question about the relative risk to other areas?

There is genuine concern about how the present arrangements work. Tom Crossett, the flood defences co-ordinator for Lewes Flood Action, drew attention to some of the inconsistencies caused by the present arrangements in a letter to me, dated 5 September. He estimates that the defences for Malling will cost £800,000, and those for Cliffe £2.2 million. He says:

"the current points system, with its emphasis on economics rather than people, sets greater value on the assets protected. (£18.4 million as opposed to £4.5 million in Cliffe.)"

He continues:

"The tragedy of human suffering that flooding brings and you know so well among your constituents is much better represented by the rate of flooding. You will see from the attached tables that every time"

a flood occurs

"in the Brooks . . . the average Cliffe resident will have had to mop up between 2 and 3 times . . . In other words the rate of flooding in the Brooks is 1.9 houses per year, whereas in Cliffe the rate is 4.2".

The risk to individual people, which is what matters, changes, but the economic calculation that is applied does not take that fully into account. That is a problem.

I recognise that the Minister is sympathetic—I am not buttering him up; he knows me well enough to know that I say what I think. He has tried his best to resolve this matter, and I have confidence that he will continue to do so. However, I need to know what obstacles are slowing things down in providing proper flood defences for Lewes. Is the flood defence review interfering? Is there simply insufficient funding for flood defence? There has been some increase in funding from the Government in recent years, which has been welcome, but if that is not enough I hope that DEFRA Ministers are saying clearly to the Chancellor that more money is needed. It is intolerable if towns such as Lewes—I am sure that there are others—continue to suffer major risks of flooding because the Government will not provide the necessary funds.

One of the problems in Lewes is that the cost of dealing with the walls is greater than was originally thought. Perhaps cost will make things more difficult, but Lewes's walls are more than 200 years old in places and they have not had money spent on them for the past 40 years. Is the Government's policy to replace or repair them, or shall we give Lewes back to the river and marshland? Lewes is an historic and special town, and it is recognised by the Government as one of the top 50 towns in the country for urban environment. We must have a townwide solution because we cannot have continued risk hanging over our head.

Downstream storage is not the whole answer, and I do not pretend that it is. However, three years after the floods occurred it seems that no progress has been made on identifying how we can use fields south of Lewes and north of Newhaven as excess storage capacity in the event of floods.

The Environment Agency acknowledges that using downstream storage would, at the very least, take the edge off some of the flooding that would happen in Lewes in the event of a major flood. Why has no progress been made? It seems a relatively simple matter of making environmental assessments, of having discussions with about 12 landowners and farmers and of ensuring that compensation plans are in place. That does not seem terribly difficult to organise. How could it be easier to get planning permission for dealing with major town walls in the middle of an historic town than to sort out downstream storage in a lot of fields? However, every time I raise the question with the Environment Agency I fail to get a straight answer. Will the Minister find out why no further progress has been made on the use of downstream storage to ameliorate the situation and take the edge off any future flood—God help us if that occurs?

I know that the Government would like to use contributions from developers or riparian owners to meet some of the costs of flood defence—who would not? If a Government of any persuasion can find someone else to pay for something that will be of public and private benefit, they will take that opportunity. My concern is that the rules are not clear. When do the Government expect riparian owners to contribute? Is it simply a question of when the Environment Agency is able to lean on people and persuade them to cough up, and if they do not the Government will make up the difference? What rules apply to contributions from riparian owners?

Can the Minister also assure me that we are not seeing a two-tier flood defence system emerging, whereby those areas with rich riparian owners who can contribute have their flood defences mended because they provide match funding, and those areas with no such owners do not have defences provided? It would be intolerable if there were one rule for rich areas and another for poor areas. I hope that he can confirm that that is not the Government's position. He needs to set out the position on riparian ownership. Finally, can he assure me that if riparian owners do contribute, their money is not counted as a windfall by the Government and will not be deducted from the money that DEFRA would otherwise provide?

[Norman Baker]

I hope that the days of my securing debates on flood defences in Lewes are numbered. I am really sorry to have to return to the matter today, but the uncertainty of the present situation makes that inevitable. I know that the Minister means well and I have every confidence in him. I hope that he can give some answers to reassure my constituents.

4.39 pm

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Elliot Morley): I congratulate the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on securing this debate. I understand his concerns and those of the people of Lewes who were badly affected by a severe flood. He was right in what he said. It is not unreasonable to have an opportunity to explain some of the complications of and reasoning behind flood risk assessment and the analysis of the general principle of flood defences.

I understand that people become frustrated, but it is not fair to go to the papers and say that flood schemes in Lewes will be scrapped. That is not so, and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has given the go-ahead for Malling Brooks, which meets the criteria. It might be delayed by last-minute technical issues that the Environment Agency must resolve, but the scheme has our approval because it meets all the criteria and is not a problem in that sense.

I have been at great pains to ensure that I have been honest when I talk to the local media in the hon. Gentleman's constituency about the problems facing Lewes. Installing a flood defence scheme there is not simple. If it were, it would have been done a long time ago. There are complex technical and engineering issues, with the complication of riparian owners, walls being in private ownership and private contributions. There are all sorts of problems, and many of them can be resolved, but not overnight. I have always made it clear that there must be a proper assessment. A strategy must be put in place and worked up, and that is being done.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about the walls, which are a complication in Lewes. As he knows, for many years, houses have encroached on the river because people like to live next to rivers. That means that the walls are part of the foundations of the houses and of the river defences. The Environment Agency is trying to find an equitable split between the contribution that the Government, the agency and the regional flood defence committee are prepared to make towards strengthening those walls for flood defence purposes and the benefits that will accrue from strengthening the structural foundations of the houses. Under the strategy, some of the walls will have flood defences on top, and there is concern that because of their age and condition they will not take the weight and might collapse. There is also concern that when poking about in structures that may be many hundreds of years old an awful lot of problems may be found. That may increase the cost and we must have some idea of the cost implications, because the cost may be a great deal more than has been projected. That is not to say that the scheme will not go ahead. We are not saying that if the costs rise there will be no scheme—I want to make that clear—but we need to know exactly what is involved.

We expect the Environment Agency to seek contributions from riparian owners for flood defence benefits, as well as the structural benefits from flood defence walls. That is of direct benefit to property owners because of the impact on property prices. If a lot of money is spent strengthening and defending a property, that will be reflected in its value and it is not unreasonable to have a contribution from the owner. That creates all sorts of problems, and the agency is currently trying to find a way through.

I concede that the way in which cells are approached is not ideal. For engineering purposes, it is normal to look at a flood defence scheme in terms of self-contained cells. That is part of the engineering assessment. I will be quite honest and say that it is also the case that an assessment must be made of the cost-benefit ratio. It would not make sense to spend millions of pounds on a cell if that is far greater than the value of the property within it. We have 1.7 millions properties at flood risk, and we face demand for schemes all over the country, including in the Uck catchment. We have to use resources in the most effective way.

To illustrate that point, I can give the hon. Gentleman an indication of the calculations that are made. He is quite right about the Malling Brooks and Cliffe areas. If we take a one in 100-year flood event, which is the kind of protection level that I want to see, there are about 218 residential properties at risk in Malling Brooks and 166 in Cliffe. There are also commercial properties. Town centre, west has a score, but one that is low priority. We have two residential properties at risk there in a one in 100-year event. In North street there are no residential properties at risk in a one in 100-year event. In Talbot terrace there are six. Some schemes may cost millions to defend a tiny number of properties.

I know that that is not much consolation to the people who live in those areas, or to the school in Talbot terrace that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, and I sympathise with their situation, but they cannot expect millions of pounds of taxpayers' money for a very poor return on those cells, when that money could go to other schemes, including in Lewes and other parts of the Uck area, where many more people can be defended. My intention is quite simple: I want to reduce flood risk for as many people as I possibly can. We sometimes have to accept that kind of cost-benefit analysis to get the maximum benefits from the available resources. That is why it is done in that way.

Having said that, with the development of new technologies that we are funding and experimenting with, although those communities do not qualify for defence now it may well be that they will in the future. It does not mean that there may not be some form of temporary or portable defences, which are being developed around the country, that could be applied to defending such areas. It does not necessarily mean that they face a future with no possible defence whatever. I do not know all the circumstances, and I do not know at present whether it is possible to use those means there; what I can assure the hon. Gentleman is that we are actively looking at ways of doing so. We are looking at ways all the time of maximising protection for people either through permanent engineered defences, soft defences or new technologies, such as portable, demountable or temporary defences. We are considering all those things, which may have potential

benefits for people who live in areas that currently do not qualify for a scheme. It is not necessarily the end of the story.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about downstream storage.

Norman Baker: Before the Minister leaves cells, will he say whether the provision of flood defences in some parts of Lewes can worsen the flood risk in others?

Mr. Morley: Yes, I will deal with that point, because I think that I have some stats that I can give the hon. Gentleman. In examining the schemes, we have to take into account the impact on other areas of putting defences in one area. That is a normal part of the assessment. Looking at the defence that is likely to go to Malling Brooks, because the case has been accepted, up to a flood event of one in 50 years there is no change and no impact at all on other parts of the town. If we take a flood event of one in 100 years, there may be a difference in the water level as a result of the schemes of between 30 mm and 70 mm, which is not a very large amount. To put it in perspective, we would get a much bigger wave from people driving through flood waters as, sadly, they are rather inclined to do, not knowing that it creates a bow wave that raises the water level and can cause a lot of problems for people in flood-hit areas. The amount is minuscule. It is not really going to impact on other parts of the town. I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance.

I am pleased to say that our discussions with the Association of British Insurers have been very constructive. The insurance companies are taking a perfectly reasonable and pragmatic position. In the case of the school mentioned by the hon. Gentleman, the ABI says that even properties without the short or medium-term prospect of a defence will not be automatically disbarred from insurance. The insurance companies are prepared to examine cases on their individual merits and talk to the people concerned.

Apart from the new technologies, we also give advice on floodproofing and flood mitigation through the Environment Agency. That can help to ensure that insurance is maintained and that people deal with potential risks even when there are no flood defences.

Do not think for a moment, however, that that is our preferred solution. Our preferred solution is, of course, to provide people with proper flood defences, but we must face the reality that we must prioritise. When I was the Minister responsible, I was very keen on the scoring system that we introduced. I want people to see how things are calculated, so that residents are aware of where they are in a calculation. A priority score is a way of ensuring that the maximum number of people most at risk get the priority. That is entirely justifiable. I know that it disappoints those who do not qualify. Although they may not qualify now, that does not mean that they will not qualify in the future, nor does it mean that no other measures can be taken to deal with the problem.

The hon. Gentleman asked about downstream storage. He knows that I am very keen on the upstream flood plain reinstatement and downstream soft defence approaches—they both have a role. The Environment Agency is actively modelling the benefits of removing some of the banks downstream from Lewes. As he said, when it models it must consider the impact on other areas, which it must ensure is not detrimental. It also has to model the removal of banks to understand what reduction there would be. One would not want to see the expenditure of large sums, which could be spent elsewhere on flood defences, to obtain only a small reduction. That would not work. The agency has to convince itself that the expenditure would be beneficial, and that work is under way.

I understand people's frustrations—with particular reference to the lady in the newspaper article that the hon. Gentleman mentioned—and I am always keen on getting things done tomorrow, if possible, but sadly, it does not always work like that: one has to go through the correct process. It is worth pointing out, however, that through the agency we have spent about £600,000 so far in the Uck-Ouse river valleys. That includes reinstating the existing defences to their pre-flood standard, and a lot of that money has gone into Lewes. The expenditure also includes improved telemetry and warning systems throughout the river network, and the upgrading of pumps in Malling Brooks. That £600,000 is money on account and is not to be sniffed at. It demonstrates the commitment of the Environment Agency and ourselves. We are committed to reducing risk.

We recognise the case that the hon. Gentleman makes, and he has every right to make it. I hope that he understands that I will not mislead people about the technical and practical problems that we face in areas such as Lewes. It is not the easiest place in the world to install flood defences, but I can assure him that we will install them. We have approved the first cell and I am confident that the second cell will also be approved. We will not stop there. We will continue the research into whole catchment management and continue to support new technology and defence innovation. We will also continue to provide advice for local residents, and to work with local councils and agencies to reduce risk.

I am sorry that progress sometimes seems slow, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman understands that our commitment is unwavering, and that we will find every way that we can to ensure that we improve the defences for the people of Lewes.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes to Five o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 11 September 2003

[MR. PETER PIKE *in the Chair*]

United Nations

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

2.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): I welcome the opportunity to debate the United Nations and Britain's position within it. Before starting, it is appropriate to express on behalf of all hon. Members our deep shock at the horrifying attack on the United Nations in Baghdad in August and the appalling and tragic death of Sergio Vieira de Mello and his staff. I last met Mr. Vieira de Mello in Geneva at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in March, and it would be difficult to find a more dedicated, charismatic and effective leader within the United Nations structure. It was also tragic that his political affairs officer, Fiona Watson, a former Officer of the House, was killed, with 20 other people. On behalf of all hon. Members, I pay tribute to those people. I welcome Kofi Annan's determination that the UN should continue to make its contribution to cohesion and world peace despite those tragic events, and I am sure that hon. Members will join me in that.

This debate is the start of what the Government hope will be an annual process of reflecting on the United Kingdom's position within the United Nations and the overall structure and direction of the UN. It is timely that this debate is taking place in advance of the opening of the 58th session of the United Nations General Assembly, which my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department for International Development and I will attend later this month. Given that timing, today I want to outline the Government's views on the way forward for the United Nations.

It is also timely that in the middle of the UK's month at the helm of the Security Council, when we are leading important Council business on conflicts in Africa, discussion of the middle east peace process and, of course, Iraq, we shall be putting forward an initiative on managing the transition from conflict to the rule of law. I shall speak about that later.

The debate also provides an important opportunity to take stock of the enormous breadth and depth of the UK's relationship with the United Nations. The Command Paper, "The UK in the UN", which we published last week, sets out the current situation effectively, and I urge all hon. Members to read it, as it sets out some of our ideas for reform of the UN, on which I shall elaborate in greater detail as the debate proceeds.

Anyone who doubts the continuing relevance of the United Nations need only look at the range of work outlined in the Command Paper. Discussion of military intervention and sanctions in the Security Council may grab the headlines, but the UN's ongoing work, funds and programmes are at the heart of global efforts to improve the lives of 2 billion people throughout the world who live in abject poverty on less than $1 a day. The Command Paper makes it clear that the UK is active across the full range of the UN's work as a major contributor of people, ideas and funding.

Earlier this week I met Mr. Fawzi, the outgoing head of the information centre in London, who paid a departing call on me. He was at pains to stress his belief that the United Kingdom is almost unparalleled in its political and financial commitment to the UN. I was grateful to hear that directly from someone who has spent his life working with the UN.

One myth that the Command Paper lays to rest is the idea that disagreements with the UN and the Security Council over Iraq sounded the death knell for the UN, or for our interest in working through it. Even in the Security Council, where the disagreements were felt most strongly, the reality belies the media's image of permanent splits. The Council was united in its original analysis of the problems in Iraq in a succession of resolutions over more than a decade setting out obligations for Iraq, and in its determination, in Security Council resolution 1441, that Iraq was not in compliance with those. I think there can be no doubt about that whatever.

Despite the subsequent disagreements, since resolution 1441 the Council has united again around four further resolutions dealing with Iraq. It is also worth making it clear that in the same period it has adopted 60 resolutions on other subjects before the Council—all but two unanimously. Whatever took place over Iraq, the breadth and scale and importance of the work of the UN continues apace.

It is clear that the breadth of work outlined in the Command Paper highlights the UN's importance as the only truly global democratic institution, with 191 member states meeting on an equal basis in the General Assembly. It is certainly the case that to engage in global business, one has to engage through the United Nations. The success of the UN, therefore, is critical to many of the UK's international policy objectives. The Command Paper describes our contribution to the development of policy at the heart of the key areas of UN activity—international peace and security, human rights, development, health, crime and justice—which reflect many of our national interests. To promote those interests effectively, the UK and its Government have to help the UN to succeed.

The Command Paper sets out how we hope to achieve this in relation to each of the main bodies of the United Nations. I would like to draw out some of the overarching objectives for the UN to help it deliver the results that matter for the UK, and I hope that we can all do that during the debate. We want a Security Council that effectively deals with all threats to international peace and security, including new threats such as terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, which will undoubtedly require us to develop new approaches. We also want a revitalised General Assembly that helps provide strategic direction for international efforts to manage globalisation. We want the implementation of the proposals for the reform of the UN secretariat set out by Kofi Annan last year,

[Mr. Bill Rammell]

and we certainly want better co-ordination of the wider UN system of fund programmes and specialised agencies.

One example in which I believe that the UK's contribution and vision have helped achieve a greater UN impact is in the reform of UN peacekeeping operations. Our involvement in peacekeeping goes back as far as 1964 in Cyprus, and since then the UK has participated in 18 further UN missions. I believe that the outstanding record of our armed forces is demonstrated in their support and commitment to restoring peace, security and stability in the Balkans and Cambodia.

In Sierra Leone, I believe that our contribution—this is now universally acknowledged—was critical to what subsequently has rightly been seen as a major UN success. In Afghanistan, the UK was the first nation to lead the international security assistance force, which has made a significant contribution. The situation there is much better than before, and I hope and believe that that will continue.

We have also worked in the Security Council to ensure that peacekeeping operations have robust realistic mandates, which focus on situations in which they can make a genuine contribution to restoring and maintaining peace. We have also worked through the General Assembly to build consensus on reformed and effective operations. Indeed, the UK has been at the forefront of the secretariat's efforts to implement the Brahimi report on peace operations, which was established in August 2000.

We have worked closely with the Department of Peace-Keeping Operations on developing a programme of assistance under the UN strategy of the global conflict prevention pool. We have encouraged the development of links between peacekeeping operations and the many other UN bodies involved in post-conflict work to ensure an effective, integrated international effort on the ground.

On 22 September, the United Nations General Assembly will begin its 58th session. The agenda is wide-ranging, and we shall contribute, as a country and a Government, to all aspects of that. We have a number of particular priorities. First, we hope that the international community can address the threat of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. We want to build on the European Union's Thessaloniki declaration on counter-proliferation to get a commitment from the wider international community in the pursuit of this vital agenda through the UN.

We want to encourage the international debate on counter-terrorism and ensure that there is continued commitment to the process of peer review and partnership through the Counter-Terrorism Committee of the Security Council, which has been one of the most significant success stories for the UN over recent years.

We also want further national and EU support for peacekeeping, including capacity building in the UN system and among non-EU troop contributors. In addition, we will work for a new focus on international policing, which is a necessary supplement and ingredient of any post-conflict situation. We believe that one of the key tasks for the UN is to reduce the likelihood and frequency of conflict around the world, and as a result we are very supportive of efforts to build UN capacity in conflict prevention. In that regard, we are working to strengthen African institutions to improve their role in *maintaining African peace and security.*

Tony Baldry (Banbury): If we really are committed to conflict prevention in west Africa, we must ensure that the special court in Sierra Leone has the resources necessary to complete its work. Is the Minister aware that the special court will soon be issuing redundancy notices to staff because it does not think that it has the financial wherewithal to continue? Perhaps he will give some thought to that in his summing up.

Mr. Rammell: We have contributed significantly to the special court in Sierra Leone. The model that has been pursued in Sierra Leone is far more cost-effective than other mechanisms of post-conflict restorative justice that have been established throughout the world. We have encouraged other nations to contribute to the court and will continue to do that. I will return to the issue in my summing up, when I may be able to give further details.

This year's session of the General Assembly will finally agree the organisation's budget for the next two years. We want the budget to focus on UN priority activity to ensure that the organisation is as efficient and effective as possible. That is one of the recurring themes when considering general reform within the UN. The Government and I are passionate supporters of the UN, but if we are really to believe in it, it must ensure that its resources and programmes are targeted at the issues, problems and concerns that are relevant and are priorities for the whole international community. We will return to that.

The opening week of the General Assembly comes during the month in which the UK holds the rotating presidency of the Security Council. As a neutral chair, our main responsibility will be to conduct the daily business as efficiently as possible, building consensus around the many important issues on the agenda. Those include the situation in the middle east and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a mandate for a new peacekeeping operation in Liberia, and renewing those in Sierra Leone and on the Ethiopian-Eritrean border.

In addition—this will be a significant development—we will initiate a debate on post-conflict transition to justice and the rule of law. The UN's broad experience in bringing many countries out of conflict means that there is much expertise on individual aspects of that agenda. Restoring the rule of law is both backward looking, in the sense of dealing with the injustice of the past, and forward looking, in the sense of establishing or reforming the institutions and democratic structures that guarantee the rule of law in the future. Critically, the UN has experience of all those elements. Its experience ranges from international criminal tribunals to training in policing and justice. We are arranging discussions between the Security Council and experts to

consider how the international community can learn from previous experience and more effectively achieve the transition to the rule of law.

Overall reform of the UN—its methods of working and its institutions—is one of the most timely and critical issues that we will face. Like any organisation that wishes to remain relevant in the modern world, the UN continually updates its priorities and its working methods. That is why the Government are committed to pushing forward the process of reform, which has been led with such vigour by the Secretary-General of the UN, Kofi Annan. Part of our agenda for reform is of long-standing and part is based on new thinking—inspired, bluntly, by what has taken place during recent months—and the discussions that I initiated and led in the Foreign Office, which involved the Foreign Secretary and other Ministers and a range of politicians, academics and practitioners. I believe that some Members here today attended a seminar on UN reform held at the Foreign Office on 19 June.

Institutional reform can play an important part. The Government have been a long-standing supporter of enlarging the permanent and non-permanent categories of Security Council membership. The original Council formation was enlarged in 1965 to reflect the growth in UN membership in the post-colonial era, but the world has moved on and changed significantly since 1965, with the enormous expansion in UN membership and the end of the cold war. In particular, the economic power of Japan and Germany and their enormous contribution to the UN should be recognised with permanent seats on the Security Council. India and Brazil, which are emerging powers, should be given seats reflecting their regional weight and increasing global reach. Significantly, Africa must be given a permanent seat to ensure that countries can build up experience and weight in the Council that will give that continent, which takes up so much of the Security Council's time, a more effective voice.

However, the Security Council is only part of the picture. If we wholly and exclusively focus on its make-up, we will miss the essential importance of the debate. To maintain its position at the centre of the international system, the Council must address the full range of the challenges that face us. The need for it to deal with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is pressing. As a first step, it would be appropriate for it to acknowledge the threat and perhaps commission further work on how the UN could tackle the menace.

The Council must be as imaginative in that area as possible, and certainly as imaginative as it was in responding to the terrorist threats and attacks that happened exactly two years ago today. Following those horrendous attacks, the establishment of the Counter-Terrorism Committee within the framework of the Council was an unprecedented innovation, showing how the Council can succeed in setting the international agenda. The CTC was chaired very ably and successfully for its first 18 months by Sir Jeremy Greenstock, who is now en route to Iraq to work with Paul Bremer in leading the international effort there. The CTC set up a system of peer review that has shown significant progress in making universal the existing international instruments against terror. The chairmanship has now been taken on with equal vigour by Spain.

It is perhaps time to consider whether the CTC should be placed on a more permanent footing, with control of its own resources and expert staff, as recently recommended by the Foreign Affairs Committee. I would be interested to hear Members' comments and views on that issue.

Similarly, we should return to the question of when the Council and the international community should have the right to intervene in massive abuses of human rights, whether those inflicted by Governments on their own peoples or those that Governments are powerless to prevent. The debate that was rightly sparked by the horrors of Rwanda and Kosovo has largely fallen silent. The UK was at the forefront of earlier action on the matter, starting with the Prime Minister's speech in Chicago in 1999, and subsequently pursued through draft guidelines that we floated in the Security Council.

This is a very important issue, and I know from brief conversations that I had with two hon. Members who intend to contribute today that it is of real interest and concern to them. If we want the UN to be the credible and effective body that it needs to be in the modern world, we must face up to the questions of where, how and why it is justified to intervene on humanitarian grounds. I say that as a passionate believer in and supporter of the UN.

Clearly, we also want to invigorate the General Assembly, which is too often weighed down by its attachment to outdated procedures and to the continual recycling of well-worn arguments, as the same resolutions come up year after year. The Assembly is also too often deadlocked by the bloc politics that have somehow outlived the cold war, which ensures an atmosphere of continual confrontation and, bluntly, lowest-common-denominator solutions. Too much Assembly business is repetitive and sterile, with the same issues coming up year after year, thereby choking the agenda and blocking off other discussion. Little time is allowed for the General Assembly to debate the many issues of substance that genuinely face the world today.

There are practical procedures that we can put in place to deal with the problem and to streamline the agenda. We could, for example, reduce the frequency and length of the time for which committees meet, ensure that the Assembly debates certain low-priority issues only once every two or three years, rather than annually as at present, and combine related resolutions. We should consider, very strongly in my view, introducing sunset clauses for programmes, so that we do not keep programmes running year after year even when the issue has moved on and the real problem is not as significant and enduring as it was. We also have to strengthen the oversight role of the General Committee, the General Assembly's agenda-setting body.

In the context of General Assembly reform, I am pleased to welcome the election of Julian Hunte, the Foreign Minister of St. Lucia, as the president for this year's session of the General Assembly. As well as that being a long-overdue chance for a Caribbean country to take on that important post, we are pleased to note his reforming agenda, and we intend to work closely with him to ensure that he can push forward that agenda and develop his plans to increase the relevance of the Assembly's work.

[Mr. Rammell]

We have also taken the opportunity to set out in the Command Paper our intention to take action to try to break down the stultifying bloc politics of the Assembly. We want to seek ways of building alliances across regional and political groupings. We also want to place that on the agenda of the European Union, the G8 and other forums to ensure that we are all considering it as constructively as we can. In particular, we want to focus on those countries whose lack of resources leaves them especially reliant on the group system because they feel that they have nowhere else to go.

We want the UN to reach out more effectively to non-governmental organisations, whose role in society has increased immeasurably and dramatically since the UN was established. That has been a very healthy and positive development, but the UN needs to develop, evolve and catch up with it to ensure that it is engaging with everyone, not just national Governments.

On secretariat reform, the UN has recognised, under Kofi Annan's stewardship, that a successful organisation needs an effective administration to deliver its priorities. The Secretary-General has drawn on his experience at the heart of the administration to shape the reform agenda that he initially launched back in 1997. Much has been done, which we welcome, but there is still room for improvement.

In September 2002, the Secretary-General launched the latest round of his programme of reforms with a report entitled "Strengthening the UN: An Agenda for Further Change". The United Kingdom has fully supported that agenda. The latest reform agenda includes many items: priority setting, management of human resources, financial management, working practices and ensuring that there are appropriate staffing levels. All that is crucial to providing an efficient administration that can deliver priority activities and go on to achieve the objectives set for the UN by the international community.

The UK Government take a lead role in pushing for reform of the UN bureaucracy. Reprioritising activity in line with the millennium declaration, coupled with time limits on programme mandates—also known as sunset clauses—will be key. There is real concern that the UN is in danger of spreading itself too thinly because it has failed to discontinue activity that is either redundant or no longer serves its original purpose. People who say that they support the UN—thus implying or suggesting that we should not challenge, question or scrutinise how it works—are not genuinely its friends. If it is to evolve and be successful and effective, it needs to take on those challenges.

On the UN budget, an organisation with such a wide range of responsibilities and interests undoubtedly needs adequate funding to carry out those functions. The UK, rightly and justifiably, is a major financial contributor to the UN. In 2002, the UK paid more that £600 million, through our assessed and voluntary contributions, to support the many activities described in the Command Paper on the UN that we have recently published. That is a considerable sum, but it represents excellent value for money when set against the benefits that the UN delivers. For example, we each pay only about £1.90 for the UK's share of the cost of peacekeeping operations. Everyone would acknowledge that that is value for money, given the benefit that it can bring.

As a major contributor, we are also interested in proper management of UN budgets. Our permanent mission to the UN at New York represents the UK in negotiations on expenditure for the UN regular budget, peacekeeping operations and international tribunals at the fifth committee of the General Assembly, where all aspects of the programme and activity are carefully scrutinised to promote budgetary rigour and maximum effectiveness in supporting the UN's overall objectives.

The UK has certainly lobbied for linkage between budget and reform, using the budget as a tool to push for acceptance of the Secretary-General's reform agenda. It is important to stress that our aim is not to cut budgets but to ensure that the organisation delivers value for money. Nobody is suggesting that there should be a cut in contributions, but if we can introduce greater efficiency and focus, we can ensure that there is even more money to spend on other programmes within the UN structure.

Finally, I turn to development. The UN is undoubtedly integral to the international development architecture. Major players such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are part of the UN family and work with the United Nations Development Programme and other UN development organisations to make poor people's lives better. Since 1997, when the UN Secretary-General set in train a series of reforms to the UN development effort, much has happened to improve co-ordination across the UN family, with support for that process from the Department for International Development.

Those reforms were carried forward in the Secretary-General's 2002 reform agenda, with action points addressing the need to strengthen the effectiveness of the UN's presence in developing countries and to clarify roles and responsibilities in technical co-operation. In parallel with those efforts, individual UN bodies in the sphere of development have launched ambitious programmes aimed at improving the Assembly's focus.

I have tried to run through current Government thinking on reforming the UN, its institutions and its methods of working. I hope that we can have a constructive debate this afternoon, and it is timely that we are debating the issues in the UK. We are not the only people undertaking that process. The Secretary-General has made it clear that he wants to propose and develop a reform agenda. The Latin American countries are undertaking a similar review, and many other members of the UN are going through similar processes. The reform of the UN has been long discussed, but I genuinely believe that the timing and circumstances for the debate are the most propitious for some time. I therefore urge Members to get involved.

I have not given an exhaustive list of the options for UN reform. As I have said, we have listened to many views in drawing up the work programme, and I hope to hear more views during the debate. It is essential that the UK's engagement with the UN and its reform go wider than just involving the Government. We want to engage civil society and the private sector, and we want to encourage well-informed debate in Parliament.

This debate is the start of what we see as an annual process. At this time each year, in the run-up to the UN General Assembly meeting, the Government will propose an annual Commons debate on the UK's position within the UN, which may help the UN and us. The process is important, and I look forward to hearing what Members have to say and hope that we can have a constructive debate.

2.58 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Hon. Members will agree that this is one of the most timely debates that we have seen in this Chamber. It comes when the UN's role in Iraq, and indeed the whole future direction of the UN, is on all our minds. I place on record my own and my party's condolences and appreciation for all those who have lost their lives serving the UN, particularly those dedicated and hard-working people who were killed and injured in the recent bombing of the UN building in Baghdad.

I recall debating this subject in May last year. On that occasion, I said that in an ever more globalised world, discussions and understanding between nations are more important than ever. The opportunities for misunderstanding and conflict may be greater, but so too are the opportunities to resolve such problems without violence. The UN remains an important forum—probably the most important forum—for the resolution of disputes between nations and peoples, as well as being an agent for social and economic progress.

What cannot be escaped, however, is the fact that since that debate, much has changed. Iraq merely threw into stark relief what had been lingering for some time. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) said in a lecture earlier in the summer, international institutions, including the United Nations, the EU and NATO, have all sustained damage during the Iraq conflict. He pointed this out:

> "For many, the United Nations is still widely perceived as the ultimate organisation of international cooperation . . . but the stark truth is that, in the run-up to the Iraq conflict, the UN Security Council was rendered impotent, and in February when France made it explicitly clear that it would veto any 'second' resolution . . . it became effectively gridlocked".

The questions that remain are whether recent events have undermined the Security Council's effectiveness or simply its reputation in Washington DC, and what can be done to help the United Nations adapt to recent and not so recent changes.

We have to look deeper to understand that. The vital backdrop is the end of the cold war and the geopolitical changes that flowed from it. The UN was established in the era immediately after the second world war, and it came of age during the cold war. That was a time when the two superpowers and their two attendant blocs counterbalanced each other. Neither one side nor the other could dominate the world, and neither of them had a free hand to act as they wished. It was an era of balance and, in many ways, of compromise.

Today, the Communist eastern bloc is gone and the USA remains as a world power—indeed, the world power. It possesses unrivalled military, economic and technological power, and as things stand there is no rival power or power bloc that can match it. That presents a changed geopolitical environment from the one in which the United Nations emerged, because the US has the power to act as it wishes. It can act unilaterally if it determines that that is in line with its national security strategy document. The USA can act alone if it perceives a risk to itself. That ability to act unilaterally, combined with its clear view of a threat that necessitates removal, has coloured many views and subsequent actions of the US Administration.

With Iraq, the US believed that the UN had already made clear its view that Iraq was acting illegally, and the US therefore believed that it was incumbent on the UN to enforce previous resolutions—it would have otherwise failed in its duty and thereby made itself redundant. Others, such as France and Germany, took the view that if the Security Council simply agreed with the US proposals, that would be tantamount to making itself redundant, as it would be abrogating its right to disagree with a proposed course of action.

To many, it appeared that the US was saying, "We hope you back us, but if you don't we'll act unilaterally anyway." That appeared to mark the death of multilateral consensual conduct of international relations in favour of a more conviction-based model where the hyperpower called all the shots. If this were a truly a unilateral world, the UN would not have a discernible role in great power politics. It is not, however, a truly unilateral world, and ironically, events in Iraq have begun to show that quite brutally. To be effective, power must be matched with wider acceptance.

The reality is complex, and in the world today there are probably even more reasons why we need the UN than there were before. That is something that the United States Administration are also beginning to realise. Let us not forget that President Bush and Secretary Powell made their presentations on Iraq to the UN and sought, and succeeded in obtaining, a UN Security Council resolution—1441—before finally acting.

I do not intend to revisit yesterday's debate, save to say that since the end of the conflict the importance of the UN in the reconstruction of Iraq has become daily more clear. America recognises that it needs the assistance of the international community through the UN for the reconstruction of Iraq. I, like most others, welcomed President Bush's statement earlier this year, following talks with the Prime Minister, in which he made clear the importance that he attached to the UN's involvement in post-Saddam Iraq.

We have long supported UN involvement in the reconstruction. Although we regret the Government's apparently inadequate preparations for post-Saddam Iraq, which have placed a great burden on our troops who are obliged to do jobs that would be more properly done by aid organisations and contractors, we hope that every effort will be made to secure greater UN involvement. I hope that no country will seek to block or undermine those measures, as we can all see that that would only hurt the Iraqis.

We should not fall into the trap of pretending that until recently the UN Security Council was a perfect body in which the political interests of individual nations were separated from their behaviour. The cold war was filled with political use of the veto on both sides—for example, on motions regarding Israel. The UN has always reflected political power.

[Mr. Alan Duncan]

The UN charter aspires to save people from the scourge of war, establish conditions under which justice, human rights and respect for international obligations can be maintained,

"promote social progress and better standards of life",

and practise tolerance. Those objectives are as valid and worthy today as when the charter was drawn up. We must try to modernise the UN where necessary and translate the objectives into workable projects. That highlights the concept of what the new UN, if I may call it that, has to do. To be effective, it must blend power and consensus. That is the challenge that it must address during the reforms that it faces. Given America's status and power, the corollary is that no one should expect the UN to be able to tell the US what to do, if Washington is not so minded. Equally, no one should expect the US to be able to tell the UN what to do and have it fall into line on every occasion.

I am encouraged that the debate to reform the UN to adapt it to those new realities is going strong. It is a debate to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes constructively contributed in his recent lecture, addressing issues such as the need to expand the UN Security Council, areas in which the UN has a positive role to play and the question of peacekeeping or peace making. I do not have time to rehearse all his erudite arguments today, but I will touch on a couple of them.

Similarly, I welcome the Minister's contribution today, and a speech that he made in June, but I do not believe that all the proposals that he has outlined would necessarily help. Some threaten to create more, not less, bureaucracy, and although increases in the size of the Security Council are proposed, there are no suggestions for tackling problems that might arise if, for example, India became a permanent member but Pakistan did not. None the less, those are important contributions to what should be a mature and open debate.

Kofi Annan's proposals, which were recently published and are soon to be formally discussed, are also important. Mr. Annan has ruled out a run-of-the-mill review and has thereby made an important commitment to improve the inner workings of the UN. I welcome the decision by President Bush, President Chirac and Chancellor Schröder to accept Mr. Annan's invitation to attend the UN General Assembly meeting to debate UN reform priorities. I am sorry that—unless the Minister has something to announce today—our Prime Minister will not be there.

We cannot deny that the debate is real and urgent. One key question is whether the UN should be engaged in peace making as well as peacekeeping. The UN has been successful in peacekeeping operations such as those in Namibia, El Salvador, Cambodia, Mozambique and Cyprus. On a bigger and more recent level, it has been in Afghanistan where, although there is still much to be done, there is much of which the UN can be very proud.

As I said last year, humanitarian aid, health programmes and the building of effective education systems are all vital if we are to tackle the long-term causes of poverty and conflict. Dealing with humanitarian crises when they occur, helping refugees and feeding a starving population are important aspects of the UN's work. There is also, however, a longer-term commitment to improving social conditions and tackling root causes, and in those areas the UN continues to be the key international player.

United Nations subsidiary bodies also have a long and distinguished record. The World Health Organisation successfully co-ordinated the international response to SARS and has been combating various lethal diseases in developing and developed countries for decades. The International Atomic Energy Agency has been doing vital work in monitoring atomic materials, most recently in Iran. The World Food Programme is successfully relieving starvation and famine in afflicted areas. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees continues to relieve the suffering of people made homeless and stateless by conflict and natural disasters. The UN has been taking an active, indeed a leading role in the fight against AIDS. That is a superficial skim across the surface of some of the UN's activities that are perhaps not as much in the public eye as the activities of the Security Council, but they are every bit as important.

There is room for reform in those areas as well: for example, in the procedures of organisations such as the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. I hope that a firmer line could be taken with countries such as Burma and Zimbabwe, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes has repeatedly called on the Government to internationalise the situation in Zimbabwe through the UN. I would be interested to know why the Government do not make better use of the UN in that way, and why they appear to be frightened of bringing the tragedies of Zimbabwe to the attention of the international community. It could only be constructive if they were to do so, and I do not understand what they are afraid of.

I have focused on the broader questions concerning the UN's future, rather than on the specific achievements and reform proposals that many hon. Members will no doubt address thoroughly and eloquently this afternoon. I want to leave time for others to consider this important subject, but the UN deserves a practical alliance of realism and idealism. That is the only way in which it can effectively adapt to the new geopolitical environment and continue to serve the interests of its members. I hope and believe that that balance can be struck. It must be struck, because the UN is far from past its sell-by date; it is in need of change, but has much good work still to do.

3.11 pm

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): Before I contribute to this important debate, I hope, Mr. Pike, that you will allow me to say a few words about Westminster Hall, because it is the first time that I have spoken here. That might seem odd because, as you will remember, we served together on the Modernisation Committee in which I introduced a paper suggesting that we have another debating chamber, which I clumsily called the Second Chamber or the Primary Chamber. The Clerks, with all their wisdom and historical knowledge, suggested a better name: Westminster Hall.

The aim was to alter the timetabling of the House of Commons, so that debates such as this were not conducted in the middle of the night or on Friday

evenings. I have watched this Chamber evolve into an important part of the House of Commons—although I have not taken part in its debates. When I wrote that short paper, I hoped that the media would be interested in the Chamber's proceedings. I regret that they have chosen largely to ignore it. That is a great shame because so much is introduced here that the British people should hear about. I want to put that on record.

I identify myself with the comments made by the Opposition spokesman and the Minister on the Baghdad bombing. One of my near neighbours in Oxford, who was in the same office as the representative, had his legs blown off and suffered other appalling injuries. We must remember that, as well as the deaths that occurred, many in that dreadful experience, such as Gill Loescher, suffered awful injuries from which they will never fully recover. That is a reminder of how those who work for the UN place their lives and liberties at risk for the benefit of the citizens of the world.

I welcome the debate because, as the Minister will know, I have been concerned for a considerable time about the need to reform the UN. When people talk about reforming it, they normally mean reforming the Security Council to make it more representative of the modern world. I accept that that is important. It is long overdue that countries such as India and Brazil—two future superpowers, by any standard—are represented on the Security Council. That is an issue on which people agree that reform is necessary

However, I do not want to focus my comments on that issue today. I want to make a relatively short contribution on what I see as the most important aspect of reform in the United Nations: the procedure for dealing with totalitarian and failed states. It is a difficult issue, because every nation is a member of the United Nations, and one person's definition of a tyrannical regime is another person's definition of life, liberty and heaven on earth.

The world now has an opportunity that it has not had before. All the great powers have either got democracy and the rule of law or are trying to get it. Both China and Russia fall into the latter group. They are feeling their way towards the rule of law and democratic processes but are clear that they want to get there. That means that there is a growing recognition around the world that it is impossible to have a modern state that is based on a tyrannical regime or for a modern state to make full use of technology without many different freedoms, including that of information. Freedom requires both the rule of law and a degree of democracy.

I am conscious of how the United Nations was set up in 1945. We must remember that it was established in the context of the second great war of the 20th century and the failure of the League of Nations. There was a great desire to create a structure that would make it difficult for countries to invade and go to war with each other again. Although there have been a few examples of failure, overall it has been remarkably successful, particularly in its work to make it more difficult for nation states to invade each other. However, one problem at the heart of the 1945 settlement was that it put the nation state at the centre of everything. It did not pay the attention, which we now have to give, to failed and failing states. Our big challenge for the 21st century is to do that.

In the several recent debates on Iraq, I became increasingly struck by the similarity between the argument on the primacy of the nation state and the one that we used to have in Britain and other western countries about the primacy of the man—and I mean the man—in his own home. We have always been ready to intervene against nations if they cross their borders, so Iraq's invasion of Kuwait immediately produced an outcry, but we turn a blind eye to what happens within the nation state.

An analogy that I have used before concerns our past domestic law. If a man beat his wife up in the street, he would be arrested, but if he did it in his own home we would take no notice. Indeed, I remember as a child walking by on the other side of the road from one house, with my mother saying, "It must be dreadful to live there. I wonder why she doesn't leave." We regarded it as unacceptable to intervene because a man's home was his castle, and we take a similar view with failed and failing states.

As the Minister and I have discussed on several occasions, and as I raised with the Prime Minister after the last G7 summit, when it was also discussed, it is difficult to get the lines right about how or when to intervene, particularly as there are different definitions of democracy, the rule of law and freedom. However, the vast majority of us, and a growing number of states and leaders around the world, know the difference between a tyrannical regime and one that is trying to succeed and needs help.

People sometimes say to me, "You intervened in Iraq. Who's next? Why not intervene in all these other countries?" The answer is simply that different judgments must be made for different situations. Let me spend a few minutes considering that point. I took the view that it was right to intervene in Iraq. In fact, if anything, we should have intervened much earlier. The problem for the UN was that it had signed a ceasefire with Iraq, but that was never fully put into effect. Saddam Hussein did not honour the conditions laid down in the ceasefire, so a spate of 17 resolutions followed, as we well know, again calling on Saddam Hussein to accept the requirements that the UN had imposed on him. We ended up passing all the resolutions and signing a ceasefire when we knew that the state involved would not follow any of them. We had the additional problem that Iraq was located in a very unstable region.

That leads me to other examples. People ask, "Why not intervene in Iran, Syria, Zimbabwe, Burma or North Korea?" I say that the arguments are different. One can argue that there is the prospect of Zimbabwe and Burma returning to a degree of normality and freedom if we get the assistance and, indeed, the pressure right. There is a considerable effort in the world to do that. There is also some hope of achieving that in Iran and Syria. Indeed, I argue that there are quite exciting prospects for the reform movements in those countries to win. It does not follow that they will win, but there is a chance.

The issue of North Korea is much more difficult. If there were a country that needed regime change, it would be North Korea, but there is a difference between North Korea and Iraq. Unlike Iraq, North Korea is located in an area of stability. It is surrounded by states—most notably Japan, South Korea and China; there is also Russia—with an interest in maintaining

[Mr. Clive Soley]

stability. That indicates how we should ask the UN to restructure itself. If there is a regional interest in restoring stability—there certainly is with North Korea, Zimbabwe and Burma—the UN needs two things: the ability to work with the other regional powers in a way that secures change and stability, and structures that enable it both to put pressure on the countries involved and to offer the carrot of help towards reform.

In reality, however, if a regime is so awful that it destabilises the surrounding region, the UN needs the ability to intervene. On Rwanda, we failed, and failed miserably. Everyone in the world should recognise that. When people say to me, "You can't intervene in nation states," I say that if I had lived there, I would have wanted someone to help me.

Many Iraqis live in my constituency, and many of them opposed the war, but on one matter they were all clear—they wanted rid of Saddam Hussein. One man in my constituency lost half his family to Saddam Hussein and then three other family members to a British bomb. Not surprisingly, he feels very ambivalent about the whole thing, but the one thing on which he is not ambivalent is the pleasure at seeing the end of Saddam Hussein. That man in my constituency is critical of many of the other things that we have said and done, but he supports that.

We should never underestimate the importance of recognising the right of individuals to have the rest of the world take sufficient interest in their concerns and problems and intervene as and when that is necessary. That does not mean that the world should invade Burma, Zimbabwe or wherever. It means that we should develop different structures, within and outside regions, to put pressure on countries to reform. It also means that we should face up to the difficult problem of regime change because, as we all know, the UN cannot legally just go in and call for regime change. However, that is what the UN wanted with regard to Iraq, and Kosovo and Serbia. We intervened in Kosovo without the approval of the UN—it could not agree on Kosovo either, but it accepted that intervention, as did most of the world, because it knew that it was necessary. However, the assumptions behind the articles of the UN are that it cannot require regime change, such as was needed also in Rwanda. We therefore have to face up to that difficult choice.

I shall conclude my remarks by saying to the Minister that we need the UN to draw up much more flexible ways of intervening. By "intervening" I mean everything from putting pressure on, to offering support and help, to discussing with other nations in the region what we can do to change the situation in countries such as Zimbabwe, Burma, Iraq and Iran.

We all know what the problems are. We know that there is a current tendency to want to move in the right direction, but we have to change the UN from what it was in 1945—an organisation designed to protect individual nations from outside intervention—to one that expects its members to live up to certain minimum standards. That does not mean that we should invade China if it still commits human rights abuses, but it means that we should have much tougher codes on human rights, and ways of drawing attention to nations that are failing to deliver on that—we all fail to deliver sometimes. Above all, a series of steps should be taken before we take the ultimate step of intervening in a nation state that has totally failed, is destabilising its region, brutalising its population and, as in the case of Saddam Hussein, is run by a psychopathic killer who has managed to take over that state.

We cannot sit back and pretend that such problems concern only the people of a particular country, and that they can do something about them. They might have been able to do something when a dictator took over, but once that has happened the opportunity for removing him disappears. That is particularly true of leaders who have brutal regimes, such as Saddam Hussein, which suppress all dissent and do so very effectively. I do not believe that the world is willing to sit back and watch such things take place any longer—the television coverage of Kosovo, where people saw what was happening, demonstrated that.

In a sense, the problem is that people did not see what was happening in Iraq. They did not see the awful tortures that took place there, examples of which were given by my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd). Television did not show children being tortured in front of their families to make them talk, or people being put into plastic shredders. Therefore some people—whether over the road in Parliament square or elsewhere—still say that people are dying in Iraq now. That is true, but the numbers dying are dramatically fewer than those dying under Saddam Hussein's regime. Moreover, there is not the appalling and nightmarish torture that took place in Iraq under Saddam Hussein. That message needs to be put across, and the UN is the organisation to transmit it. During this century, the power of public opinion and the ability of the UN to examine those complex situations will give us a better chance to reduce the power of those psychopathic killers, and to remove them from power in the states in which they cause so much misery.

3.29 pm

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley). I echo his comments about the Westminster Hall venue. Those of us who are on the beat in this Chamber slightly more regularly than he is endorse what he says about this being a place where we have the opportunity for measured debates, of which this afternoon's is a good example.

In the introduction to the Command Paper that is the starting point for the debate, the Foreign Secretary says:

"Never has the UN been more needed."

I say, "Hear, hear," to that. As we meet on the second anniversary of what is universally known as 9/11—the terrible atrocities in New York, Washington and elsewhere in the United States—we are in reflective mood. We have had 12 months of intense and—we must not duck this—divisive activity that has left the participants in the debate wounded, figuratively and sometimes literally. It is welcome that we have a chance this afternoon to reflect on that, and I particularly welcome the Minister's statement that this is intended to be an annual event.

If the United Nations did not exist, we would have to invent it. It replaced the League of Nations, which proved itself sadly ineffective in preventing conflict in

the world or managing the different competing powers of the nation states. There have been times, especially in the past year, when people felt we were in danger of needing to invent a third international body. I do not take that pessimistic view, but we need to recognise the innate value of the United Nations and understand why it is important that it exists. In a fractured world, it is vital for making and keeping the peace. It is essential to have proper forums in which we can talk, rather than going to war. Increasingly, we need to assist the world's poorest out of the famine and disease that often underpin wars and conflicts.

Earlier this week at a press conference, the United Nations Secretary-General made a distinction between hard and soft threats. We have focused on the hard threats of international terrorism, weapons of mass destruction and so on, but we must give equal attention to the soft threats of famine and disease, especially HIV/AIDS.

On balance, the United Nations is undoubtedly a force for good overall, although it is not without problems and shortcomings. In common with other hon. Members who have spoken in the debate, I believe it is important that we acknowledge the fact that the United Nations is in the front line. The tragic attack on the United Nations building in Baghdad in August killed 22 people and, as the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush said, injured many, who will live with their difficulties for a long time, if not for the rest of their lives. The event led us to reflect on the ideas that underpin the United Nations: was it a target simply because it is an easy target in such circumstances, or was that symbolic of a wider challenge to its legitimacy?

As we debate these issues, it is important to recognise the strong role that Britain plays in the debates, and in maintaining the United Nations. Britain more than lives up to its position as a founding member of the United Nations and a current member of the Security Council. My colleagues and I profoundly disagreed with United Kingdom Government approaches on key issues such as Iraq; nevertheless, we recognise that under successive Labour and Conservative Governments, Britain has played a leading role in the United Nations.

That is highlighted in three key areas. First, our diplomatic contribution is first-class. Mention has already been made of Sir Jeremy Greenstock, who is now the special representative in Iraq. I had the privilege of meeting him in New York a few years ago, and I was impressed by him and his colleagues, and the operation that they oversaw. I join all other hon. Members in wishing him well in his difficult role in Iraq. More recently I met the new ambassador, Sir Emyr Jones Parry, in his previous incarnation as ambassador to NATO. He has a hard act to follow in Sir Jeremy Greenstock, but I am sure that he will be well up to the task.

Apart from our diplomatic contributions at the UN, Britain's financial contribution should not go unnoticed. The Command Paper highlights that in great detail. It is a staggering amount of money. I hope that the people in the Treasury who attend to these things appreciate just how important that contribution is, and do not regard it as a soft target. Without those contributions Britain's clout in the UN would not be nearly so significant.

A third area that I shall briefly highlight, echoing the Minister, is the significant military contribution that our forces make around the world in the many different problem areas that have been mentioned. So many other areas could be listed too. In each of them people recognise Britain's role, and for that reason we continue to have a greater influence than we might otherwise have as a middle-ranking country.

Current events are never far from our attention. The bomb in Iraq brought us all up short. This weekend there is a gathering of Foreign Secretaries and senior UN officials in Geneva to attempt to broker a proper resolution for the ongoing administration and governance of Iraq. As the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) said, yesterday's debate covered most of the main issues and I do not seek to rehearse them again. I hope that it is taken on board that the legitimacy of the post-war situation in Iraq will depend on the embedding and involvement of the UN in its many different guises in the governance of that country. UN authorisation and accountability for the operations there are essential. If the wider world is to believe that something more than a military conflict has taken place, UN endorsement will be very important.

The middle east is never far from our thoughts. The latest suicide bombings and the Israeli retaliation are a depressing return to a familiar cycle. The UN is part of the Quartet, still hopefully sticking to the road map, which is being torn apart with each passing day. It is not clear whether it is sensible to retain any optimism about the road map, but without it, and if the UN and other key powers do not play their key role, there can be even less hope in the middle east.

There are huge areas of important work that the UN does beyond seeking to make peace or keep it once conflict is over. Often those burst into the headlines. I am sure that other hon. Members will focus on some of the development issues that are before the world at present, not least at the World Trade Organisation meeting at Cancun in Mexico. We must not lose sight of the fact that the momentum that developed and the real sense of optimism when the millennium development goals were endorsed just a few short years ago are beginning to be lost. If we do not think that that is right we should pause to reflect on the words of Kofi Annan at his press briefing earlier this week in New York. He said that he was not sure that the consensus and vision were still intact to deliver on the millennium development goals. I hope that the Minister will reflect on that when he winds up.

Even the greatest supporters of the United Nations—I count myself among them—recognise that, for all its achievements, it needs reform. The contributions that we have heard this afternoon have focused on that in large part. The Secretary-General led the charge when he spoke publicly not long ago. Reflecting on the uncertainties of the past year, he said:

> "We all agree that there are new threats, or rather that old challenges have resurfaced in new and more virulent forms. What we do not seem to agree on is what exactly they are, or how to respond, or even whether the response should be a collective one. We seem no longer to agree on what the main threats are, or on how to deal with them."

He recognised that without even that basic agreement there is something wrong with the United Nations.

[Mr. Michael Moore]

As the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton said, the Secretary-General encouraged Heads of State to attend the General Assembly later this month. I understand that the Prime Minister will not attend—I am not sure whether that is because it coincides with the Labour party conference or an important national or international event. I hope that the Minister can assure us that even if the Prime Minister does not attend, Britain will still be represented at a senior level at those talks. We are at a key point in the UN's development, and the Prime Minister, whatever our disagreements with him, has championed the international order, so surely he should be there and take part in those discussions.

We could focus on many areas that need reform, and some have been mentioned this afternoon. I agree with the Minister that innovations such as the Counter-Terrorism Committee are welcome. We support his notion that such a committee should become a permanent feature of the United Nations infrastructure. That committee illustrates the UN's ability to innovate. We regularly hear that it is a morass of bureaucracy and inflexible, but a new need was identified, a solution was found, and we should seek to make it permanent.

Kofi Annan has highlighted the need for Security Council reform, saying

"if we can reform the Council and make it more democratic and representative, it will gain also in greater legitimacy. I think most Member States want to see that happen."

I cannot imagine anyone opposing that sentiment.

I agree with the broad thrust of the suggestion that there should be new permanent members of the Security Council. Japan and Germany have been mentioned as key members and, crucially, there should be members from other continents which, almost scandalously, do not have permanent representation on the Security Council.

Perhaps the Minister would also deal with an issue about which the Secretary-General was clearly troubled. If countries are to be eligible for permanent member status they must have no outstanding resolutions against them at the Security Council. A point that was specifically made to the Secretary-General was the situation in India and Kashmir. None of us wants to challenge the right of India, Brazil or any other country to be part of the Security Council, but perhaps the Minister would specify some criteria that he envisages as the basis for membership.

Another area that needs reform is the way in which Security Council resolutions are developed. That must be done mostly privately in the backwaters of the UN headquarters in New York, Geneva or whatever venue is most appropriate. However, too much of the political debate that is important in this country and elsewhere is influenced by leaks, counter-leaks and lack of information on what is actually at stake. The example that I would highlight is Zimbabwe. There has been a great deal of pressure from us, from the Conservatives and, frankly, from the whole House, on the Government to seek a United Nations resolution. Understandably, Ministers have said that they do not want to introduce a draft resolution for fear that it will be rebuffed—I am sure that the Minister will repeat that today. I think that that solution only suits Zimbabwe. We must find a new mechanism for discussing draft resolutions, and understand who is blocking them and why. Only in that way can we seek to focus the power of the United Nations on the members who are blocking serious efforts to resolve real problems.

Zimbabwe takes us neatly to one other area that I would like to touch on, which was the focus of the contribution by the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush—the doctrines of intervention that we might encourage and develop. I do not want to repeat the arguments of March, or those of the many weeks and months preceding that debate. We had a thoughtful contribution about why what we did was right then. Many of the arguments will appeal to all of us on different levels. Was it right or not? The legality of it will entertain international lawyers and academics for years to come. Understandably, the UK debate, which was passionate and vigorous, was a microcosm of a much wider debate.

I would agree with the Minister's comment that we failed in Rwanda, and part of the reason why we failed is that we did not have at our disposal the tools that would legitimise and allow such interventions to take place. That has to be seen alongside the question whether there is the political will to deliver the troops required. We also live in a world where the United States has set out its new doctrine of pre-emption, which many would say is fundamentally at odds with the United Nations charter and with international law as we have known it.

We all accept that United Nations resolutions are not the sole repository of international legitimacy, but equally, we accept that they are important sources of that legitimacy. We need a new mechanism that will allow us to work out how we deal with crimes against humanity, genocide and all the humanitarian issues that are troubling us in this modern world. As the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush said, so much of what we now have to cope with internationally is happening within member states' borders rather than across them. The UN needs to recognise that, and we need to be part of it.

Some of the reforms will be beyond the scope of one meeting of the General Assembly or a meeting of Heads of State, important as those are. I hope that the Minister will look for new ways to develop the momentum for reform. We might need a constitutional convention of UN members to consider that, aside from the regular meetings of the General Assembly. The system is broke, and it needs fixing—but it is well worth fixing.

As I draw my remarks to a close, I would like to comment in a parenthesis on the very sad death of Anna Lindh, the Swedish Foreign Minister, who was stabbed as she was out doing her shopping yesterday, and died overnight. There is a palpable sense of shock around the House and the whole Palace of Westminster today, and the international media are reflecting that. The Foreign Secretary and Secretary-General Kofi Annan have remarked on her commitment to the United Nations and her internationalism, and it is a tragic loss that she is no longer with us.

The debate has been important, and it will continue to be so. There are important contributions to come. I hope that in future this will not just be a Thursday afternoon debate in Westminster Hall, but something

that can attract more attention in the House and in the country as a whole. Talking is the easy bit; we must hope that the Government will build on this debate, and build the momentum for change. Even critics such as the United States, which has sought to bypass the UN at key moments, now recognise more clearly its innate strength and purpose. As the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton said, it is not past its sell-by date but is a force for good, and we should all be focused on making it better and more effective.

3.49 pm

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): I welcome the fact that the Government have initiated this debate and that they propose to have it each year. Even more than that, I welcome the enthusiasm in the Minister's opening statement not just for the more showy parts of the United Nations—the active, or even, dare I say, the more glamorous side: war. He gave his commitment to reform, which is part of the detailed diplomatic side—the necessary work of Ministers and civil servants. That work is behind the scenes, time consuming and undramatic, but his enthusiasm for it gave me some hope.

However, on this second anniversary of the attacks on the twin towers and the Pentagon in the USA, it is appropriate that we have time to reflect on the role of the UN. I want to comment, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley), on the future and, in particular, on the role that he underlined, to which I shall come in a moment.

The events following 11 September 2001—the invasion of Afghanistan, the further terrorist attacks and the war in Iraq and its aftermath—have raised more and more questions about the importance and value of the UN. We had a useful debate yesterday on the UN in Iraq, and I do not want to cover that ground again, except to pay tribute, as other Members have done, to those UN staff who lost their lives on 19 August, particularly the leader of that group, Sergio Vieira de Mello. His record of service and his achievement underline the crucial role that the UN has played in the resolution of conflict through his work in post-conflict reconstruction in Lebanon, Bosnia, Kosovo, East Timor and, finally, Iraq. We have heard today of the death of Anna Lindh, and we recognise that both were people of international calibre; they were a loss not just to their family and friends or to their own nation. The contribution that both have made internationally will be sadly missed.

My concern—the future role of the UN—stems from the trauma of Rwanda. The jolt to my thinking happened when the UN pulled out of Rwanda, and we saw the violence and the genocide that followed. Since then, as other hon. Members have said, there have been tragedies in countries in need of support that the United Nations, with its present remit, has been unable to give—for example, in Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe.

I was especially keen to speak today following an interview that I heard last Sunday on Radio Bristol. It was with the visiting Bishop, the Rt. Rev. Ben Ojwang, who is the Bishop of Kitgum in northern Uganda. He spoke passionately of the situation facing his diocese and the people of northern Uganda as a result of the atrocities committed by the Lord's Resistance Army, including the abduction and brutalising of 20,000 children. That is happening in a country that we are all acclaiming as having met the HIPC—heavily indebted poor countries—regulations. It is one of the countries that is doing better and that we highlight as developing, and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister would suggest that it is one of those moving forward to democracy. Yet communities in the north of Uganda have been suffering terribly for 17 years.

As the bishop said, while the Ugandan army has gone into the Congo, it has failed to resolve the situation within its own borders. We all know that that depends in part on the situation in Sudan and involves the cross-flow of people, but it is tragic. The bishop argued for mediation to resolve the 17-year conflict and asked our Government to take part. Just as the interviewer was about to cut him off, he suddenly came up with a lovely illustration. He said that the only illustration he could give was the anguish and pain of childbirth from which there must come peace and that he was looking to Britain to be the midwife of peace in northern Uganda. It suddenly struck me that we should use that illustration for the United Nations: out of areas of tragedy, pain and conflict, we must bring forward hope and peace. I thanked the bishop in my mind and thought what a graphic and poignant illustration it was. I want hon. Members to keep Uganda in mind as we think about a new role for the UN that involves humanitarian intervention in a sovereign state.

As the Minister indicated, we do not have to start from scratch. I have not read the speech that the Prime Minister made in Chicago in 1999, but I will look for a copy. My new thinking on the issue was prompted by an article in the *Financial Times* in September 2000, written jointly by my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) and the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell). The article was entitled "Revised Role in Humanitarian Tragedies". I ask all hon. Members to read that article again. It strongly expressed the need for the UN to play a role when

"a government has shown that it is unwilling or unable to cope with a humanitarian catastrophe".

It stated:

"We believe that the international community has a duty to intervene".

The authors called for a clear framework for intervention to cope with such problems and proposed six principles, which are worth revisiting, as they are the kind of principles that we argued for in the House on 18 March. First, there should be more concentration on conflict prevention. Secondly, armed force should be used only as a last resort. Thirdly, responsibility in the first place should lie with the state where the violations are taking place. Fourthly, the international community has a duty to intervene when Governments are unwilling or unable to cope with a humanitarian catastrophe. Fifthly, any use of force should be proportionate to the humanitarian purposes to be achieved and in accordance with international law. Finally, the use of force should be collective and taken with the authority of the Security Council, except in exceptional circumstances.

The authors went on to indicate that such things would not happen without further reform of the UN's structures. As many hon. Members will recall, they

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advocated allowing another five members to join the Security Council and suggested Germany, Japan and one each from Africa, Asia and Latin America. They asked for four more new, non-permanent members. They also raised the important idea of an annual resolutions review by the Secretary-General to ensure that resolutions were not ignored and to determine which obligations were outstanding. The article certainly impressed me. I have kept it and refer to it.

Internationally, things have been on the move. As I did in a speech in the House, I want to draw attention to the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty and its report, "The Responsibility to Protect", which was commissioned by the Canadian Government. The commission's year-long review reached with some important conclusions. The challenge of whether we can intervene was dealt with in the initial address by Kofi Annan:

"Surely no legal principle—not even sovereignty—can ever shield crimes against humanity . . . Armed intervention must always remain the option of last resort, but in the face of mass murder, it is an option that cannot be relinquished."

The report went on to indicate that there were times when intervention was called for in the wake of completely unacceptable human rights abuses. It has one key aim: to facilitate the process of building a new global consensus on intervention for human protection. Its central theme is that sovereign states have a responsibility to protect their own citizens from avoidable catastrophe, mass murder, rape and starvation, but that, if they are unwilling or unable to do so, responsibility must be borne by the broader community of states. Those ideas are therefore permeating the debate, internationally and nationally.

Despite all the immediate demands on his time, the Prime Minister has also recently readdressed the issue. At the progressive governance summit in London in July, he insisted that we could not walk by on the other side if people in failed states were being brutally downtrodden. That echoes the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush.

The draft communiqué for the conference stated:

"Where a population is suffering serious harm, as a result of internal war, insurgency, repression or state failure, and the state in question is unwilling or unable to avert it, the principle of non-intervention yields to the international responsibility to protect."

In fact, the final communiqué did not contain those words—it appears that they were too radical for some international partners. However, the final version said that the report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, which was launched by the Canadian Government in 2000, was "a valuable contribution". The gathering in London referred to that report, and our Prime Minister again tried to ensure that we do not pass by on the other side.

I admit that I have not seen the Command Paper—I must have come badly prepared for this debate—but I have pulled out the global conflict prevention pool document, for which I offer tribute to the Government. I am glad to say that, as is the Government's wont, the document is from three Departments: the Department for International Development, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence. All have put forward ideas for conflict prevention that are very much along the lines that have been alluded to this afternoon.

My one criticism—perhaps it is not strong because there is a parallel document—is that the United Nations is referred to on the very last page, rather than at the front, so the recognition that the Government are making a contribution with the UN, not just working in isolation, is somewhat lacking.

I quibble with one word in a sentence in the final paragraph—hon. Members will guess which word. The documents states that the UN was launched in 1948 and has, in the decades since,

"helped to defuse tensions and encourage negotiated solutions in conflicts around the world. Its unique legitimacy and authority and its global mandate mean the United Nations has a key role to play in conflict prevention."

It does not have "a key role" but the key role. We must continue to recognise that we have a valuable part to play. I was glad to hear the Secretary-General praise Britain for its contribution to the UN. In all that we say, our language must indicate that Britain is a member of the UN and that that is where our allegiance and effort will go.

Lest it should be thought that my idealism has left behind any realism, I remind hon. Members that today is also the 30th anniversary of the overthrow of the Allende Government in Chile. That coup was supported by the UN through the CIA—a different sort of intervention in a sovereign state. That difficult situation in Chile is not of the sort that hon. Friends and I advocate, and there are different ways of interpreting intervention in a sovereign state. Such things are incredibly complex and not an easy option for the UN. Those of us who want to see humanitarian intervention—prevention, rather than always bringing about the cure—will have to work very carefully behind the scenes. A lot of careful diplomacy must take place.

Allende was not the only person killed, so I want to conclude with a reminder of the death of Victor Jara. He was a remarkable man—a poet and a theatre director. He was a man who supported the arts. Under arrest and held in a stadium, he was still composing in those short days before his death and the last couplet of an unfinished poem reads:

"How hard it is to sing
when I must sing of horror.
Horror which I am living,
horror which I am dying.
To see myself among so much
and so many moments of infinity
in which silence and screams
are the end of my song.
What I see I have never seen,
what I have felt and what I feel
will give birth to the moment . . ."

There the poem ends. The phrase, "Will give birth" echoes the bishop's words, and I will end on that theme.

Birth does not come about without agony, without pain. It will cost all of us a great deal to work toward intervention and an understanding of the level of humanitarian degradation that we, as the UN, should

not be prepared to accept. I urge the Minister, with all his commitment and enthusiasm, to continue that work. Perhaps midwife is not the ideal metaphor or idea, but it has a strong potency, so I leave it with him and urge him to continue the good work that he has started.

4.8 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury): The hon. Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) has made a very sensible and sober speech. On Uganda, the International Development Committee has had several meetings with Members of the Ugandan Parliament, who have lobbied and briefed us on the sad situation in northern Uganda. The Lord's Resistance Army has committed a number of atrocities over the years—not least kidnapping children, tearing them from their families and turning them into child soldiers. That is a war crime. The message that we have been given is that the Lord's Resistance Army recognises that it has nowhere to go. Through mediation, it wants to find a solution with Kampala and President Museveni. There is a nuance here for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. There is a danger that we may be too keen on reform, which would allow us to have some success stories in Africa. We are perhaps too generous to President Museveni. We do not apply as much pressure on him as we might do on other countries. If there is to be progress in northern Uganda, it will be achieved by getting people around the table to try to find a solution to disarm the LRA.

The hon. Members for Bristol, West and for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) made some interesting points about intervention. This is my only thought about that: against the background of recent events, many countries in the world would see discussion of reforming the UN charter to make it easier to intervene as perhaps making it easier for the coalition to intervene when we want to do so.

May I give a domestic example of the sensitivity surrounding the matter? Next year, Parliament is due to host the annual Inter-Parliamentary Union conference. It is a significant event in our Parliament's life and that of the IPU. I have just returned from an IPU meeting in Cancun, which was held prior to the World Trade Organisation conference. I was surprised and distressed to hear that the Zimbabwean Government have made it clear that they want to attend the IPU conference next year. The Speaker of the Zimbabwean Parliament, who is a member of ZANU-PF, will lead their delegation. Unsurprisingly, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has made it clear that, in accordance with the EU sanctions in relation to Zimbabwe, if he applies for permission to travel to the UK, it will not be granted.

Everyone in the House is concerned about the situation in Zimbabwe. When the International Development Committee recently visited southern Africa, we concluded that Mugabe's actions in Zimbabwe had turned a difficult situation for southern Africa into a humanitarian disaster. A significant number of other African Parliaments have asked the secretary-general of the IPU to attend a special meeting in Geneva, where they will request that the venue for next year's conference be moved from London to somewhere else because they say that who attends IPU conferences should be a matter for them, and not for the UK Government. In other words, they are showing "solidarity" with Zimbabwe rather than facing up to the problems that President Mugabe and his Government are perpetrating against their own people.

That is disappointing. Those of us who are firm believers in the New Partnership for Africa's Development and in peer pressure in Africa find it particularly disappointing, but it is a fact of life. I sympathise with and support many of the approaches described by the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush, but we must recognise that, against the background of recent events, there is hypersensitivity about what UN intervention currently means.

We all know why the Government chose to hold a debate on the UN today. Government business managers and the Prime Minister know that the vast majority of Labour party supporters and—I suspect more importantly—of people in the country instinctively support the UN. As time goes on, it becomes increasingly important for the Prime Minister to justify why two members of the UN went to war against a third without clear and explicit UN approval. The coalition finds itself in a bind. There is a desperate need for more troops in Iraq to enhance security, facilitate reconstruction and enable rotation of existing troops, who have been serving in extremely difficult conditions for a long time. However, without explicit UN endorsement, nations such as India and Brazil have made it clear that they are not willing to commit troops to Iraq. On the other hand, the United States has made it clear that it will not support any UN resolution that gives greater or further authority to the UN in Iraq.

It is surprising that the UN has not played a vital role so far in Iraq given the Prime Minister's commitment:

> "We are of course agreed, as we say in our joint statement, that there will be a vital role for the United Nations in the reconstruction of Iraq".

I do not dispute that the UN has played a humanitarian role in Iraq, and we have heard today about the tragic consequences of that for many brave individuals who work for it. However, by no stretch of the imagination can that role be described as vital. That is surprising because the "we" in the quotation refers to the Prime Minister and President Bush. They made that statement not once, but twice—first at their summit meeting in the Azores and secondly when they were together at Hillsborough castle in Northern Ireland. It was also made at a joint press conference between the Prime Minister and the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in mid-April 2002.

Serious questions are being posed over the US Administration's ability to do everything themselves. The *International Herald Tribune* reports that the Pentagon believes that the military occupation of Iraq is currently costing $4 billion every month and that the figure will rise dramatically to $20 billion next year. The *New York Times* on Tuesday observed that President Bush's $87 billion request for post-war costs is heavily weighted to maintain military operations, with some $65.5 billion going to the armed forces. It also notes that the $87 billion price tag makes the package the most expensive post-war military and civilian effort since the Marshall plan to rebuild Europe after the second world war. The figure must also be combined with the $79 billion that was earlier approved by Congress during the war.

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To put the matter into context, what has been spent already in Iraq is, in today's dollars, 25 times the amount to American taxpayers of what was spent in the 1991 Gulf war to expel Iraq from Kuwait. The *New York Times* observed yesterday that there had been a substantial earlier miscalculation. The Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz told a Congress appropriations committee in March:

"We are dealing with a country that can really finance its own reconstruction and relatively soon".

Alan Larson, the Under-Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 4 June:

"Iraq will rightly shoulder much of the responsibility".

Their views rested on two assumptions: that the Pentagon would be able to reduce its presence quickly and that Iraq was reasonably well developed. Both were wrong and, as a consequence, President Bush has now had to ask Congress for $87 billion.

That is a substantial amount, especially in comparison with the amounts that are spent on development aid in continents such as Africa, but the need to spend the huge sums unquestionably explains President Bush's overtures to the UN Security Council. According to the *New York Times*, it amounts to

"one of the most significant changes in strategy since the end of major combat in Iraq".

Moreover, the paper said that

"fuller UN involvement would not only reduce the cost in American lives and dollars—it would also improve the chances of success".

How are we going to get British troops home from Iraq? There was a time when the Labour party believed unquestionably in the United Nations. After its 1964 election victory, Harold Wilson appointed Hugh Foot, later Lord Caradon, to become the UK's ambassador to the UN, with an executive seat on Cabinet Committees. So much importance was attributed by the Wilson Government to the UN that Hugh Foot was a hybrid between an ambassador and a Minister.

The Government have abandoned their support for the UN. What we hear and have heard today is the mantra that the UN needs reforming, yet it is always unclear what that reform involves. A lot is said about reforming the Security Council and increasing its size, but for a long time there has been no dispute that it needs to expand to include countries such as Japan, India and Brazil.

Does reform of the UN mean altering its charter? Last week the UN Secretary-General gave an interview to the *Financial Times*, in which he said that

"we need to look at the way the international peace and security architecture is structured and functioning . . . We have to be able to adapt our institutions".

and that should

"not exclude reform of the Security Council."

Kofi Annan tends to be cautious in his assessments, but I suspect that his normal optimism has been shaken by the debilitating Security Council rows over the Iraq war. I understand that he has written to 191 world leaders asking them to attend the UN General Assembly meeting later this month to debate its priorities. I understand that the US President, George Bush, the French President, Jacques Chirac, and the German Chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, are among 90 leaders who have agreed to attend. So far the UN has said that the UK Prime Minister will not be there. In his winding-up speech, will the Minister tell us whether the Prime Minister will attend that special session of the UN General Assembly, along with other Heads of Government?

The fundamental question is whether we believe that it is in the world's best interests to try to achieve results and solve problems together. If so, we should surely do all that we can to reinforce and support the UN. In recent years, the International Development Committee has been concerned with many issues, including the HIV/AIDS crisis and climate change and its impact on poorer countries. We concluded that there would be a greater change in the next 100 years than there was in the last 300,000. We also considered food shortages in the horn of Africa and southern Africa, where each year more people depend on food aid. None of those challenges to the world will be resolved by individual countries, however powerful they are. Going it alone is not an option.

The Minister should ask his private office to put in his weekend box the most recent issue of *Foreign Affairs* magazine, which has an extremely good article by Madeleine Albright—the US Secretary of State from 1997 to 2001—entitled, "Bridges, Bombs, or Bluster?" She quotes a senior US statesman who said, immediately after 11 September, that

"this most recent surprise attack"

should

"erase the concept in some quarters that the United States can somehow go it alone in the fight against terrorism, or in anything else, for that matter."

That was a quote from George H. W. Bush, the United States' 41st president.

In contrast, President Bush—the 43rd president—offered his own perspective shortly before going to war with Iraq.

"At some point, we may be the only ones left. That's okay with me. We are America."

As Madeleine Albright observes in her article:

"The best rebuttal Washington had to qualms about regime change was that military force was the only way (in the absence of effective UN inspections) to enforce the council's resolutions and thereby strengthen both the UN's credibility and international law. Unfortunately, the Bush administration made its eagerness to pull the plug on chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix and his team transparent and billed its preemptive war doctrine as a replacement for international law. As a consequence, much of the world saw the invasion not as a way to put muscle into accepted rules, but rather as the inauguration of a new set of rules, written and applied solely by the United States."

That follows up my concern about changing and strengthening the rules on intervention. The actions of the coalition have led many countries to believe that it will be intervention not on the UN's terms but increasingly on those of the coalition and the most powerful nations in the world.

During the week before the war, the International Development Committee happened to be in New York and Washington and we met senior Members of Congress, the president of the World Bank, the UK

ambassador to the UN and many other permanent representatives at the UN in Washington and New York. On the return flight to London, the Select Committee unanimously wrote to the Prime Minister and much of the content of our letter still stands. The Committee told him that it had become clear from the meetings that

"the fracture of the international community over Iraq is the most serious since the end of the Cold War. Unless immediate steps are taken to heal these rifts, the poison of mistrust and antagonism will run deep to the detriment of the world . . . Some are criticising the United Nations for failure in the period leading up to war. But it was the nations of the Security Council that failed to find consensus over a second resolution. It is wrong to blame the professional agencies of the United Nations which must play the key peace-building role now."

Of course no one pretends that there was a halcyon golden age of UN co-operation to which we should return. My first memory of an international political crisis was the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, which was resolved with the help of the UN—despite President Kennedy's doubts about the UN—because it was a convenient forum for both Russia and the United States to resolve the crisis and save face. However, when the Russian tanks rolled into Prague in August 1968, the UN could do nothing to defend the people of Czechoslovakia.

Since the collapse of the Berlin wall and the break-up of the Soviet Union, the UN has been at the forefront of assisting in nation building, encouraging democracy and promoting conflict resolution. In truth, the UN can only be as good and as effective as the manpower and resources committed to it and its agencies by its member states.

By and large, if the UN has been given the authority and the resources, it has done a good job; if it has been denied authority or adequate resources, it has understandably failed to perform or to perform as well as it might. One simple example of this is the UN special court in Sierra Leone. I spoke this week to one of the chief prosecutors on the special court who said that it is "really Alice in Wonderland" that Nigeria, which is on the management committee of the special court, has given asylum to indicted President Charles Taylor of Liberia. Surely Nigeria's granting of asylum to Taylor cannot be consistent with its international obligations.

Instead, however, of the special court being strengthened, the opposite appears to be happening. One needs only to consider its financing. This week, the special court had to explain to a delegation of Canadian parliamentarians that, in two months, the court would have to start to issue redundancy notices as it would be wrong to do otherwise in the absence of further funding. The Minister has justifiably praised the work of the special court, because it has worked far faster than the special courts in Rwanda or the former Yugoslavia. Not surprisingly, our Canadian parliamentary colleagues found that situation crazy when contrasted with the speed, efficiency, diligence and professionalism with which they saw the special court discharging its work.

I do not challenge the assertion that the UK Government have been generous in their funding of the special court but I hope that our approaches to other countries will bear fruit in ensuring that its work can be carried out. If the international community cannot succeed in simply indicting and bringing to trial those responsible for the worst war crimes in west Africa, what hope is there of the international community prevailing elsewhere?

It is further notable that Kofi Annan's comments to the *Financial Times* described the response of the international community to conflicts in parts of Africa as

"hesitant and tardy . . . We continue to lack the political will, as well as a vision of our responsibility in the face of massive violations of human rights and humanitarian catastrophes occasioned by conflict".

However, the real issue is not the need to reform the United Nations but how the United Nations functions in a world with only one superpower, which clearly believes that there are actions that must be taken to protect its citizens and homeland and that the role of the UN is superfluous to those needs or at worst a serious impediment and at best an organisation simply to co-ordinate humanitarian and other assistance. That is the crux of the international community addressing criticisms from within the UN of the international community.

I have been struck on recent visits to Washington in discussions with colleagues, Members of the Congress and the Senate and Americans generally by the extent to which, since September 11, they perceive the United States as being an island under attack by terrorists—those, known and unknown, who wish to hurt the United States and her citizens. Perhaps understandably, they are simply resolved to do whatever they consider is necessary to protect America. If there are others who are willing to go along with them in doing what they feel to be necessary, well and good; if not, they will do it on their own. The difficulty with that approach, as Iraq shows, is that it has clear limitations. Even a nation as powerful as the United States on its own—its defence spending next year will be greater than that of the rest of the world combined—cannot prevail in Iraq even with the support of key allies such as the United Kingdom.

I hope that the Prime Minister and the United Kingdom Government will use such influence as they have to seek to persuade President Bush that, whatever the United States' understandable desire to go it alone, we need to act together as an international community if we are effectively to contain rogue states such as North Korea. We need to enhance, not undermine, the status of the United Nations.

Furthermore, we should not allow history to be rewritten. The United States' frustration with the United Nations over Iraq was because the United States believed that there would not be a second resolution, and that France would veto a crucial motion on attacking Iraq. It is clear, and it is to the Prime Minister's credit, that he did everything possible to try to get a second resolution, which he would not have done unless he felt that necessary. If anyone doubts that, it is worth their reading Peter Stothard's book "Thirty Days". It was intended to be 30 days in the life of the Prime Minister when he became 50, but it coincided with the lead-up to the war in Iraq and its outbreak. What caused the Prime Minister to abandon his support for a second resolution was that he knew that the United States would go to war against Iraq regardless of whether the second resolution was passed.

France made it clear that it would not support the attack on Iraq because it did not believe that there was sufficient evidence of wrapons of mass destruction to

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justify it. Given what we know now, was France so wrong in that assessment? In truth, if they knew then what they know now, how many Members of Parliament, on both sides of the House, would have withheld their support from the Prime Minister in the crucial vote on 18 March on going to war with Iraq?

The issue is not the need to reform the United Nations but the need to recognise that the international community working together is better than some countries working on their own. Still the most effective means that we have to give a purpose, assent and reality to the international community is the United Nations. Evidently, by returning to the United Nations for help in Iraq, President Bush has eaten his words about the UN's irrelevance. His actions are a clear reminder of the UN's indispensability, even to the one country that sees itself as indispensable, but that will not necessarily make the institution any more effective. To regain its status, the UN will have to show itself ready to tackle, multilaterally, an Iraqi crisis on which the USA and the UK have made a start. Therein lies a serious problem, because it would be unfortunate if the upshot of the current Security Council negotiations for a new resolution on Iraq were simply to slap a UN label on a US-led military force.

Doubtless, longer-term issues remain, to which the UN Secretary-General alluded to this week. I suspect that the publication on Monday of the UN's report on progress towards its 2000 millennium declaration goals will give the Secretary-General the opportunity to raise many of those issues, one of which is the UN's view of the balance of threats facing humanity. The UN has been unfairly criticised for its usefulness in the fight against weapons proliferation and terrorism, but the Secretary-General was right to remind us that, for most countries, the real scourges are the old ones—famine, poverty and disease—and that specialised agencies of the UN combat those daily. Therefore, if there is to be reform of the UN, that will be pointless unless it is matched by the commitment of every member of the international community to those UN agencies and to the UN as a whole. If that were to start to happen, the USA, the UK and others would find that the UN's edicts would then carry much wider legitimacy and credibility.

4.36 pm

Mr. Rammell: We have had a very productive and constructive debate. Even though I have an hour left, I shall briefly—

Mr. Alan Duncan: Briefly!

Mr. Rammell: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I will be brief in my response to some of the points that have been made.

When I opened the debate, the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) asked me what we were doing about the special court for Sierra Leone, and I promised that I would return to that issue in my summing up. As he is aware, the court relies on voluntary contributions. I am sure that he is also aware that the UK has already committed £6.6 million to the overall budget of around £40 million for the three-year lifespan of the court. That is a contribution of 16.5 per cent. which, in anyone's scale of contributions, is significant. The hon. Gentleman knows that funding is a source of concern: the court currently faces a shortfall of about £14 million. We have undertaken an active lobbying campaign, involving the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and other Ministers, in support of the UN Secretary-General's call earlier this year for additional funding. We will continue with that campaign. We have made our contribution, and it is important for others to make theirs.

The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan), leading for the Opposition, began with an interesting contribution. He singled out the fact that in considering the situation of the UN, we must recognise that the world has changed significantly since the end of the cold war, and that there is now one pre-eminent economic and military global superpower: the USA. In the debates that are taking place at present, people must face up to the fact that we cannot wish that away. It is part of the circumstances in which we operate, and we therefore need to think through how to ensure that the US can and will work with the international community and the UN. Similarly, it is incumbent on the USA to think through how it and its actions are sometimes perceived throughout the world. The Prime Minister said that when he went to Congress a few weeks ago. That is at the heart of the debate; sometimes we have a caricature of a debate that does not face up to the reality and the difficulty of the situation.

The hon. Gentleman then discussed what he described as the inadequacies of the preparations for the post-conflict situation in Iraq, and the implication that there is chaos on the ground. I do not underestimate the ongoing and significant difficulties on the ground in Iraq, but it is pertinent to state that there are also significant improvements. All 240 hospitals in Iraq are now functioning. By the end of June, most of the schools were open. Yes, electricity and oil supplies have been targeted by terrorists, but in response an estimated 10,000 Iraqis are being trained and armed to guard Iraq's electrical and oil facilities as well as its bridges and dams. Iraqis are also helping coalition troops to secure the 19,000 km of power lines and 7,000 km of pipelines in Iraq.

Mr. Duncan: I agree that that is good news and represents a step forward. Will the Minister undertake to publish, for the benefit of the House, a list of the contractors that are active on the ground, supplementing the work of troops and bringing to Iraq the necessary civilian reconstruction that we all want?

Mr. Rammell: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary referred to that in the debate that took place earlier this week. We have certainly not sought contracts for British firms for their own sake, but British firms have a strong track record on post-conflict reconstruction. We have done all that we can to facilitate that situation, and we will continue to do so.

The key point that I am making is that there are significant difficulties on the ground in Iraq, but in the debate that this country is having, particularly through the media, there is almost a wilful refusal to acknowledge that some progress is being made. If people talk to Iraqis in Iraq, or Iraqis in this country

who have family in Iraq, they will see that Iraqis acknowledge that there are difficulties, but also willingly attest that there has been significant progress and the situation is immeasurably better than life under Saddam Hussein.

The hon. Gentleman went on to talk about Zimbabwe, about which he and I have had exchanges in the past. The argument—it was picked up by the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore), who leads for the Liberal Democrats—was that we should take this issue to the Security Council. I remind hon. Members that when the European Union proposed a resolution at the Human Rights Commission in Geneva in March to criticise Zimbabwe's appalling human rights record, a no-action resolution was proposed by the other African states, and a significant number of members of the Security Council voted in support of that motion. If we cannot even get those members of the Security Council to support a resolution on Zimbabwe's human rights record at the Human Rights Commission, how on earth, at the moment, will we get them to support a more important resolution at the Security Council?

Mr. Duncan: Shame.

Mr. Rammell: The hon. Gentleman talks about shame, but we need to act purposefully and in full recognition of what will be the results of our actions. Were we to propose a resolution in the full knowledge that it would be defeated at the Security Council, that would do nothing for people in Zimbabwe who need international support. That is why we are working purposefully and carefully. In particular, we are talking to the African states that we want to take the lead on this issue. We do criticise the Zimbabwean Government. Anyone who thinks that we do not should look at what some of the state-sponsored newspapers in Zimbabwe say about the UK Government and what we are doing. However, if it is just the UK Government who lead on these issues, that could, in some circumstances, be counter-productive. The comments from the Opposition Front Bench are not widely endorsed.

We then had a significant contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley). He talked persuasively about the potential limits to the primacy of nation states and advanced a strong argument that there should, in some circumstances, be limits to the right to self-determination if that self-determination entails massive and sustained abuse of human rights or destabilisation of a whole region. He is right. The key debate that we need to have is about when, how and in what circumstances. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) also referred to that. That is the pertinent debate in which we need to engage. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush said that that would inevitably mean different solutions in different places. That is the reality that we have to face. It will, as he argued, mean more flexible ways of intervening.

We then had a contribution from the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale. He said, and I think that we would all agree, that the UN is a force for good in the world. He also talked about the fact that the UN is on the front line, particularly bearing in mind the appalling attack on the UN in June. In the current debates on what is happening in Iraq, some people absolve themselves from thinking through the challenges that we face by saying, "Oh, isn't it dreadful that just the British and the Americans are leading this?" But that was an attack on the international community, in case anyone is in any doubt. Whether it was carried out by the remnants of Saddam's regime or other international terrorist organisations, they were directly taking on the international community through the body of the United Nations. That should be recognised.

I welcome the comments that the hon. Gentleman made about the key role that the UK and its Government play. That should be a source of pride to all of us, and to the people of this country. He praised the diplomatic contribution that the UK makes to the UN and the wider international community. I used to think that that was one of those issues on which the Brits always congratulate themselves without there being much substance to it. However, since I have been a Foreign Office Minister, when I go around the world I am struck by the fact that, totally unprompted, many Ministers, civil servants and journalists from other countries automatically volunteer the view that the UK makes a significant contribution through its diplomatic effort.

The hon. Gentleman went on to talk about the new suggested draft resolution at the Security Council and the need to embed the role of the United Nations. We certainly subscribe to the UN's vital role and have always envisaged that over time, it will progressively increase. However, there is a need for clarity. Sometimes the semantics of the debate are lost in the position taking. Certainly the proposed draft resolution envisages an enhanced role for the UN, but that will not entail the UN running Iraq, specifically because Kofi Annan has said that he does not want the UN to run Iraq, and does not believe that it can. It has never run a country that size. No one is arguing for the blue-helmet solution. Sometimes in this debate we lose sight of what is really needed and what is really possible.

The hon. Gentleman then talked about our representation at the General Assembly. The Prime Minister's commitment to international issues and to the UN is unprecedented. He will not be attending the current General Assembly, but in the light of that he has urged that there should be senior representation. I assume that by that—although I am going to the General Assembly—he meant representation slightly more senior. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will be attending for a significant period.

The hon. Gentleman asked an important question about our views on the expansion of the permanent membership of the Security Council, and what our view would be if outstanding resolutions against some of the suggested nations were in existence. Let me be clear: we believe that all Security Council members should uphold their obligations under the UN charter, and we make that clear to all who have ambitions to be Security Council members, whether permanent or non-permanent.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the importance of the millennium development goals. We welcome the annual publication of the report on those goals. This year's report came out recently, and was especially

[Mr. Rammell]

thoughtful, covering a wide range of areas. The millennium development goals are an excellent example of the UN providing significant leadership and setting targets to improve people's lives. As I said in my opening contribution, 1 billion people currently live in abject poverty. There is a legitimate question—I think that this is what the hon. Gentleman was referring to—about whether the millennium development goals will be met by the target date of 2015. We are strongly committed to helping to achieve those goals, and more effective co-ordination in the UN system will also help. We will get a better idea in 2005 when the UN system carries out the first formal review of the progress towards those goals, but we are strongly pushing for them in the interim.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the criteria for intervention and discussed whether the constitutional convention in the European Union might perhaps be a model. I am not sure about that.

Mr. Moore: The Minister is generously answering my points, and those of other colleagues, in detail that we would all commend—but may I clarify something? I was not in any way using the European Union constitutional convention as a model, but suggesting the idea of a constitutional convention that would allow the states to consider these serious issues.

Mr. Rammell: I take that point fully, and I clearly understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying.

The hon. Gentleman also expressed his shock at the tragic killing of Anna Lindh and paid tribute to her. I did not mention that in my earlier contribution. As I am someone who has a Swedish wife and has met Anna Lindh several times, what happened yesterday and today shocked me to the core. It has affected many of us. For a country as liberal, open and prosperous as Sweden to be affected in that way is enormously shocking. I know that that view will be widely shared across the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West spoke movingly about the situation in Uganda and drew out some of the wider lessons from Africa, where some of the most appalling atrocities and impacts on human rights have occurred. She argued strongly, and rightly, for the UN to be able to become involved in humanitarian intervention. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush, she effectively and cogently underlined the need for us to establish the principles on which such intervention should take place. She also mentioned something that reminded me that I had not made this clear in my opening remarks—that as well as calling for an expanded permanent membership of the Security Council we are in favour of an expanded non-permanent membership. That point needs to be made clear.

Finally, I turn to the comments of the hon. Member for Banbury. In calling for a debate about the criteria under which humanitarian intervention can take place, I should make it clear that that view predates the whole Iraq situation. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West referred to the article drafted by the former Foreign Secretary and the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell). I cannot recall its date.

Valerie Davey: It was 2000.

Mr. Rammell: Yes, 2000. That issue has been around for a significant time. In that context, the cynicism of the remarks of the hon. Member for Banbury was out of keeping with the tone of the rest of this debate. He stated that the UN's role in Iraq was negligible, but if he reads the special envoy's report, which went to the Security Council on behalf of the Secretary-General, he will see that it discussed the UN's role in very positive terms. I would absolutely refute his statement that we have abandoned our support for the United Nations. I have to say that I take it a little hard that a member of a party that in the run-up to the conflict urged us to go along with the Americans come what may, ignoring the constraints of the United Nations if need be, should now be lecturing us on our support for the UN.

Mr. Duncan: The Minister really must correct that. The accuracy of our position is clear. We said that we thought that the legal justification probably already existed, but we argued strongly in favour of the desirability of a second resolution. I think that the Minister should put that clearly on the record.

Mr. Rammell: I recall absolutely what I heard in those debates. I also recall that in a recent debate on the UN an eminent senior Conservative Back Bencher said that he was ashamed of the tactics and stance of those on his party's Front Bench, and of how they were currently handling that issue.

Mr. Duncan: He was against the war altogether.

Mr. Rammell: No. I am sorry, but I was referring not to a Conservative Member who was against the war, but to one who strongly supported it. The only difficulty is that I cannot recall his constituency, so I cannot refer to him—[HON. MEMBERS: "Staffordshire"] It is in Staffordshire—absolutely. I think that that point needs to be made for the record. Our advocacy of the criteria for intervention is not about giving carte blanche to the coalition, but if we can create a consensus on when, how, in what circumstances and according to what criteria intervention is justified, that can only be a cause for good.

In general, we have had a significant and constructive debate this afternoon. I hope that we can go forward and ensure that such a debate takes place annually, which can only help to inform the House and the wider country of the importance of the United Nations and our role in that organisation.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes to Five o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 16 September 2003

[SIR NICHOLAS WINTERTON *in the Chair*]

Transport (London)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The first debate this morning will be initiated by the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on the important subject of transport in London.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What could be better than starting the morning by debating transport in London under your excellent chairmanship?

When making my way into London, I find that if things are going well it can be a pleasure. Driving along the Embankment and seeing the Thames in all its glory can be wonderful. London is my city, and I am proud of it. However, those are the good days. All too often, for many residents and commuters, the daily business of moving around London is not a pleasure. Indeed, it can sometimes be a trauma.

To a city such as London, transport is vital. I do not have to explain why; it is self-evident. The Government, in their usual brilliant way, have managed to hand over many responsibilities for London. However, I am feeling particularly magnanimous this morning, so I shall not harangue the Minister; he is a jolly fine chap. I feel particularly magnanimous today because, on Friday evening, Uxbridge football team managed to beat Wealdstone football club, a club that I believe he supports. Wealdstone's supporters were magnanimous in defeat, which is unusual, so I shall extend my courtesy to the Minister this morning by not attacking the Government—at least not virulently.

The Government have an important role to play—they hold a watching brief over those aspects of transport that they have handed over to Transport for London—because if things go wrong, the country goes wrong. One of the most obvious problems was the recent power failure on the underground. Interestingly enough, those of my colleagues who are on a pay scale above me have decided to use an Opposition day to debate that subject this afternoon, although it will be answered by the Department of Trade and Industry rather than the Department for Transport. That power failure was a serious matter, but as it will be debated at length this afternoon, we need not spend too much time on the subject now. Suffice it to say that the Government must keep a close eye on things and consider what back-up is necessary.

I know that London Underground is undertaking a full review, and that emergency lighting and other aspects will be considered, but bearing in mind the current situation in the City and elsewhere, with the threat of terrorism as well as having to put with ordinary cock-ups, the Government have a duty to ensure that things are being properly looked after. While we are on the subject of mistakes, the Central line comes to mind. Not only did we suffer the fiasco of the line being out of action, which inconvenienced tens of thousands of people, including my constituents, but more problems have been found since. I remember that, because I was a member of the Select Committee on Transport for a while; the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake), whom I see in his place, was also a member. The people from the Central line came before us and gave some pretty poor excuses. To see it going wrong again underlines what we thought.

Next year will see the centenary of the arrival of the underground in Uxbridge. The steam locomotive that came into the station where Sainsbury's now stands is still in existence, and I am hoping to arrange for it to come down the line for a celebration. I am not convinced that much has improved in the 99 years since the Metropolitan line first came to Uxbridge. It might be of benefit to those living along the line that the service is no longer steam, but if we consider reliability and the time that it takes to get into London, we have not advanced from those Edwardian times. That is a great shame. The Metropolitan line and the underground are part of the culture in which I grew up. I am proud to be part of Metroland, as is the Minister. I do not know whether the Minister's constituency regards itself as the rolling Middlesex countryside beloved of John Betjeman—in Uxbridge, there are still vestiges of that—but the underground is an important lifeline for us and it must be improved.

I notice a rather striking absence of Government Members. That might be explained by the fact that they have taken the Jubilee line to Willesden Green and other places near Brent, East; it is not for me to cast aspersions. In our previous interesting discussions about London Underground, there has been a range of opinion about public-private partnership. It is now in place, and we have to make it work for the good of all Londoners, so it would be not only pointless but churlish to have an argument about alternatives.

To expand the underground system is expensive and difficult. Because of the built-up nature of the area that I represent, it would have to go overground rather than literally underground. However, in Uxbridge, we have a campaign that we take very seriously. I know that the Minister has no responsibility in the area but, working on the assumption that somebody might one day read what we say in this place, I urge again that serious consideration be given to the extension of the Central line to Uxbridge. That would not be difficult because a siding comes out of Ruislip Gardens station on the Central line, a few yards, or perhaps metres—in Uxbridge, we are probably into yards and chains—from the Metropolitan and Piccadilly lines. It would not only bring enormous benefit to Uxbridge—I declare an enormous interest in Uxbridge from the business side of things—but bring job opportunities to areas closer to London, such as Notting Hill, because it would open up an area that is short of applicants. That would be useful. It would also give us a link to the Chiltern line, which is generally reckoned to be a good thing that works well. That would leave an opening for lots of commuters from the Chilterns.

The overground is not at all bad. However, it does have very bad days. I have only one overground station in my constituency, which is West Drayton station. A

CHADWYCK-HEALEY

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[Mr. John Randall]

little work has been done to improve it with the Hayes and West Drayton single regeneration budget. The back of the station is still a bit mucky, but we are working on that. Last year, I managed to commute quite happily from West Drayton to Bournemouth to the Conservative party conference. In fact, I arrived more fresh faced than many of the delegates who had stayed overnight; I cannot work out why that was. Sadly, that will not be so easy for Blackpool, but it is something that we should give more publicity to.

At Hayes, in the neighbouring constituency to mine, they have done a great deal to improve services. There is a line to Heathrow, and, of course, we are all waiting for the advent of Crossrail. We may have to wait some time, but I hope that the Government will get on with Crossrail; I have urged them again and again to do so. We have the added impetus of the Olympic bid. I am very much in favour of that, not just because the event itself would be greatly prestigious, but because it would provide us with a real incentive to sort out transport in London.

I understand that the recent athletics competition in Paris was marred by the fact that its transport could not be sorted out. Of course, the Francophobes in the British press might have been making out that Paris could not get it right, but I recently drove past the Stade de France and was surprised by how far out it was. If we are going to have successful sporting events, we have to get our act together on the matter of transport. We should be seriously considering that.

One thing that we all require from the rail system, whether overground or underground, is safety. I mean not just safety in terms of the running of the train, but safety at the stations and on the way home. Although many people might think that I am a big chap, I would use the underground more often to get to Uxbridge from this place were it not for the fact that on late-sitting nights I do not particularly fancy walking from Uxbridge station to my home, 20 minutes' walk away. It is probably unfounded, but I do not feel particularly safe. Although improvements have been made at Uxbridge station over the years, it is still not a very welcoming place. I think that a lot of people would use the public transport system more if they felt that public safety around those areas had increased. That is obviously not a matter for the Minister's Department, but generally speaking it is something that we must consider if we want to increase the use of public transport.

Reliability is another issue. Using my own example, the journey to Westminster in the mornings might be a bit crowded and unpleasant but it tends—unless one is unlucky and there is a leaf on the line or something like that—to be reasonably quick. Late at night, by which I mean after 8 or 9 o'clock, although I know that people have had other experiences at different times, I may get turfed off the train at Harrow-on-the-Hill; it may not be going as far as Uxbridge. Harrow-on-the-Hill is, as the Minister knows, a marvellous place. It is not quite as good as Uxbridge, but it is not bad. However, the platforms get a bit boring after an hour or so. That is the sort of thing that puts me off the journey, and makes me think about using the car to get in and out of London. That is a bit of a blow, of course, because I have to pay the £5 congestion charge.

Anecdotally, things improved a little for me when the congestion charge was introduced, but they seem to have worsened again. When I am already late for a Bill Committee, there is nothing more annoying than thinking that the first thing that I have to do when I get to my office is to log on and pay my £5 charge. I am starting to wonder whether the scheme is as successful as it is claimed, although I am prepared to review the figures.

As a lapsed retailer, I must say that the figures for central London appear to have worsened. John Lewis, among others, says that its sales figures have reduced dramatically. That worries me greatly. It is very easy to take such businesses for granted and assume that they are a milch cow that can provide rates endlessly, never mind what is imposed on them. My hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) may touch on that if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

On a more positive note, buses seem to have improved a little, although I am disappointed that bus fares have gone up. I use buses a lot in central London. We have problems in my constituency. Again, that is not a matter for the Minister, but the people running those bus services might take note if I raise it in this place. The 207 service is being re-tendered, and a jolly good thing too. I have heard of gaps in the peak evening service of an hour or more. Buses are even taking short cuts, which is an interesting concept for a bus route—"We are running a bit late. Let's not take the usual bus route. Let's take a quick turn down there. That'll get us back on time." That is a little tough for people waiting at a bus stop, but never mind: the bus company is trying to improve its reliability.

There have also been problems with the 222 bus service, but perhaps my remarks are becoming a little parochial. Westminster may not be the place to take up this matter. However, I have a great deal of sympathy for the bus drivers, who must put up with an awful lot: a lot of abuse, even violent attacks. They have many problems with schoolchildren. I recently asked a bus driver which time of day he found the most threatening. I expected him to say that it was late at night, but he surprised me when he said that it was when the children came out of school. I use the word "children" loosely, as they do unmentionable things and cause the vehicles to stop. There is also the sheer weight of them, which means that bus companies must lay on more buses.

I am certainly not a union man—the last union to which I belonged was the students' union: I was responsible for ordering the beer—but London has a problem with the recruitment and retention of drivers. I understand that the shortage of drivers may have an impact on services. The Transport and General Workers Union told me that, between 1992 and 2000, the number of train drivers increased on average by 51 per cent, while during the same period the number of bus drivers increased by only 23.9 per cent. I am not in a position to dispute that, but I know that there is a shortage of bus drivers.

A problem affecting my constituency is that drivers are trained but then go off to Heathrow where the job is more lucrative, leaving the bus companies, which have paid for the tuition, short of drivers. The turnover rate is very high. There are also problems in the engineering sections. This problem must be addressed. It is part of a larger problem of recruitment and retention that affects London's public services. Everything costs so much that many people move out of London because they cannot afford to live there.

I should like briefly to touch on taxis. They are a part of transport in London that we sometimes do not talk about too much. We all want taxis when we are in a hurry and they always seem to be about, although I think that taxi availability has gone down as London has expanded. I understand that taxi drivers are a little concerned about the Knowledge, which is the test that they take. They think that it should be modernised. I am not suggesting that the Government should consider treating the Knowledge in the same way that, it seems, educational qualifications have recently been treated, so that more and more people pass the Knowledge, because it is an important part of the job. However, the issue should be looked at.

One of the good things about taxis is that most of them—nearly all of them in London—are wheelchair accessible. That brings me on to almost my final point: the accessibility of public transport in London for the disabled, which is not looked at much. The disabled are obviously a wide group, and I understand some of the problems. In the case of the underground system, it is difficult suddenly to put in disabled-friendly access, but we must look at that. Buses now have some accessibility, but I understand that the policy is to allow only one wheelchair user on at a time, which could be a bit frustrating if one is waiting with a friend or somebody else comes along.

I also have concerns about the new pre-payment ticket machines for buses, which, I understand, might cause problems for people with learning disabilities. I would not speak for you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because that would be very unwise, but let us face it, although people try to make things easy with colour-coded knobs and so forth, when one is looking at a machine and trying to follow the instructions, one can sometimes get it wrong.

Therefore, I am a little worried that sometimes we forget about people with such disabilities. That applies even when they come in with their own vehicles. We know that there is abuse of disabled parking bays. There is also sometimes abuse of the disabled badges that enable people to park in those bays—I can never remember whether they are orange or blue these days, and must get colour blind on them.

Transport is one of the keys to success in London, but we must be careful not to add to the problem. In the light of that I finish with a note on airports, inevitably. Any expansion at Heathrow would increase the need for transport in London, never mind whether it would be disastrous for the environment and the quality of life of people living there—this is the place but not the time to discuss that. However, from an economic point of view, an expansion at Heathrow would throw the west and central London transport systems into even more chaos. That includes anything done at Northolt, so I hope that the Government will rule both of those out as soon as possible.

In that context, I have a question for the Minister. Can he say when he expects the aviation White Paper to be published? I have heard Ministers, including his boss, the Secretary of State for Transport, saying that it will be published at the end of the year, and of course I believe that, because I believe everything that the Government say—they are always right. However, I have heard whispers that the publication might be delayed. I wonder whether the Minister can assure me, so that I can rest easy today, knowing that I have done my bit to ensure that the Government are living up to their promises.

As I said at the outset, I do not want to have a go at the Government—well, I do really, but on this occasion I might get more if I am trying to be nice. Transport is very important. We must consider all its aspects and bear in mind the environmental consequences. I hope that the Government will adopt one of their famed joined-up approaches not just in the Department for Transport but in all other Departments.

9.54 am

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): We are all grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) for introducing the debate in his usual felicitous way. He represents a north London constituency, so may I introduce a south London perspective? I shall make only two brief points because I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) also wants to speak.

Connex's decisions affect the whole of south-east London and many of my constituents who use its commuter services through Bromley and south London. The Chamber will be aware that the chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority decided a few months ago to terminate Connex's franchise at the end of this year. Connex will continue to run its services until then, after which some unspecified people—he more or less said friends of his whom he knew and could trust—will run it for a further 12 months, after which there will be a competition and the franchise will be re-let on different terms. I understand that those new terms will include a higher subsidy. I am pleased about that because it is necessary and one of Connex's problems has been financial difficulties arising from miscalculation of the subsidy required.

The transitional 18 months has been handled extremely badly and Connex now has no incentive to provide a decent service. It knows that its time will be up in six months, so why should it bother to do other than what its conscience dictates? That is quite high in Connex's case and I have regard for it in that respect, but there is no commercial or financial incentive for it to carry on providing a good service. The chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority will have had consultations with the Government, and the right approach to the matter would have been for him to say that the service is unsatisfactory, a new franchise would be set up in 18 months with new conditions and everyone could apply. That would have given Connex an incentive to improve its performance and to re-apply with other people.

[Mr. John Horam]

Half a dozen train operating companies might apply for the new franchise and that would have led to a better result, because I fear for my constituents during the 18 months of uncertainty and while friends of Mr. Bowker are running the railway line from south-east London for a year. If the Minister allowed the chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority to make that decision, it was the wrong decision and I would like his comments on how we can get through those 18 months.

The first decision as a result of the change—it is common to all parts of the rail service, not just in London—is that trains have been taken out of service because the chairman of the SRA hopes that greater attention can be paid to punctuality and reduced crowding. I do not know the experience of other Members in the Chamber, but the greatest complaint in my area is not lack of punctuality. People become concerned when, for example, at Charing Cross they struggle to get on an extremely crowded train in the evening, because they are aware that there are sometimes safety issues. If people are pressed into a train with their faces against the window, they worry about safety. That is not a happy situation for people going to and from work and there have been instances of commuter rage because people are really worried about crowded trains, trying to get to work, trying to get home and so on.

The idea of paying the same fare for fewer services and, therefore, for punctuality—I understand the reasoning behind that—seems to be evasion of train operating companies' responsibilities. They should pay attention to their own efficiency. The reason for overcrowding on trains, in my experience and that of my commuter constituents, is that a four-car train often rolls up when there should be an eight-car train. That is often because old rolling stock that has not been properly maintained breaks down at the depot and, therefore, does not arrive at the station. Alternatively, there has been a recruitment problem and there are not enough people to run the trains. Those are efficiency problems to which the operating companies should pay more attention, rather than penalising commuters by having fewer trains in order to get back on track with punctuality. I would be grateful for the Minister's comments on those two problems, which immediately affect my commuter constituents.

My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge was characteristically generous in not particularly attacking the Government in this debate. His tactics might be right as he may get a more felicitous answer from the Minister, but he was over-generous. Transport has been a very bad area for the Government. Just before the last election, Jonathon Porritt, chairman of the Government-appointed Sustainable Development Commission, singled out transport as the worst area of Government performance in the whole sphere of their activity. We must lay the blame at the Deputy Prime Minister's door, as he was in charge of transport for the whole of the last Parliament. He set absurd goals, and the Government have had to perform a U-turn. His approach was completely misconceived. It is at its worst in London because he and the Chancellor of the Exchequer simply could not agree with the Mayor of London on how to finance the necessary investment in London Underground. That has been a disaster for London. For four or five years, nothing has happened except that piles of legal documents have mounted up to no avail. The result is that badly needed investment in London is barely under way.

Transport has been close to a fiasco from the Government's point of view. I feel sorry for the present team of Ministers. I am pleased that they now have a dedicated transport Department because that may mean that they can concentrate on this matter more effectively than the previous gargantuan Department, but they have major problems to sort out in London as a result of a period when they did absolutely nothing and London suffered as a consequence.

10.2 am

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall), who is a colleague in the Whips Office, on introducing this important debate.

As my hon. Friend rightly pointed out, and as, I am sure, the Minister will confirm, one of our problems as London Members of Parliament, whether they be the small crowd of 13 on the Conservative Benches or the rather larger, albeit today invisible, massed ranks on the Government Benches—the exception is the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen)—is that much of this issue has become devolved over recent months and years to the Mayor of London. It is therefore inevitable that in any debate in this place about transport issues in London we have to touch on his role during the past three and a half years in the post. Of course, the matter is now under the auspices of Transport for London, but there remains some parliamentary input.

I shall briefly touch on one or two issues as I examine the concerns of many of my constituents in central London. The main concern for many of us in London, and what transport in London means to many people outside the capital, is the tube network. There has been a catalogue of disgraceful delays and bureaucratic bungling. As my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) said, much of the blame must be laid firmly at the Government's door. It is difficult to go into great detail, but the last six and a half years have been a catalogue of wasted time and my hon. Friend was right to cast aspersions on the role of the Deputy Prime Minister. His tenure in looking after the transport system throughout the country, let alone in London, will be remembered only as a never-ending disaster.

Unfortunately, the wrangling between the Government and the Mayor of London over the tube, which finally ended with power being passed fully into the hands of Transport for London, has effectively meant that there have been three wasted years in which no improvements have been made, for all the best will in the world. Many Londoners now have a grave concern that there are going to be appalling blackmail tactics by Mr. Bob Crow and his friends at the Rail, Maritime and Transport union, who have Mr. Livingstone in their pocket—a situation which there is little doubt would continue if he won a second term as Mayor of London, because the RMT will be a major funder of his independent campaign in June.

We have grave concerns about what will happen to the underground system. A lot of money will be spent, but much of it will go into the pockets of union members

who will constantly complain about safety measures, despite having had no great concerns about safety in past decades. It is interesting that most railway accidents in recent years have been down to driver error or the incompetence of unionised staff, rather than Railtrack, to which blame has been attached. We are in for yet more difficult times, and the commuters who rely on the underground and the rail system to get from far-flung suburban areas to work in central London are the ones who will suffer.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge pointed out, the bus service is one of the success stories of recent years. It is only fair to say that, although perhaps the success has been slightly over-hyped by the Mayor of London in the past three years. In my constituency there have been marked improvements, including the addition of new hopper buses, but at a great cost. The Transport for London budget is now out of control. A shortfall of £500 million is estimated for future years and the Mayor will, I fear, throw himself on the mercy of central Government, who, I suspect, will have relatively little sympathy for his antics.

Above all, Londoners will suffer. Some advertisements in London buses are about the advantages of a congestion charge—notionally, the money raised will be put into buses, but we all know that that is far from the truth. I shall not go into detail about the congestion charge, because I have spoken about it in this Chamber several times and led a debate on it in February. It has not been quite the failure that we all feared, in the sense that there have not been riots in the street. However, many central London retailers and traders have suffered greatly, and my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge mentioned the comprehensive survey by Sir Stuart Hampton of John Lewis, outlining the many grave concerns of central London retailers. However, at least in the first few months of the congestion charge, there was less congestion. That was one reason for retailers suffering—passing trade was radically reduced, although there is evidence that that is beginning to change.

The real concern about the congestion charge is that so little money has been raised. It has been a bureaucratic nightmare; it now appears that the over-hyped assumption that £200 million a year would be raised is being downplayed, not just to the latest figure of £65 million a year given by the Mayor of London, but to a mere fraction of that, for the next two or three years.

The raison d'être of a congestion charge was to raise a pot of money that could be securitised for a range of other transport initiatives, such as Crossrail in particular, which people in London consider an important part of a long-term strategy. Crossrail is an issue that dates back to the post-war era as it was recommended as long ago as 1948. The Conservative Government in the early to mid-1990s first put the project on hold, and a repeat of that by this Government appears almost certain. I should be glad to hear the Minister's comments about Crossrail. The tragedy is that a decision must be made now to bring about improvements 10 or 12 years down the line. An Olympic bid would be almost unsustainable without a commitment to—and the reality of—Crossrail, at least for those areas in the near part of eastern London that would be affected.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge about taxis, although I appreciate that the subject is a little outside the Minister's area of authority. There is a grave concern that there has been an explosion in the number of unregistered cabs here in central London. My feeling is that we need to encourage the licensing of reputable black cabs, despite concerns about the dumbing down of the Knowledge. My real concern is safety for the elderly and for young women, many of whom come to socialise in my constituency in such places as Soho and Covent Garden on a Friday or Saturday night and want to know that they can return to the suburbs safely. There have been appalling statistics on rape and assault in recent months.

Mr. Randall: My hon. Friend may be interested to know that I am a member of the Sexual Offences Bill Committee. One of the presentations from the Metropolitan police was on rape resulting from taking a minicab. That obviously does not happen everywhere, but it is a serious problem.

Mr. Field: I thank my hon. Friend. There is little doubt that there has been an explosion in the number of unregistered cabs, and we all feel very strongly about that on behalf of our constituents.

I shall touch on airports, although that issue is closer to the heart of my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and I appreciate that he has expressed grave constituency concerns. When walking in such places as West Drayton in his constituency and Harmondsworth and Sipson in the constituency of the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), one cannot fail to be impressed by the number of posters, which are all over the place: the campaign involving many local residents in that part of west London is massive. One of the benefits of our long parliamentary recess is that it gives us a chance to do some research, and on one of the warm summer days this year I spent some time walking through much of that area and looking at the beautiful 12th century foundation church of St. Mary's, Harmondsworth, which is likely to be entirely obliterated, or find itself a mere stone's throw from a third runway, if such a runway is built.

However, the business argument cannot be lightly dismissed, apart from the very questionable Department for Transport methodology on aircraft usage. I am a great believer that freedom to travel gives freedom to think, and one of the benefits of living in a cosmopolitan and open-minded globalised society is that if people are allowed to travel and experience other cultures, many of the problems highlighted by the global terrorist threat of the past two years will begin to be dissipated. The discussion on the third runway at Heathrow is ongoing, and I understand that the final decision on that and on runways at Stansted and Gatwick is likely to be delayed until the new year. I hope that the Minister can confirm the precise state of play.

There has been a savage attack on private car usage by central Government through fuel duties and by the Mayor of London's anti-car policies—not just the congestion charge—but car usage must be seen as an integral part of sensible transport planning.

I shall conclude soon, because the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead wants to say a few words. Our concerns about transport in London reveal a mess of the

[Mr. Field]

Government's making. The Secretary of State may well be seen as a safe pair of hands who was appointed to neutralise this as an issue, but the conclusion, first aired by the *Evening Standard*, that the Government really have it in for London and Londoners is inescapable. As a capital city, we make a vast contribution to the national coffers—some £20 billion net per year—yet we receive considerably less than our rightful share in terms of infrastructure projects. That applies not only to Crossrail, but to the general state of the railways and roads, and to hospitals and other matters outside the Minister's transport remit.

To me, that is an attack on the quality of life of all but the very richest Londoners, who can in effect opt out. It may well be that national pay bargaining suits the trade unions and a Labour Government dominated by Scots and northerners, but it is an absolute disaster for Londoners whose public services are thereby denuded of cash and staff. I appreciate that the Minister will want to address specific transport issues when he sums up, but I hope that he takes back to his boss the grave concerns—felt by many of us who represent Londoners—about the general quality of life. Much of that is, I fear, in the hands of central Government and I hope that they will act positively in the months and years ahead.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) is an assiduous Member of Parliament. He is also a London MP. I am sure that, if I call him, as I intend to do, he will provide some explanation of why he could not be present for the opening of the debate.

10.15 am

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise for not being present at the beginning of the debate and missing the speech of the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall), which I will read assiduously. I was across the road at St. Thomas's hospital getting my tetanus and diphtheria jab. I am in a bit of a sweat—I do not know whether that is to do with the jab, or running across the bridge.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that those injections are necessary for travelling on public transport?

Harry Cohen: They are necessary for travelling on public transport in Bangladesh, where I am going on a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association trip early next month.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Uxbridge for securing the debate. It is incredibly important for Londoners and commuters, and for business, that public transport flows smoothly in London. I know that the matter has been devolved to the Greater London Authority, but Parliament must keep its hand in, as public transport is important to the national economy.

Rail transport has never recovered from the appalling privatisation by the Conservative Government. The costs just keep going up, particularly in relation to safety. Trying to make the railways safe has eaten up a vast amount of money that the Government put aside for investment. The Government must consider that. They are right to make safety the top priority, but investment must be increased again. We need to make rail an efficient means of transport throughout the country, as well as in London. Crossrail is an important new investment that should get the go-ahead. I am not convinced that it will be relevant to any Olympics bid, but it should go ahead in any case to improve the efficiency of rail in London.

The Government should reconsider the urban rail network rather than throwing all their eggs into the M25 and road widening and road building on the outskirts. The Labour Government came in in 1997 saying that they would do much more for the urban rail network. That seems to have been a low priority for investment. It should come back up the order of priorities.

The Government must do something about fares. That issue does not relate only to rail transport, but it is relevant to it. Rail fares are too high. With all the different companies, there is great confusion about what fares people pay. Again, we were promised that that would be sorted out and that people would be able to see clearly which fares were the cheapest or the best, but that has not come about. We need to end the confusion that arises from private companies charging different fares for the same journey and enable easy comparisons to be made. The overall level of fares should also come down if we want to encourage people to use the railways and the tube as opposed to their cars.

I have had debates on the public-private partnership and I do not think that it was the best value for money. The Audit Commission is to carry out a major review in the coming months and I suspect that it will confirm that PPP is not the best value for money. However, the contracts are signed. I remain concerned that there are delays in getting the improvements that even those contracts say should happen. Pressure must be put on infrastructure companies to ensure that those improvements come about.

The Government must consider issues such as air conditioning that are way down at the end of the queue. People may be stuck in trains, as happened when the electricity was cut off. It is appalling that they should be stuck in tube trains for any length of time, whether it is due to a power cut or some other reason without proper air conditioning. Air conditioning should be higher up the order of priority.

The Central line has been experiencing more problems after all that happened earlier this year. The compensation payments were a bit mean and are only now being increased to a reasonable level for regular commuters. In recent times, it has become evident that the tracks are in disrepair, which has caused some problems. I hope that under the PPP scheme the responsibility for that will fall to the private companies and that they will not call on their letters of comfort or tell the Government, "You foot the bill." That would defeat the object of what the Government said that PPPs were about. I will be following that aspect with interest.

The congestion charge has been a success, but increasingly traffic is creeping back into central London. Unpleasant though that may be for many drivers, the Mayor may have to consider increasing the congestion charge. It is important to ensure that traffic that has to enter London can flow. I would like the congestion

charge scheme to be extended into urban areas where local authorities want it. It is a tool that they could use to tackle congestion in their main high streets and shopping streets. Legislation and more flexibility may be required to allow that to come about.

On signage, traffic signs showing directions and destinations in London are very poor. Attention has been drawn to that, but no one has overall responsibility for it. It should be put into the camp of Transport for London, which should be given the power to do something about it to improve signs across London.

We should give Transport for London and local authorities more flexibility where they want to introduce a local tram scheme, such as the Croydon light rail scheme. That came in over budget, but it has been an effective transport project. Similar projects would be effective in many other parts of the country. Coming in over budget is a problem that goes beyond transport. The Government need to get a grip and ensure that estimates are realistic. That is a bigger problem, but it should not put us off trying to introduce such tram link schemes, which could be effective on a small scale in suburban areas. I ask that consideration be given to bring that back on to the agenda of Transport for London.

10.23 am

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on securing the debate. I know that he has a keen interest in transport issues, and I enjoy sitting on the Transport Committee with him.

The contributions this morning have all concerned transport issues, and I do not think that anyone has made political points. I hope that the points that I am going to make will not be deemed political either. The hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) referred to overcrowding on the trains. I had hoped to do a little reading on the train this morning for this afternoon's debate on electricity supply and London Underground. Unfortunately, the slam-door train that arrived consisted of four carriages rather than eight, so I was packed in there with other commuters. That was good for being able to talk to people about the train services, but not very good for travelling in comfort.

Other Members have made good contributions. The hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) made a very good point about the confusion over rail fares. The Liberal Democrat party conference is in Brighton next week, and we have been informed that the cheapest fare is two single tickets. I fail to understand why two singles are cheaper than a return, and such confusion must be sorted out if more people are to use train services.

I welcome the Minister's presence today, but, given the issues with which we are dealing, where is the Mayor? He is, no doubt, in Brent, East at the moment, along with others. My colleagues are doing mystery shopper exercises on the Westminster to Willesden Green section of the Jubilee line. Presumably, that is where several other Back Benchers are as well.

The Mayor and the Government must have as their objective a transport system in London that is safe, reliable, affordable and of a quality that the world's greatest city deserves. The transport system must improve the quality of life in London. In every survey, Helsinki and Stockholm are always at the top for quality of life while London is at No. 60, 64 or 70. Quality of life must be addressed so that people think of London not only as an exciting city but as a city in which it is enjoyable to live.

The Mayor in particular will be judged on his ability to meet that objective. He will be assisted by his Government supporters, as they are now working together to meet it. The Liberal Democrat mayoral candidate, my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes), will also seek to meet that objective if elected. He would have liked to be here for this debate but is, presumably, in Brent, East.

What are the obstacles to meeting the objective? Clearly, the key obstacle is the lack of funding. It is unlikely that the fares box will be a great source of additional revenue, given that London already has the highest transport fares in the world. As well, there seems to be a downward trend in the Government's contribution to London's transport—it has fallen from £1.3 billion in the 2002 spending review to £1 billion in 2005. Finally, as several Members mentioned, the congestion charge is raising less money than expected.

That is the background against which additional funds must be found for transport and necessary transport infrastructure improvements in London. There is probably only one significant source of such funding—the businesses that will benefit from new transport infrastructure projects. Such arrangements are widely accepted in other parts of the world and should be considered in this country. For instance, if property prices for office premises increase significantly because a new Crossrail line has been built outside the front door, it is entirely right that the owners should be asked to contribute.

The evidence from surveys by London First is that the largest businesses—although, admittedly, not the smallest—have responded positively to past suggestions that, for instance, business rates be increased temporarily if funds are earmarked specifically for transport improvements. If anyone believes that that is not the way to fund infrastructure improvements, which are needed in London, they must come up with an alternative. Everyone accepts that Crossrail is needed. Perhaps the Minister can tell us how much private funding has been secured. The Government have said that private businesses will contribute significantly to the project, which will not happen without such contributions. That is the principal problem.

The tube is also a problem. In the Select Committee last week, it was interesting to hear the Secretary of State for Transport say that Metronet will be responsible for funding if new rolling stock is required on the Central line. If the current rolling stock is unreliable and the technical flaws, which appear to exist, cannot be remedied, he expects Metronet to pick up the £700 million to £800 million bill. I would be interested to know whether Metronet considers that an option. Would the public-private partnership deal involving Metronet fold if it were required to stump up such sums of money? One can imagine the effect that such expenditure would have on Metronet's profit margins. There is a problem with PPP, which many Members, including the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead,

[Tom Brake]

have identified: what happens when a major consortium or one of the major players in a consortium goes belly up? Who comes in and saves the day?

There are also problems relating to buses. I can only assume that journalists, Ministers and some Members of Parliament tend not to travel on them very often because, if they did, they would, like me, want to see the resolution of the problems with the Countdown information system. If we want people to travel on buses, they must know when the buses will arrive. A replacement for the Countdown system was supposed to have been identified, but I do not know whether that has happened. Currently, no one can rely on the information provided at bus stops. No one can rely on being told when the next bus will arrive, so there is complete confusion about whether it is worth trying to make alternative transport arrangements or whether it is better to wait for the next bus.

The congestion charge has a role to play. If it is going to be extended, it may be necessary to examine alternative ways to deliver it, which may involve a global positioning system. I hope that the Minister can confirm whether the satellite tracking system, which is being examined for lorries, will be specifically designed for use in cars. That point is extremely important.

It is not clear how far the retail industry has been hit by the congestion charge - it depends on which survey one reads. The London Chamber of Commerce and Industry asked businesses whether their productivity had increased because journeys were faster. Some 21 per cent. said yes and 74 per cent. said no. If that means that 74 per cent. of journeys take exactly the same time as before and that 21 per cent. are faster, I suggest that the congestion charge has been a success.

When businesses were asked whether they were considering moving to a site outside the congestion charging zone, 25 per cent. said yes, although they did not give a reason why. They were not necessarily saying that they were considering moving because of the congestion charge. An independent survey of 500 business found that only 2 per cent. said that they would consider relocating their premises outside the zone. The only conclusion that one can draw is that the congestion charge's impact on retail industry is unclear.

Mr. Randall: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify whether the figures concern businesses in general or exclusively retail businesses?

Tom Brake: The first figures are about retail businesses, and they come from the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The others are from an independent survey of businesses by an American research firm. The survey does not specify which lines the businesses are in.

Clearly, one solution is Crossrail, and we must hear from the Minister what progress is being made to identify the private funding that is key to its development. However, the Mayor's latest gimmick with the Oyster card is an unnecessary addition to the range of solutions. I do not know who has been given one of them, but they are being distributed free to, among others, London Assembly Members, the Association of London Government, chief executives, council leaders, London MPs, rail and other transport groups, bus companies, Government transport representatives and several reporters. They are exactly the people who probably already have free travel, or who are aware of the Oyster card. That freebie would have been better aimed at people who are less informed of the advantages of the card, rather than those who are already well informed. As the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) said, when the buses budget is out of control, the Mayor needs to consider the pennies and the pounds.

The Minister is responsible for ensuring that there is guaranteed, stable funding for transport in London. However, the spending review states that funding appears to be decreasing and we need an assurance that Crossrail is not going to drift year on year. If it does, the expansion that the Government want to see in east London—in the Thames gateway—will not happen.

I have not touched on airports, but will the Minister confirm whether the recent reports in *The Sunday Times*, suggesting that BAA has already been given the go-ahead for new runways at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted, have any truth in them?

10.36 am

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on securing the debate and introducing such a broad range of subjects. He demonstrated his great sense of tolerance, which has more to do with his character than the feelings of the public and visitors in London, who possess a mood of great intolerance towards the dire state of the transport system in London.

I begin with a reminder of the verdict of the British people on the Government's transport and public transport record halfway through their second term. According to MORI, 53 per cent. of the public think that the Government have a poor record on transport and public transport, compared with 25 per cent. who think that their record is good. In answer to the question whether they think that transport and public transport will get better, get worse or stay the same over the next few years, 39 per cent. think it will get worse, compared with 23 per cent. who think it will get better. My hon. Friend has done us a great service by getting the Minister in the dock to answer the charges of people who are fed up to the back teeth with the poor quality of public services.

It is all very well to say, "Not me, guv, because it has all been passed off to Transport for London," but the Government initiated plans for transferring responsibility to Transport for London. They said that that meant that things would get better, but we now know that things are getting worse. To add insult to injury, we have not only a decline in the quality of service, but further, sharp fare increases for bus and rail passengers. That is a hallmark of the Government's approach to public services, which cost more and decline in quality. On Thursday, the people of Brent, East will express a strong indictment of the Government's public transport record and policies.

My hon. Friends the Members for Orpington (Mr. Horam) and for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) also added to the charges against the Government, and I hope that the Minister takes time to respond to the pertinent points that were made.

I shall start with the congestion charge. The Liberal Democrat spokesperson, who is in splendid isolation today, suggested that the charge is all right—indeed, it is his party's policy to extend congestion charging across the country—but he pooh-poohed an important survey conducted by the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry. That survey attracted a surprisingly high response, and although only an interim report has been produced, the concerns expressed should be taken seriously. If the retail sector inside the charge zone suffers a significant loss of custom as well as a possible loss of investment and threatens to move out of central London as a result of the congestion charge, people should take the threat seriously.

The rationale for the congestion charge was that it would be a double benefit—we were told that it would reduce congestion inside the zone and that the income generated would be used to improve public transport. We now know that the scheme is not generating anything like the income forecast. Originally, that figure was more than £200 million a year, but it was downgraded to £200 million. Based on the Mayor's latest figures, it will now be £65 million. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster said, a more realistic assessment is that we shall be lucky to achieve a surplus of £6 million in the first year. What a poor return on an enormous capital investment.

Our consistent charge against the Government is that they have wasted a heck of a lot of public money. If one looks at the detail of the congestion charge, one can see that it is another example of public money being wasted hand over fist. I do not know whether my hon. Friends or you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have had a chance to look at a document that has relatively recently come into the public domain—the rebaselined combined services agreement between Transport for London and Capita Business Services Ltd., which was published on 29 August and which includes a supplemental agreement dated 19 August. Those who are worried about where the money is going could do worse than look at the money being paid to Capita in respect of routine work in connection with the congestion charge.

You may be surprised to learn, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that an administrative assistant is charged at the rate of £250 per day. Those with a little more technical expertise are charged at the rate of between £800 and £1,000 a day. That is where the money is going—on the exorbitant charges being imposed by Capita under its agreement with Transport for London. No wonder the Mayor resisted publication of that document. He did not want people to see exactly where the money is going. If administrative assistant , who need only two A-levels to qualify, can be charged at £250 per day, that surely is overpricing, particularly as most of them are based not in a high-cost area such as central London, but in Coventry, which is where Capita's activities are centred.

That is where the money is going—it is being wasted in administration. That is why the Opposition say that it would be better to invest capital in London's transport, where it is really needed, and scrap the irrelevant and increasingly problematic congestion charge.

Tom Brake: If a Conservative mayor took such action, what would the hon. Gentleman do to address the resulting significant increase in congestion and how would he fund the shortfall in revenue?

Mr. Chope: The hon. Gentleman asks about funding the shortfall. It looks as though the revenue generated this year might be £6 million, which is not a proper return on the capital employed. So far as the other costs are concerned, he has just said that he believes that the shortfall in funding for Transport for London, estimated at £500 million for each of four successive years starting next year, can be made up only by increasing the business rate. That would place an additional burden on the business community, whereas we know from the reports that we already have that scrapping the congestion charge would relieve it of a significant burden.

While congestion in the centre of London has been suppressed by using market mechanisms, the evidence is that outside the inner London area congestion is as bad as, if not worse than, it was before. If the hon. Gentleman believes in adopting public policies that use the market mechanism to suppress demand, I can understand the logic of his position—if he applied that principle to the health service, the charges would increase enormously and demand would decline. We do not accept that. Almost everybody who uses our transport system does so out of necessity rather than because they want to go out on a frolic. People find it necessary to get between the place where they live and the place where they work and most of them have no alternative but to go by public transport. Those who have small businesses and need to deliver have no alternative but to take a van and park it close to where they work. We do not think that artificially increasing those people's costs is a way forward. We should improve the transport system overall.

My hon. Friends have covered many aspects of this policy, but I think that the most important is crime. That is highlighted by the appalling news that a seven-year-old child who was supposed to be in the care of social services has been brutally murdered in a case that was almost dismissed as one in a separate category that does not concern most people, as it is a so-called black-on-black crime. That is an appalling expression, which should be excluded from the language of politicians. Any victim of crime should be treated on a par with everybody else, and the colour of the perpetrators and the victims is irrelevant. The case illustrates the violence and the threats of violence that permeate much of London life and affect those who use public transport, whether they are on the buses or on the underground. Unless the Government and the mayor get to grips with that, we shall never have a public transport system in London of which we can be proud.

10.48 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Tony McNulty): I congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on the

[Mr. Tony McNulty]

characteristically generous way in which he opened the debate, on having secured it and on all his opening comments save the unnecessary dig over a very lucky goal that means that Uxbridge rather than Wealdstone will proceed in the early rounds of the FA cup. I declare a partial interest in that, when Wealdstone gets its glorious 3,000-seater stadium in my constituency, I shall become a non-executive director, having laboured in the vineyards for some 12 years, both as a councillor and an MP, to get the club into that position. In the words of football fans, "Come and have a go if you think you're hard enough," in terms of the new pitch.

Many of the points raised by Back Benchers of all parties were well put and well argued. Some were cogent, some I would disagree with. I shall try to comment on them in the short time available. If there is time at the end, I might indulge the boring and vacuous contributions of both Oppn Front Benchers, which were not terribly worth while. Although I am temporarily a Front Bencher, I always consider Westminster Hall and general Adjournment debates to be the purview of Back Benchers. If I am allowed a passing comment on parliamentary traditions as they grow and on being a Minister during the past year or so, the notion of Opposition Front Benchers winding up in a Back-Bench debate adds nothing whatever to such debates and I would rather that they desisted. However, that is not for me to say.

Turning to what the hon. Member for Uxbridge said, of course the Government still have a significant role concerning transport in London. Although some matters have been devolved, there is still a significant job to be done with scrutiny, oversight and ultimate decisions on the overall quantum of transport spend. I assure the Chamber that whether it is on Transport for London generally or what it is seeking to do in terms of traffic management, street work, the roads network, the tube and so on, we shall certainly continue to meet regularly for discussion and liaison. That is important because Transport for London is partnership focused. We are not saying, "It's all yours now, so get on with it — it's not my fault." Nor shall I indulge in saying, "That is a matter for them, so go and see them." If London Members are concerned about London's transport system, whether it is my responsibility or that of the Mayor or of TFL, I am more than happy to deal with them.

I appreciate what the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) said about the power supply debate, which will come later. It is a Department of Trade and Industry and Department for Transport debate, and it is better for the matter to be dealt with then.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) said that he will keep a watching brief on the Central line. I assure him that I shall do so as well, and with interest.

I wish the hon. Member for Uxbridge well in plans for next year's centenary of the tube going to Uxbridge. It does not hurt to go to the very end of the line and the far reaches of the Middlesex area of London every now and again, and if he wants me to come along in any capacity I am more than happy to do so. I might even have a cup of tea in Randall's or some other obscure little retail outlet in Uxbridge. Unhappily for me, I suspect that he has far more of the rolling hills and dales of Middlesex countryside à la Betjeman than I have in Harrow, East where the Metroland developers were perhaps otiose in covering much more of the green bits than in West Drayton, Harefield and other areas that he represents.

I agree that the underground must be improved. I also agree with the hon. Gentleman that when London's transport goes well, whether people are driving in or travelling by tube or train, it can be very pleasant, but I fully accept that there is much that we can and should do. Members have suggested that now that the PPP is in place, the message should be, "Get on with it." I could spend time apportioning blame for the delay, which is three years and not longer, as the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) and others have suggested. I could regale people with the history of mayoral interventions via his legal friends in and out of the courts and so on, but that is not worth dwelling on.

I suggest that we simply need to get on with not only the PPP but subsequent suggestions to develop the tube network, which, on the whole, is an extremely efficient way of transporting many millions of people around London every year. It is easy to dwell on the serious occasions when things go wrong, such as with the Central line. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead said, we never see headlines saying, "Another good day on the tube. Millions transported to and from work safely and securely." I appreciate that that is not news, but it is the reality more often than not.

I accept Members' exhortations on Crossrail. We have set out the framework and I shall try to give an update on that. The Government never suggested that the Olympic bid depended on Crossrail. The sponsors' business case states that it will be 2013 or 2014 before the rail link is finished, even if it has a fair wind between now and then. Those who link the fortunes of Crossrail and those of the Olympic bid do this city a grave disservice. The rail link will not be ready. It is unnecessary for those purposes, and the Olympic bid team are on record as saying that it is unnecessary, given possible improvements elsewhere. To talk down our bid before it has even started does not say much for London Members.

On the congestion charge, Mr. Kylie would say that there is a range of opinions. I agree. I partly accept some of the points made about retail, although, as someone said, the position is murky. We still do not know the complete picture. Mr. Kylie would say, "Give it a year and we will take full stock of what is going on." Figures have risen and fallen. My office was in Whitehall, which was a ghost town when the congestion charge was introduced. Admittedly, it was half term and there were road works, but it was a delight. One might have been at work in the middle of the day, but given the traffic it felt like Sunday at 5 o'clock in the morning. We must wait and see. The congestion charge was never meant to be a revenue-raising instrument, as is suggested by those Norrisites who would revise history. It is about relieving congestion. Revenue was very much a secondary issue.

I am sorry, but I do not have a great deal of time left to talk about other matters. I broadly accept what all Members said, especially about public sector workers and bus drivers in particular. We will work closely with British Transport police and/or other authorities to

ensure that threats and violence against bus drivers are dealt with and that the full force of the law is brought to bear against the offenders. I worked in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister last year, so I know that much of its work relates to the broader issues of transport and affordable housing for public sector workers.

I can tell the hon. Member for Uxbridge, although I am sure he already knows, that there were major increases in the frequency of the bus service on the 222 route from August 2003. Sadly, I have no information to hand about the 207 service, but I wish the re-tendering process well.

Members talked about the importance of taxis, which I recognise. Much of the taxi industry's concern is twofold. First, the process—not the amount and the substance of the Knowledge—should be reduced. People very often fail one part of the test but pass another and have to wait for ever to reach the next level because all sorts of time slots are built into the process. That needs to be reconsidered. Secondly, I strongly accept the point about touting and the increase in the number of minicabs. The sooner that we can work with the Public Carriage Office to introduce the new licensing regime, the better. I do not yet have the date, but I know that I shall have the great pleasure of going out at midnight with the British Transport police and the Met on one of their purges.

I know that getting home at night is difficult, but if anyone outside ever listens to our proceedings I strongly advise people—male or female, but especially female—not to get into cars that pull up and say, "I am a cab. Where do you want to go?" Some 5 million more passengers now use night bus routes and services. People must use reputable taxi companies, or not use taxis at all. That is a matter of grave concern.

The hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) talked about Connex. I shall write to him about some of the more detailed aspects, as I cannot do the matter justice now. I am bemused to see not one but two talking Opposition Whips. I spent a couple of years in the Whips Office. I talked, but not publicly, so this is a relatively novel concept for me. Again, I agree with much of what the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster said, but I strongly disagree with the notion, which I am sure was merely a flippant, throw-away remark, that most accidents are the result of driver error or incompetence and that unionisation has something to do with the level of error.

The debate was wide-ranging, and I shall write to Members about any other matters that I have not addressed. I say simply to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), who seems so confident about Thursday's by-election in Brent, East, that he is deluded.

Yarl's Wood Fire

11 am

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Nicholas Winterton): Order. The hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), who has initated this debate, is an experienced and long-serving Member and an ex-Minister. He will be aware that certain matters are covered by the sub judice resolution of the House. In particular, that resolution applies to any reference to matters relevant to outstanding criminal charges, which in the present case may include the performance of Group 4, which operates the centre. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will bear that advice in mind.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I appreciate that advice and will do my utmost to stick to it and ensure that any references fall entirely within the rule.

I am thankful that this debate on such an important subject has been allowed, and I appreciate the attendance of the Minister and the attention of her office in the past few days to ensure that she would be briefed about what I would be asking. This is no attempt at an ambush. I appreciate her interest, because I know that she intends to try to provide the best possible answers to my questions. I also acknowledge the presence of the hon. Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall), who has had a considerable interest in the matter for a long time. We share a number of concerns over the issue.

Briefly, this is the story so far. Yarl's Wood was designed as the largest asylum, detention and removal centre in Europe, and was opened in my constituency in November 2001. It was several months late and built at an unknown cost—questions about the cost are deferred, owing to commercial confidentiality, to which I shall return. The centre was run on behalf of the Home Office by Group 4, which had also been part of the private consortium that had designed, built and insured it under the authority and, presumably, the supervision of the Home Office and the immigration service.

On 14 February 2002, barely weeks after opening, one half of Yarl's Wood was burned down and completely destroyed, following an incident of disorder. There were 385 detainees on site at the time, less than half the 900 that the centre could have held when fully operational. Injuries were mercifully slight all round—one security officer was hospitalised with a broken pelvis after leaping from an upstairs window in fear for his life. A number of security officers remain affected by the incident and there were minor injuries elsewhere. A number of detainees escaped in the confusion. Although there were fears that some had died, an exhaustive police search of debris concluded that, mercifully, this was not the case.

The fire was a disaster and the Home Secretary came within a hair's breadth of seeing major loss of life. That he did not was sheer good fortune, as the chain of events that led to the incident was a series of errors and incompetence. As a result and due to the potentially serious consequences, in terms of loss of life, and the real financial consequences, I am bringing the issue back to the Chamber today.

Following the incident, there were further significant developments. Most bizarrely, the private insurers of Yarl's Wood, having presumably collected fat

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premiums for their trouble, decided to sue the blameless Bedfordshire police under the Riot (Damages) Act 1886 for upwards of £100 million. That may be business, but it is shameful. The police are vigorously contesting the claim and the Government, belatedly, are examining whether the Act has outlived its usefulness. Although the outcome remains in doubt, my constituents are acutely aware that they will technically be liable for the bill if the private insurers win. In passing, will the Minister say whether the Crown is joined in any way in that action? If so, I should like to know which side it is on, as it has an interest in Yarl's Wood that is insured, I understand, by the same insurance syndicate.

An internal Home Office inquiry commenced after the fire. That, however, was doomed to failure, as the Home Secretary was advised. It took some limited evidence in secret and reported in secret to the Home Secretary in September 2002. The report could not be published because of the next significant event—the criminal trial of those accused of violent disorder and arson at the centre. The trial concluded this August after about four months. Of the 10 accused people in the dock, only two were convicted—neither of them for arson. The trial concluded with a series of startling allegations of incompetence made against Group 4 not by the defence but by the prosecution, the Crown. I shall refer to that obliquely later.

In summary, 18 months after the fire we do not know what led up to it, who started it, precisely what happened on the night or who is liable to pay for the damage. To its great credit, Bedfordshire county council held its select committee inquiry in public. The report was published in the summer of last year and raised important questions. It could not compel witnesses, however, and as the criminal trial had yet to take place, critical evidence was sub judice and could not be given. Accordingly, now that the major criminal trial is out of the way, it is time to take the next steps and bring the matter to the Floor of the House again.

I shall ask the Minister about a series of major issues, on all of which her staff have been briefed. First, there should be a full public inquiry. The appointment of Stephen Shaw as prisons ombudsman, to pick up where Mr. Stephen Moore of the Home Office left off, is a good appointment. However, to justify what he is going to do, he must hold meetings in public and he must cross-examine. That is because we are now aware of a series of contradictions over potentially serious incidents, which must be dealt with. I shall mention two.

The first is the decision whether to fit sprinklers in the building. The former acting chief fire officer of Bedfordshire, Jeff Goddard, gave written evidence to the Bedfordshire county council inquiry. He said that he was at a meeting about sprinklers with Home Office officials at which the issue was absolutely one of cost. The decision not to fit sprinklers was in his opinion made purely on the grounds of cost. That is not what the Home Office says. Which is right? It is only for the independent inspector examining witnesses in public to determine the answer.

Secondly, there is confusion about the chain of events on the night, particularly whether the police had access to the Yarl's Wood site at a time of their choosing as opposed to a time of Group 4's choosing. Having spoken to Group 4 and the police, I am now in possession of two completely contradictory accounts of that vital time. Again, which is right? That is of major importance. If the police had been allowed on site at the time when they say that they asked for access, the incident might have been dealt with before the fires were started and before the tremendous cost that resulted and the danger to people. Is that the case or not? We do not know. I maintain that that should be brought out in public, so that the public can see people examined to determine the answer.

Will the inquiries be held in public? Will the inspector be able to cross-examine? Will he be able to compel witnesses to come? Does the Minister agree, and will she back him in his efforts to hold meetings in public? While she is about it, will she now publish the Stephen Moore report that came to the Home Secretary last year?

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the issue is not just whether the inquiry is held in public but whether it is a judicial inquiry? If it is not, we may be in exactly the same situation, with a revamped Home Office overarching internal inquiry, as we have been during the past year or so, for the very reason that the criminal investigations have not yet been completed. The reasons for the delay and the eventual demise of the first part of the inquiry could remain relevant today, whereas a judicial inquiry might be able to open up matters a little.

Alistair Burt: I am entirely with the hon. Gentleman. It is vital that the inquiry has the opportunity to delve into all the facts. Although I welcome the appointment of Stephen Shaw, who will be more independent than the previous official appointed, I have no doubt that the powers sought by the hon. Gentleman are the correct ones. I, too, want a judicial inquiry. I hope that the Minister can respond to that.

On my second issue, will the Minister say that commercial confidentiality will not be a defence for anyone who is required to give information to the inquiry? I referred earlier to the fire and the fact that the buildings were destroyed very quickly. The construction of the Yarl's Wood buildings and the way they caught fire and were destroyed so quickly are major issues. The point is simple: the loss of the buildings, and the allegations about the competence of those who were running the centre, mean, in my view, that the right to stand on commercial confidentiality should be forfeited. My constituents, and everyone who has already paid for Yarl's Wood and will do so again, are entitled to know how much it cost us and who is pocketing all the money.

An incident that illustrates my argument has been reported in the *Bedfordshire on Sunday* newspaper. It published an allegation that the cost of the sprinklers, which was originally considered to be about £750,000, jumped to about £14 million at the time when the Home Office rejected efforts to have them installed. Why did the amount rise so rapidly? What were the costings for the sprinklers? We do not know. Why not? I think that the public are entitled to know the cost of construction, operation, maintenance and insurance at Yarl's Wood. I should be grateful if the Minister confirmed that it will not be possible for any of the companies involved to rely on commercial confidentiality to continue to hide the true cost of Yarl's Wood from the British public and my constituents.

Thirdly, I should like the Minister to ask the inquiry—judicial or otherwise—to extend its remit to include the allegations made about Group 4 at the end of the criminal trial. For the reasons that you suggested, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall not go into the allegations in detail. However, it was curious that the allegations were made not only by the defence but by the Crown. They are serious and go to the heart of the integrity of the company. The company was not represented at the trial and had no opportunity to defend itself. If the allegations are true, Group 4 should not be running anything. If they are not, an apology is required. I do not think that the matter can be satisfactorily settled until the allegations have been properly examined and that is why the remit of the inquiry should be extended.

Fourthly, and consequent on what I have said, Yarl's Wood should not be reopened until the matter relating to the competence with which it has been run has been dealt with. Yarl's Wood is shortly to reopen. A series of consultations has been held and I appreciate the efforts of the Home Office, on this occasion, to tell local residents what is intended, who will be housed at Yarl's Wood and how it will be run. My constituents appreciate that too. However, the overriding issue is whether, in view of the allegations made about Group 4, it should be running the establishment at all. The county council, local councillors and the local liaison committee, which has worked hard on the issue from the outset, often in co-operation with the Home Office, agree with me that the centre should not be reopened. I should therefore appreciate it if the Minister, even at this late stage, told us that until allegations about the competence with which the Yarl's Wood centre was run have been cleared up, it would be unsafe to reopen it.

Finally, I ask the Minister for a commitment to complete openness by the Home Office and the immigration service, on questions that will be raised during the inquiry. There are serious charges to be made against the Home Office and the immigration service, and I shall run through some of them—in no particular order, and without expecting an answer to every one.

The Home Office changed its policy in autumn 2001 so that asylum detainees would no longer be held in prison. Did that lead to the placing of inappropriate detainees at Yarl's Wood? When the Home Secretary visited Yarl's Wood in March 2002, he certainly referred to inappropriate detainees being placed there. When Yarl's Wood was first opened, local residents were told that the low level of security and the light regime were entirely appropriate because the detainees to be placed there required low security and were a low risk. If the policy changed during the autumn, without that being made known to the local residents or me, and inappropriate detainees were placed at Yarl's Wood, did that contribute to what happened subsequently?

Will the Minister publish the names of everyone who was at Yarl's Wood during the short period from November 2001 to February 2002? Had some of those people been in prison? Had they been involved in previous disturbances, and if so, were they involved in the disturbances at Yarl's Wood? Had Bedfordshire police offered to run background checks on everyone who was being brought to Yarl's Wood, particularly if they had been in the UK for a period of time and something was known about them? If that offer was made, was it refused by the immigration service? Is it true that Group 4 was required to take everyone that the immigration service brought to Yarl's Wood regardless of whether it had any information on their background?

What responsibility does the Home Office take for the matters relating to Group 4 complained about at the trial concerning the design and build of the centre, training and the running of operations there? Was the Home Office involved in the allegations made by the Crown at the trial that appeared to some to deflect attention away from the Home Office and on to Group 4? What happened to all those who escaped from Yarl's Wood? What happened to those detainees who were deported?

Is there any truth in the suggestion that some of the detainees who were subsequently deported could have been charged with offences, including arson, that might have led to the conviction of someone for the fire started at Yarl's Wood? Will the Minister tell us of the latest situation in relation to the outstanding legal matters concerning Yarl's Wood, further criminal trials, and the conduct of further civil litigation?

I am sorry to put such a number of questions to the Minister, who I know will endeavour to do her best to deal with them, but she will appreciate that for me, and the hon. Member for Bedford, Yarl's Wood remains a serious matter. The Minister knows that I have every sympathy for her in dealing with issues affecting asylum and immigration in the UK at the moment. That is exceptionally difficult. She also knows that I support the policy that those who have had their claims denied will have to be returned, and some of those people may have to be held before they are returned. Because of that, and the rolling out of centres intended to hold people in such circumstances, it is vital that we get it right. What happened at Yarl's Wood was a disaster; things went badly wrong. To give full confidence in the system in future, we might as well be as open as we can be now about what happened. I put it to the Minister that the series of suggestions that the hon. Gentleman and I have made give her the best opportunity to do just that. I would appreciate her response.

11.17 am

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): I know that it is customary to do so, but I genuinely congratulate the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) on securing another debate on this important issue. I thank him for the energetic way in which he has represented the legitimate concerns of his constituents and the constructive way in which he has taken up some very difficult issues, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall). I also note your important guidance at the start of the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for which I am grateful. Finally, I thank the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire for his assistance in preparing for the debate. I shall need further advice on some of those questions, particularly the ones that he raised latterly. I shall write to him about those, but I shall try to cover most of the important points in my reply today.

I appreciate that the events at Yarl's Wood on 14 February 2002 are still of great interest and concern, not only to local people, but to myself, officials in the Home Office and the Home Secretary. He is right to say that we

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need to ensure that we move on and do not repeat whatever mistakes were made that led to those events. I am determined to do that. I understand and share the disappointment that there were not convictions for arson despite the seriousness of those events. Clearly, those are matters for the police and the Crown Prosecution Service to consider because it is for them to bring charges.

Hon. Members will be aware that the events of February are the subject of an inquiry by Stephen Shaw, the independent prisons and probation ombudsman. I do not want to pre-empt the outcome of his inquiry in any detail, although I want to touch on some of the points that the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire raised. We are some considerable time on, as the hon. Gentleman rightly says. It is not the case that nothing has been done in that time. Lessons have been learned about the design of the building, and management, and that has all been taken into account in reaching today's position.

The hon. Gentleman raised several general but very important issues. The first of those is that Stephen Shaw's inquiry should be conducted in public and that it should be a judicial inquiry. I remind the House that, in the light of the interest that has been shown in this important matter, we decided at the outset that it was preferable for the outcome of the investigation that the proceedings should be fully independent. Stephen Shaw was therefore asked to take overall responsibility from Stephen Moore, with the same terms of reference, and to bring the matter to a conclusion. The decision followed careful consideration of the work that Stephen Moore had done, and it was in line with the original commitment to have an independent element. Stephen Shaw will draw on Stephen Moore's work and the material that he gathered, and build on that. I conveyed that information to the House in a written statement in June.

I think that that was a sensible approach and it follows that I do not feel that a full public inquiry is the best way of getting the information that we need into the public domain at the earliest opportunity. The question of whether the evidence should be given in public should turn on whether that method is most likely to get at some of the core issues and contradictions that the hon. Gentleman identified. I have absolute confidence, and I know that he shares this, that Stephen Shaw will do that. He is most likely to be able to do so under the terms of reference that he has accepted. If he comes back to the Home Secretary and me and tells us that he feels constrained, we will have to consider a response to that.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether it should be possible for someone to hide behind commercial confidentiality as a reason for not giving information. I accept the general premise that it should not. If that were to happen, I have no doubt that Stephen Shaw would come back to me. For the hon. Gentleman's information, Stephen Shaw has already been given all the Yarl's Wood contracts and all the documents relating to contracts and costings. He will use those as a basis for the line of questioning that the inquiry will take.

Alistair Burt: Does Mr. Shaw need formal permission from the Minister, or the Home Secretary, to dispense with commercial confidentiality, or can he make that sort of decision and a decision about public hearings on his own? What is the chain of accountability and authority?

Beverley Hughes: We have agreed the terms of reference with Stephen Shaw, and having been given the relevant information he can pursue issues in line with those terms of reference as he wishes. We have decided that the hearings will not be public at the moment. That is the situation unless Stephen Shaw comes back to me and says that he feels constrained, and that we need to rethink any aspect of the conduct and parameters of the inquiry.

Mr. Patrick Hall: On the matter of timing, surely my hon. Friend will agree that the time things will take is a possible constraint. The fact that the matter has gone on for so long without the investigation being completed, never mind anything being published about it, and that further criminal investigations are likely to take place, could lead to months of delays that would not help to restore public confidence. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is a constraint?

Beverley Hughes: With the greatest respect, my hon. Friend cannot have it both ways. I know that Stephen Shaw wants to conclude the inquiry in the most comprehensive way that he can in the shortest possible time. A balance is needed. The material gathered by Stephen Moore was very much work in progress, but Stephen Shaw will draw on that and will take the inquiry as far as he needs to to get to the bottom of the important questions being asked. I can assure the Chamber that his report will be published. I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that there is a balance to be struck. It is more important for us to get to the bottom of those questions than it is for me to ask Stephen Shaw to rush the inquiry through. When I met him just after he had started his work, we talked about timing and discussed that very point. He will do it in the shortest time he can while feeling that he has done the best work that he can.

On whether the centre should reopen before Stephen Shaw's work is done, I say to my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire that I do not want to delay the reopening of Yarl's Wood any longer than is necessary, but we will obviously take great interest in the results of the inquiry, when it is published.

We have already put in place revised arrangements, which include mandatory fire training and drills. They are witnessed by Home Office officials under a permit-to-use process, and they have to be successfully and satisfactorily completed before the Home Office will allow the building to open. Members already know that sprinklers are being installed throughout the centre together with additional fire-breaks, fire alarms and other associated safety modifications. That work has been undertaken following extensive consultation with other bodies, including Bedfordshire fire and rescue services. Operational procedures have also been scrutinised and enhanced, and improvements have been made to the building's internal security features. Contingency planning is being developed with the police, fire and ambulance services.

We plan to open the undamaged part of Yarl's Wood incrementally. On 28 September, the first phase will open for 60 single women. Following the successful establishment of that group, there will be a progressive reopening of the undamaged part of the centre to accommodate up to 400 people—single women and families—by spring 2005. We are not rushing that. We are introducing it in a planned, progressive and managed way to ensure that it is a success. There will be an incentive scheme to encourage responsible behaviour. Participation in constructive activity has been planned to encourage a safe and controlled environment for detainees and staff.

The hon. Gentleman wants details of detainees who were in Yarl's Wood on 14 February. Whether or not it is right to divulge that information, it would be very difficult to provide it. We would have to go through the files of every detainee to find out who they were and where they came from. That is the information that the hon. Gentleman wants. He wants not only their names, but where they came from. He is concerned that a disproportionate number of people with difficult backgrounds, such as those from prison, ended up in Yarl's Wood after the closure of remand places. I will check, but the policy that he outlined has not changed.

There were 385 people in Yarl's Wood at the time and they came from various sources. Some would have been detained for the first time at a port and brought to Yarl's Wood, and some would have been brought from other parts of the removal estate. There would have been others from the prison estate, and those dispersed from the prison estate were dispersed around the detention estate. They were not disproportionately placed at Yarl's Wood or any other detention centre.

The spirit of that policy was retained. I will check and write to the hon. Gentleman, but there was no deliberate attempt disproportionately to place difficult people at Yarl's Wood

Alistair Burt: I know that it is late in the debate, but my point was not that a disproportionate number of people may have been sent to Yarl's Wood, but that any were sent there. There was such a low-level and light security regimes, that no one from a difficult background should have been sent there.

Beverley Hughes: I need to check the policy commitment at that time. The hon. Gentleman implies that it meant that nobody from the prison estate would be placed in Yarl's Wood. I need to check if that was a policy commitment, and if so, what happened. The hon. Gentleman has asked several questions about checks and about Group 4's requirement to take everyone, and I will write to him about those matters.

I guarantee that Stephen Shaw will have access to all the information that he needs. He will do an excellent job. It will include the behaviour of all concerned, and he is aware of the comments made in court about Group 4. He has asked for a transcript of them and he will deal with them in his investigation. I have assured him that, to assist him in his inquiry, he will receive the full co-operation of the Home Office.

11.30 am

Sitting suspended until Two o'clock.

Community Policing

2 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Nicholas Winterton): The first debate this afternoon is initiated by the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew). The subject is community policing. Before I call the hon. Gentleman, may I congratulate him on being a prolific user of Westminster Hall? I think few hon. Members recognise the opportunities that this Chamber offers, but the hon. Gentleman certainly does.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am not sure that I can live up to that billing, particularly as it was you and I who got the idea off the ground. If nothing else, we will serve as a memorial to the long-term future of Westminster Hall. It is a wonderful Chamber, and we have debates here that we could never have in the main Chamber. We were right to push for it in the Modernisation Committee.

That is my first explanation for what I am doing. My second, as I have said to a number of colleagues, is that I asked for a debate on community safety and, thanks to the good offices of the Speaker, the title has come out as "Community Policing". I shall refer to community policing, but I shall refer also to community safety. If all else fails, do not blame me, blame the Speaker's Office. It is important that we consider the debate at this time. Before we started, I said in an aside to my hon. Friend the Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing, and Community Safety that this was a coming debate.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Would it be in order for the hon. Gentleman to seek an adjournment while I find my colleague who deals with community safety issues rather than community policing, which is the subject on which I was intending to embark?

Mr. Drew: I shall not be so indiscreet as to veer completely away from the subject, particularly as I have a lot of support from the police in Gloucestershire. It is good to see several hon. Members here today including a near neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. Dhanda).

I can talk on this matter with some expertise because, since I was elected in 1997, I have been out with the police at least every three months with inspector neighbourhood area patrols, so I have seen things at the raw end. Many of the experiences that I will talk about are the result of that.

I want to discuss the positive issues of community engagement and the preventive measures that are encapsulated by the title "community safety". I owe the police thanks for helping me construct the debate. I will quickly run through the roll of honour and then say no more about it. I thank the chief constable, Tim Brain and Superintendent Nigel Avron, who has briefed me carefully. I thank the three inspectors of the inspector neighbourhood areas, which is the structure we have in Gloucestershire: Pete Craddock, Mac McGarry and Paul Donovan. I also thank the district council's community support officers Phil Sullivan and Dilys Warren.

To complete the cycle of greatness, I would not want to ignore the voluntary sector. I have done a lot of work with neighbourhood watch with Eddie Whitlock and Phil Hughes, and with victim support with Richard Lacey, with whom I raised some money on the back of a tandem. We rode around 100 miles of Gloucestershire, so I know his backside if nothing else. I shall move quickly on.

The context of the debate is that people care passionately about law and order. All the evidence coming from polling or social organisations shows that the issue of law and order is highly salient. By chance, a group of pensioners came to visit me yesterday from Minchinhampton in my constituency. With no prompting, their first questions were all about law and order. It was the classic thing: "We used to have a sergeant; we used to have two constables in Minchinhampton, and we've got no one now, yet the problems—the burglaries and the disorder on Friday and Saturday night—seem worse than ever."

That problem is the crux of my debate. I said to that group what I always say at police consultative committee meetings: we want visible policing. People have a right to expect, when they pay their bill to the police authority—and there was a whacking great increase in Gloucestershire last year, which I shall not dwell on, but which people noticed and took a view on—that they will see the police actively engaged in their community. However, visible policing is not the same as effective policing.

Mr. Parmjit Dhanda (Gloucester): My hon. Friend mentioned the police precept—which was very big—but does he agree that it is often forgotten that the police precept is 9.7 per cent. of the overall community charge bill for Gloucestershire?

Mr. Drew: I agree, and I am not attacking the police. I spend a long time listening to them, and have great respect for them. However, the high precept has made an impression; people want to know what they are paying their money for. Visibility is what they want. Many people still have the notion that the best form of policing is the bobby on the beat. Unfortunately, the criminal fraternity has moved on and society has become somewhat more difficult. Hon. Members know that the police tell us that what is required is intelligence-based policing and the use of modern technology. Policing is now about working in a different way, although there is no escaping the fact that in rural areas—and I make no apology for focusing a great deal on rural areas—a conflict arises. It is not an easy question to resolve.

It is not only through an increase in police numbers that the Government have set about resolving the problem. When I visit INAs, I always meet new police who are in training. The numbers are greater than they have ever been, but so are the pressures. The Government's approach uses a raft of partnerships, which are incredibly valuable. The key ones are the crime and disorder reduction partnerships, but community safety partnerships are also important. The work involves agencies that were previously discrete; now probation and health are locked into the partnerships.

On Friday, the chief fire officer of Gloucestershire, Peter Jones, was saying how much the fire service appreciates being involved in going out on preventive work—not just dealing with smoke alarms. He suggested that, rather than expecting officers to retire at 48 or 49, it would be good to enable them to go on to that work, instead of using front-line officers to do it. I hope that the Minister will take note of that inspired aside from him; I have always argued the same about the police. They retire far too early; I do not mean that they retire from front-line work too early, but we could use their expertise when they retire.

In Gloucestershire, the key to what I am talking about has been the evolution of the tri-service facilities at Quedgeley in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester. Ambulance, fire and police services have come together in a new way of dealing with emergency calls and what is happening is also linked to the new police station at Quedgeley. Those responsible should be congratulated. I have always been in favour of the regional agenda, but I should be grateful for an assurance that it does not go as far as trying to undermine the tri-service arrangements that were put together with a lot of time, money and private finance initiative schemes. We do not want those to be ripped asunder by a sudden decision that the fire or ambulance service is to be reorganised in a way that means they cannot use the facilities.

I want, finally, to look at the importance of the voluntary sector. I have mentioned two voluntary organisations, but I would also include some of the preventive work that is being done with housing and health. Although such matters are not seen as the police's main responsibility, the police welcome engagement with those agencies. Another relevant agency would be social services, as the police argue that too often their biggest problem in the community is that they pick up the responsibility for jobs that others could, and in some respects should, do.

I make no apology for saying that the way that such things best come together is through some form of mutuality. I am interested, as is my hon. Friend the Minister, in concepts of mutuality and new forms of co-operation. I do not think that we should stay with existing systems and structures when better ones could encourage the greater sharing of responsibility and of the resources applied. That sounds like nice fluffy-bunny stuff, but in reality if that is made to work, it can be much more successful.

Much of the issue of community policing is tied in with two important pieces of legislation. They are the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and the Police Reform Act 2002. The first set up the whole agenda—making organisations work together in a different way so that they bear down on crime and disorder. Whether we like it or not, crime and disorder are the problems of our time. The latter Act brought in more organisations and introduced a more targeted approach—and a more effective one—to specific problems.

In Stroud, the strategies and organisations created on the back of the 2002 Act are working very well. They are clear, popular and easy to defend by those who explain them at meetings. The people who make them work—the police and the CSOs in Stroud district and those in the county council and other organisations—are heroes in a way because they have put so much of their own time into making the strategies as effective as they have become. I make no bones of the fact that trying to persuade the public that the system is working as well as it could is still a problem.

We need to give things time, but the structures are right and the legislation has spawned different areas of activity, such as the work of the racial incident unit. In Gloucestershire, we have not traditionally had a problem with a high level of racial crime, but sometimes an undercurrent of racism has been found in rural areas. Other issues, such as runaway children and domestic violence, have been around for generations, but now, because of the way in which crime and disorder reduction partnerships work, we are at least putting measures in place that can highlight what needs to be done. People come forward with their complaints with more confidence that something will be done.

The Police Reform Act 2002 broadened the crime and disorder context to bring in other organisations. The Government are to be congratulated on that. The Act also brought new appointments; there is a link with current changes that are establishing the idea of community well-being in the framework of local government. That has led to the establishment of new positions. In Stroud, we now have a number of neighbourhood wardens who go into the community, not necessarily under the auspices of the police, although they work very closely with them, and deal with all the relevant issues. They do not deal just with crime-related issues, but with good neighbourliness. They are already making a difference.

Mr. Dhanda: My hon. Friend and I both have a habit of slipping into speaking Gloucestershire from time to time. He mentioned INAs earlier, but I am not sure that all hon. Members are familiar with INAs, but they are policing areas in Gloucestershire. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) was not aware of that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) also made an interesting point about the involvement of local authorities. Does he agree that one of the most helpful things that the Government have done is to provide match funding to ensure that officers funded by city councils, such a park wardens and city centre managers, can now be beefed up to community support roles?

Mr. Drew: We are always willing to take more funds, wherever they come from, but particularly from central Government. I am sorry if anything was lost in the translation, but we in the west country tend to talk in a dialect and sometimes use abbreviations. I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford, but no doubt he has similar arrangements in his constituency and refers to them slightly differently.

My final point about the 2002 Act is that it highlights what needs to be done about disorder, but that was not happening with antisocial behaviour orders. We in rural areas have not been great users of such orders, but we are beginning to use them more now because they have been streamlined. I do not entirely belong to the same school of thought as my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) when he argues about that, but the public have been way ahead of us in realising the

[Mr. Drew]

problems that antisocial behaviour causes and we must be seen to be doing something about that sooner rather than later. That is something that rural, as well as urban, Britain should learn from.

Another issue on the back of the two Acts is that so much is tied up in the word "partnership". It has not only spawned many new activities, but has reconstituted some existing activities so that people, certainly the professionals, can see the delivery of services being clearer cut. We are fortunate in having help from central Government. We have a number of bobby buses so that we can send the police out to rural areas. Police stations disappeared generations ago and the visibility of policing is important.

We have also begun to pull together some of the drug and alcohol strategies with the work of drug action teams and a very successful substance abuse group in Stroud. They are now reporting directly to the community safety group and through that to the crime and disorder reduction partnership.

Last, but not least, we were proud to pioneer—not internationally because the idea came from Canada—messages in a bottle whereby older people are encouraged to put a medicine bottle in their fridge with all their details inside. That was encouraged by the police because when they break into a place where someone may be ill, they fear having no easy access to the details. My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford pressed that idea with the support of the police. There is much good going on, but much more could be done.

In conclusion, I refer to what I see as the key problems and how the Government are setting about trying to overcome those problems, but I could do with some advice from my hon. Friend the Minister on how we could do better and how the message could be taken to the Strouds of this world to ensure that people understand exactly what is happening. First, there is a degree of complexity between people and partnerships. I have already referred to many of them and one day I shall get someone to draw out for me all the different interrelated partnerships that exist between the statutory, voluntary and private sectors.

There is a worry about lack of co-ordination, as well as expense in terms of time, let alone money, because people must attend so many meetings nowadays. I suppose that we could look at some form of rationalisation, but that, again, has been overtaken by events with the start of the local strategic partnerships within which, supposedly, all the other partnerships sit. I sit on the Stroud local strategic partnership, as I do indirectly on the county partnership. There is much good will but some question about what it is turning up. The crime and disorder agenda often sets the wider agenda for the local strategic partnership. That may be a good thing or may show that other areas are weaker than they should be.

The second issue concerns resources. As always, there will be special pleading by people in rural areas. Sparsity issues and the fact that such areas have traditionally been less well funded do not mean that there are no problems with drug abuse and disorder and that people do not ask why they do not see the police. We must take account of that in the funding structure. The issue must be addressed by local government, police authorities and, of course, central Government.

The raft of measures that the Government have introduced, though highly creditable, are expensive to run. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will assure us that we are not looking for quick fixes but are providing long-term funding streams. The programmes may change slightly over time, but we must see how they work. That is important as places such as Gloucestershire begin to get access to CSOs, who will work with neighbourhood wardens, specials and the full-time police. We must ensure that there is proper protocol and that each office knows what it is to do and that it will be appropriately funded.

Another issue is how we engage the public in policing, particularly the kind that they want: traditional, old-fashioned policing that tackles the criminal fraternity. The approach in Gloucestershire is good. There are regular meetings with consultative committees, and I always find the police accessible. I am not so keen on their phone line, but I believe that they have ironed out many of the problems.

Unfortunately, research from the Local Government Association indicates that people's opinions of the police tend to be worse after they have had contact with them than before. I am afraid that that is not unusual. People have contact with the police in the most pressured situations—when they have been robbed or attacked or something has gone badly wrong in their lives—so it is not difficult to understand that finding. However, improvement is needed in that area. For that reason, the call from the police for support from the other organisations is crucial. It is no good putting together all these different partnerships if the police end up at the front doing all the difficult business. It is important to know that everyone is capable of pulling together. The ASBO experience is a good example. The police have been calling for ASBOs to be used much more often, but other organisations have been less than forthcoming.

I seek from my hon. Friend the Minister guarantees that, once the system is in place, it will be left alone. We must let it work its way through to a natural conclusion, so that people know what the different roles are and that resources are in place. My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester rightly pointed out that there was a big debate in Gloucestershire on the precept. People want to know that they are getting value for money and that things are being done.

My last point is that policing must be done in a very positive light. If it is seen to be purely negative—all about catching people rather than prevention—I am afraid that society will always lose. Policing will work much better if partnerships continue and build on a level of positive engagement in which the public and the voluntary sector are included. If that happens, the Government will have done well. More particularly, people will feel much more confident. They will go out in the evening, which is something that many say that they are not prepared to do at present.

2.24 pm

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on securing this very important debate and, as you said, Mr. Deputy

Speaker, on his hard work in securing many other debates like this one. Luck, as well as assiduity, plays a part. I ask for many debates in this Chamber, but they are never called.

In Staffordshire this year, there has been an impressive reduction in crime, and an impressive increase in Staffordshire police's detection rate. I trust the figures, because a few years ago, Staffordshire was ahead of most forces in adopting the ethical recording of the crime that was reported to it. As a result, it bore the pain of an apparent increase in the number of offences committed. I am therefore inclined to trust the improvement shown by the current statistics.

I am pleased to pay tribute to our chief constable, John Giffard, and his police officers, for their enormous contribution to this year's very happy situation. I am sure that they would agree that there is much more to community policing than putting police officers in uniforms and sending them out on to the streets. The police are supported by a great team of people, including the very professional civilian staff who greatly contribute to the work of police officers and help them to carry out their other duties by supporting them in those duties.

Increasingly, we see closed-circuit television cameras on our street corners, which of course means a control room somewhere that is usually staffed by employees of the council or private security firms. Again, they support the police in the valuable work that they do.

Traffic wardens, too, are part of the family of the community police. They do very important work, especially in more rural areas where people get quite het up about those who break road restrictions with impunity. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud said, CSOs are the latest addition to the police family. He also rightly mentioned neighbourhood wardens, who have been doing valuable work in areas that may be more built up than those in the Staffordshire constituency that I represent.

I draw particular attention to the local authorities that are part of the crime and disorder reduction partnerships, and to the support and the resources that they bring to community policing. I shall talk later about special constables, who have an important role to play in supplementing the work of full-time police officers, as do the neighbourhood watch schemes and the public.

The tremendous success of the Staffordshire police relates to other parts of the country in that the police are aided greatly these days by the technology that they use. From a shaky start six years ago, Staffordshire police are now so good at handling calls that, this year, they won two awards, including a European one, for their call- handling prowess. I am grateful to them for making that great improvement in their call handling, which was necessary.

My hon. Friend the Minister may want to talk about the radio system because of the great amount that is being invested in it and the fact that it is diverting funds from other parts of the policing budget because of its importance. Another important new piece of technology is the automatic number plate reader—the ANPR—which is a tremendous aid to policing in Staffordshire. I have been with the police when they have used ANPRs by the side of the road in a community and on the motorway. Last year, I attended the V2002 pop concert, not as a concert-goer but as an observer of the policing operation for what was a huge event. The ANPR was a valuable tool there, too.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud also mentioned the visibility of the police in rural areas where there are no longer any police stations. Staffordshire is one of the few forces that possess their own mobile police station. At the V2002 concert, the front desk and holding cells—an important attribute of that service—were in full use. The sergeant, whose idea it was, proudly showed me around it and told me that police forces around the country had shown great interest in hiring it from Staffordshire police when they are not using it, for use in rural locations in their areas. That tool has helped Staffordshire police and, it seems, other forces around the country.

Full-time police officers do such magnificent work every day of the year in every community. Thanks to the crime fighting fund, record numbers of police officers in uniform are doing their valuable work for our communities both nationally and locally in Staffordshire. When I was elected in 1997, the police authority in Staffordshire had recently made the difficult decision to freeze recruitment of police officers for three years because of financial difficulties. That caused a problem, and we have been slightly slower in reaching a new high for numbers of police officers than other parts of the country because of the continuing effects of the freeze. We have, however, certainly taken full advantage of the crime fighting fund.

In Staffordshire, the police authority showed political courage in raising the council tax precept for policing. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud observed, however, we have suffered electorally as a result. In this year's local elections, there was a big swing away from Labour candidates. When I talked to people about why that happened, many of them mentioned the large increase in their council tax, which was a function of the councils, which raise the majority of council tax, and the police authority. There is an interesting lesson there for politicians of all parties: the public may well clamour for more police officers on the beat, but there is a cost. In Staffordshire, people are beginning to notice the cost. Perhaps they will be more willing to listen to solutions that complement the valuable work of police officers. I want to develop that idea later in my speech.

In August 2002, we moved to a new system of allocating a uniformed police officer to every local government ward in Staffordshire as community beat officers. It is now possible for any Staffordshire resident to know the name and see the uniform of the police officer allocated to their area. That is particularly valuable in rural areas, which have alleged that they have been denuded of police officers and that they therefore never the see the police. Rural areas are now seeing the police.

I can speak from personal knowledge about the presence of a police officer on the beat. In the summer recess, I took the opportunity to accompany a couple of community beat officers as they pounded the beats of the rural areas that they represent. I walked the streets of Penkridge and Wheaton Aston with officers, and I saw the areas that they police. We took the opportunity to stop and speak to local people. For example, PC Calladine, the officer for Wheaton Aston, and I were

[Mr. David Kidney]

called across by the local neighbourhood watch co-ordinator to discuss an issue. Because PC Calladine knows his beat, he took me to a woman who was concerned by vandalism to the local public payphone, and we were able to exchange information about it.

That shows the value, especially in rural areas, of the individual police officer on the beat. I must say that, in the several hours that I spent in Penkridge and Wheaton Aston, the most serious crime that we detected by pounding the streets was an out-of-date tax disc on the windscreen of somebody's car. The police officer cautioned the person responsible and explained that he was going to report them to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, which might well prosecute them and would certainly demand repayment of the back duty. That is a valuable service, but police officers are expensive resources.

People must understand that, while police officers are performing such duties, they are not performing the other services that people also want. If, for example, I am woken up by the sounds of an apparent burglary downstairs and dial 999, I do not want to hear that the beat officer will start walking promptly towards my house and will be with me in an hour; I want to hear that the police will be there in minutes. Indeed, I have had to ring 999 once during my six years as a Member of Parliament. I thought that someone was trying to break into my next-door neighbour's house. I did not say, "I am an MP. I expect a super service." Nevertheless, two police cars appeared within minutes of that 999 call, and that was impressive. However, it is important to remember that there has to be a balance between the visibility of police officers walking their beats to give reassurance and to collect human intelligence, and the ability of the police to respond appropriately to situations that might need a fast response or the attendance of many officers.

That brings me to community safety officers. Again, it is marvellous that the Government are offering money from central funds to allow police forces to recruit community safety officers. As a result of that fund, Staffordshire has just announced the recruitment of its first 10 CSOs. I am grateful to the Minister for that. I have spoken to the chief constable about how he intends using that resource, and he is minded—I agree with him—to focus the work of the CSOs on antisocial behaviour.

I feel sorry for the police officers bombarded with calls about antisocial behaviour, because it is often the case that no crime has been committed. Nevertheless, everyone wants to know why the police cannot knock on a neighbour's door and ask them to turn down the music, to stop the argument or to stop using bad language. The police are under public pressure to turn up, so they do what is wanted, but it is not their job because no crime is involved. Using CSOs is a good alternative, because they can add presence with their uniform. They can also supplement the work of the local authority and the housing authority, as they are more likely to be responsible for dealing with antisocial behaviour. I believe that CSOs can play a valuable role. I would be interested to know whether the Minister envisages that being a front-line use of community safety officers.

When people speak of their dissatisfaction with crime levels, they do not say that are too many burglaries—we have seen a hugely impressive reduction in the number of burglaries in Staffordshire. Nor do they talk about car crime or theft, which have also seen huge reductions. They tend to talk about antisocial behaviour. As I said, much antisocial behaviour is not criminal and it is not a priority for the police. However, people consider that it comes under the heading of community policing, and they want something to be done about it. I hope that CSOs will be used in Staffordshire as part of the police response.

I want to talk about the valuable role of special constables, because I have walked the beat with them. I have talked to them about why they chose to do that brave and good work, which they do for no financial reward. I have been impressed with their motivation and their desire to do something good for the community. The fact that such people have the valuable intention to put something back into the community should be encouraged and facilitated.

Since the crime fighting fund starting paying for more police officers to be recruited, special constables in Staffordshire have decided that that they like the work and want to convert to full-time police officers. That has left us with fewer special constables. We have finally woken up to that, and Staffordshire has started a number of campaigns to recruit new special constables. I hope that the Minister can say something about national support for those local recruitment campaigns. I have assured the police in Staffordshire that I want to support them in their recruitment because I know how valuable the work of specials can be.

That brings me to the other partner in policing—the public. The police in Staffordshire organise the neighbourhood watch. The crime reduction partnerships obviously give verbal support to it, and councils pay for neighbourhood watch signs on lamp posts showing that an area has a scheme in operation. I do not think that the commitment of the other partners to neighbourhood watch schemes is as good as that of the police. I would like it to be better, and I would like to hear the Minister's views on that.

The police's support for neighbourhood watch in Staffordshire is excellent. They have dedicated officers, and a good telephone warning and messaging system for their co-ordinators. Neighbourhood watch co-ordinators have strong support. They have an annual conference, and between conferences they do some recruitment. I support all that, and I have been ever-present when they held their annual conferences in my constituency. I am committed to neighbourhood watch, but I think that the scheme could be much better. That is an example of the public accepting some responsibility for the policing of their areas. I believe that the most effective deterrent to crime is the fear of detection. The police on their own cannot detect criminals very well or frequently without the support of the eyes and ears of the public. So often it is thanks to information provided by the public that the police are able to secure convictions.

Neighbourhood watch is a good example of the formal organisation of the public into recognising their responsibilities and having the opportunity to carry them out. Every area should be a neighbourhood watch area, which is not yet the situation in Staffordshire. I

want to hear the Minister say that she agrees with me on the value that I place on that, and that there will be national support for neighbourhood watch recruitment and support once systems are in place. It is so important that, as is the case in Staffordshire, the police can share their successes with their neighbourhood watch schemes as a result of the information collected. Those successes constantly reinforce for people the message that something useful and valuable is being done for their community. I hope that the Minister can speak on that, and also say that the status of neighbourhood watch schemes in the crime and disorder reduction partnerships will be raised in coming years, and that they will be a priority for the support of those partnerships.

It is the personal responsibility of each of us to take care and follow sensible crime prevention advice over matters such as property marking and locking windows and doors when we go out. We should also go that little step further and actively support the police in their difficult and courageous work, in whatever ways we can. That can happen as long as it is not difficult—as long as we can get through when we make a phone call and that members of a neighbourhood watch scheme have the support that they need. That is my wish, and I hope that the Minister will comment on it.

2.41 pm

Mr. Parmjit Dhanda (Gloucester): The debate has already been quite an education for me as I have listened to my two colleagues. I now know where to go if I want a ticket for V2002, although I might be dragged into doing a little community policing work. I have also learned that if I ever need to speak to my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), I should come to Westminster Hall first. It is very useful to know that this is where I am most likely to find him.

I wish to make a couple of brief points on the Gloucestershire background to this debate. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud said, we have had a vigorous debate in the past 12 months on policing and funding issues. When last year's settlement came through, we were a little disappointed because we were one of the 19 authorities that received a 3 per cent. increase. At the same time, we must bear in mind that inflation is 2.5 per cent. and that the police grant for Gloucestershire for 2002–03 is at its highest ever level, £55.34 million.

The story does not end there, because we need to take into account a number of subsequent grants to get the full picture for Gloucestershire, not least the rural policing fund that this Government introduced in 1997, which is now worth some £778,000 for Gloucestershire, and is going up. Other contributions include money—about £190,000—towards Airwave, the local communications channel. Just before last Christmas we were told that we would get another £180,000 towards the provision of video interview and rape examination suites. Perhaps the most satisfying thing about being the Member for Gloucester, however, is the tri-service centre, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud referred. It is a £6 million private finance initiative scheme and the first such centre in the country. It works superbly. It is a great capital investment project, reducing crime and doing its bit for the ambulance service and the local fire authority as well.

In addition, we are to have a £25.2 million brand new police headquarters at the same site in Quedgeley. We are lucky. As my hon. Friend also said, we are blessed with some very good local community officers. Dominic Everiss, who works on the boundary between Gloucester and Stroud, is one of many officers who do a good job at a local level. When considering the Gloucestershire experience, we must remember the neighbourhood projects and the work done by people such as Mark Gale—I know that the Minister knows this—in reducing crime and working with communities. They make a huge difference.

During this debate about policing and whether we are making a difference, my hon. Friends have put the case about police numbers and uniformed presence very well. I dug up some figures from the House of Commons Library the other day because I wanted to get a good look at the picture in Gloucestershire. I have a brief summary of the position since 1979, which is as far back as the Library's figures went. In 1979, there were 1,096 police officers in the county. Numbers rose steadily until 1984 when they peaked at 1,149. The figure stayed around that mark for a number of years. It gradually peaked again at 1,174 in 1992, but that was the highest level that it reached under the Conservative Government. It then fell steadily year on year and kept falling until 1999—it takes time to turn round such a problem. At its lowest ebb, in 1999, the figure was 1,104. The crime fighting fund came into force in the subsequent year and the figure steadily rose. In 2002, it had reached 1,183, and it has now risen to its highest ever level of 1,240.

I pay tribute to one of the police officers we have left out: Chris Merrick, who is the divisional commander for the Gloucester and Forest of Dean division. Chris Merrick deserves the plaudits that he gets because he challenged the scaremongering that sometimes goes on. The weekend before last, a front page in our local paper in Gloucester, *The Citizen*, claimed that the city centre was not being adequately policed. Chirs Merrick put that right on the letters page. He said that, as well as the work that was going on in the city centre, there were

"another three INAs in Gloucester—Hucclecote, Gloucester South and Barton Street—which all have officers working in them 24 hours a day to respond to incidents and support officers in neighbouring areas".

He said:

"Furthermore, we have many other officers working from Gloucester Central Police Station, such as our Operation Resolve robbery squad, CID, scenes of crime officers, Operation Gemini, Professional Development Unit, the Crime Management Unit, the Divisional Support Group, and our Barton Street-based Road Policing Unit to assist as and when required.

Add to this our Force Operations Unit, which includes the Motorway Unit, the Dog Section and firearms teams, and readers may be assured that rather than the 20 officers your article suggests are policing the city centre, the figure can be multiplied many times."

He said that the article was inaccurate. He continued:

"The force as a whole now has more than 1,240 officers—the most it has had in its history".

My two colleagues made good points about the uniformed presence. It is not only a question of police officers; it is also about community support officers and others. I got some statistics from the House of Commons Library on the civilian support staff based in

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our head offices. In 2002, 545 civilian support staff were based in police offices in Gloucestershire. That is an increase from 1992 when there were 367. The figure is still rising. We have another 60 community support officers, who will be out patrolling the streets. It is important to point out that a uniformed presence on the streets—community support officers—is not about policing on the cheap. It is about communities being empowered and people from communities helping to police their own areas. Involving communities in the policing of their areas can reduce crime. That is the whole idea behind the CSO scheme.

My hon. Friends the Members for Stroud and for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) mentioned specials. We are lucky to have a number of specials working in Gloucestershire and we have a long and proud history of specials. Will the Minister talk about the protocols for specials and how they will continue to fit into the scheme when we have a uniformed presence with police officers and CSOs? It is important that we maintain our specials and that they continue to feel a valued part of policing in our county and beyond.

Mr. Drew: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Dhanda: I was about to conclude but I will gladly give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Drew: I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree with what I have to say, and I want to address the Minister through him. Getting time off to serve is one of the biggest problems that specials face. We ought to encourage employers to see the benefit of serving with the specials as a form of community engagement. The issue is important and it is getting more difficult to resolve.

Mr. Dhanda: I agree and I hope that the Minister can elaborate on that.

We are blessed locally with very good private companies that are ethically minded. Our local Barclays bank and Cheltenham and Gloucester building society are keen to become involved in community initiatives, and I would like the Government to do more to involve them in communities and policing. If we gave them the opportunity, they would grasp the nettle.

2.51 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I congratulate the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on securing the debate. Stroud is the constituency most similar to my own, so I recognise several of the matters that he has raised—I recently met Gloucestershire's chief constable, Tim Brain, who served part of his career in Avon and Somerset police and whose work I commend.

Listening to the hon. Gentleman, I had running through my head the memory of one of my rare excursions to Gloucester to play a rugby match many years ago, in which a Gloucester forward decided to bite me on the top of my head. I have had a very poor opinion of law and order in Gloucester ever since, but no doubt things have changed.

Mr. Dhanda: The hon. Gentleman is welcome to return to Gloucester. We had the same discussion on Select Committee business in the United States recently, and I assure him that no one will bite him on his head.

Mr. Heath: That is a welcome reassurance.

Community policing is about keeping the peace. That is one of its prime functions. I am a great believer in community police patrols for several reasons. I accept that they do not result in a massive decline in the clear-up rate, and I accept that detection is not their primary function.

The police patrol function distinguishes itself in three ways. First, it deters. That can be over-emphasised, but a uniformed police presence has a deterrent effect. Secondly, it reassures communities and individuals who would otherwise feel vulnerable. Thirdly, it informs the detection process through a constant flow of low-level intelligence, which may have a significant effect.

I am constantly worried by the perception that community policing and the patrol function are marginal activities for police forces, and that those are expendable when times are difficult and resources are stretched. That is not to say that other factors to which hon. Members referred are not important. Policing can be put only into the context of the community that it serves. Environmental considerations such as lighting, children's facilities, the strategic partnerships that have been mentioned, other uniformed presence and other agencies in the field all play a part in creating a safe, law-abiding environment.

I return to whether we have an effective community policing strategy in this country. Inevitably, I refer to my experiences and I make no apologies for that. I had a long involvement with the Avon and Somerset police authority, but for some time I was also a member of the Audit Commission. One of the functions of the commission was to look at the effectiveness of police forces. Just before I left the Audit Commission back in 1996, I recall that we published an extremely useful document, which I revisited to see whether it had any lessons that were still relevant. The document is called "Streetwise: Effective Police Patrol". It was published in February 1996 and it examined the patrol function.

The document came to the conclusion—much of this is still relevant—that the public attach great value to police patrolling, as many hon. Members have said. It asserts that uniformed police officers have a function in reassuring the community. People like to know who their local bobby is and I commend Gloucestershire for achieving that sort of recognition. Effective patrolling underpins an important and basic concept in British policing, which is policing by consent. When a police officer is part of a community and known by it, that underpins a feeling that is the basis of British policing—policing by, for and from within the community rather than something applied by the external force of state control.

Back in 1996, most people were dissatisfied with the way that police functions were carried out and about 80 per cent. of people wanted to see more police. I do not know what the more recent figures are but I would be surprised if they have changed much. People want to see more police and they are worried when their police officers seem to disappear at regular intervals. That is a

particular problem in rural areas, as police officers often seem to be taken from rural communities to the cities to meet the latest targets.

The Audit Commission study revealed that at any given time only 5 per cent. of police strength was on the streets. I shall return to that matter in a moment because it is an education as to what happens in reality. There were also criticisms of the way in which the police patrol function was managed. Too often, officers who are on patrol are unsure about what they are expected to achieve and their principal role. The lack of adequate briefings or debriefings was criticised. Often, when a police officer returned to the station at the end of a patrol they could not pass on what they had learned that day to anyone and patrolling was not well targeted.

I return to the figure of 5 per cent. as it is an interesting illustration of where all the police have gone. The Audit Commission considered a medium-sized force of 2,500 officers serving a million people. Of those 2,500 officers, many are on specialist duties of one sort or another, and there are probably about 1,350 available for patrol at the outset. Of course, policing is a 24-hour-a-day activity, so there is a shift pattern. During each shift, 335 of the original 2,500 officers are available. However, that number is cut down by sickness, training, attendance at court and biannual leave. It is reasonable to say that only 250 of those 2,500 officers are available for patrol at that point. People on patrol have to do other things. They have to interview prisoners and fill in forms—they have to do all the things that are associated with their function as officers. Making all those assumptions, we end up with just 125 of the original 2,500 officers available on the street to that county or policing area. That is a rapid and telling decline.

The Audit Commission put it another way. It considered the case of a reasonably big city with a population of, say, 180,000. Such a city will have 1,400 miles of pavement, 850 acres of parks and open spaces, 770 miles of road, 75,000 houses, 230 pubs and 95 schools, and it will have just 10 police officers on the streets. When they are spread as thinly as that, is no wonder that people say that they do not often see a police officer.

There are ways in which the problem can be addressed and the dilution can be mitigated. Geographic policing has been mentioned: it should be standard practice throughout the country. Named officers should police named areas, so that everybody knows who they are. If that is done, one way of undermining it is to move the officer on every five minutes and put a new named person in place. That happens alarmingly often and for a variety of reasons. A named officer in a geographical area has a problem-solving remit and can analyse patterns. He might do it on an ad hoc, unscientific basis, but that can help to identify where the problems lie in the patch and he can feed back information about the patterns. There can also be intelligent patrolling, targeted to ensure that the police officer is visible at the time when it will have most impact on the people whom we seek to reassure—when the pubs chuck out in the middle of a market town or when the pensions are collected at the post office.

If a patrol function is carried out properly, it will go wider than simply policing and will touch on community safety, the subject that the hon. Member for Stroud really wanted to debate. Community policing is more than just a marginal area of police activity. It is not just part of the police function, it is vital to good community relations and the quality of life of an area. At the moment, it is beset by continual funding problems. I accept that there are more officers in our provincial forces than there were a few years ago, but there are still too few to reassure people that they have adequate policing. There are inequalities, and there is a feeling that not only the police but other agencies, such as the magistrates courts, are retreating from rural areas. Everything seems to disappear into the nearest town, or even further away, and there are difficulties with police management.

Notwithstanding all the difficulties mentioned by the hon. Member for Stroud, and the fact that so many officers have joined the regular force, it is important to keep the special strength up. We should have retained officers, as I have said many times. However, the council tax business is now a real deterrent. It is causing problems. People are refusing to pay because they say that they are being asked for more money but are not getting a better service. That is why we hear wild talk about splitting up police authority areas and electing sheriffs—a sort of wild west scenario. It is a consequence of people feeling that they do not get value for money from their police force. The Government need to deal with that; they neglect it at their peril.

3.3 pm

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I cannot pretend to be the aficionado of this Chamber that the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) is, but it is a useful forum for less partisan discussions about issues of concern. I welcome the debate because, as the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) has said, it concerns something that actually matters to the people whom we are elected to represent. I sometimes think that the House spends too long debating issues with which many people cannot readily identify, but today's debate is certainly about an issue that most people identify with. It takes place against a background of rising public disillusionment with the police and the law and order system.

There is an increasing perception among many members of the public that someone who is largely law-abiding—obviously, the description must be qualified—will get everything thrown at them for doing the slightest thing wrong, whereas habitual criminals and people who present a serious problem seem to get away with impunity. That may not be an accurate picture, but I believe that it is a common perception in the communities that we serve.

The term "community policing" is used by different people to describe different things. Some use it to describe the function of a police officer walking down the street or round the village. That is often coupled with references to reassurance, as if that is the be all and end all of the matter. I get very angry when I hear people talking about community policing as a means of reassurance. Reassurance comes as a result of doing what people want, which is preventing, deterring and detecting crime—not from being able to see a police officer. Reassurance is a result, not a fundamental objective, of effective community policing.

My definition of community policing is one in which officers are actively involved in the community. The hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) made reference

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to an example in his constituency. There are good examples throughout the country of officers being available almost day and night, often setting their own shift patterns and deciding the best times for them to be on or off duty. Officers are involved with public sector and other organisations that serve the community, such as housing associations, the housing and planning authorities, environmental health, waste collection and so on. They have a vital role in that respect, but they also play a key part in the detection and deterrence function of the police.

It is true that community police officers carry out the function that we have heard about from New York, explained in the broken windows theory about helping to keep the environment attractive, so that it is less of a cause of crime. However, good community police officers are also familiar with the people whom they serve; they have their ear to the ground and pick up low-level intelligence, which often leads their colleagues to significant policing actions. What I am describing raises issues of personnel, including civilians and the countless people who have been described as the police family—not just police officers but CSOs, civilians, street wardens, the accredited community safety officers and, importantly, special constables, whom several hon. Members have mentioned.

I shall not rehearse today the arguments that I have had with the Minister's predecessors about CSOs. The Conservative party has never opposed, and would never oppose, a role for civilians in helping the police. Indeed, a Conservative Government worked hard to promote the concept of civilianisation of police authority posts that did not need a police officer. There are two matters on which we differ strongly from the Government; on one of them we are on the same side as the Liberal Democrats.

One of those matters is police powers. It is our fundamental belief that police powers should be given only to people who have been trained at the same level and with the same rigour—which effectively means regular police officers. The second matter involves our belief that the decision whether to employ CSOs or regular officers should be made at force level, and should not be imposed by Government. Of course, many forces have CSOs, but when the Government produce a ring-fenced fund that is available only to be spent on CSOs, it is hardly a surprise when CSOs are appointed. If the Government had said, "Here's £60 million that we're going to add across the board to police forces' budgets," and left police authorities to decide how many CSOs or regular officers to employ, in whatever permutation, we might have a different picture from that which we have today. That is particularly so as it becomes increasingly obvious that the cost of employing a CSO is not dramatically cheaper than that of employing a regular officer. The cost is cheaper, but not to the extent that was perhaps once perceived. The training costs are obviously very much cheaper, because CSOs get comparatively little training.

The problem of policing versus civilians and the way that that links through to police numbers, to which all hon. Members have referred, is connected to the issue of crime numbers. In the last 30 or 40 years, the number of crimes per police officer has increased at least tenfold, and I have some statistics that estimate that there has been up to a seventeen-fold increase. The burden of crime that we are expecting each police officer to deal with has therefore increased dramatically.

That leads me on to issue of council tax precepts and the growing increases that we have seen over the last few years. We have heard about the increases in Gloucester and Staffordshire, and one can find similar figures in Cambridgeshire and most other police authority areas. However, coupled with that is the point that the hon. Member for Stafford made, which is the increasing public resistance to and concern about those increases. I am quite certain that the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome is correct that part of that concern is due to the fact that people do not see any benefit as a result of that increase. That is partly because they do not see the police officers, but it is also due to the increasing problem that police officers do not attend the scenes of crimes that they do not believe to be significant. That is particularly true in rural areas, but I believe that the situation is the same in many urban areas.

There is plenty of anecdotal evidence that many crimes are reported not because the victims ever expect them to be solved, but because they need to report them to claim on the insurance for whatever has been stolen. The consequence of that is that more and more local authorities—both the London boroughs and those outside London—now use their council tax either to pay accredited CSOs or, in some cases, to buy in officers from the police force, because they want to have more control over what is going on, and to feel that they are providing police officers to be seen on the streets by the people they serve. That is an indication of the lack of accountability between police forces and the communities that they serve.

That lack of accountability is largely due to the huge increase in centralisation that we have seen over the last few years of both direct and financial control. There are so many ring-fenced, penny packets of money in police budgets, and the only decision that is open to the discretion of police authorities is whether they get them, rather than how to spend them. One extreme example that my local authority has given me is of an apparently national budget of £2 million to be used for video systems. Dividing £2 million up between 43 forces does not add up to very much and, when one takes into account the huge cost of compiling a bid, which is so commonplace these days, one ends up with a big question mark over whether the plan is worth it.

Lack of accountability is also related to the question of whether the visibility of police officers has anything to do with effectiveness. It was suggested earlier that there is somehow a conflict between visible policing and effective policing. I do not believe that that is the case, as I made clear earlier. The role of a visible community police officer is critical not only in deterring, but in combating and detecting crime. There is ample evidence of that from some parts of the country—the North Wales police has pioneered this approach—and from the United States.

Other hon. Members mentioned the particular problems of rural areas. I stand second to no one in my concern for rural areas, where problems of lack of police numbers, visibility and attendance at crime scenes may be more obvious than anywhere else. It is difficult to see how effectiveness can be increased if the police do not

attend crime scenes. There can be no expectation that a crime will ever be solved if no statement, or any other evidence, is taken. Such failures, which are caused by several factors such as centralisation, give rise to public scepticism about policing and encourage the public's resistance to increases in the council tax precept to which all hon. Members have referred.

The fundamental issue that all politicians must challenge is how we rebuild a system of trust and accountability between police forces and the people whom they serve. That is not a criticism of, or a negative reflection on police officers—I have huge admiration for them—but a criticism of the system in which they are ever increasingly forced to operate.

The hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. Dhanda) referred to the huge increase in the number of civilians in his local constabulary from 367 to 545. Has he looked into the breakdown of what they do? How many of those extra civilians are involved in anything that could be described as combating crime, and how many are involved in the bureaucracy that is now enshrined in every police force, such as filling in forms about Government targets and the countless other administrative functions that now burden every authority?

Mr. Dhanda: I can inform the hon. Gentleman that quite a few of those civilians—I do not have a specific number—are civilian statement-takers, which frees more police officers to provide a greater uniformed presence on the streets.

Mr. Paice: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is right, but most police forces went down that road a long time ago. I suspect that many of the 367 civilians that he referred to at the starting point, which I believe was in 1997, were already performing the functions that police officers need not do. That idea was pioneered by the previous Government.

This afternoon, I have heard some side-swipes at what may be perceived as Conservative policy. As we have made no announcements on that front, any such side-swipe is purely speculative. The role of Government must now be about refocusing the linkage between the communities and the police forces that serve them. That must involve an element of democracy. The partnerships about which hon. Members have spoken highly are a step forward—I would not decry that—but they are not the sole solution.

We have to consider more clearly direct accountability between police forces and their communities. We will then see the dramatic step change in the role of community policing that I believe is behind every hon. Member's speech. We all want that. There is an increasingly widespread belief that it is an important part of policing, but the issue is how we make that happen. We have a long way to go to achieve that.

3.18 pm

The Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing, and Community Safety (Ms Hazel Blears): I am delighted to reply to the debate. I believe that I am one of the few Ministers who spend more time in Westminster Hall than in many other places in Parliament, and I am delighted to be here again.

We have had an excellent debate, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on his thoughtful and perceptive contribution, which considered the wider issues of community policing and how that is central to making our communities safer, healthier and more vibrant places for people to live and work in. That is the breadth of today's debate.

I am also delighted that my hon. Friends the Members for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) and for Gloucester (Mr. Dhanda) have been able to contribute the views from their patches. I have been impressed by the connection that all hon. Members have with their local police forces. I had no idea that most Members of Parliament were in effect community support officers in their free time. I am delighted to welcome them to the extended police family and I am sure that they are making an excellent contribution to safety in their communities.

In the short time available, I want to address many of the issues that have been raised. First, community policing is not just a warm, friendly feeling. It is not simply about reassurance, but it is key to making our police services both visible and effective. I am glad to agree with the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) at least on that. Community policing is not a mutually contradictory way of policing; good community policing means gathering intelligence, knowing what is going on in the patch, feeding into strategic responses and increasing the confidence within communities, so that their members feel able to come forward and give the police information on which they can act. In our drive towards community policing, we must be clear that we want to value, reward and enhance the skills involved. In the past, the community officer was almost at the end of the chain; he did not play the central role that we now envisage.

Community policing is not just about police officers. We have heard a lot about the extended police family, community support officers, neighbourhood wardens, street wardens and neighbourhood watch, and latterly schools watch and hospital watch. Finally, what can people do to re-establish the norms of decent behaviour in the places where they live and work? The extended family embraces all of us. We face a step change, moving from policing by consent, which was emphasised by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), to policing by co-operation. That is a significant step. If one is policed by consent, one is a passive recipient of police services, whereas if one is policed by co-operation, one becomes an active player—a citizen with an important role in the process.

Despite the initial reluctance of the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire, the introduction of community support officers has been welcomed across the country. In Lancashire, we are piloting an innovative use of those officers, a tri-service project that mirrors in some ways the one in Gloucestershire between the police and the fire and ambulance services. We are beginning to pilot community support officers as the first port of call for all the blue-light services. That is an exciting development, creating added value by co-ordinating all our services. It is not about policing on the cheap; it is about thinking creatively about the skill mix that is needed. I am disappointed by the lack of creativity and imagination of the hon. Member for

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South-East Cambridgeshire when considering how we can use that skill mix to get a bigger impact from the investment in our police resources.

We have learned the lesson in the health service. By getting nurses to do things that only doctors used to do and involving therapists more, we get better value out of the trained professionals in the service. The same challenge faces the police. How do we utilise civilians who are beginning to do not only routine tasks, but important forensic investigation, which has not happened in the past and was highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester? We can bring people with a range of skills into the service and we have to be creative about it.

I turn to funding, because it would be remiss of me, as a Minister, not to do so. Hon. Members have acknowledged that funding has increased in the past three years.

There has been a pretty generous police settlement, and I would be the first to acknowledge that local communities, too, have done their bit by being prepared to accept higher precepts and make a contribution from their local areas. I know that precepts have increased significantly but if we look at the absolute numbers, even in the case of my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud where there was a 50 per cent. increase, we are talking about 93p a week to pay for those extra police officers and the extra community support officers who are tremendously valued by local people.

There is also the rural policing fund in areas of sparsity and, in addition to the general police grant, specific grants for the crime fighting fund. That is not simply imposed from the centre but has been introduced with the support of all members of the tripartite organisation. There has been Airwave funding, which means that our police officers have better means of communicating with each other. That can make a difference on the ground. The basic command unit funding enables unit commanders to have more autonomy to decide where resources should be put. The building safer communities fund helps the crime and disorder reduction partnerships.

On multiplicity of funding streams, I am delighted to be able to say to my hon. Friends that, by bringing together the money for communities against drugs and for safer communities, we have been able to put into a single pot funding for the crime and reduction partnerships to make a difference in local areas. We have also put into a single pot the money for diversionary activities, the positive activities programme that has been taking place throughout the summer. What were in the past various different funding streams that people found very difficult to access are now in a single pot.

We have significantly more work to do to try to simplify the partnerships and ensure that people are in the "doings" world rather than the "meetings" world. I am hugely conscious of taking up people's time in a whole range of meetings and I want to examine where we can streamline them and make them more effective.

I am delighted to confirm that police numbers are at record levels: 132,268 police officers was the latest count, and there are also 1,600 community support officers out there on the ground and a number of neighbourhood wardens acting locally. We are increasingly providing visible and high-profile funding locally to reassure local people that officers can be out there preventing and detecting crime, because this is not just about reassurance.

In the remaining couple of minutes I shall mention specials and home watch, about which hon. Members have expressed concern. It is right to say that many of our specials have joined the regular force, which is one reason why we have struggled to keep numbers up. I am delighted that we have now got a whole programme to support the recruitment of specials. We have invited forces to bid for co-ordinators and we have a programme to persuade employers that it is in their best interests to have the extra skills that people gain by being a member of the specials and to encourage them to provide time off and ensure that employees are not disadvantaged by becoming special constables. We are making sure that the job of being a special is more worth while and are tasking specials in the same way as police officers. There is always a temptation to get the specials to do the jobs that the mainstream force does not want to do. If specials are willing to volunteer, it is important that they are right at the heart of the action as well as doing local work. Involving them in the way in which they are tasked is very important.

I am pleased that, in Gloucestershire, the number of specials has gone up in the past six months. We are beginning to see numbers come back up through some of the recruitment campaigns that are taking place, but we have to think very carefully about the role of specials in relation to that of community support officers in the future. As we widen the police family, we cannot allow any one section of it to remain static. We must see where they fit in and how work can be done to support them.

Home watch and neighbourhood watch are very under-utilised resources. I went to a conference of neighbourhood watch co-ordinators in my area last week. We have 300 schemes in my relatively small city with several thousand local people prepared to do something to make a difference in preventing and fighting crime in their neighbourhood. That is a huge pool of people whom we can perhaps engage more realistically and substantively in future. Community engagement is a thread that will now permeate every part of our police reform programme and how we can re-establish our relationship with local communities. We need to do that in a real and practical way; we should not talk about community engagement but make it a reality for people on the ground.

I welcome the contributions to the debate made by all my hon. Friends. I can think of nothing more important than increasing the trust and value that local communities have in their police force, and the role of the wider police family in making our communities safer and healthier, and more vibrant places for people to live, work and bring up their families. We face a huge challenge, but I am certainly not pessimistic about it. A great deal of good work has already been done, and a great deal of exciting work remains to be done, in which we can all engage, for the benefit of our constituents.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Time is up. We thank the Minister for her reply to that important debate.

Rail Infrastructure (East Coast)

3.30 pm

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): As a Member who represents a constituency that is some considerable distance from this capital city, I shall continue to raise this subject in the House. The Minister may be aware that, last year, I had an Adjournment debate in this Chamber on the electrification of the north-east section of the east coast main line. After the recent visit of the all-party rail group and the Rail Freight Group on the east coast main line to York and Doncaster and enjoying a trip on the North Yorkshire Moors Railway, on a steam engine especially named "The Parliamentarian", I return to the House revitalised and ready to refocus on the important issue of the reinstatement and fast-tracking of the stalled improvements desperately needed on the east coast main line infrastructure.

Looking back on my Adjournment debate on 26 June 2002, I was disappointed by the response of the then Minister for Transport—now the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (Mr. Spellar)—to my pleas for the electrification of the most northern part of the line. I am sure that the Minister who is to reply this afternoon will be much more sympathetic to my representations.

I am greatly saddened that the much needed improvements to the infrastructure of the east coast railway, which were promised and promoted as the best way to secure faster travelling times between London, Dundee and Aberdeen have been so badly delayed. In retrospect, I accept that those improvements would be a useful and positive step in an investment programme that would make the long-term prospect of electrification much easier to achieve—if it ever makes it back on to the agenda.

My major concern in today's debate, however, is that even those hoped-for improvements to the east coast main line have been shelved. Furthermore, the prospects of improving the line north of Edinburgh have disappeared into the highland mist that we so often experience at this time of year, despite the sunny weather that we are having in London. Once again, the north-east of Scotland's rail aspiration has, as a result, been ignored and forgotten. That is to the detriment of travellers, business users and rail freight opportunities alike.

It is time for Members of Parliament who represent constituencies in the north-east of Scotland to start clamouring for a higher priority for an agenda that does not discriminate against the east coast at the cost of a vastly improved rail transport infrastructure on the west coast. Given the Strategic Rail Authority's review in January of this year, even those improvements are now at risk. The question is whether the Government's target of increasing the number of rail passengers by 50 per cent. and rail freight traffic by 80 per cent. over the duration of the 10-year plan is at risk.

I hope that the Minister will reassure us that the Government will do all they can to ensure that the SRA and Network Rail get their priorities back on track, and that improvements to the west coast line are delivered on time and on target. With the completion of the works being timetabled for 2007, the focus needs to be shifted to the east coast, and improvements on the east coast main line need to be made as swiftly as possible. It goes without saying that without improvements to the east coast line, the economic benefits that can accrue from fast, efficient transport links to the south and Europe will be seriously diminished.

The Prime Minister highlighted the importance of the east coast main line when he was interviewed earlier this year for Great North Eastern Railway's house magazine, *Live Wire*. When asked how important the east coast main line was to national and regional prosperity, he replied:

> "This line is vitally important both nationally and regionally. Everyday it carries 200,000 passengers, 1,900 trains and 200,000 tonnes of rail freight."

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is absolutely crucial fully to understand that when we discuss the east coast main line we are talking about the line from London through Dundee to Aberdeen? Unfortunately, some people think that it starts at Edinburgh. We must never allow that to be accepted.

Mr. Luke: I shall deal later with that matter, about which I have had discussions with the chief executive of GNER.

Referring to the economic relevance of the east coast main line, the Prime Minister said that he knew how important it was to people in the Sedgefield constituency to have a safe, reliable and frequent service to York, London and Edinburgh. In the context of my constituency, I entirely concur with those sentiments. Furthermore, if such connections are important for the constituents of Sedgefield, they are doubly important for my constituents and those of other Members whose constituencies are farther north and more isolated.

Since the debate last year, I have continued to get a negative response to my pleas for electrification. You will not be surprised to hear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I have continued to pursue the required improvements to the rail infrastructure to ensure that the constituents of Dundee, East and Sedgefield have parity of service. In the wake of last year's debate, other hon. Members and I have had meetings with GNER, Virgin Rail and the SRA to put the case for electrification and improvements to the east coast line north of Edinburgh. The Minister who replied to that debate accepted the need for such improvements. He made it clear that the line from Edinburgh to Aberdeen was in need of some improvement and that several projects were in hand to assist with that. In subsequent discussions that I have had with the SRA, to which I shall refer, there was no evidence that those projects were in hand.

The need for improvement was also recognised by the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mrs. McGuire), when I wrote to her following last year's debate and the comments of the then Minister for Transport. In her response to my inquiries, she, like the Minister, argued that increased line speeds could be achieved without electrification of the route. I am sure we all appreciate that that would be a very expensive option, because of the nature of the line. She said that electrification would, unfortunately, not overcome the physical difficulties that the route

[Mr. Luke]

presents. As a consequence, her initial priority, like that of the Minister, was to improve the line and increase line speeds. As both Ministers pointed out, however, and as has been recognised by everyone who is involved in the debate, the only way to do that north of Edinburgh is to straighten the line over its entire route through Fife and to lay further track north of Dundee at Usan to ensure that travellers get the travel times that they deserve. To allow such improvements to go ahead would mean a significant shift in priorities and spending once the improvements to the west coast line are completed. Any lengthy delay there would condemn travellers on the east coast line to a second-class railway service for an even longer period.

Christopher Garnett, the chief executive of GNER, shares that worry. In March, in his response to a letter from me, he stated:

"As far as the East Coast Main line is concerned, wherever we say it ends"—

I had taken issue with him about remarks from GNER and others that indicated that it stopped in Edinburgh, whereas it goes on to Aberdeen—

"the key issue for me is to ensure that Network Rail and the SRA provide the funding to the highest level of operational and safety standards."

His great worry, voiced in that letter, was that any delay in the supposed upgrade of the east coast main line would result in ordinary maintenance renewal delays such as those that occur on the west coast main line. In truth, I believe that he worries, as I do, that the current delays in the implementation of the 10-year plan condemn us to a second class—not a standard class—east coast rail service. Indeed, instead of getting faster services and shorter travel times on the east coast, we are getting some slower services and longer travel times.

In his letter to me, Mr. Garnett goes on to conclude that we need to keep up the pressure on Network Rail and the Strategic Rail Authority to achieve the best service possible on the east coast line. It will come as no surprise to the Minister that I have had several meetings with the SRA to that end. The main objective of my dialogue with the SRA has been to extract a costing of what would be needed to upgrade the line north of Edinburgh.

In his letter of 19 May 2003, Chris Austin, the executive director for corporate affairs with the SRA pointed out that, following discussions he has had with Network Rail,

"the only scope for achieving any further significant line speed improvements on this corridor would be through a programme of route realignments and strengthening works on some of the major structures".

That has already been highlighted. The major structure to which Mr. Austin refers could be the Tay bridge, which causes something of a block on the line on the way north. He goes on to say:

"Each of these items carries a significant price tag and as a consequence no work is planned on raising line speeds by the Scottish Executive on the route at this stage."

In the letter, he goes on to give an interesting comparative exercise on the costing arrived at for the Midland Mainline railway improvements by Railtrack in 2000. That placed a price of £60 million on the upgrade of the route between London and Sheffield—a distance of about 159 miles. Mr. Austin points out that, given that that level of investment would achieve a saving of only 10 minutes, that work could not be seen as cost effective and as a consequence Railtrack and Midland Mainline were unable to make a value-for-money case. However, the £60 million was an alternative used on the introduction of new trains that had the ability to reduce the travel time between London and Sheffield through better acceleration.

I have yet to respond to Mr. Austin on that but, although there are little geographic differences between the London-to-Sheffield line and the north-east part of the London-to-Aberdeen line, if £60 million were spent on improving the east coast main line north of Edinburgh to Aberdeen—a distance of 126 miles—the travel time would be significantly reduced. I believe that it would be halved. That is a value-for-money case if ever I heard one.

That type of improvement would lead to a dramatic increase in the number of passengers using the railways along the east coast main line from the north-east to Edinburgh and London. Cutting travelling times from Aberdeen to London to six hours or less and from Dundee to London to five hours or less would create that demand. The improvement would be a huge benefit to travellers. It would be a massive boost to the prestige of the railways in the area and would provide a tremendous vote of confidence in the Government's transport plans for the next 10 years. The improvement would also bring the Government closer to achieving their target of increasing passenger numbers by 50 per cent.

Is the improvement achievable? In the light of the celebrations today—I am sorry that the Minister is not at Waterloo—surrounding the completion of the first phase of the fast-speed link to Europe, which, for the first time on a regular service in the UK, allows trains to travel at 186 miles per hour and which has cut the travel time between London and Paris by 20 minutes, I believe that it is eminently achievable, if we use that kind of approach. If we have the confidence in our railways that the French and the Japanese have in theirs, the improvement will be achievable. Let us make the next 100 years of the railways as exciting as the first 100 years of their existence. The UK should take the initiative it gained in pioneering the railway age to recapture its lead in promoting this universally popular, environmentally friendly and accessible form of travel in the 21st century. Empty trains are rare in the UK. The need to boost rail traffic is always the Government's prime concern.

We need to set an ambitious agenda, however, if we are to regain the momentum that we have lost in the development of our railways in the past two to three decades. Certainly, in the past five years, we have lost further ground in some aspects. First, we need to review and speed up the works on the west coast main line, and given the current crisis in funding, we need new innovative ways to do that. The SRA and Network Rail will have to look at new models of finance for that project. One option open to them could be to enter into discussions with companies involved in rail maintenance that have developed new ways of laying track at lower costs. As part of the railway delegation that visited some of those companies during our time in York, I believe that underutilised potential for

completing the work on the improvement of the railway system in the UK more cheaply is waiting to be harnessed if those companies are given the opportunity to be more fully involved.

As I said, on completion of the west coast line, the emphasis has to move eastwards. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) is here today, and improvements such as upgrading Waverley station in Edinburgh have to be progressed. The delay in delivering a faster, more efficient rail service on the east coast was featured on the front page and in the editorial of Glasgow's newspaper *The Herald*. In those features, the SRA and its failure to deliver the much-needed £800 million worth of improvements—an upgrade to the Waverley station as a way of speeding trains up the east coast has been shelved—and the stop-gap funding to be provided by the Scottish Executive were much criticised. About £100 million was to be spent on the improvements, rather than £800 million over the next 10 years. A sub-heading in the article read:

"Cost cutting plans will not benefit suffering rail users."

The point was well made.

My colleagues from Edinburgh will continue to put the case for these draconian cuts to be reversed just as I will continue to argue for greater investment in the east coast main line north of Edinburgh in pursuit of the much improved rail service that rail users and the taxpayers in that area deserve.

The £60 million mentioned in relation to spending on Midland Mainline, or indeed a small fraction of the billion or so spent on the completion of phase one of the fast service Eurotunnel rail link, could be put to good use—some might argue better use—in my part of the east coast. The Minister in his response may say that the Scottish Executive have a major role to play in that area of transport policy. I will not deny that, but the Minister can rest assured that I and other Scottish Members will be working with colleagues in the Scottish Parliament to ensure that the points I have made today will be forcibly relayed to the Scottish Executive.

I will send the Scottish Transport Minister a copy of this debate and ask him to meet me and other Members from the north-east to discuss issues relating to the Scottish end of the east coast main line. However, saying that the Scottish Executive are involved does not excuse the United Kingdom Government from their responsibility for cross-border transport links and the overall co-ordination of national transport strategy throughout the UK.

To ensure the excellence of the rail service that we all want in the years ahead the Government and the SRA need to take action now to ensure that the targets they have set out are achieved. They need to give a commitment that UK rail travellers, whether they live in Doncaster, Darlington or Dundee, should enjoy the excellent levels of service taken for granted by so many citizens of our European Union partner states. We need a world-class rail service to transport a new generation of rail users

In conclusion, I hope that the Minister will endorse that aim and give a commitment to do all he can to achieve the goals we set as an outcome of this debate. I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for granting me the opportunity to go on about the rail infrastructure on the east coast—a subject close to my heart. It is a theme I will return to time and again until we achieve the improvements in the rail infrastructure up and down the east coast that are needed to provide the service standards required throughout that area.

3.49 pm

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke) on the persistence with which he has raised this issue. He referred to Edinburgh's Waverley station, which is a vital hub for the rail network in Scotland and the entirety of Great Britain. Most of us were looking forward to the major upgrade of Waverley station, which has been under discussion for a number of years. I share my hon. Friend's concern at the way in which the original proposals for a major upgrade—ambitious, but essential if rail services in Scotland and on the east coat are to develop their full potential—seem to have been reduced to the minimum. As my hon. Friend says, the signs this week—I hope that it is just press speculation—are that the proposals will be reduced to the most basic scheme possible. Moreover, those proposals would have to be funded entirely by the Scottish Executive and, notwithstanding the UK-wide importance of the Waverley upgrade, without a contribution from the Strategic Rail Authority.

I do not expect my hon. Friend the Minister to be able to respond to the issue in any detail today. However, given the concerns raised by so many hon. Members and others, I ask him to meet me, the other hon. Members who represent Edinburgh seats and members of the local authority, so that he can hear our concerns about the future of Waverley. We can then find out the time scale and the current situation for that project, which is important both to Edinburgh and the entire country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Nicholas Winterton): Order. The Minister will reply in the time that he has got left.

3.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall try to respond to the points in the time that I now have available.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke), not only on securing this debate but on having secured the second debate on the subject in 18 months. He is a powerful advocate for his constituents on matters of transport, and he has spoken powerfully about today's railway system. I listened carefully to the points and issues that he has raised. I hope to be able to respond to some of those and I will write to him about any I cannot deal with today.

I would like to say a few general words about the Strategic Rail Authority that were raised by my hon. Friend. The authority is responsible for the development of the east coast main line and Network Rail has responsibility for its maintenance. Those bodies are addressing the key problems in the rail industry that were inherited from the previous Government—the years of decline, poor management and fragmentation following privatisation and a lack of strategic direction. We now have those things in place, which I am sure is good news for his constituents.

[Mr. David Jamieson]

The statutory purposes of the Strategic Rail Authority are to promote the use and development of passenger and freight networks and to contribute to the development of an integrated transport system. Its primary objectives are the achievement of the key targets in the Government's 10-year plan for transport, to increase passenger and freight usage and to improve the punctuality and reliability of train services. The SRA is tasked by the Government to work within allocated resources and to secure value for money from its expenditure.

The SRA will determine national investment priorities and take forward the enhancement programme in its role as the strategic specifier, working closely with Network Rail as its delivery agent. The SRA assesses proposed improvement projects for affordability and value for money on a Great Britain-wide basis.

Britain's railway network is now under the new ownership and strengthened management of Network Rail. Network Rail is a private sector, not-for-dividend company, whose key objective is to provide a safe, efficient, reliable and affordable network rather than to generate profits for its shareholders. I think that those are some of the points that my hon. Friend made in his speech.

The creation of Network Rail was a turning point for Britain's railways, and a real opportunity to reverse the years of decline. In its first year, Network Rail has made a promising start.

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, Central): I have a simple point. The Victorians invested in the railways and built the line to Aberdeen. We have heard from two hon. Members about the failure to invest in the line north of Aberdeen. In the past 30 years, the North sea oil and gas industry, one of the key economic generators in the country, has been based in the north-east. Last year, that industry accounted for about 20 per cent. of investment in manufacturing industry. Throughout that 30-year period, transport links between the north-east and the rest of the UK have been appalling. Will we see any improvement in the next 30 years?

Mr. Jamieson: Had my hon. Friend been patient, he would have heard the next part of my remarks, which I hope will give him some comfort.

Track renewal has increased dramatically. Steps are being taken to improve the knowledge of the network's condition and the factors behind the escalating costs. The SRA has developed the capacity utilisation policy to ensure that the most efficient use is made of the existing network. A consultation on the subject ended last year, and we have now published the network utilisation strategy, which looks at getting better use out of the existing lines. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East would agree that that is vital.

The second route to be completed under the national framework is the east coast main line, which my hon. Friend discussed today. I understand that the baseline work on the east coast main line route strategy started in April. A set of options was drawn up in June and evaluation work began on those options this summer, with stakeholder involvement in the form of regional reference groups, including representatives of the regional development agencies, the regional passenger councils and the passenger transport executives. This will help to develop the preliminary options to be included in the draft strategy document, which the SRA aims to produce in December.

The route strategy will provide the basis for a major review of timetables for implementation in 2005 and for implementing the SRA's new franchise replacement policy on the east coast main line. It will also produce a strategy for rolling stock replacement and a modest affordable model programme of investment based on requirements for the next 10 years. The SRA aims to have the route strategy in place in the summer.

The east coast main line is a huge route and I understand that Edinburgh was chosen as the cut-off point to make the route strategy manageable. My hon. Friend will be aware that services north of Edinburgh, and in Scotland as a whole, are the responsibility of the Scottish Executive.

The SRA has confirmed its commitment to producing a strategy for the development of the east coast network by the end of 2003. This will determine which further enhancements of the infrastructure will be required. It will also focus on making the best use of current infrastructure on one of the country's principal rail routes.

The SRA therefore intends to upgrade the east coast main line in a phased programme, and individual project elements will be subject to case-by-case approval and careful integration with Network Rail's renewal programme. It is too early to say what that will include, as further investment will depend on the completion of wider studies, especially the route utilisation strategy, but the preferred schemes will be those that produce capacity and performance benefits.

My hon. Friend also talked about the electrification of the east coast main line. I understand that that there are no plans for electrification north of Edinburgh. This issue is often raised in my area by people who say that there is no electrification on the south coast west of London. Previous assessments indicated that electrification of the line would be very expensive. There are also doubts about whether there is sufficient demand to justify the investment required.

Advances in train technology are such that the traditional distinction between electrification and non-electrification is becoming blurred. Diesel engine technology now produces fewer emissions, better acceleration times and higher top speeds, and is a serious competitor with electric trains.

My hon. Friend raised another issue about the line from Edinburgh to Aberdeen and the need for improvement. Straightening the line, not electrification, may be the main issue here. It may be more important for the through-put of passengers, but is not one of the SRA's main priorities. It would, however, be a more attractive proposition than electrification if funding could be secured. The Scottish Executive may consider funding for works that benefit internal Scottish services. They do, however, have their own list of priorities.

My hon. Friend also talked about Waverley station. At £33.5 million, this is the largest investment project being undertaken in Scotland and is due for completion

in April 2004. It includes the renewal of equipment in the main signal centre at Waverley, which controls the east coast main line.

I have not had time to cover many of the points that my hon. Friend raised. To give a proper answer to some of the other question I am prepared to enter into correspondence with him if he will find that helpful, rather than trying to deal with them now.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We thank the Minister for his reply. He got in a great deal in a short time. Before we move to the next debate, I have to advise hon. Members that I anticipate a Division in the House. We shall, of course, be granted injury time.

Road Speeds (Somerset)

4 pm

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): If the Minister would like, I shall finish slightly early so that he can continue with east coast electrification and upgrading, but I am sure that he does not really want to do that. I sympathise with him for having to respond to two consecutive debates. That is remarkable, and probably above and beyond the call of duty.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Nicholas Winterton): Order. My worst fears are confirmed. We shall break for 10 minutes.

4 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.11 pm

On resuming—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The debate can continue.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that I do not have to say that again this afternoon. I shall certainly not return to the subject of east coast railways.

I should like to begin with a quotation from "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland". Alice may never have encountered any of Somerset county council's crazy new speed restrictions, but there is no doubt that Somerset county council currently occupies a kind of administrative wonderland.

"'You are old, Father William', the young man said, 'And your hair has become very white; And yet you incessantly stand on your head—Do you think, at your age, it is right?' 'In my youth,' Father William replied to his son, 'I feared it might injure the brain; But now that I'm perfectly sure I have none, Why, I do it again and again.'"

Those words were penned by Lewis Carroll, but they might as well apply to Councillor Tim Carroll, the chairman of Somerset county council's environment and transport policy committee.

Last year, the county council came up with a new road safety policy that involved standing common sense on its head. Presumably Councillor Carroll turned cheerfully upside down. There was no danger of injuring his brain, because the brain power behind the policy can be identified only with a very powerful microscope. Somerset county council decided arbitrarily to introduce new speed limits on A and B roads. Its motives were, no doubt, unimpeachable: it wanted to make Somerset's roads safer. We would all agree with that aim. However, in doing so with no proper consultation, it created a complete speed muddle that contributes nothing to safety and has already cost the council tax payers of Somerset a small fortune in public money. Indeed, what it has done might have created a danger to road users.

For example, the council has rightly set strict new limits outside all schools. No faster than 20 mph, says Somerset, but that applies all day and all night, long after the children have gone to bed and the gates of the school are firmly locked. Everyone agrees that speed

[Mr. Liddell-Grainger]

limits outside schools make sense. Most intelligent councils—I suspect that that includes Plymouth—fix advisory limits and do not operate them 24 hours a day, but Somerset county council could not be bothered with the administrative and legal paperwork. So, outside every school there is a 20 mph limit, even in the middle of the night.

If this were not a short debate, I could list every town and village where the county council contractors have arrived at dawn with drills to erect new metal posts bearing new metal signs and new speed limits.

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing this debate. He will be well aware of events not many weeks ago on the A358, which joins our constituencies—my hon. Friend lives at one end and I at the other, in Taunton. I am told that there are more than 50 new speed signs, with varying speed limits, along a 12-mile stretch. Is he aware that those were put in not on the basis of what parish councils want but on the basis of safety figures that show that there have been 108 accidents? That sounds laudable, but those figures date from 1994 to 1999. It has taken the county council four years to implement them. If nothing else, it is guilty of lethargy.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: I certainly know the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook) on the matter. The *Taunton Times* and the *Somerset County Gazette* resound to the noise made by my hon. Friend and long may that continue. He is absolutely right. The figures are out of date, ill conceived and ill thought through.

We have not heard the worst yet. Next come the county council road painters, emphasising the message with stripes on the tarmac. All that would be acceptable if the county council had sought the real views of real people in real villages before implementing the new policy, but it did not ask the district councils, nor did it consult all the parish councils. Somerset county council did what it always seems to do nowadays, which is to assume the role of the nanny, and nanny, as we all know, thinks that she knows best. The proverbial buck is meant to stop at the top. Perhaps Councillor Cathy Bakewell, leader of Somerset county council, deserves the title "Nanny-in-chief".

If the speed management policy had been properly baked, there would not be a single complaint, but it was not baked well, or even half baked; it did not even get into the oven. The result is a heavyweight harvest of completely unnecessary metalwork. Poles are sunk into verges and signs by the hundred have been bolted on, as my hon. Friend said, but it is what those signs say that makes the policy such a sick joke, because they contradict each other. If one drives on the A39 through the village of Holford, one is greeted by no fewer than seven new signs in each direction. That is 14 signs in all, to save the mathematics between us, not including the extra ones that have been painted on the road surface. In case you have not been there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or the Minister, Holford is the size of a postage stamp. It is a very nice place with very nice people, who are just as concerned about road safety as the rest of us, but they did not ask for those signs outside the village. The council did not send round a consultation form or even a man with a clipboard. It simply turned up, banged in the poles and screwed in the new speed signs. That is how it works.

One is entitled to approach the village at a perfectly legal 50 mph, then one brakes to obey the new 40 mph sign, brakes even harder to keep to 30, reduces suddenly to 20, goes back up to 30, then 40 and finally to 50 again, all within a few hundred yards. That is assuming that one goes any faster than 20 mph anyway. The A39 is a busy, winding and narrow road. It carries a huge number of tourists in the holiday season and slow-moving lorries at all times. It services Butlins at the rate of about 9,000 people a week. In my experience, if one averages 30 mph on the A39, one is doing very well. It may need upgrading—that is another story for the Minister—but what it does not need is a set of silly speed limits.

I invite the Minister to take a look at some of the signs. I went out with a camera to photograph some examples and I have pictures of some of them here. They made not only myself but the pictures quite red. I have pictures of some of the signs warning of cameras from one village in Holford. That is not some cheapskate exercise by Somerset county council. It has spent a small fortune planning it. Many of those new expensive signs bear the symbol dreaded by all motorists, the picture of a fixed camera—liable to flash in one's rear-view mirror and guarantee an automatic fine and several penalty points on one's licence.

We all agree that in the right place speed cameras are an excellent idea. I have talked to Avon and Somerset constabulary about the matter and it knows what it is talking about. It uses mobile speed cameras to great effect where there is room to deploy them, but it would not contemplate fixed speed cameras on winding stretches of the A39. One officer told me:

"That would be the act of a lunatic."

The police have to enforce the speed limits. Councillor nanny Bakewell and her pals simply dream up the loony schemes. The scores of new signs warning of speed cameras ahead are, unfortunately, not a dream. Nobody in their right mind would plant a speed camera where Somerset county council declares that a speed camera should be planted. Some motorists are stupid but not that stupid. When a county council makes believe on an issue as important as road safety, it is liable to bring the whole legal process into disrepute.

Since the new signs were put up, hundreds have been deliberately defaced. I do not condone such vandalism—nobody does—but I understand why people have taken the law into their own hands. They were furious at the high-handed attitude of a local authority that did not listen, did not ask and did not take a blind bit of notice when people complained through elected Members, such as myself and my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton.

There have been as many complaints as there are new road signs. My postbag has been groaning with letters of complaint ever since that madness started. The latest stupidity is in the village of Fiddington in my constituency. The villagers have been pleading with the county council for speed limits and nanny Bakewell has done absolutely nothing about it. Under the enlightened

leadership of Somerset county council, one gets no new speed limits where they are actually needed, and a rash of them where nobody wants them.

As constituency MPs, it is my job and that of my hon. Friend to get things sorted. I went to the county council and had a private chat with officials and they said, "Don't worry, Ian,"—no use of "Hon. Members" there—"we hear that the whole policy is under review." There were signs of relief all round as I told everybody that we were going to have a review. That usually means a rethink—an official recognition that they have got it wrong. "Whoops, silly me!" Nanny Bakewell and her Somerset county council cohorts are not as straightforward as that. They do not believe in saying sorry publicly, but they are prepared to admit their errors to one another.

A dramatic and revealing document has just come into my possession. It is an e-mail that was sent to all county council staff by the new chief executive, Mr. Alan Jones. In it, he confesses that the implementation of the new road policy has been "inconsistent and insensitive." Thank you, Mr. Jones. I could not have described the mad hatter antics of nanny Bakewell better. However, there is worse to come.

People who live in Somerset will receive a 21-question survey from Somerset county council. It will seek people's views on what sort of speed limits there should be and where they should be placed. The county council is now adding insult to injury by inviting people to give their views after the work has been carried out. I have been unable to obtain an estimate of the cost of that absurd exercise in pyramid-selling democracy, but I am absolutely sure that it does not come cheap because nothing ever does from Somerset county council and it comes on top of the high price of introducing speed limits that people did not want in the first place.

Road safety is crucial and the Government rightly leave it to local authorities to settle matters of speed, but I was disturbed to read a disquieting article in the *Western Morning News* on Saturday 13 September under the headline, "Hopeless rural roads are not our concern!" It included a fetching photograph of the Minister with a copy of the *Western Morning News* in his hands. The state of rural roads is certainly not our fault, but should be of great concern. When a local authority behaves in the way that Somerset county council has behaved, my question to the Minister is, "Please, can you not do something to stop them?"

4.27 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) on securing this debate on this important issue. There is obviously a spat between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in Somerset, but I shall not enter that debate. I do not know Councillor Bakewell, but I am sure that, although she is a Liberal Democrat, she is motivated by the best intentions. I shall also not go into the lengthy metaphors that the hon. Gentleman used.

I was also surprised to see the headline in the *Western Morning News*. The old story is, "Don't believe everything you read in the newspapers." People should certainly not believe everything that they read in the *Western Morning News*. It was certainly not what I said. I said that I was pleased that the *Western Morning News* had joined the Government's campaign for better roads in the west country and I said that they were very much our concern. I said that it was the concern of the Government to get better roads, but the responsibility of local authorities to carry that out. I also said that a lot of extra money had been provided for those roads and a former Tory council leader admitted that he had underspent on roads and spent the money on other things, but he said it was all our fault anyway.

Speed and safety are at the heart of the Government's policies. About one third of the accidents in which people, many of whom are children or elderly people, are killed or injured on our roads each year are caused by people travelling at inappropriate speeds, so we should not treat the matter lightly. I was glad that the hon. Gentleman distanced himself from those who take the law into their own hands with safety cameras and signage. That is manifestly not the way in which we do things in this country and we have democratic means of dealing with such matters. Some of the thugs who go around doing that are putting people's lives at risk and I am glad that he distanced himself from those people, as I have.

I listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman said about Somerset's current programme of introducing speed limits on such a comprehensive scale throughout the county. However, I understand that the county council is only part of the way through implementing the initiative and that some rethinking is taking place. Slower speeds are one of many measures available to local authorities to reduce accidents and to improve the environment, particularly in rural areas. The key is that it is up to local authorities to find the right balance between the quality of life in their communities, achieving the important objective of reducing accidents and maintaining the appearance of attractive villages in rural areas. The policies have been devolved because locally elected councillors are best placed to deal with such matters.

I applaud Somerset and many other local authorities for taking the problem of traffic speeds in their communities very seriously and striving to achieve the right balance in such a difficult policy area. I receive many representations from across the country, including Somerset, from parents whose children are trying to cross roads outside schools. There is a considerable problem in both rural and urban areas of people going too fast. I am not surprised that local authorities are being pulled two ways in implementing the policy, and I cannot help but wonder whether the same people who urged the introduction of measures to slow speeds in their villages are now finding it inconvenient to slow down in others.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the Government's real commitment to address the serious issue of road safety. In 2000, we published, "Tomorrow's Roads—Safer for Everyone," in which we adopted challenging targets to reduce the number of those killed or seriously injured in road accidents by 40 per cent. by 2010, and to reduce by 50 per cent. the number of children killed or seriously injured over the same period. I am pleased to say that we are on course to meet those targets.

[Mr. David Jamieson]

The hon. Gentleman will know that the Prime Minister is committed to the road safety strategy. We published a review of speed policy, in which we recognised the value of 30 mph being the norm for villages. Experience shows that lower speed limits without other measures to encourage drivers to slow down have generally only a small effect on traffic speeds, and local authorities are advised to consider what other measures are necessary to achieve the lower speeds required. It is also for local authorities to target their resources where the problems are the greatest. The resources are best targeted where speeding causes casualties and discomfort to residents.

In October 2002, the Government responded to the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee report on road traffic speed. Some evidence from that report is pertinent to the issues raised in this debate. If the measures recommended in the report were to achieve a one-third reduction in road traffic accidents, the savings to society could be as great as £100 million per week.

Speed is clearly a major factor in causing accidents. It is highly significant that, when we introduce speed management measures or improve speed enforcement on roads with a high level of casualties, casualties are substantially reduced, in some cases by 50 per cent. or more. That is why it is important to identify where speed is a problem and deal with it effectively with targeted engineering and enforcement, and driver education and training.

I am pleased to see that local authorities, the police and motorists have responded positively to those road safety targets, and there can be no doubt that there have been real improvements in safety on roads in this country, not least in the west country. As the hon. Gentleman will know, the implementation of that policy is, of course, a matter for the local transport authority. We have put in place a system of local transport plans, under which local authorities can bid for new capital funding for local transport measures. I must say that Somerset has done very well out of those measures. Cash-starved a few years ago, it is now doing very well.

We have, of course, provided a real increase in resources to local authorities to implement and to improve their local transport plans and, in particular, to pursue better road safety. In Somerset, funding for integrated transport measures, which includes measures to promote road safety, has increased from just over £0.3 million in 1998–99 to more than £5 million in 2002–03.

Local authorities are best placed to decide how to use resources in their areas, and they are also best placed to understand their local problems and how they can be solved. Local authorities can, of course, pursue a range of measures to achieve those road safety targets. The policies implemented in Somerset have, in general, reduced accidents in line with targets. To give the figures again, they reduced the number of people killed or seriously injured from an average of 376 to 332 last year, although that figure has risen to 351 this year. I also note that the number of children killed or seriously injured has fallen from 34 to 25 over the same period. They are most likely the hon. Gentleman's constituents.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: Much of that is to do with the M5, which goes all the way through the county. There have been an enormous number of deaths on the M5, as the Minister is fully aware, so the problem is not just to do with the county.

Mr. Jamieson: I am aware that some of those incidents happened on the M5, but the motorways tend to be among the safest roads in terms of the amount of through-put of traffic. One of the big problems is on rural roads, where local people tend to get killed and injured.

The changes that I mentioned are a real tribute not only to the safety improvements that we have made to vehicles, but to local highways authorities and the police in promoting better solutions to create safer roads.

I understand that there is another reason for Somerset's policy of introducing the new speed limits throughout the county. Put simply, I am told that that is what residents have asked authorities for. Somerset has undertaken an extensive consultation with the communities in rural areas, asking them how they would like to see the resources that are made available through the local transport plans used. I am told that the answer that was given was clear: speed of traffic through rural villages, sometimes at the national speed limit of 60 mph, was a key concern. However, to return to the point that I made originally, perhaps the problem is to do with reducing speed in the village where one lives, but finding it inconvenient when the limit has been reduced in other villages.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: I apologise for intervening on the Minister again. The speed limits in villages are not in doubt, and we are not here to debate them. However, nobody asked for the speed limits outside villages, and the consultation has only just started.

Mr. Jamieson: Somerset's approach was clearly spelt out in its local transport plan, which was published in July 2000 and which stated:

"We will introduce a policy to apply a consistent approach to speed limits across the county, particularly in built up areas".

That commitment was based on requests from more than 250 parish councils for environmental traffic calming. Somerset has implemented that commitment with a comprehensive programme of promoting 20 mph speed limits at 280 school sites and 30 mph speed limits in about 230 villages, which is an impressive programme.

The aim of the approach, as I understand it, is to achieve a consistent speed limit throughout the county, so that road users know that, whenever they enter a built-up area, they should slow down. No doubt the number of traffic signs that the initiative has required may be a surprise to those who were unaware of what Somerset was proposing to do. Somerset will have consulted local parish councils, as is required, in promoting individual schemes, so parish councils must have expressed a view on the proposals as they were going ahead—there was a statutory duty on them to do

so. The consultation will have included details of the signs proposed to be put in place, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

The hon. Gentleman asks what the Government's policy is on such a programme. Put simply, the local transport plan system gives local authorities the powers to implement such a programme, if they so decide, in the light of their local policies and objectives. However, our advice on the production of local transport plans states:

"Traffic management in rural areas should aim to produce better and safer local road conditions for those who live, work and visit there and help protect the character of the countryside and its communities."

Plans must balance the needs of both rural communities and road users.

It is a sad fact that some drivers drive at inappropriate speeds. However, one of the biggest influences on drivers' choice of speed is not the speed limit itself but the nature and appearance of the road in question. It is therefore imperative that speed limits are set that are appropriate and enforceable.

We are always looking at the most effective ways to improve safety on rural roads and working to deliver our road safety strategy commitments on that, including updating our guidance to local authorities on setting local speed limits and how to reduce traffic speeds in rural villages. Local authorities have the powers to introduce 20 mph speed limits, but their success relies solely on drivers reducing their speed without the constraining influence of any physical measures. We therefore feel that if there is a criticism of what Somerset is doing, it is that some the limits have been set without some of the other measures that are perhaps important in reducing the speed of vehicles.

The hon. Gentleman has raised an important matter. I hope that there can be a calm and sensible debate about it in Somerset. Road safety is important, and children are particularly vulnerable. I hope that good sense prevails. He might revisit in today's *Hansard* some of his comments about certain Liberal Democrat council leaders and how they have dealt with this matter. They may be able to come to some mutually agreed resolution.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty minutes to Five o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 17 September 2003

[DEREK CONWAY *in the Chair*]

Road Haulage Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

9.30 am

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire): I am delighted to have secured this debate on some of the most important issues relating to the road haulage industry and the difficulties that it is facing. Perhaps it would be helpful at this stage to give a brief history of organisations such as the Road Haulage Association, which I have been speaking to during my research into the issues.

The RHA was formed in 1945 to look after the interests of haulage contractors in various parts of the country and, in effect, it amalgamated local organisations that had been established previously. It has subsequently developed to become the primary trade association representing the hire or reward sector of the road transport industry. Some 10,000 companies are now members of the association and they vary from major concerns with more than 5,000 vehicles to single owner-drivers.

The purpose of this debate is to highlight the issues facing the road haulage industry that arise from the Government's policies and the consequences for the future of the industry. This debate is not about hauliers having a moan and a whinge. British manufacturers are equally concerned that the high cost of transportation is a major factor in undermining their ability to compete in European and world markets. Indeed, many of them are struggling to compete in our home market.

I want to raise a number of general issues, including fuel costs, foreign competition, proposed lorry road user charging and, perhaps most importantly, the proposed implementation of the working time directive on the road transport sector, which will be implemented in March 2005. The Government have expressed a genuine interest in working with all interested parties in the transport industry, including employers, employees and employees' representatives, such as the Transport and General Workers Union, of which I am a long-standing member. The Government's 10-year plan for England and Wales is the first long-term plan for transport policy in the United Kingdom for more than 30 years and it represents an important and welcome departure from the previous Administration's stop-start treatment of transport investment. It was warmly welcomed by the industry when it was published in July 2000, and perhaps lessons can be learned from such transport policy and rolled out throughout the UK.

Under the 10-year plan, the industry has a route map of overall spending, infrastructure and, perhaps most importantly, deliverables. It provides a context in which companies can make strategic, long-term decisions about the structure of their supply chains, establish long-term business plans and make significant investments in distribution and logistics. It would help the industry greatly, however, if the contract arrangements with customers could be extended to a minimum of five years. That would allow transport companies to plan effectively for the future and to offer their employees limited security. The contracts are currently for one year or for two to three years. Very few run for the full five-year term, although the industry would appreciate that degree of stability.

You will be aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of the industry's long-running and, at times, controversial campaign to reduce fuel costs. The European Commission's transport White Paper recommended that commercial road transport uses should be harmonised wherever possible to avoid distortions of competition and the taxation of fuel. The industry would support any action that could achieve that. However, there is recognition that it is unlikely that such a reduction will take place immediately throughout the United Kingdom because of the costs involved.

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way and congratulate him on securing this important debate. Does he have any information about what the reduction or the increase in fuel taxation on British HGV operations would be if harmonisation throughout the European Union were to be obtained?

Jim Sheridan: I do not know the precise figure—the Treasury would be more able to answer my hon. Friend's question—but the road haulage industry is considering the possibility of at least a freeze, especially on diesel, for the next few years. That would go a long way to harmonising fuel costs throughout the EU. There is a realisation among the road haulage industry that taxes in this country help to pay for the public services that so many of us enjoy. The haulage industry is no different from anyone else in recognising that there is a price to be paid for public services. Again, however, I emphasise that it would be greatly appreciated if this Government could do something to bring about harmonisation of fuel costs throughout Europe.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Is the hon. Gentleman going to say anything about the threat that the road haulage industry faces of a further increase in road fuel duty from about 1 October this year, following the Chancellor's remarks in his spring Budget?

Jim Sheridan: I have no intention today of touching on what the Chancellor does, or proposes to do or not to do, in the forthcoming Budget. The RHA has told me that it is not overly concerned about the Chancellor's forthcoming plans. Certainly, it has not raised any concerns with me.

Mr. Chope: Has the hon. Gentleman seen the September 2003 edition of *Roadway*, published by the RHA? The whole front page is devoted to a public wealth warning on this issue.

Jim Sheridan: I have not seen the article to which the hon. Gentleman refers. Any reduction in fuel costs for the industry would be greatly appreciated. I and others will be advocating to the Treasury the fact that any assistance in reducing fuel costs would be extremely

[Jim Sheridan]

helpful to this important industry. However, I emphasise that it must be recognised that there has to be a certain amount of taxation to keep the required public services. Creating that balance is important.

The industry's problems with fuel costs have been further compounded by oil companies and their distributors changing the terms and conditions of the sale of fuel to some transport companies. There is anecdotal evidence that hauliers, particularly the small ones—the most important ones—are experiencing significant difficulties with changes in how the oil companies and their distributors operate.

A Scottish haulier almost went out of business when fuel giant Shell slashed his credit terms from £60,000 to zero in just 10 days. He has been a Shell customer for almost 30 years and he spends about £300,000 a year on diesel, but Shell ordered him to provide accounts before he could buy any more fuel on credit, even though he had never previously been asked for that. When he explained that he could not comply with that instruction because his accounts were with his accountant, Shell refused to sell him any more diesel. Consequently, his wagons were laid up, as he had no fuel to drive them. Those actions could be understood if the haulier had reneged on payments or if a cheque had bounced—we might then see the sense of it—but Shell left him high and dry and with no alternative. The RHA has received many similar complaints about oil companies from its other members.

Mr. John Lyons (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): Does my hon. Friend accept that this type of practice will be a threat to small, family-run businesses if it develops more widely in the industry? We need to do something to protect them.

Jim Sheridan: My hon. Friend raises an important point. That practice will particularly affect single owner-drivers, who have nothing to fall back on when faced with that type of difficulty. The houses of many single owner-drivers are mortgaged on their businesses, so when companies such as Shell behave in this way it threatens not only the businesses of single owner-drivers, but their houses and livelihoods. That concerns many of them. It is a real problem for the industry, which is in bad enough shape already without fuel suppliers making life more difficult. I recognise that there are limits to the extent that the Government can influence how major companies and distributors operate, but the Minister's involvement in trying to influence their operating practice and how they deal with their valued customers would be welcome.

I now turn to the issue of unfair competition in the industry from some European businesses, many of which exploit their employees for cheap labour and have the capacity and the knowledge to circumvent the regulations surrounding road transport in Britain and those safeguarding British workers. The problem particularly involves the ever-growing number of eastern European drivers who use our roads without making any financial contribution to their upkeep and maintenance. I have written to the Secretary of State for Transport on the matter of continental drivers and the undermining of significant investment.

Mr. Marshall: Is my hon. Friend concerned, as I am sure many of us are, that after the addition of 10 new members to the EU at the end of the year, the situation will become much worse because there will be many more drivers from much poorer countries, which may have poorer standards of driving and driving tests, overloaded lorries and all the other problems associated with the industry? Does he agree that those difficulties will be exacerbated when those countries join the EU?

Jim Sheridan: My hon. Friend raises an important point, particularly as he has a long history of work and involvement in the transport industry and knows a great deal about it. He is right—the problem is ever increasing as many more eastern European drivers, for instance, come into the country. One can only hazard a guess at the standard of servicing and MOT applied to those lorries, how the workers are treated and whether the practices in some countries are undermining the profitability of the industry as well as the employment rights of British workers.

There is concern about continental drivers undermining the significant investment in ports such as the Rosyth container terminal in Dunfermline, which is a valuable route to mainland Europe for many of our hauliers. There is evidence that continental drivers frequently fill up their fuel tanks, including their reserve tanks, and drive the length and breadth of our country using cheap diesel purchased outside Britain. As someone who has used the Rosyth ferry alongside a number of my parliamentary colleagues, I was extremely disappointed by the fact that that route was used mainly by British drivers. However, I have spoken to my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire), in whose constituency the Rosyth ferry operates, and she informed me that the ferry is on the up and in good shape. I was extremely pleased to hear that.

I was also pleased to hear that the Secretary of State for Transport agreed that it was unfair that hauliers from outside Britain could use our roads without making any contribution to their maintenance and upkeep. That is why the Government are introducing the lorry road-user charging scheme, which will be applied to all lorries using our roads, although it is a little disappointing that the time scale for the charge's introduction means that it will not apply until 2006. I am concerned that some of our smaller hauliers could go out of business before that happens. I would welcome any assistance from the Minister in reducing that time scale.

The introduction of the LRUC scheme is probably a precursor to a wider programme embracing the motorist. Most organisations, such as the RHA, support the proposal in principle as the best way to level the playing field between the relatively high-taxed UK-based hauliers and their EU counterparts. They would welcome the offsetting of any reduction in fuel duty as the best way to ensure that, overall, total tax achieved through the LRUC scheme will remain the same. I would welcome the Minister's comments on that. There are concerns about the scheme's impact on the hire or reward sector of the road haulage industry. Again, I would welcome any further clarification.

The burning issue in the industry is the EU working time directive, which is due to be implemented in March 2005. While it is right and proper that British workers enjoy the same employment rights as their colleagues in Europe, the legislation has major implications for the industry in terms of human and financial resources. Initial reports estimate that an additional 60,000 drivers will be required to accommodate that new legislation. That could be a window of opportunity for the industry to become more representative of the communities that it serves by recruiting more women and ethnic minority workers. Currently, a vast proportion of lorry drivers are white middle-aged males.

The Minister will be aware of consultation between his Department and representatives of the industry on the implementation of the working time directive. I would like an update on where the consultations stand and when the consultative document will be published. I would welcome a clear definition of what constitutes a working day for the British worker. Will waiting time be calculated as being part of the working day?

I hope that I have reflected accurately the views and concerns of those who depend on the transport industry for their living. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say on the issues that I have raised.

Derek Conway (in the Chair): Before I call the next Member to speak, I should say that there can sometimes be confusion about whether the person in the Chair should be called by name or addressed as Mr. Deputy Speaker. Some are Deputy Speakers, some are not—I am one of the "are nots". Addressing Deputy Speakers wrongly is not a capital offence, but those who are Deputy Speakers might get very upset while those who are not should be addressed by name. My surname will suffice.

If no other Member wishes to speak, we can move on to the Front-Bench contributions. I call Dr. Cable.

9.50 am

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I congratulate the hon. Member for West Renfrewshire (Jim Sheridan) on choosing the subject of today's debate. I regret that more Members have not taken advantage of the opportunity to participate, because it affects all our constituents. After the summer of discontent three years ago, none of us is likely to forget the importance of the road haulage industry; it has a key role in the national infrastructure.

I shall pick up on two of the key themes mentioned by the hon. Gentleman in his introductory presentation, and make a few other points. I start by talking about tax, a highly emotive matter that has dominated the national agenda in recent years. Recent diesel differentials have remained extremely large. The hon. Gentleman spoke about the matter in broad terms, but I can tell the Chamber that the United Kingdom diesel rate after tax is 81p a litre, whereas, in countries where lorries are loaded before they come to the UK, the rate is different. In Belgium, it is 49p; and in France, it is 57p.

The enormous differential presents two problems. The first, described by the hon. Gentleman, is that it affects the competitiveness of UK operators, because their basic input fuel is bought at a much higher price than that of their continental competitors. The second problem is the adverse effect on the UK economy as a whole. Large numbers of continental operators use British roads, and the heavier ones inflict serious damage on our roads. Maintenance costs are therefore higher, but those lorry owners make no contribution to our costs through their tax payments. Everyone accepts that that is fundamentally wrong and the problem needs to be addressed.

There is broad consensus on the way forward, and the various statements that the Government made in the Budget and, more recently, in May seem an entirely sensible way of dealing with the problem. All three parties accept the need for a road-user charge that should apply equally to foreign and British users. The charge should be applied in such a way that it does not involve additional costs for UK operators—the money should be rebated through either vehicle excise duty or fuel duty—but is paid by continental operators. That would go some way to levelling the playing field and providing a more rational economic basis for taxation.

The Government are right to have proposed a distance-based charge rather than a time-based one. That will give them the opportunity to apply charges that bear some relation to the environmental and social costs. The proposal currently applies to off-motorway as well as motorway use, and it would permit higher charges on the bigger, more damaging vehicles. That seems a sensible structure.

I would like the Minister to clarify two points. First, although I may have misunderstood the situation, I believe that there are difficulties in making the UK proposals compatible with EU regulation, so I want to check that that is not a problem. Secondly, there is some concern in the industry that the new distance-based charge, which is desirable in principle, may be difficult to apply because of the black-box technology required. The industry has asked the Government to help by setting standards. That would speed up the development of the necessary technology, which would not merely take the tachograph measurements but incorporate equipment for the new road charge and other technology to improve the performance of the UK industry. It would be useful to know how far advanced we are with that technology.

The second key issue raised by the hon. Member for West Renfrewshire was working conditions, including working time, which are important for two reasons. First, although people have different views about tough working standards and the extent to which they should be applied, it has been accepted for decades that road haulage is a special case because safety is an issue not simply for the employees, important though that is, but for the public. There have to be rigorous standards and they have to be enforced. Obviously, we are in favour of that.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) rightly pointed out the second way in which road haulage is a special case. We are dealing not only with working conditions in the UK, which are subject to British rules, but with journeys that cross many borders. Standards across the European Union must therefore be consistent; otherwise they will not be enforced. There will be abuse, standards will fall and safety will suffer, affecting all of us. Whatever people might think about the desirability of tough Europe-wide standards in

[Dr. Vincent Cable]

general, they must, emphatically, apply in the case of road haulage. We would fully support such an approach.

There is no fundamental disagreement about that point. There must be strong standards to maintain safety, and the approach used must involve the working time directive. The key point is that that will lead to a substantial need for additional manpower—if hours are reduced, more people are needed to do the same work—so there is a big recruitment issue, which means that there is also a training issue. Although we hear a great deal about the need for more plumbers and electricians, we do not often hear about the need for more long-distance lorry drivers. There needs to be more emphasis on vocational training to address the issue of labour supply. Has the Minister any views about that, and is there any industry-wide initiative comparable to that in the building industry, such as a levy-based system that would enable training needs to be met?

My final point is that I have read through the literature of the Road Haulage Association, which has a legitimate interest in its members. However, if we are considering freight as a whole, as represented by the Freight Transport Association, there is a bigger picture. Freight does not have to be carried by lorries. We know the sad story of the Post Office, which goes back some years. Probably the biggest planning application that ever confronted my constituency was a proposal to convert a big railway marshalling yard, the so-called Feltham marshalling yard, into a sorting office linked to road haulage, with the consequent abandonment of the rail link. Enormous social costs are being paid as a result of what was no doubt a correct commercial calculation by the Post Office. That decision has been replicated many times. It would be interesting to hear from the Minister about the Post Office's current role in freight, and about any support for the rail freight initiative through the Strategic Rail Authority.

I thank the hon. Member for West Renfrewshire for having initiated this important debate. We discovered three years ago that a great deal of complacency had set in with regard to the road haulage industry. That exploded in a politically damaging way through the blockades, so it is important to keep a close eye on the issues in the industry to ensure that that does not happen again.

9.58 am

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Likewise, I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr Marshall) on initiating the debate. It is a great disappointment to many of us that there have not been more participants because it is an important subject, which goes to the heart of the British economy.

Jim Sheridan: On a point of clarification, Mr. Conway. I am not from Glasgow, Shettleston; I am from West Renfrewshire.

Mr. Chope: I do apologise to the hon. Gentleman. I knew that he was from somewhere up north but I am sorry that I got his title wrong. That does not alter the fact that I congratulate him on introducing the debate.

If I were to sit down immediately we would have an hour to hear from the Minister on Government policy on the issue. I begin by asking the Minister why he, and not his hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), is taking part in the debate. One of the most constructive outcomes of the fuel dispute three years ago was the emergence of the road haulage forum. That forum meets regularly and, as I understand it, the Government's representative from the Department for Transport is none other than the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport—indeed, he was at a forum meeting earlier this month. He is the key Transport Minister, dealing on a day-to-day basis with road haulage, so surely he should be present to demonstrate the importance of the issues raised in the debate and respond to them. I fear that, worthy as the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty), is, as road haulage is not his responsibility he may say that he does not have the necessary answers to questions that have been and will be raised.

The hon. Member for West Renfrewshire (Jim Sheridan) referred to unfair levels of fuel tax. It is worth putting on the record the front page of the September 2003 edition of *Roadway*, the magazine of the Road Haulage Association. Inside a black border is a statement that says:

"Public Wealth Warning. Chancellor, you threatened to raise fuel duty on October 1, 2003. Please think again. DON'T DO IT! All EU countries must pay the world rate for oil. Only the UK chooses to levy penal rates of duty. That puts transport costs up and makes this country less competitive. It gives foreign hauliers operating in the UK a grotesquely unfair advantage. In the interests of a dynamic manufacturing and service based economy, you should be REDUCING fuel duty for road transport."

I hope that the Minister will clarify the situation concerning that threatened increase in fuel tax. When the Chancellor introduced his Budget, he said that he would not introduce an increase in fuel duty because of the instability in world fuel prices. At that stage, the world price of oil was about $27 a barrel, and it is now about $28 a barrel. The price is higher than it was, and there is clearly a lot of volatility in supply. Therefore, I am surprised that the Chancellor has not made a statement to clarify his intentions for a mid-year increase in fuel duty.

I hope that the Minister will put that omission right today because, as we know, the House rises tomorrow and will not reconvene until after 1 October. It is important to clarify the Government's approach, particularly for everyone involved in the road haulage industry. As I understand it, if there were an inflation-linked increase in duty, the road haulage industry alone would be burdened with an additional £172 million of costs each year. That is a large sum of money.

We heard today on the radio that the Government are making much of spending £50 million on trying to reduce congestion on our roads by giving schools incentives to encourage children to walk and cycle to school. Some £50 million is going to that, but at a stroke another £172 million could come from the road haulage industry alone in the next few weeks—an industry which is already paying the highest fuel taxes in Europe. I hope that the Minister will respond to that concern in the substantial time that will be available to him.

The second issue that the hon. Member for West Renfrewshire emphasised was concern about the working time directive. He asked for clarification from the Minister as to whether working time would include rest time that is part of the working day. That is a pertinent point, particularly with regard to a recent highly publicised judgment in the European Court that made it clear that, for the purposes of the working time directive, doctors are deemed to be working when they are on call. If that applies to lorry drivers, who are, in a sense, on call or waiting by their lorries while they are being unloaded, the already oppressive proposal contained in the directive would have an even greater impact on the competitiveness of our industry.

At the meeting of the road haulage forum to which I referred, both the Freight Transport Adjuster and the RHA raised that issue. A report of that meeting says that the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport, wanted to be provided with some more information. I am surprised that he needed any more information, because the Centre for Economic and Business Research produced a formidable report in February this year for the RHA, which I am sure the Minister must have read if he is seriously interested in the issues. That report spelled out in the starkest terms not only that there would be a need for 60,000 additional drivers, as the hon. Member for West Renfrewshire mentioned, but that major additional costs to the UK economy would result directly from the working time directive.

The report also said that there would be a significant increase in congestion, which would largely be due to the difficulties of moving freight at night. Under the proposals, anyone working during the core period for night work, which is described as a four-hour period between midnight and 7 am, will be limited to working a maximum of 10 hours. That is likely to make it less economic for hauliers to use the opportunity presented by transport at night on roads that are less congested, and they will be forced to use the roads during peak times and in the working day to a greater extent than they do now.

Jim Sheridan: Against the background that the hon. Gentleman has described—he has claimed that there should be parity with European legislation on fuel costs and so on, and that British hauliers should enjoy the same level of fuel tax as our European partners—will he state clearly whether a Tory Administration would implement the working time directive for transport workers and afford them the same rights as their European colleagues?

Mr. Chope: Unfortunately, as I think the hon. Gentleman realises, we as a Parliament have lost a lot of our sovereignty over such issues. If our power to opt out of that directive is not exercised now and the Government have already either lost or not fought the argument, the options open to an incoming Government will be restricted.

There is another example of that, which concerns speed limiters, and I hope that the Minister can address the issue. As I understand it, the European Commission has decided that the maximum speed for speed limiters for heavy goods vehicles should be reduced from 100 to 90 kph. The British representative in the discussions voted against the proposal, but it was carried by other European Union countries. As a result, it will now be imposed on the people of this country against our will.

That is another unacceptable example of how we are finding our sovereignty and power to decide being undermined by the European Union. The hon. Member for West Renfrewshire says that we are in favour of harmonisation, but I have said only that I am in favour of this Government taking action to remove the burden on our industry of uncompetitive taxes. We believe in the freedom of individual countries to decide their own tax rates and regulatory regimes in accordance with the principles of sovereignty, but that is being constantly undermined by the European Union.

It is inconsistent for the hon. Gentleman to argue that he is concerned about the working time directive without looking at the structure underlying such directives. That structure makes the European Union less competitive in global markets and, in particular, undermines the most enterprising parts of the European Union, especially the United Kingdom, which of course includes Scotland.

What has happened so far with the latest part of the working time directive? The original Labour party line was that it would never want the directive extended to the transport sector, but now we see that it will be extended. Labour has done nothing effective to resist it, and we are left with only the residual issue of the extent to which we can introduce regulations that are less oppressive in this country than elsewhere. The absurd result is that lorries will not be able to use the relatively empty roads at night, because their drivers would break the ludicrous regulations, which will add to congestion during the day.

The Minister should consider the CEBR report, which contains horrendous figures about the cost to the British economy of the working time directive, which is due to come into effect next year. It estimates that there could be a loss of £706 million from our GDP and an addition to both the retail prices index and base rates, simply as a result of that particular provision.

What will the directive achieve? Regulations on drivers' hours already exist, and there is no need to extend them and incorporate the working time directive. Working time has never been directly linked to health and safety, which we are all concerned about, but the European Commission has used the notion of health and safety as a ruse to introduce greater controls over individuals' lives. Unlike other parts of the working time directive, which have been introduced in other sectors, there is no opt-out for the haulage sector, which is a direct affront to the rights of individuals to work. There is a well-established right to work campaign in the United States, and I envisage such campaigns being replicated soon in this country if the European Union continues to impose mindless regulations on our workers.

Jim Sheridan: Putting aside employee rights in the working time directive and employers' potential profitability, does the hon. Gentleman accept that drivers in Britain, whether British or foreign, regularly

[Jim Sheridan]

work some 60 to 70 hours, driving 40 or 60-tonne lorries through our communities? Does not that represent a threat to the safety of the British public?

Mr. Chope: Frankly, I do not believe that such a threat is borne out by the evidence. If the hon. Gentleman were to look at the statistics, he would find that the greatest incidence of accidents occurs shortly after people come on their shift. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman is arguing in favour of the rigidities that will be imposed by the working time directive, but the concerns that he expresses are not borne out by the statistics. I have always been concerned about health and safety because I have always wanted health and safety rules to be based on facts and evidence rather than on supposition. The facts and evidence show that the greatest incidence of accidents involving drivers on the roads occurs soon after they start their shift, and the same is true of accidents at the workplace. That may be counter-intuitive; nevertheless, it is supported by evidence, which should drive our policy making.

Jim Sheridan: I apologise for pushing the point, but the hon. Gentleman quotes statistics and facts. Could he advise us where they come from?

Mr. Chope: I do not have the documents before me at the moment. However, the hon. Gentleman may know that I have taken an interest in health and safety for a very long time and was privileged to serve as a member of the Health and Safety Commission for four or five years. The statistics are well established. I also recall that they were referred to during the RHA convention earlier this year, which I had the privilege of attending. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to avail himself of the information, I am sure that he will be able to do so using the facilities of the House of Commons Library. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the interest he shows in ensuring that policy making in this country is based on evidence rather than the prejudice that we come up against so often from the European Union.

In the time that remains, I wish to ask the Minister to deal with some of the other issues, perhaps finally finishing with the working time directive. When will the consultation process on it be complete? There is a lot of concern from those in the industry that they are being kept in the dark. They know that the working time directive will operate from next year, but they do not know the detail. Surely, they should be told about that.

Will the Minister answer some questions about the road haulage modernisation fund, which is relevant to the need for more drivers—attracting people into the profession—and training? At the time of the fuel duties dispute, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced with a flourish that he would set up a £100 million road haulage modernisation fund. We now learn that only a very small percentage of the money has been spent. Indeed, it was not a ring-fenced, identifiable sum but simply a notional sum that could be drawn down in the event of sufficient bids being made that qualified for the money.

Despite all their best efforts, the people involved in the road haulage industry have found it extremely difficult to get access to the money in that fund. That is because the money in the fund is not ring-fenced but must be provided by the Department for Transport at the expense of some of its other priorities. The Department for Transport is extremely reluctant to make money available from that "fund", which is not even operating at all in Northern Ireland.

The Government should make an open declaration that when the Chancellor said that there was going to be £100 million for a road haulage modernisation fund he meant what he said. That money should be available for training until such time as the whole of that money has been exhausted. What is on the cards at the moment is that a very small proportion of that money will be used and it will not be available for training, which was the original intention. That is another example of the Government pulling the wool over the electorate's eyes, effectively deceiving the electorate and the road haulage industry.

Jim Sheridan: On training, I ask the hon. Gentleman a genuine question from a point of ignorance. Other industries have to make significant investments in the training of their own people—I am thinking of my own background in engineering, where individuals and private companies have to make significant investment in training. From his vast knowledge of the RHA and the road haulage industry, will he tell me how much they invest in the training of their drivers?

Mr. Chope: I do not have access to that figure, but I do know—and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman accepts this—that the Government made it clear when they set up the road haulage modernisation fund that they wished the fund to be used largely, if not exclusively, to promote training to attract more people into the industry. That was the Government's intention—or at least, that was what the Government said that they intended to do. In reality, every time bids have been made to draw down money out of that fund for training, they have been resisted. Only a small proportion of the money has found its way into training a fresh generation of lorry drivers and hauliers. The industry is suffering from a relatively high average age of operative, and there is every good reason to encourage a new generation of younger people to become involved. That will not be possible if the Government do not release the money that they promised for the road haulage modernisation fund.

Has the Minister been able to get the information that was promised to the director general of the RHA at the recent meeting of the road haulage forum about the contrast in the number of continental hauliers being prosecuted for traffic offences in this country as opposed to the very high number of UK vehicles being stopped and being made subject to checks and prosecution? That is a cause of immense resentment among British lorry drivers, who are for the most part law-abiding. They find that they are being picked on when more than 10,000 foreign vehicles travelling on UK roads every day seem to be regarded by the enforcement authorities as too big a problem to address. From our own experience of driving on British roads we know of many examples of lorries with foreign number plates being driven in a way that falls far below the standards that we expect of our own road users, and they seem to be doing so with impunity. The Minister assured the RHA that he

would look into that matter, and I should be grateful if the Minister present today will let us know the results that flowed from that.

There is also the movement of abnormal loads. From 1 October, which is not far away, regional police authorities will no longer be in a position to escort certain categories of load. The police expect operators to use self-escorting or private escorting for a great number of those movements. It is still not clear what the national guidelines for such movements are. Such things include escort vehicle specification, the qualifications or experience of attendants, and, most important, which loads can be moved under self-escort. The matter was raised at the meeting of the forum and I understand that the Minister himself was surprised that there were no guidelines in place. I ask the Minister present today to say whether those guidelines are now in place so that people involved in road haulage will know where they stand on the movement of abnormal loads from 1 October.

I hope that the Minister will take advantage of the 35 minutes or so that we have left to address the issues in detail and demonstrate to those present and to a much wider audience outside this place that the Government really are committed to supporting the British road haulage industry and to ensuring that it is internationally competitive and is not undermined by uncompetitive practices from the continent, aided and abetted by unfair burdens placed on it by taxation and regulation. If the Minister addresses those issues, I am sure that the low esteem in which the Government are held by most people involved in the road haulage industry may rise somewhat. I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments.

10.26 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Tony McNulty): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Renfrewshire (Jim Sheridan) on securing this important debate. He outlined the concerns of many in the road haulage industry with clarity and some force and cogency—his was not like the last contribution. I am grateful for this opportunity to discuss some of the details that he raised. If I have time, I may refer to some of the obtuse political points raised by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), but they are not terribly worthy in terms of a detailed and substantive discussion of the problems faced by the road haulage industry.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of road haulage to our economy. The freight and logistics sector accounts for about 4 per cent. of GDP and 3.5 per cent. of total employment, and the road haulage sector represents a sizeable proportion of that. However, as Members know, it is far more important than that in terms of its interconnectedness, its support for the rest of industry and the relaying of materials. It is a massively important industry.

Mr. Chope: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McNulty: No, not at the moment. I have just started, thanks very much.

Wider industry depends on efficient freight transport and to a great extent that is what it gets from the road transport sector. I say to the hon. Member for Christchurch that this is principally a Back Benchers' debate and I shall address the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for West Renfrewshire, as I said barely 30 seconds ago. If I have time, I will come on to some of the hon. Gentleman's more obtuse points, made between the anti-EU invective.

The road haulage industry is an important sector. The Government maintain a regular dialogue with the Road Haulage Association, especially through the road haulage forum and its sub-groups, so we are well aware of the concerns of its membership, which have been more than adequately articulated by my hon. Friend the Member for West Renfrewshire. In many areas, we are working with the RHA and other parts of the industry to address the concerns.

Members know that it is not always appropriate for the Government to intervene, but we do have legitimate interests in how the industry operates. First and foremost, we want a safe industry. That requires rules and proper enforcement. The notion, which was alluded to by my hon. Friend, that a past member of the Health and Safety Commission should think that the working time directive has little to do with health and safety—that it is appropriate for lorry drivers, among others, to work however many hours they choose in a given week, taking larger and larger loads around the country—simply defies belief. The anti-EU rant got in the way of logic.

We will continue to work to ensure that where we regulate we do so proportionately. In some cases, such as the working time directive for road hauliers, regulation is established on an EU-wide basis, but the directive allows a degree of discretion in its detailed application.

My hon. Friend asked when we will consult on the implementation of the road transport directive for work. We aim to launch the consultation process and document by the turn of the month. In the context of the directive, he mentioned the need to recruit more drivers. We share the concern of the industry to broaden the recruitment base to include women and ethnic minorities, and we are working with the industry to achieve that.

The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) asked what constitutes working time. The directive allows some flexibility on that point, but the issue is complex. Our definition of working time in the context of our derogation will be covered in the consultation. That consultation will be accompanied, as ever, by a regulatory impact assessment providing our assessment of the costs of implementation.

On what constitutes working time, mandatory breaks and periods of availability do not count as part of the driver's working time in the context raised by my hon. Friend the Member for West Renfrewshire. The consultation will begin at the turn of the month and a degree of leeway and flexibility will be reflected in those consultation papers.

There are other areas where we are keen to work on a voluntary basis with the industry, as our objectives complement each other: haulage companies want to maximise profits; we want to see safe operators offering good-value services with minimum damage to the environment. That is consistent with the thinking behind the road haulage modernisation fund, which is

[Mr. McNulty]

devolved throughout the United Kingdom and was announced by the Chancellor in November 2000. The fund will close in 2004. Take-up has not been what he hoped for—far from it—but the scheme has achieved some valuable results.

The hon. Member for Christchurch dwelt on the paucity of take-up, but he did not dwell on the substance of that take-up, whether it is clean-up, fuel economy advisers, the modernising operator scheme pilots or enforcement in Great Britain. Limited funds have been spent on training schemes, but that needs to be seen in the light of other projects—as he well knows, given the answer that he received to a parliamentary question. The driver development scheme, the driver simulator project, the respect for people scheme, the careers website and the modernising operator scheme have been established and there is clearly a lot more to do.

Mr. Chope: If the scheme is so worth while, why are the Government not carrying on with it until the whole £100 million guaranteed by the Chancellor has been spent?

Mr. McNulty: The scheme has been proved effective and successful in substance in those areas where it has been taken up, but given that it is coming to the natural end of its initial three years it must be reviewed in the pot, along with all other priorities, as a draw on public funds. There was not £100 million for ever; there was £100 million to respond to the needs of the industry. It was always subject to take-up. So, the notion put about by the hon. Gentleman, among others, that there has been only such-and-such a take-up, which means that all the rest is available for some other purpose, is wrong. He knows that it is wrong, but it makes a nice little political point for him, along with all the other obtuse political points that he makes.

There will be a review of the processes that have worked and of the efficacy or otherwise of the fund in all its assorted parts, and we will move forward. Take-up has been less than anticipated, not least because of the working time directive. More generally, there needs to be a clear examination and review of recruitment and retention issues and training in the industry. I must say that, at least in part, the implementation of the working time directive may attract to the industry people who have not previously found it appealing.

The fund has delivered some valuable results. For example, we have funded a driver development project to train drivers to drive in a safer and more fuel-efficient way. We are training not only drivers but trainers, who will hopefully embed best practice in the industry. Early results suggest that some drivers can reduce their fuel consumption by more than 10 per cent. If an average lorry consumes £25,000 of fuel each year, such a reduction represents a significant saving, which will go straight to a company's bottom line. It also means a reduction in damaging emissions.

We are funding a project to help companies adopt best practice in their operations. Some 3,000 seminars, which are backed up by our ongoing research programme, are being run around the country to help haulage companies understand that simple steps can improve fuel efficiency. For example, setting the right gap between the cab and the trailer improves aerodynamics and can save up to 4 per cent. on the fuel bill. The modernisation fund also supports the fitting of particulate traps, which have so far been installed on 600 vehicles.

We support training initiatives to encourage young people into the profession. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Renfrewshire said, we share the industry's desire to broaden the recruitment base beyond the traditional white male section of the community. The Government have been active, but the industry must also play its part. Many hauliers, especially the bigger ones, have made their operations more efficient and the challenge, as in other industries, is for small and medium-sized companies to do the same.

We understand that there are resource constraints. In the smallest companies, the owner is invariably also a driver who will not want to spend all evening staring at figures after a day on the road, but the biggest gains, both for the industry and for the wider community, can be made in such companies. We continue to put a lot of effort into getting the message across. We also continue to encourage everyone in the industry to take advantage of the help that is still available.

My hon. Friend also raised the question of fuel duties. As he said, it is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. Unless I missed it, I did not hear an articulation of current Conservative policy on fuel duty during the deliberations of the hon. Member for Christchurch, but I am happy to give way if he wants to elaborate. He knows that Treasury Ministers attend the road haulage forum and that they are more than aware of the industry's concerns. It is not for me to comment further, not because the matter is the responsibility of the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), but because I do not job share and have a job as a Treasury Minister as well as being a Transport Minister.

Mr. Chope: We accept that a threat hangs over the haulage industry. If the Government believe in joined-up government, they should immediately clarify the situation. The Minister is a member of a supposedly joined-up Government. If he cannot tell us whether the answer is yes or no, can he tell us when an announcement will be made?

Mr. McNulty: What I can do is reinforce what the Chancellor said at the last Budget—the hon. Gentleman is more than aware of this. There will be an announcement in October, so, given that we are barely halfway through September, he is being slightly premature. The announcement will be made by the Chancellor, not by a Transport Minister, and funnily enough October means October.

Given where we were in April, the Chancellor felt that it was not appropriate to consider such matters, not least in view of the international context. Rather than making a decision then, he left it until October, which is the normal time at which we return to do business. It is not in anyone's interest for him to rush between now and 1 October to get a decision, whatever it may be, into the public domain, given that we return, as I understand

it, on 18 October. That more than fulfils the Chancellor's obligation, as he said that he would make a further statement in October. *[Interruption.]* That was probably the most obtuse of all the hon. Gentleman's points, but if he wishes to persist I will give way by all means.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to the Minister for that. Is he saying that the Chancellor will make his announcement to the House of Commons after it returns in October, rather than between 1 October and when the House returns?

Mr. McNulty: I am saying that how and when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor makes that announcement is entirely a matter for him. I was referring only to the hon. Gentleman's point that because my right hon. Friend referred to October in the Budget there has to be urgency between now and 1 October to determine the matter. That is not the case at all, as the hon. Gentleman well knows. My right hon. Friend will make whatever statement he chooses, in the context of his April statement on fuel duties, in October. Given the Government's integrity and enormous respect for the House of Commons, I do not doubt that the House will be party, through the appropriate channels, to such an announcement or statement. That is the end of my role in the matter.

I am sad to say to my hon. Friend the Member for West Renfrewshire that I cannot offer any comment on the terms under which the oil companies supply fuel to hauliers, although I am concerned about the anecdotes that he has relayed today. I will ensure that they are relayed to Ministers from the Department of Trade and Industry, who are more appropriate to respond.

I welcome my hon. Friend's support for our plans to introduce lorry road-user charges. As he said, that will ensure that all hauliers of whatever nationality pay their fair share towards the cost of using our roads. We have already made it clear that the new scheme will be cost neutral for the UK haulage industry as a whole, as there will be an offsetting reduction in fuel duties. The hon. Member for Twickenham asked about the compatibility of lorry road-user charges with European Union legislation. The European Commission has just proposed changes to the rules that govern tolls and charges for lorries. Its proposals are broadly compatible with what we want to do, but we shall work during the coming months to negotiate a satisfactory outcome between the two. I understand that there are no deal breakers, to use the vernacular. We just need to arrive at a position of compatibility.

The hon. Gentleman asked how the technology is developing. Details of what technology will be used to operate and manage the charging scheme still need to be worked out in partnership with the private sector, which has the expertise to design the equipment. The technology will probably involve a combination of satellite positioning and mobile communications systems. Measures to ensure confidentiality and to combat fraud and evasion will also need to be developed, as he suggested.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Renfrewshire asked whether the charging could be introduced before 2006. I am sorry to disappoint him and the haulage industry, but 2006 is probably the earliest date for introduction, given the complexity of the project and the technology behind it. We want to get it right from the start, rather than introduce it in a hurry, and that takes time.

From the Conservative Front Bench, we have had no policy on fuel taxation, no apparent policy on the working time directive other than to recognise that it has absolutely nothing to do with health and safety, and no real policy that I could discern on lorry road-user charging. We did have almost a condemnation of every police force in the country—they are somehow all abusing their enforcement powers over offences committed by all these foreign lorry drivers who are far more prone to getting away with offences on our roads than British lorry drivers. I know that there is some exasperation in the industry with that, but not in such sweeping terms.

Concerns have been expressed and articulated by the RHA, but to couch them in quite the terms that the hon. Member for Christchurch did is demeaning to him, if I may say so, as is his rant against various aspects of anything remotely European. We have come to expect such rants but, unlike the expression of concern by my hon. Friend the Member for West Renfrewshire, this one did not put in context the real concerns of the RHA with any credit to the hon. Gentleman.

I listened keenly to my hon. Friend when he discussed the issues concerning the haulage industry, and I congratulate him again on securing this important debate. In conclusion—

Mr. Chope: I thank the Minister for giving way, because, obviously, another quarter of an hour is available if he wants to say more about the Government's view of the road haulage industry.

On vehicle stoppages, the Minister has not explained why he is replying to this debate instead of his colleague the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport, who serves on the freight forum. At that meeting, that Minister seemed to be concerned about the differential enforcement of the regulations. Today, this Minister seems to be dismissing that as anti-European invective, which it is not. There is a question whether there should be consistent and even enforcement. Will the Minister say how far his investigations have gone in trying to get to the bottom of the matter?

Mr. McNulty: The first thing the hon. Gentleman should not do is put words in my mouth. What I characterised as anti-European invective was how he pursued and articulated the very real concerns—as I think I said on at least two occasions—of the industry, which my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport is taking seriously and considering in some detail. The concerns expressed by the industry do not fall in the context of the anti-European invective that characterised the speech of the hon. Member for Christchurch today. That is what I clearly said. I did not dismiss or belittle the real concerns of the industry. I said that it will not have a particularly useful or articulate champion in the hon. Gentleman if he constantly pursues the matter with anti-European invective, as he does and which anyone who reads the record will see clearly.

[Mr. McNulty]

I say again to my hon. Friend the Member for West Renfrewshire and colleagues who have had to leave that the substance and manner of their raising of the issue are to their credit.

Mr. Chope: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McNulty: Once more, and once only.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to the Minister. In the time remaining, will he address the issue of speed limiters and the EU's proposal to reduce the maximum speed for lorries with speed limiters? Will he explain the Government's approach to that, because I understand that they voted against the proposal? Why did they fail to carry the day and the argument?

Mr. McNulty: That is a fair point, but I am unable to deal with it. However, I shall ensure that my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport writes to the hon. Gentleman about the matter. I am more than happy to say that I cannot respond and the hon. Gentleman may use whatever political guile he wants to make something of that, as he is trying to do about my presence here instead of my hon. Friend.

The way in which the issue has been raised is important and I assure my hon. Friend the Member for West Renfrewshire that I shall maintain a keen interest in the matter, as will my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport on the matters to which I cannot respond. I am heartened by the 10-year plan and the overall thrust of the Government's transport policy. The FTA said in *Freight* magazine that it

"will continue to monitor the government's progress in keeping to its promises. While it is gratifying that it is at last beginning to take some of the industry's concerns on board, there is a long way to go before the infrastructure situation can be stabilised, let alone any long term improvements."

I agree with that. In the context of all that we are seeking to do on transport policy for a vibrant and successful haulage industry, we need to tackle the neglect, despair and disinvestment in the overall transport infrastructure. That is what we are trying to do in the 10-year plan. I am grateful that the FTA welcomes that in some regards, although I am not surprised that such a significant body maintains a watching brief over us in terms of broad transport policy and, specifically, the road haulage industry.

10.49 am

Sitting suspended.

Spouse Immigration Visas

11 am

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." So begins one of the greatest works in English literature. In her first sentence, Jane Austen plays on the uncomfortable truth that the eligibility of a future wife or husband depends not only on their character, sense of humour and facial symmetry but also on what material comforts and prospects will result from the marriage.

That "universal truth" has not changed during the past 200 years. All other things being equal, the rich and well connected will rarely lack for suitors. Wealth is, of course, relative and the poverty of 18th-century Britain no longer exists in the United Kingdom. However, it is still seen and experienced in much of the world, and a British citizen or a person with indefinite leave to remain in Britain, whatever his or her other qualities, has a significantly enhanced attraction as a marriage partner for those in many other countries.

I represent the diverse and cosmopolitan constituency of Cardiff, Central, which has two universities and a significant Pakistani and Bangladeshi population. Over the past 11 years I have helped hundreds of constituents to obtain visas for their foreign spouses and, as far as I am aware, most of those marriages have been successful. However, some of them are not, and evidence from my constituency suggests that that proportion is increasing.

The typical case that comes to my surgery is that of a young Asian constituent accompanied by one or more senior male members of his or her family. When the foreign spouse has obtained their visa I usually hear no more of the case. However, in an increasing number of instances, the young British Asian comes to see me several months later to complain about the behaviour of their spouse and to ask me to get them sent back. Such complaints are almost always made by young women, who usually come to the surgery alone or accompanied by a sister or friend. Often the young woman will be very anxious that other older members of her family are not informed of the complaint.

My experience suggests that in those cases there is great social pressure on many young Asians to agree to foreign marriages and that the foreign spouse's interest in the marriage is often primarily in gaining access to Britain.

Two recent cases have crystallised my concerns about how the system is working. I cannot mention any names but shall give the specifics of those cases.

Mr. S, whom I know quite well, and his daughter came to see me last year to ask my help in getting his prospective son-in-law into the country. I gave what help I could. However, two months after the marriage the son-in-law absconded. That led to the break-up of Mr. S's family, as the daughter blamed his advice and left home. Somewhat unusually, Mr. S was racked with guilt over his part in the matter and resolved to track down the errant son-in law. He went to India to see the man's family, and through them he eventually tracked him down to an address in London. He phoned the immigration and nationality directorate of the Home Office and told the directorate where the man was.

However, nothing seemed to happen, so he went to the nearest police station. The police, contrary to what they should do, looked up the errant son-in-law in their files, and said that they had no information on his immigration status. They had, however, arrested him and he had been prosecuted for shoplifting. Mr. S was perplexed and at a loss to know how the system was supposed to work when the police and the immigration department seemed to have no contact with each other and no one seemed to care that this man, with the marriage a failure, was now in the country—he believed, illegally.

On behalf of Mr. S, I wrote to the Home Secretary, who replied that the issue of whether his marriage persisted would not be pertinent until the end of the probationary period. As that period was now two years, the Home Office was saying, in effect, that it would not care if the marriage had broken down until 22 months after it had done so, and that this man would be in this country legally until then. I was at a loss to explain to Mr. S how this was a sensible way of running a visa system.

The second case is more complicated and involves two families: the J family from Cardiff, with one brother, Mr. J, and two sisters, Ms J1 and Ms J2; and the Y family from Pakistan, with one brother, Mr. Y1, a sister, Ms Y, and a cousin, Mr. Y2. The three members of the J family married the three members of the Y family. All those marriages broke down acrimoniously, and all but one of those people contacted me independently of each other.

Ms J1 came to me complaining of domestic violence and saying that her husband, Mr. Y1, should be deported. Mr. J complained that Ms Y had married him only for immigration purposes and should be deported. Ms J2 complained to me that her husband should also be deported. However, Mr. Y1 and Ms Y—although not Mr. Y2, who, as far as know, is still in the country illegally—obtained indefinite leave to remain. Both have been back to see me asking me to help them to marry new people from Pakistan and bring them into this country.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): I thank my hon. Friend for raising this very difficult subject, which I know takes some courage. In many of the cases that are referred to me, the person who entered the country for permanent settlement as a spouse has left his wife within days of receiving indefinite leave to remain, and has attempted to obtain a separation or a divorce. Within weeks, that person has often applied to act as a sponsor for bringing in another wife—usually, in my constituency, from Pakistan. In the case of someone who has entered the country as a spouse in order to be granted permanent settlement and has obtained indefinite leave to remain, I suggest that the law could be changed so that he cannot act as a sponsor until he has received citizenship. If it could, the person would have to wait for another three years before acting as a sponsor. That would not entirely stop the abuse of our immigration laws, about which we are hearing, but it might deter a few young men from such action.

Mr. Jones: The point made by my hon. Friend relates precisely to members of the Y family, who, I am told, have successfully brought new spouses into the country.

This complicated position is extraordinarily difficult to disentangle. I would not be surprised if you were rather confused at the moment, Mr. Conway. The situation is confusing—all the more so because I owe a duty of confidentiality to each of these people and cannot discuss each person's case with any of the others. Whenever I write to the immigration department to inquire about the immigration status of one or another of the spouses, it refuses to answer due to its code of practice on Government information. It is therefore very difficult to understand exactly what has happened.

The cases highlight a number of problems in the system. There is no periodic checking of whether marriages persist during the probationary period, and even when the individuals inform the department that their marriages have broken down, there is no action until the end of the probationary period. There are no checks at the end of the probationary period to ensure that the marriage has persisted, unless there is either an application for leave to remain or a complaint. Many people are just allowed to disappear, and no effort seems to be made to find them. There is no joined-up information sharing on such matters between different agencies, including the police. There is no control on people doing the bare minimum to obtain indefinite leave to remain, divorcing and immediately applying to have spouses come from foreign countries to join them, which was the very point that my hon. Friend has made. Although the point is sensitive, there are insufficient safeguards to ensure that young girls in this country know what they are doing when they enter marriages with men from abroad, and that they are not coming under undue family pressure.

I wrote to the Minister in June with my concern over those cases, and made a number of proposals. I suggested that a computer-generated list of expiring visas could be produced, and letters sent to the sponsor to check whether the marriage subsists and ask whether they will support an application for the spouse to stay. If not, measures can be taken to ensure that the person is sent home. Consideration should also be given to raising the minimum age for a sponsor to 21, in order to encourage more mature relationships, where pressure from families would play a smaller part, to ensure that the sponsor had more control over the choice of partner, and to encourage more marriages between families residing in Britain between people of similar upbringing. Also, I believe that either there should be some sort of delay between the granting of indefinite leave to remain and a person being able to sponsor a new spouse, or only British citizens should be able to sponsor spouses.

In August I wrote to the Department, and I received a reply from the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart). The only argument against my proposals that she could muster was that checking marriages would put more pressure on non-genuine applicants, who might in turn pressurise their sponsors to go along with their proposals, thus perhaps increasing domestic violence. However, I counter that by pointing out that since checking marriages would reduce and shorten the number of sham marriages, the argument is not convincing.

[Mr. Jones]

Such difficult and sensitive issues are, for understandable reasons, rarely discussed openly in public, or even within the families and communities concerned; but I have seen too many distraught and heartbroken young constituents in my surgeries to keep quiet about the situation any longer.

11.12 am

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): First, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) for raising the issue and for using the opportunity of an Adjournment debate to do so. I also thank both him and my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer) for the work that they have done on the topic. She talked about courage, and both my hon. Friends, with sizable populations of minority ethnic groups in their constituencies, are raising some important but difficult issues; I am grateful to them for doing so.

The whole question of how we enforce the law relating to potential abuse in marriage cases is at the heart of the issues that my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central raised today, together with the question of what other measures the Government might take to crack down on that route for abuse of the immigration system. I should like at the outset to say something about what we are doing on enforcement at the moment. First, as my hon. Friends know, where a person marries after the commencement of enforcement action, for example, as an illegal entrant, an overstayer or a deportee, we seek to enforce their removal. Secondly, as a general rule, where a person who is liable to enforcement action has a genuine and subsisting marriage to a settled spouse that existed for two years before any enforcement action was taken and where it is unreasonable for the spouse to accompany their partner on removal, we would grant a period of leave. That discretionary leave is now made up of three blocks of two years, with indefinite leave to remain not being granted until the end of a six-year probation period. That restricts the benefits for people who enter, or try to enter, into a sham marriage, because it requires couples to show after two, four and six years that the marriage subsists.

Thirdly, in the immigration service there are teams with the task of investigating the links, which frequently exist, between organised crime, identity fraud and multiple marriages. As my hon. Friends have implied, such links are an attempt at very big business.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will my hon. Friend deal with other sham marriages that are entirely fraudulent, including one that I have drawn to her attention involving a constituent of mine, who married a woman whom he met at the wedding ceremony? The sum of £14,000 changed hands a year after the marriage. The woman had been refused admission to, or been deported from, this country five times. A racket is being run in which brides, nearly all from eastern Europe, are advertised freely on the internet. Agents, mainly solicitors, are used to ensure that the money changes hands. It is a criminal activity.

Beverley Hughes: It certainly is. I cannot comment on the particular case that my hon. Friend has raised, but I am happy to give him information about the work being carried out jointly by the Passport and Records Agency, the immigration service and the police. A considerable number of quite big busts have happened, with many people being arrested at once, as the result of long-term investigations in which false identities are picked up and traced back to identify those engaged in the sort of business that my hon. Friend described. I do not know whether the case that he cited was affected by one of those investigations, but activity is certainly under way to break those networks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central raised a couple of examples that clearly suggested that we could do more about enforcement and, particularly in relation to his first example, inter-agency co-operation. I do not find those instances acceptable: I am happy to say publicly that, notwithstanding the many calls on the enforcement teams, if information is put forward about a particular case, and the person in question has been prosecuted for an offence, we should be able to act on it. I shall certainly take up the issue.

My hon. Friend raised a second case, about the J and Y families; which was more about the potential organised abuse of the system. I and my officials are grateful for the information that he has given us. There is a suggestion of anomalies, at least, at this stage, and an investigation is now being carried out.

I should like to give my hon. Friend an example of some of the work that is being done.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I know that it is difficult to do so, but will my hon. Friend find a way to provide MPs with information about a person's immigration status when they request it, having received relevant information from someone else? As long as they give guarantees that they will not disclose the information to third parties, MPs should be given it; otherwise, it is impossible for them to understand whether they are being lied to, and whether the Department is carrying out its duty effectively.

Beverley Hughes: I understand the dilemma for my colleagues, and I hate signing the letters in question. I do not know whether it will be of any comfort to my hon. Friend to know that I also receive them. When I take up cases and another Minister replies to me, I am told the same. I have looked into the matter, but there are great difficulties: unless we can guarantee confidentiality there is a prospect that Ministers or officials could be subject to judicial review in the courts. It is not only a code of practice that defines the parameters of the information that we can give out, but human rights legislation, and a range of other legislation, by which we are bound. I understand the point that he made, and I will look into it again.

I will give an example of a case involving an immigration service visit to a British spouse to investigate a potential case of obtaining indefinite leave to remain by deception. Our officials' suspicions were aroused when an immigration officer recognised the family name of a British spouse whose sister was being investigated for contracting two marriages. Further checks were made with the assistance of the marriage

section of the Office for National Statistics. An in-depth, two-year investigation took place, which, as I implied earlier, involved a lot of tracking and careful collection of evidence. Finally, the two sisters were prosecuted for marrying 29 foreign nationals between them. They were convicted of bigamy and defrauding the Secretary of State, and received prison sentences of three and two years respectively. Some of the foreign spouses had become naturalised citizens during the investigation, but others were trapped on the immigration service's computerised warning system and were removed as people who had been granted leave to remain by deception.

There will always be cases in which we could have done more, but I assure colleagues that there are also cases in which we vigorously pursue enforcement. We try to focus on cases, such as the one that I described, in which we can achieve a big result in cutting through an organised practice that is highly abusive of the immigration system.

My hon. Friends put forward proposals to which I want to refer. I was asked whether, in the case of those who are given indefinite leave to remain as a spouse, we could delay or require them to have citizenship before they could sponsor other people entering as potential or actual marriage partners. I will investigate, although I will no doubt be told, as I am often told, that such proposals are contrary to the right to human life under article 8 of the European convention on human rights. None the less, I will investigate those possibilities because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley rightly said, they might not stop abuse but they would be a deterrent and a block in the system.

I have replied to the confidentiality issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central, but he also raised the possibility of periodically, or at the end of the period of probationary leave, checking everyone who has obtained leave on a temporary basis to remain as a spouse. He has suggested before that we might be able to check using computerised identification of applications. I share his reaction to arguments that that could criticise genuine marriages and lead to domestic violence—I do not think that that would happen.

However, there are practical problems with the current capacity of information technology and the scale of the enterprise. If possible, we would like to use the same system to check that those on student visas and other temporary forms of application, not just relating to marriage, were returning, but there are practical problems with that. Although we are updating the computer system for marriages, we cannot put a "bring forward date" of two years on a particular case—the system does not have that capacity. We can try to address that, but we cannot do so at the moment within the limits of the technology. There are also other practical difficulties about the scale of that exercise.

As we try to strengthen our response to abuse of the immigration system—and the related issues of illegal entry and working—an identity card system for foreign and British nationals could be helpful. That would enable us to have an embarkation control, which would be effective and, because it would be electronic, would not delay people leaving the country and cause queues at our ports. If we can get to that point—no decision has yet been taken—many issues can begin to be addressed without dealing piecemeal with marriage, student visas and so on. Before I finish—

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I am encouraged by what the Minister has said about ID cards. I raised the matter in the House 18 or more months ago. If she will tell me and my hon. Friends which of her Cabinet colleagues are causing the problem, I promise that we shall do our utmost to get at them.

Beverley Hughes: My hon. Friend will not be surprised to hear that I would not say that any Cabinet colleague is causing a problem. However, it is right that the detail of a scheme that is massive in terms of technological issues, time scale—probably six to 10 years—and cost should be debated. If the Government do decide to proceed, we can do so with confidence that problems that have been identified can be overcome. It will be a significant step in terms of practicality, technology and cost.

Hon. Members will know that our desire to tackle marriage abuse has been strong. On 1 April, the Home Secretary introduced changes to the immigration rules aimed at tackling the growing menace of fraudulent marriages. The measures included increasing the probationary period from one to two years, introducing a no-switching policy into marriage provision for those coming to the UK for a period of six months or less, removing the "legally unable to marry requirement" preventing a fiancé under 16 from applying for leave to enter and preventing persons under 18 from acting as the sponsor in a marriage application.

I very much welcome the approach of hon. Members, who have spoken on the basis of experience in their constituencies. None the less, my colleague the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Slough, and I still come under considerable pressure from many other colleagues who write to us, despite our changes to the rules to tackle abuse, arguing that a particular constituent or sponsored spouse of a constituent should not have to abide by the rules and should be granted leave to remain for marriage on an exceptional basis. To some extent, one can understand that. However, we need to take a clear view that we have introduced rules to prevent people from abusing the system. In fairness to everyone, we should apply them equitably across the board.

Hon. Members will also know the other side of the coin. We have reviewed our position on domestic violence. That concession was introduced in June 1999, and as a result of our review of it, we decided that the range of types of evidence acceptable to meet the terms of the concession should be widened. That was done specifically to help some of the women caught in marriages, whether or not they were abusive of immigration rules, who, having got here, found themselves subject to abuse.

It has also been suggested, although not during this debate, that we raise the age of sponsorship to 21.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I suggested it today.

Beverley Hughes: I beg my hon. Friend's pardon; I did not remember his having specifically mentioned that. He knows that on 1 April we raised the age of sponsorship to 18. A lot of views were expressed and we decided that 18 was right in the first instance. However, we shall monitor the effect of the change, and the higher age that is used in some countries, and if we think that we need to alter it, we will.

11.29 am

Sitting suspended until Two o'clock.

Schools Funding

2 pm

Andrew George (St. Ives): I am pleased to have secured this debate. The subject is of deep concern to many right hon. and hon. Members, especially in the current financial year when many schools are facing significant funding crises. I raised the issue in this Chamber on 2 April at column 309 of *Hansard*. The Minister for School Standards responded to that debate, which was entitled "Education Funding (Cornwall)". Our forthcoming 90-minute debate will give us the opportunity to consider more wide-ranging issues, and I have no doubt that other hon. Members will wish to ask questions about schools in their constituencies.

I know that it is customary for debates in this Chamber to descend towards a party political spat, but I want at least to set the right tone. Now that the problem has been acknowledged, I hope that our debate can be constructive and conciliatory. I say that for three reasons.

First, I must congratulate the Government on having achieved many of the outcomes that we want for our schools. For example, the school building programme is at an unprecedented level of improvement and development. Wendron school in my constituency has just had a new school and, after many years of pleading, Bodriggy school is now coming on to one site of the school in Hayle. Many other building programmes have been needed for a long time, and developments such as general investment, identification of need and promotion of teacher training are much appreciated.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): In a wholly conciliatory and constructive sense, may I ask whether the hon. Gentleman agrees with my identification of one of the greatest tragedies of the schools funding crisis this year? Schools have shifted money, earmarked for capital projects, to revenue budgets to keep the staff on which they depend to educate their children.

Andrew George: I acknowledge that problem; in fact, I shall be referring to it in a moment.

I come now to the second reason why our debate should be constructive and conciliatory. I noted that, in the live online webcast prior to the commencement of the present academic year, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills admitted that the Department had made a mistake. I could not cope with a live online webcast, but I am told that that is what he said via that medium, which is beyond the wit of someone as IT challenged as myself.

Thirdly, the Secretary of State announced his intention to deal with the problems that he now acknowledges exist in many schools with the addition of £800 million from departmental resources over the next two years. Earlier this year we were promised a likely settlement for school budgets in the next financial year.

In the same spirit—I have to be honest—I, too, must apologise for having got my predictions on 2 April rather wrong. I said that

"many schools that I have visited recently face the stark choice of sacking staff and increasing class sizes or going into debt. They may not go into debt this year but they will do so next year".—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 2 April 2003; Vol. 402, c. 310WH.]

I failed to get that right; in fact, the situation was worse than I said it was, because some schools are going into debt this year. Many classroom assistants have already lost their jobs—something that I did not mention on that occasion—and the impact is deeply felt.

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): The hon. Gentleman just touched on classroom assistants. One of the problems in the present crisis—certainly in London, and perhaps in Cornwall, too—is that, increasingly, classroom assistants are being employed instead of real teachers, often even when a supply teacher is available.

Andrew George: I have always understood that the purpose of classroom assistants is to assist the teacher. When classroom assistants are employed effectively, and provided that the classroom can cope, I am reassured, although my concern about large class sizes does not totally evaporate.

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): In the spirit of constructive information, may I ask whether the hon. Gentleman is aware that in January 1999 Cornish schools had 3,570 full-time equivalent teachers, and that by January this year, the number had leapt to 4,020? We need to remember that when talking about any changes in numbers.

Andrew George: There are statistics and statistics. The local education authority has told me about both compulsory and hard-fought voluntary redundancies! In a moment, I will go through some of the extremely difficult circumstances in which many schools have found themselves this year; they are not congratulating the Government on teacher recruitment. The hon. Lady made a brave attempt, but I am not sure that her comment was entirely in the spirit of what the Secretary of State said. He has admitted that there is a serious crisis. All parties accept that, and we cannot simply put a veneer on the situation by the selective use of statistics.

The Secretary of State and the Department have accepted that, in Cornwall, the LEA has passported more money than the Government intended it to. In fact, the agreed figure is 105 per cent. Therefore, some of the claims that the Department made in spring and early summer about LEAs not passporting money to schools were simply not true; in Cornwall, the LEA had gone over the top. Obviously, debates ensued, although my debate came earlier than some of the others. I certainly made it clear that national insurance contributions, teacher pensions, performance-related pay and other matters, all of which arose in one year, clearly increased costs for many schools. Many of them could not cope with those factors within their budgets from the Government.

There was eventual acceptance by the Department for Education and Skills that its model was insufficient; it did not take into account those additional costs. The Secretary of State apologised, which was much appreciated, and the Dept promised to work to find a solution.

I have kept in close contact with the Department and my schools since that debate. In a letter of 11 June, the Minister for School Standards, with whom I have corresponded on a number of occasions, helpfully said:

"LEAs and schools would be given flexibility to use their devolved formula capital funding"—

which the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) mentioned earlier—

"to support their revenue budgets, where failure to do so would lead to excessive instability within the school."

However, having made those concessions, he went on to say:

"It is now for LEAs, with their schools, to take matters forward locally and to sort out remaining problems."

I am pleased to say that, since June, the Department's position has shifted, and it is prepared, quite rightly, to get more involved in tackling many of the problems that a lot of schools face.

I have kept regularly in touch with schools. In the last few days I have heard from the following primary junior schools: Bodriggy, Connor Downs, Coverack, Grade-Ruan, Gulval, Leedstown, Marazion, Mousehole, Mullion, Nansloe, Newlyn, Parc Eglos, Pendeen, Penpol, St. Erth, St. Ives infants, St. Levan, St. Uny and Wendron. I have also heard from secondary schools: Humphry Davy and Mounts Bay schools in Penzance, and Mullion and St. Ives school. A picture emerges from that ad hoc collection of data. I will quote from some of the examples because it is important that people understand the impact that this year's budget settlement is having on some of the schools.

Mary Holloway, the head teacher of Grade-Ruan Church of England school, telephoned my office just yesterday. Grade-Ruan is a successful school, which achieved beacon status two years ago; I was proud to be there on the day that that was announced and presented. Mary Holloway said that the school has had a really tight year; all reserves have now been used up and, in January 2004, redundancy procedures will be issued for August. That means that one full-time teacher out of the current four will be made redundant, resulting in increased class sizes across mixed school years. That will affect standards because it is a village school.

Rod James, a relatively new and very enthusiastic head teacher from Humphrey Davy secondary school, told me in an e-mail yesterday:

"What we set appeared to be a balanced budget. It also appears that we have not made anyone redundant. However

(1) We did not replace at least 1.5 staff that resigned.

(2) We have not replaced 2.5 learning support assistants that resigned.

(3) We have had to draw down all of our devolved capital money to make the staffing budget balance.

(4) We have had to raid the small reserves we had, the committed pension fund, almost all the staff training budget, the repairs and maintenance, and the capital projects planned.

(5) Capitation to departments was reduced to an unsustainable level.

(6) The only way I can continue refurbishment is by committing 2004–5 and 2005–6 devolved capital.

[Andrew George]

(7) The cracks are now appearing in the budget as we say no to everything that staff propose including new books for new courses.

(8) We will be in deficit before the end of the year.

(9) Some of this reduction was planned because we knew that we would reduce by about 15 pupils.

(10) The crunch will be in the 2004–2005 budgets. Although we will start to grow again, we will have no carryover, reserves, devolved capital, a back log of repairs and expectations.

(11) To create a budget with these funding levels we will have to cut staffing by at least two teaching staff and three non teaching staff.

(12) This is at a time when I have a legal requirement to introduce the workload agreement and when 22 of my staff will expect to move to threshold three, a cost of more than £25,000, which the government will not fund.

This is all set at a school that the government should be proud of. A school that works in one of the most deprived communities in Britain, and yet like other Penwith schools achieves above national levels at GCSE, and key stage 3 . . . A school that works hard to be highly inclusive, taking a truly comprehensive intake and being successful with them."

Roger Bunt, the head teacher at Mullion community primary school, where I used to go, told me that a special needs teacher has been made redundant, that there has had to be a

"change from 5 classes to 4 for part of the week",

and that the

"Head is teaching for 3 days rather than 2."

Paul Hodson, the head teacher at Penpol school in Hayle, the primary school that my children attended, said this to me about the standards funds:

"It is sad to think that the government spent so much money on these very good schemes, designed to be delivered by Teaching Assistants, only to cut funding with so many schools now laying off the very people who were to lead them. At Penpol we have decided to keep everyone in post and try to bring in as much new money as possible. I bring in around £5,000 a year to the school working as an Ofsted inspector and I will plan to double my number of inspections this year."

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. Does he agree that in the individual cases that he describes one of the common patterns revealed by the comments of head teachers and teaching staff generally is that the many and varied funding streams complicate the issue, they have clearly upset Government funding and they are working against schools being able to plan properly for the future?

Andrew George: I am sure that schools, head teachers and their governors do not wish to reject the additional money that has been made available through various standards funds, funds to reduce infant classes and so forth, although they may sometimes find the strings attached to those funds irksome and bureaucratic. However, we have learned over the past year that when funds are withdrawn at the same time as significant additional costs are placed on a school, that has a significant impact on the school.

If standards funds are to be reduced, that needs to be planned. The reduction must be achieved in a way that does not result in many schools being left high and dry in the current financial year—which they have told me is the situation. Richard Zolkiewicz, the head teacher at St. Ives secondary school, told me that that is hard to quantify, but that this year there is a

"Huge deficit of the order of approximately £100,000."

Schools are being deeply affected.

I have given the Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education advance notice of some of my questions. I hope that that was helpful, and that he will have enough time to answer them.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I apologise for intervening in the first few minutes of this interesting exposition, but I have to attend a statutory instrument Committee, so I shall not be present for long.

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that two specific things have gone wrong this year? First, because Gloucestershire has now been included in the area cost adjustment, it has done significantly better this year than previously - we used to moan like hell about those who got it and those who did not. However, I presume that Cornwall is still outwith the area cost adjustment, and that has a significant impact. I have always argued that the area cost adjustment should be removed. Secondly, until we grasp the nettle of preparation for early retirement and redundancy throughout the entire public sector, there will inevitably be a cost implication. We must be open and honest with teachers and other public sector workers about the fact that retirement at 60 is the likelihood rather than the exception.

Andrew George: I am grateful for that intervention. Time is moving on so I shall try to be brief, and I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman will not be present for the entire debate. The Minister has heard the point that he made about teacher pensions and redundancy ages, and I have some sympathy with it. It is important that the Government, LEAs and teacher unions reflect on that matter.

With regard to the area cost adjustment and local government settlements, the hon. Gentleman is right to assume that Cornwall always seems to get the rum end of any deal for formula funding. Schoolchildren in Cornwall seem to be given significantly less per head than is the average for England. The area cost adjustment has not worked out well for Cornwall, because there are low wages. In fact, it results in Cornwall getting significantly less than we should.

Perhaps the Minister will tell me how the announced extra £800 million for the next two years will be spent. That sum was mentioned earlier. Will there be a formula for that? When will LEAs and schools be told about it? Will his Department make it clear that it will support schools that have no alternative other than to go into budget deficit? When will the LEAs be told the indicative budget for the next financial year? How much of next year's funding for schools will need to be found by council tax payers? Will the guidelines on teachers' performance-related pay change, because those increases are not 100 per cent. centrally funded?

What are schools supposed to do to stop making teachers and support staff redundant? How can secondary schools applying for specialist school status meet the criteria for sound financial management, if, through no fault of their own, they are unable to live

within their budgets this year? I understand that that is one of the criteria on the basis of which a bid may proceed.

Perhaps the Government will accept that current demographic trends, as is widely predicted, mean that primary school rolls will decrease. If so, does the Minister agree that that would provide an opportunity to consolidate and build capacity and resources, thus achieving a reduction in class sizes, rather than an opportunity to reduce the number of primary school teachers? I believe that the Department has a prediction that by 2010 the reduction could result in the loss of as many as 6,000 teachers. This is a golden opportunity that the Government could grasp.

What is an appropriate level for school reserves? What are schools supposed to do to maintain standards, particularly in learning support and special educational needs? What plans has the Department for the standards funds? The original plan was that they be removed in the next financial year and the year after that. Will they remain, and if so, are they to be used for the same purpose? What assessment has been made of the flexible use of devolved formula capital in building improvements and developments?

Despite a previous debate and an exchange of correspondence with the Minister for School Standards, many difficulties remain in Cornwall. Will the Minister commit his colleague to meeting me, together with representatives of schools in my area, to go through some of the issues that I have mentioned today? There are, of course, many more issues remaining. I am grateful for the forbearance of hon. Members. I look forward to hearing the Minister's reply.

2.22 pm

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): I congratulate the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) on securing the debate, not least because I, too, am from his part of the world originally. This is a vital and timely debate, because it deals with something that is strongly represented in my postbag and of great concern for many parents in my constituency.

Moving a little further east of Cornwall, in Hertfordshire the problem of funding our schools this year is severe—that is the word used by many secondary school head teachers in my area. Indeed, according to the Hertfordshire Association of Secondary School Headteachers, which has conducted a survey, 95 per cent. of Hertfordshire's secondary schools have had to make significant cuts this year, including more than 70 teaching posts. Some 90 per cent. of those schools expect that they will be in deficit, despite having already raided their reserves. The average deficit in the county is expected to be £63,400 per school—a total of £4.8 million throughout the whole county. That is a significant sum.

I am delighted to see that the Minister is with us today. However, I am sure that he will understand that it would have been equally pleasant for us if the Minister for Schools Standards had attended. Perhaps, having made notes, this Minister will tell us at the end of the debate how those deficit figures compare with the national average.

On 14 July I met with the heads and deputy heads of the schools in Hertford and Ware. Indeed, I have met heads and deputies in Bishop's Stortford and Sawbridgeworth, too. We are lucky because in our county we have many excellent professionals working in schools. However, in all honesty, I have never known them to be more anxious about their schools' future or more depressed about their own. They have explained to me that, although this year is difficult, they fear that the worst is yet to come.

As Members know, our schools face a raft of changes to the standards fund, the EFSS—the education formula spending share—and the Learning and Skills Council. We have had deep cuts in area cost allowances, and there is a continuingly significant gap between what the Government promise on employment costs and what the money provides. In many ways, the Government have failed to think through or cost properly the combined effect of the many changes. Individual changes may not be welcome, but for some schools they are manageable. However, together the changes are confusing. The financial impact means that many schools in my constituency in east Hertfordshire and across the county will face even larger shortfalls in the years to come.

That leads me on to a broader point that I sought to raise briefly with the hon. Member for St. Ives. The complexity of initiatives, proposals and announcements as well as the small streams of funding and the hypothecation of money means that head teachers spend more time chasing little pots of money than undertaking the job for which they were trained. Many of them would welcome what my own party is looking at and what others with expertise in the field have suggested—namely, sweeping away the complexity and giving our schools genuine flexibility to meet the needs and priorities of their areas. I hope that the Minister will address that broader point. The danger in discussing school funding is that, if we look solely at which area does slightly better or slightly worse than any other, we ignore the crucial and fundamental way in which the Government have sought to skew education funding.

I want to look to the next year in detail. For Hertfordshire, the gap between what the county requires and what it has stands at £15.2 million—that is based on the Government's own formula. That is bad enough, yet it could swell to a black hole of £25 million if, as seems likely, schools are yet again unable to draw on their reserves. Over the past year, schools in Hertfordshire, many of which have been putting money to one side to bid for things such as the specialist school status that the Government have been promoting, have had to raid their reserves. We have seen £10 million of that money put into current expenditure to ensure that schools can cope this year. That could mean, in the coming year, a gap of £25 million across the county.

What does that mean in real terms? In human terms, almost 600 teachers in our county alone could see their jobs go. That is bad enough, but the impact for some schools could be even worse. Subjects would have to be curtailed, options for GCSEs and higher levels would have to be cut, and classes would have to be missed. The impact of that would further demoralise remaining staff. They will find, yet again, that they are being asked by the Government to do more with less.

I wrote to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about those problems on 17 July, highlighting all the fears and raising specific questions. Sadly, I did not get any answers. I merely received a standard letter from

[Mr. Mark Prisk]

the Minister for School Standards, who obviously has something more important to do today. In that response, he sought to pass the buck by implying that the local education authority should share the blame. I cannot speak for other areas, but I can tell this Minister that the view in Hertfordshire is not that the LEA is in any way responsible. I asked my local schools, and not one reported any money being withheld by the county council. Indeed, the chairman of the Hertfordshire Association of Secondary School Headteachers went further. In his letter to the Secretary of State on 6 June, Mr. Alan Gray stated:

"We have worked closely with Hertfordshire LEA and are confident the LEA has passported funds to schools as you require."

The fault lies firmly in Whitehall, not in Hertford. I hope that when the Secretary of State meets with the all-party—I stress that—delegation from Hertfordshire next month he listens and responds accordingly.

Will the Minister assure me that all the changes in employment costs for the forthcoming year will be matched? Will he undertake to ensure that when our schools face particular problems from the combined effect of differing schemes the Government will be open to reconsidering whether the combined effect is detrimental to certain types of school in certain types of area? Are the Government prepared to recalculate the net effects of those changes? Will he ask his colleague the Minister for School Standards to ensure that when he responds to Members in future, he does so according to the concerns that they have raised about their LEAs and does not merely issue a standard letter? Frankly, that letter was irrelevant and somewhat insulting to those people I am trying to represent—that is the crucial part.

All we seek is a fair deal for our schools. However, unless there is a significant move from the Government to match the funding of the many initiatives that they promote and unless they ensure that the combined effect of departmental plans is properly accounted for, the danger in Hertfordshire is that many teachers will be lost and many of our pupils left behind.

2.31 pm

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): I thank the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) for securing this timely debate. In Coventry, the Government have done much about class sizes and funding. Nevertheless, there is a problem. Last Friday, the three local Coventry MPs met the director of the local education authority. The LEA raised a number of issues with us. It wants those issues to receive Ministers' attention and it wants to receive some answers. Prior to that, we met the trade unions. They also voiced concern about the arrangements for this and future years.

The view of Coventry's education authority is that there have been problems in relation to the transition to a new system for education and local government finance. The LEA says that the underestimation of the cost of national insurance, pensions and salaries is another factor that has been giving it many concerns. It has also expressed concern about standards fund changes and I hope that the Minister will consider that. Although Coventry recognises that it has done reasonably well, it still has problems of that type.

This is the second time that I have spoken in a debate about education funding, and particularly about school amalgamations and closures. I initiated a debate two years ago. Coventry is going through the same exercise this year and will be going through it next year. Let me highlight some of the problems. Sixteen schools have had to use capital and convert it into revenue—something that the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) mentioned earlier. Another three schools needed loans, which demonstrates that we have some serious problems. There is pressure to pull back in budgetary terms to cover the shortfalls. There are probably at least 43 teaching jobs that are at stake and could go, plus 27 support jobs.

Although Coventry recognises, as most people do, the extent of the Government's investment in education, there are still problems that must be addressed. I understand that the cuts to the standards fund will be deferred from 2004–05 to 2005–06. However, we do not have much detail, so may we have more detail about what will happen?

There is funding for changes, which can give rise to concern about industrial relations. That is a big concern for Coventry, but money may have been allocated for that.

In conclusion, some hon. Members who spoke before me have covered some of the concerns and I do not want to go over them again, but I have highlighted the concerns of Coventry's education authority about the impact that the changes may have. The problem is that while we recognise that the Government have attempted to raise standards and done a lot for education, all that good work could be undone if the problems are widespread throughout the country. I hope that the Minister can give some assurances on that. Members of Parliament and trade unions in Coventry would certainly like to talk to him about those problems.

2.35 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

2.50 pm

On resuming—

Sue Doughty (Guildford): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) on bringing this issue once more to the House's attention. It is part of a long-running saga for all Members present and many others. Members for Surrey constituencies always seem to be standing up pleading for special treatment, or we are treated by the Government as if we are. That is not the case. In Surrey we are experiencing the same problems as those that have been so eloquently described by my hon. Friend and by the hon. Members for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) and for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham). We are struggling with our schools.

Ours is a tale of despair. We have all been closely in touch with our schools and have talked to our head teachers. The Government wrote to me with a list of schools that received school achievement awards, and although they have been controversial, the Minister suggested that I should go and congratulate those

schools' staff. I was delighted to take the opportunity to thank all the staff at those schools for the tremendous work that they have done to get those awards.

As is the nature of such occasions, I asked to stay behind for coffee so that I could have a chat with the teachers, classroom assistants, teaching assistants, dinner ladies and everybody else, because giving them a chance to talk to us is part of the day. What did they talk about? A teacher who had changed career in her late 20s said to me, "I love teaching in this school but I am not staying because I cannot afford anywhere to live. I've done living in bedsits all my life and now I need to move forward." A head teacher said to me, "My struggle is holding on to staff at all, yet we have been developing the role of teaching assistants. They look, quite reasonably, for a pay rise and career development, some hoping to train as teachers, but I cannot pay them any more."

One problem is the 25 per cent. turnover of teachers, year after year. There are schools in Surrey where hardly one teacher stays for the length of a child's course through school, so that child will not have the same teachers at the end of school life as at the beginning. We have problems recruiting head teachers. One of the few ways in which we are fortunate in Surrey is that we often attract extremely good teachers by virtue of the fact that they are married to a much higher earner in the county. That takes us back to the days when a teaching job was a second profession in Surrey.

Mr. Prisk: The hon. Lady has described the difficulties that her schools have in retaining their head teachers. Does she share my concern that many leave because they do not feel able to carry out their professional job? They are constantly having to chase lots of little pots of money rather than having the professional freedom to do the job for which they were trained. Does she agree?

Sue Doughty: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. He is absolutely right. A disproportionate amount of time is spent chasing money, not only by heads, but by chairs of governors and other teachers. They are constantly chasing initiatives and recasting budgets. One result of the Government having left our schools so short of money has been a huge stress on the governing bodies and non-teaching staff—those responsible for managing budgets. They should be managing budgets to go forward, but at the moment they are managing budgets to survive. We have a problem because career aspirations are stunted—if someone wants to get on, they move away from Surrey.

A further aspect of this tale of woe is that the director of education for Surrey has been in close contact with the Government at every opportunity to explain to them the fact that Surrey passported its money through and to show that the finances are completely transparent. We received visits from the Minister for School Standards and, surprisingly, the Minister for Local Government, Regional Governance and Fire on 17 July. On that morning, Surrey MPs and members of the Surrey education department met the Minister and, with the charming smile that he knows how to do, he said, "I can't tell you what this news is, but I am sure you're going to be pleased." We listened to the announcement and more money was on the table, but it was not all the money we needed to stop the rot.

The announcement said that there was to be a minimum per-pupil guarantee for schools. That has taken away the freedom of counties to juggle in such impossible situations to make the sums balance, which is a problem. This is not an addition to the current funding received by schools. There is no additional money to pay for the per-pupil allowance. Teachers still have to be paid for and the money has to be found—Surrey had one of the highest council tax increases this year to make good Government shortfalls, not extra spending. There is no more money in the pot from the council tax.

Schools' balances have been reduced by £12 million. Of Surrey's schools, 66 will have deficits totalling £7.5 million and 17 are seeking licensed deficits from the county council because their deficits will exceed 5 per cent. Indeed, Guildford county school in my constituency wants permission to go into the red by more than £170,000 each year for the next two years, with overspending continuing until 2008. That school's annual budget is £2.6 million. How are those schools that are going into deficit going to repay that debt? In future years, are we going to see a cycle of money being spent on servicing that debt rather than on what it should be spent on? How is the debt to be managed and how will schools plan their budget?

As has been alluded to by other Members, there is a real threat to the quality of the curriculum, the teaching staff and the courses that will be offered in our schools. Guildford county school is planning teacher redundancies, although it hopes not to have to make any redundant. However, teachers are not being replaced. We have a major problem, which is one that the Government knew was going to happen. They had endless information, and delegation after delegation told them what was happening in Surrey schools. There is no comfort in saying that Surrey is an affluent county. They could be cynical and say, "If they are so rich in Surrey, they could pay for private education." Many do, but many others cannot afford it—the housing costs in Surrey take care of that. Disposable income is no higher than anywhere else in some families.

My concern is for the Minister to recognise where the knife has cut too deeply. He needs to understand that no extra money will come from council taxes—our pensioners are struggling as it is to meet the current increases. He must understand that we need to operate in a debt-free environment, and that we need to move on from that to encourage our schools and ensure that they do not have to take money from the school fabric fund, which has been badly raided, to pay for teaching salaries. We should give real hope, encouragement and fair reward to the people who serve our children so well.

2.58 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): This has been an excellent debate, although sadly it has been attended by far too few hon. Members, given the importance of the subject. I would like to start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) on raising the subject again. As my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) said, it is of fairly widespread concern across the country. It has affected Members throughout England, and I have no doubt to some extent in Scotland and Wales, although their funding for education is very different. In this country, there has been an enormous problem throughout a large

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part of local education authorities. It is good that we have the chance to debate the subject again, although it has been debated this year on different occasions.

It is interesting how the debate has changed during that time. The Government refused to accept any blame when the problems first became apparent. They were prepared to blame almost everyone except themselves: the LEAs for not passing on the money that they were given, the head teachers for not managing their budgets properly, and the governors for not running the schools efficiently. That was at the start when the Government were perhaps not showing any humility.

Later on, as my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives pointed out, the good news was that the Government began to accept part of the blame. In July, the Secretary of State admitted that mistakes were made in his Department, and that they had led to a serious shortfall in funding for schools. "Mistakes" barely brings out the extent of what had happened given the catalogue of incompetence and evasion that characterised the Department's handling of the matter. Nevertheless, I honour the Secretary of State for admitting that. It was brave because few Secretaries of State are prepared to accept that there have been problems in their Department's handling of anything. It was a welcome admission from him.

When the Secretary of State made his statement to the House, I was able to catch the Speaker's eye and ask a question. As a member of the Public Accounts Committee, I pointed out that, when permanent secretaries come before the Committee as witnesses and we find out that things have gone wrong, we often ask them whether anyone has been held to account, and whether anyone has lost their job, which they might have done had such mistakes occurred in the private sector. Sadly, it was no great surprise to hear—we have heard it again and again in Committee—that no one had been held to account, and that no one had lost or would lose their job. That is not a party political point; it is a point raised by all members of the Committee, regardless of party.

We treat people very differently in the public sector, and sometimes—this may sound terribly Tory, which is not something that I like to do—there are occasions when the public sector does not hold people to account sufficiently for their failures. It treats people much more leniently than they would be treated if they made the same errors in the private sector, which is a pity.

Mr. Prisk: Without wishing to interrupt the hon. Gentleman while he is being terribly Tory, does he therefore feel that someone should have lost their job over that?

Mr. Rendel: The question that I asked was whether anyone lost their job, and the answer from the Secretary of State was, "No, no one has lost their job." I hope that my question indicated the serious point that so often when such problems arise in the public sector, no one loses their job. It is time that the public sector thought about that. That point is made time and again by Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative members of the Public Accounts Committee. There is a clear difference in how public sector workers are treated when they are sh[illegible] have failed catastrophically.

The Government failed to take account of several issues when they set up the funding system for schools this year, which has led to problems. They failed to take account of the extra costs that schools were facing, which have now become clearer with increased national insurance contributions, the costs of teachers pensions and their pay settlement, and the impact of the local government funding arrangement.

The Government failed, importantly, to model how those changes would affect individual schools. My local authority, West Berkshire, sent a delegation to the Department for Education and Skills, where it pointed out that it had fully modelled how the changes would affect its schools. The Department told the delegation that it was the only LEA in the country—let alone the Department itself—to have gone through such an exercise. I found it extraordinary that the Government had not made any attempt to model how those changes would affect schools.

The Government also misled schools about what to expect. Stories said that there would be a growth of about 7 per cent. in funding and that it would be the best sustained rise in education spending for at least a generation. The Chancellor was saying that, and his language was mistakenly repeated by DFES Ministers at the time—the Minister present today has not been in his position for that long, so he can perhaps be absolved of blame for that. However, Ministers throughout the DFES were saying that there would be a huge rise in the grants given to schools, without taking into account that costs would rise by more than that—as much as 10 per cent.

Many schools were left with not only no real-terms increase but a decrease in their funding for the year, with the result that teachers are now being made redundant. As mentioned already, support staff are also being made redundant, with all the difficulties that that entails for the new school system in which support staff are expected to take on more responsibility. Some schools have even been forced to cut aspects of their budget such as capital funding, and we have already alluded to the difficulty that that causes given the underspending on capital funding over many years.

On 29 August, *The Times Educational Supplement* estimated that 700 teachers had been made redundant and a further 2,700 were not being replaced because of the funding crisis this year. I understand that the net increase in the number of secondary school teachers this year is just 89, while rolls are rising by about 25,000. That is set against the background that the number of fully qualified—I emphasise fully qualified—teachers has fallen since 1977.

I want to raise another point that has so far not been discussed. What has happened to the local authorities that suffered the worst underfunding in the past? The Government's new funding formula for local authorities has led to significant rises in some cases. Those are inevitably for the areas that the Government believe have received less funds than they should have, as that is what the formula means. Having proved that those areas are underfunded, the formula has raised the funds but, unfortunately, in many cases those funds have hit a ceiling.

I understand why the Government have introduced floors and ceilings into the formula. It is important not to allow cash falls and to set a floor to prevent the

situation becoming impossible for certain local authorities. However, the fact that they have paid for that by introducing a ceiling in other areas means that the local authorities that were underfunded in the past are not receiving as much as the Government's own formula calculates that they should.

Those areas face a particular difficulty. They have been underfunded and so have deficits to make up. There may be a backlog of work in their schools, a lack of library books or funding for special needs, and various other deficiencies resulting from underfunding. Now, although the funds are theoretically supposed to come through, the ceilings mean that they are not doing so.

Andrew George: Does my hon. Friend agree that his statement presupposes that the Government's new funding formula properly reflects the requirements of a local authority area? In my area, for example, secondary school pupils receive about £126 a year less than the average, while primary school pupils receive £220 a year less. Does he agree that, in areas where there are additional costs because of peripherality, rurality and higher transport expenses, the formula may not reflect genuine need across the country?

Mr. Rendel: Of course I accept what my hon. Friend said about the difficulty of getting the formula right. There will always be arguments over exactly what the formula should be, but I was merely making the point that the Government are failing to meet their current funding estimate. I am taking their point of view. I have taken the Tory party's point of view, and there is no reason why I should not take the Labour party's point of view for a while—I like to be even-handed whenever I can.

According to the Government's formula, areas that have been underfunded in the past are being further underfunded in the present, and are therefore unable to make up for the underfunding in the past. I hope that the Government will take that into account. When my authority went to see the Department for Education and Skills, it was told that it could have no more funding for this year, in spite of the fact that the Government's formula says that it should have more funding.

There has been a lack of transparency and openness in how the Government have handled funding for schools this year, which has undoubtedly damaged some schools. Sadly, it has also done little for the reputation of politics and politicians in general. Councils have been left to pick up the pieces. In many cases, they have been forced to increase council tax to make up for this year's lack of Government funding. There is still a mismatch between assessments of local need and the sums that local councils are given to spend. It is the old story of the Government retaining their grip on the purse strings while local councils are asked to accept accountability without responsibility.

3.10 pm

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): I congratulate the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) on securing the debate and on his consistency, because he previously raised the matter in this Chamber on 2 April. I am always concerned when Members say that they will be entirely constructive and conciliatory, but he did open the debate constructively.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) for taking a slightly more party political stance, even though he spoke as both a Conservative and a socialist. None the less, I hope that that absolves me of any blame that might be attributed for beginning a descent into party political wrangling, which I would never seek to do. We have discussed this important issue on many occasions, but, for reasons that I shall go into shortly, this is a crucial moment in the ongoing saga of school funding.

I should also like to welcome the Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education. He is one of the more persuasive Ministers, which is why he picks up all the impossible briefs. He has already been saddled with the task of defending the Government's policy on tuition fees, and now he has been asked to come here to defend their gross betrayal of parents, pupils and schools the length and breadth of the country.

The hon. Member for St. Ives gave credit to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for accepting his Department's incompetence in dealing with the school funding situation this year. It would have been so much better if he had taken that stance much earlier. When he spoke to the Secondary Heads Association in the new year, he uttered the memorable words:

"It just floods straight over my head. I don't listen to what you say quite frankly".

That was not a perfect illustration of listening government or of a Government who are prepared to accept their failings. Perhaps we have made a little progress in the months since then.

The hon. Member for St. Ives raised concerns about classroom assistants, worries about redundancies for existing support staff and the implications of the proposed teacher work load changes. The latter is one of the crucial problems faced by the DFES. The Department has put yet another burden on schools and their budgets; they have to try to cope with teacher work load changes this year and, more particularly, next year, when those costs will kick in. The Department has made those changes against the backdrop of this year's funding crisis, which has left many schools with a budget deficit from which to deal with expanding costs.

The gravity of the situation was highlighted by the hon. Gentleman when he referred to a small local school having to make one of its four teachers redundant, which is clearly a serious problem for that school. Such problems have been reflected and picked up by hon. Members from all parties and from different parts of the country. The hon. Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham) referred to 43 teaching and 70 support staff posts being lost. The hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) spoke about the problem of attracting and retaining staff, and she referred to the experience of a local school that had received a school achievement award. A few months ago that award was hailed by Ministers as crucial in motivating staff, but it is now being quietly dropped as an inconvenient complication in the arrangements for paying teachers and rewarding them for success.

[Mr. Graham Brady]

The hon. Member for Newbury went on to talk about one of the shabbiest parts of the whole episode: the Government's preoccupation throughout this year with shifting the blame for what has gone wrong instead of tackling the root cause of the problem. They tried to blame head teachers and local government, but eventually they were left with that blame; they have been caught fairly and squarely for what they have done wrong. The hon. Gentleman also spoke about proper accountability in dealing with errors in the public sector.

I do not want to rehearse in detail the causes of the crisis, which we have discussed many times here and in the main Chamber in recent months, but they include the increase in national insurance contributions, the removal of elements of the standards fund and the cost of increased superannuation contributions from schools. That is effectively an additional tax take because the pension scheme is not funded, and the Treasury decided to increase the contributions from teachers' employers towards the cost of paying pensions. There has also been a failure in successive years fully to fund the teachers' pay settlement. All that together has created a serious situation in schools throughout the country.

What steps have the Government taken? Reference has been made to most of them during this debate. Flexibility for capital funds is very welcome for schools in a crisis which are faced with the possibility of making redundancies among valued teaching and support staff. However, head teachers are put in an impossible position, which was memorably expressed by one of the leaders of a teachers union as having to choose between having the boiler fixed in the middle of winter and retaining the deputy head teacher. The flexibility for capital funding does not solve such impossible dilemmas.

The Government have made a U-turn on their decision to withdraw elements of the standards fund, and if that money finds its way to the right schools in the right way, that will help. The rules on deficit budgets have been relaxed, and that was covered earlier in the debate. However, schools that have had to go into deficit this year face an ongoing problem in trying to climb back out of deficit without a reduction in the costs that they face. In addition, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) made clear, there is the problem of further increases in employment costs occurring this year.

Measures are being taken in the Local Government Bill, which was debated on the Floor of the House on Monday, and it is proposed to bring forward the timetable for school budgets to the end of December. I shall comment briefly on that, as I did on Monday. It is rather sad that those measures could have been taken much sooner. They may help, but they, or measures very like them, were offered to the Government in January 2002 by the Standing Committee on the Education Bill. There have been constant warnings of the coming problems from Members and from people outside the House who are involved in education. That was yet another occasion—nearly two years ago, in that instance—when Ministers were told that difficulties were approaching, and they were offered a solution that they were too arrogant and intransigent to accept. Now, rather belatedly, they are trying to pick up the pieces in a crisis.

On 17 July, the Secretary of State promised a minimum-per-pupil funding increase for schools, but as yet we have no details of what that will mean. We do not know the percentage increase and, more worrying, we do not know what it will be based on. However, there has been a development. On Monday last week, I received a written answer to a question that I had asked which will be very instructive to Government and Opposition Members. I have with me only one of two volumes that give per pupil funding for every school in the country for the current financial year. I also asked for that information for the previous financial year.

The hon. Member for St. Ives gave a long list of schools in his constituency. I could not look up all of them in this volume, but I have found two schools that I assume are in his constituency. St. Ives infants appears to have per pupil funding of £2,360, and St. Ives junior school has per pupil funding of £1,993. I know that Members are looking forward to getting their hands on this mine of information.

If the promise of a minimum-per-pupil funding increase is to mean anything, it must start from the baseline of current per pupil funding. Until we have an absolute guarantee from the Minister and his colleagues that that is the case, we will all look with a rather sceptical eye at what the Government are promising.

We also need to know what will happen in the instance, acknowledged by the Secretary of State as far back as 17 July, of LEAs not passporting 100 per cent. of education funds to schools. He admitted that that would be possible in exceptional circumstances, but he has not been prepared to define them. If there are situations in which money is not passported to schools, how will the Government ensure that schools get their minimum per pupil funding increase? Will it be made by direct payments, thereby circumventing the LEA, or by some other means?

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford spoke of the 95 per cent. of secondary schools in his constituency which face significant loss of teaching posts, and of the average school deficit of some £63,000. He said that head teachers in his constituency had never been more anxious about their own future and that of their schools. That is a picture that we all see wherever we go visiting schools. I hope that the Minister is now prepared to listen to those concerns, which demonstrate the gravity of the sit[illegible] that the Government have created.

My hon. Friend went on to call for a simpler funding system. One of my concerns is that the Government are now creating, instead of a simple funding system, an utter mess. Effectively, we will have a local funding system that is controlled from the centre—the worst possible combination of factors. The LEA will be responsible for the distribution of funds but that will be prescribed in great detail by Ministers who will not, as they claim, have all the levers to control the expenditure. It is not entirely clear what the mechanism will be for delivering a minimum-per-pupil funding increase.

I hope that the Minister will answer some key questions. I hope that he will give a simple, straightforward guarantee that the minimum increase

promised will be worked out from the baseline of existing per pupil funding. I also hope that, as my hon. Friend requested, the Minister will confirm that that will mean a net increase above costs for this year. What hurt schools and teachers most last year was that they were promised so much and then the Government took away more with one hand than they gave with the other. Will the Government also guarantee that we will have the provisional local government finance settlement by mid-November?

In conclusion, schools throughout the UK have had a dreadful year. Head teachers have been forced to contemplate and begin a process of redundancies of staff whom they value and need to teach our children well. It would be unacceptable to have another year in which those sorts of problems are inflicted on our schools. If that were to happen, Ministers could not avoid responsibility by seeking scapegoats or otherwise shifting the blame, and they would not be forgiven for it. We all look forward to the Minister's usual persuasive response, but we need more than that. Real and effective action is needed in the coming year, because all the schools, parents and pupils in the country are watching.

3.26 pm

The Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education (Alan Johnson): I congratulate the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) on securing this important debate, to which I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond, although it has not been as constructive as the hon. Gentleman might have wanted. I have dealt with him on many occasions, and he tries hard, in his own words, to be "constructive and conciliatory." However, after he had finished speaking, those principles disappeared, so it would be remiss of me not to put some balance back into the debate.

I agree that there have been problems, some of which were highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham). I am not trying to understate those problems, but I am attempting to put a bit of balance back into the debate.

I had some close dealings with the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) when he first came into the House. He was such a pleasant and rational human being at that time that it makes me wonder what happens to people when they have been in this place for a while. The hon. Gentleman commented on the fact that the Minister for School Standards was not present. However, he should know that my hon. Friend has another parliamentary commitment on the Committee Corridor—he is currently strutting his stuff on a statutory instrument Committee. He would have loved to have been here—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman is now going through the whole ministerial team, but his point was about the Minister for School Standards, and I hope that he now accepts that my hon. Friend's absence is not an insult to him or anyone else who has taken part in the debate.

I understand the interest of hon. Members in the impact of this year's funding changes on schools, not just in Cornwall, but throughout the UK. I shall say something about Cornwall and then about the national situation. I shall then try hard to answer the 13 questions put to me by the hon. Member for St. Ives; since it is his debate, he deserves a response.

I shall begin by discussing the performance of schools in Cornwall. When we in the House speak about education, it is important, as several hon. Members pointed out, that we recognise the outstanding work that is done in our schools. Teaching numbers in Cornwall have increased by 11 per cent., from 3,610 in January 1997 to 4,020 in 2003. Over the same period, the number of school support staff working in the county has risen from 1,600 to 2,490, while the teacher vacancy rate remains at 0.1 per cent. I would like to put on record my gratitude for the work of the teachers in Cornwall who have been responsible for significant improvements in the quality of education in the county, and I will give some examples of their achievements.

Andrew George: I fully acknowledge the investment and the increased numbers, but that comes against a backdrop of steeply increasing pupil numbers. The point that I was trying to make in response to an earlier intervention by the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) was that although the record is good, we are still having problems this year with some compulsory and many voluntary redundancies.

Alan Johnson: If I have a few minutes at the end, I will come on to that, but it would be remiss of me not to put the points into context; indeed, people would drop to the floor in amazement if I did not.

Returning to the achievements of teachers and support staff in Cornwall, I can tell the Chamber that the percentage of pupils leaving primary schools in the county who are doing well in English has risen from 66 per cent. in 1998 to 74 per cent. in 2003. Over the same period, the figures for those doing well in maths and in science have increased from 62 to 71 per cent. and from 74 to 86 per cent. respectively. I am sure that hon. Members will agree that that represents outstanding work in the county's primary schools.

In the early years of secondary education in Cornwall, there is impressive evidence of improvement with pupils reaching level 5 at age 14. Results are up from 65 to 69 per cent. in English, from 65 to 70 per cent. in maths and from 63 to 72 per cent. in science. We all hope that that can be translated into continued rising achievement in GCSEs, A-levels and vocational qualifications.

Mr. Rendel: I do not know about Cornwall, but I know that when Ministers have claimed increases in figures for some other areas, it has turned out that staff increases have not been in fully trained and qualified teachers. Will the Minister assure us that the increases that he mentioned are in fully trained and qualified teachers?

Alan Johnson: I have not got on to teachers properly yet, but I will later. The increase has been in fully trained teachers. Opposition Members have made the point that some of the teachers come from overseas, but they are fully trained. I have more to say on teacher numbers, which will please the hon. Gentleman, who in his own words is being "terribly Tory" today.

It is also worth reflecting on the increases in funding that Cornwall has received since this Government came to power. The hon. Member for St. Ives mentioned that and congratulated us on it, and I will put some flesh on

[Alan Johnson]

that skeleton. From 1997–98 to 2003–04, Cornwall's total funding per pupil has increased by almost £1,100—an increase of 46 per cent. over five years. The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford, who was so balanced when he first came into the House, neglected today to mention that funding per pupil in Hertfordshire in the same period has increased by 40 per cent.

Capital investment has also greatly increased in Cornwall. In 1997–98, capital funding in Cornwall was £8.1 million. By 2002–03, it had risen to £23.9 million, and this year, taking into account private finance initiative projects worth £71 million, it is more than £99 million. That jump in capital investment should be mentioned in a debate on school funding. Nationally, there has been a record £2.7 billion increase in funding for schools this year. That will go up by another £4.1 billion in 2004–05 and by a further £2.1 billion in 2005–06, which will mean a total cash increase over three years of more than £6 billion.

Mr. Brady: Do those figures take into account the element of capital funding that the Department has urged schools to transfer to support revenue deficits?

Alan Johnson: I am not entirely sure, but I guess that the figures do. I will come on to that point, because it was raised by the hon. Member for St. Ives.

We recognise that local authorities and schools have had to contend with significant changes in funding arrangements this year, and we are aware that schools have faced tremendous difficulties with their budgets. The responsibility for the funding of schools is, of course, shared between central and local government, and we recognise that the challenge this year has been to manage the interaction of complex changes—the introduction of the new formula funding system, the transfer of funding to reflect teachers' increased pensions, the working through of the teachers' pay settlement and the end of a substantial body of ring-fenced grants from the Department's standards fund. Although there have been large cash increases in education this year, cost pressures have been substantial and have varied at school and authority level, depending on cost structures and local deployment of resources.

Mr. Prisk: The Minister talks of the important shared responsibility between Government and local authorities. The authorities need to have information from Government in order to play their part. Can he explain why the information relating to performance-related pay—a clear Government policy—was not provided to LEAs, which were therefore unable to work thoroughly through their budget considerations? That undermined their ability to do their job. Thankfully, in Hertfordshire, we passported all the money through. Why will the Government not give that information to LEAs?

Alan Johnson: In terms of learning lessons from what has happened this year, the Secretary of State has made it clear that we will try to ensure that some of the issues are raised next year. We accept that it is important for LEAs to receive information early enough. I shall come to that when I respond to the points raised by the hon. Member for St. Ives.

There have been problems, and we have sought to help local authorities to manage this year's changes by moderating the impact of the funding formula changes and, through additional grant, to ensure that all authorities have received an effective minimum increase of at least 3.2 per cent. per pupil. The increase for Cornwall is 4.1 per cent. That is on top of the transfer of £586 million to cover the teachers' pension increases, and the transfer of £500 million to cover the transfer of nursery education grant and infant class size grant.

In addition, the Secretary of State announced on 15 May flexible ways in which schools could use their budgets: for this year only, he has relaxed the regulations so that devolved capital can be used for revenue purposes; he has allowed schools to borrow from consolidated balances; and he has allowed LEAs to license schools to set deficit budgets. We consider those sensible measures that will avoid unnecessary redundancies.

I shall move swiftly through the hon. Gentleman's 13 questions, in no particular order, before turning to the general points. This might be a bit of a school test for me. I have been asked what schools are supposed to do to maintain their standards, particularly on learning support and special educational needs. The Secretary of State said on 17 July:

> "This year most LEAs' spending on centrally funded pupil services, such as special educational needs ... has increased significantly faster than their spending on budgets delegated to individual schools. It is essential that, in future ... spending on such central items should rise no faster than spending on the individual schools budget."—[*Official Report*, 17 July 2003; Vol. 409, c. 456.]

We have, however, commissioned an investigation into SEN spending. With the support of the Local Government Association, the Audit Commission and the head teacher unions, the investigation will provide more detailed information about the ways in which money is spent on special educational needs.

The hon. Member for St. Ives asked what schools are supposed to do to avoid making teachers and support staff redundant. As I have mentioned, the Secretary of State made a statement on 15 May allowing schools to use their budgets flexibly this year—in particular, the formula on capital funding to support revenue spending—to borrow consolidated balances and to set deficit budgets. The appropriate level of school reserves is a local matter to be agreed between schools and LEAs. They are best placed to understand the situation on the ground.

The next question concerned whether the DFES would make it clear that it would support schools that had no alternative but to set a deficit budget. We appreciate that some schools have found it necessary to set deficit budgets this year by agreement with their LEAs. Some have found it necessary to spend from their reserves or devolved formula capital allocations. Schools and LEAs have the primary responsibility to manage the ongoing consequences of such decisions, including maintaining sound financial management and balancing budgets. We recognise that that could be beyond the capacity of individual schools and LEAs, and in those few cases, we will be prepared to consider

limited, transitional support to avoid damage to children's education, where that is part of the recovery plan agreed locally by the LEA, schools and the Department. We shall discuss with heads and LEAs how best to provide such support.

We intend that the extra £800 million over two years will be provided without any strings attached for schools and that they should treat it precisely as a top-up to their budgets, just like the school standards grant. With our national partners, including LEA representatives, we are considering how best to ensure that we deliver that.

Andrew George: Does the Department intend simply to disburse that money per capita across the country, or will it use a more sophisticated method?

Alan Johnson: I am afraid that I, or the Minister for School Standards, will have to contact the hon. Gentleman because I do not have that information. *[Interruption.]* I will resist the temptation to repeat what the hon. Gentleman is saying from his sedentary position.

The hon. Gentleman asked me, as did the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady), when the LEAs will be told the indicative budget for the next financial year. We will announce the figures by the time of the provisional local government financial settlement in November, when we have completed the work with our education partners on the detailed analysis of cost pressures in the system. Once we have that analysis, we will be able to set the minimum percentage increase for 2004–05.

I was asked about the Department's plans for the standards funds, which were originally to be removed in 2004–05 and the following year; the question was whether those will remain and, if so, whether they will still be used for the same purpose. We intend to provide that new money—£400 million in each of the two years—without any strings attached, as I have already mentioned.

I will write to the hon. Member for St. Ives about what assessment has been made of the impact of the flexible use of devolved formula capital for building improvements and developments. As to how much of next year's school funding will have to be found by council tax payers, I remind hon. Members that council tax is an essential element of paying for local services. Providing funding for education is a shared responsibility, so it is appropriate that it should be met by both central and local taxation. There is no reason why any authority should need to increase its council tax excessively.

I will write to the hon. Gentleman about changing guidelines and teachers' performance-related pay. I am sure that the Minister for School Standards would be pleased to consider meeting a delegation from Cornwall, and I suggest that the hon. Member for St. Ives write to him directly. I am happy to assure the hon. Gentleman that schools facing deficit budgets this year will in no way be disadvantaged in their bids for specialist status. I will write to him also on the question of demographic trends.

I know that the funding situation this year has been difficult. I do not agree with the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West that this is a gross betrayal of parents and teachers. I have dealt with him a great deal over the years, and he has made some very flattering comments, but he is the man who put the hype into hyperbole. Let us get some rational balance in the debate. We provided additional help from the centre, and some authorities have provided more from their own resources.

Many authorities and schools have faced up to difficult decisions, and it is clearly vital that we continue to focus on the problems that we face and that we seek to resolve them. We have to look forward and learn quickly from this experience so that we can put in place better arrangements for next year. We have been working hard to do that. We have been working hard to do that, and we will shortly be making a further announcement that will cover many of the points raised by hon. Members from all parties about the necessary changes.

Iran

3.44 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): I hope that it will not be regarded as condescending if I welcome the Minister to the debate and say that I have always regarded him as one of the small band of sincere and committed MPs with independence and integrity. I was genuinely surprised when he was appointed to his position because I know that Governments of all parties do not like that kind of person in their outfit.

The Minister has a particularly difficult job, as he knows, because the situation in the Foreign Office now seems to be rather like that in Iran, where power is divided between a supreme leader and an elected President. We now seem to have two Foreign Offices: one in Whitehall and one in Downing street. I appreciate that the policy on Iran seems to have been changed in July by Downing street and that, for that reason, the Minister will probably be unable to give a very helpful reply to my arguments. My hope is that he will think carefully about the issues that I raise.

There is certainly no doubt about the change that has taken place. I could cite a multitude of reports of the Foreign Office's positive attitude to Iran. I have the report of a lovely speech by the present Leader of the House, which was made when he was a Foreign Office Minister, in which very positive things were said. However, things have changed and we must accept that.

I am very upset about the change because, given the many and complex problems over the war with Iraq, it must be obvious to the Government and the United States of America that we should be doing everything in our power to show encouragement and understanding to the more responsible, sensible and constructive nations in the middle east. The Minister will be aware that I was one of the small minority who did not support the policy in Iraq, for reasons that I explained in a debate on 18 March. We are in danger of making another huge error in our relations with Iran.

In the case of Iraq there was the 45-minute threat from the weapons of mass destruction. We have now placed a 45-day demand on Iran over its nuclear programme through the International Atomic Energy Agency following the surprise initiative with Australia, Canada and Japan. The demand has caused huge resentment in Iran, particularly as the Government there had been co-operating with the IAEA and had gained the impression that progress was being made. Of course, those could be treated as pathetic arguments of a guilty nation. However, to my great surprise, I came across a document that had been handed out to the board of governors by the director general of that international authority. I read it through carefully and it mentions some of the problems and some of the ensuing issues. I could quote all kinds of positive things. The document was issued not last year, not two years ago, but on 26 August.

I will simply quote the last paragraph, although many things in the document are positive and encouraging. The last paragraph states:

"Since my last report was issued Iran has demonstrated an increased degree of co-operation in relation to the amount and detail of information provided to the Agency and in allowing access requested by the Agency to additional locations and the taking of associated environmental samples. The decision by Iran to start the negotiations with the Agency for the conclusion of an additional protocol is also a positive step".

The report indicates that, although there are and have been problems, Iran has been trying to help and to make things positive. The director general said that he would report further at the November meeting or earlier.

The report contains a huge number of positive and encouraging statements about Iran. For me, the fascinating one was in paragraph 25 where the board appeared to accept the Iranian argument that depleted uranium particles, which have caused so much concern, could have originated from the imported containers. When one looks at the report and considers what we have done in giving an instruction to Iran—the 45-day rule—it seems foolish and almost arrogant to upset, and cause unnecessary conflict with, a country that, if we dealt with it in the right way, could play a really positive role.

The whole business has caused huge anger in Iran, and my greatest fear is that its result will be seen in the parliamentary elections in March 2004. It is no secret that since democracy returned to Iran there has been a huge dispute between those referred to as the modernisers and those referred to as the traditionalists or conservatives. The Parliament and the President are both liberal in attitude, but the manner in which we are dealing with Iran seems almost designed to promote the strength of the negative fundamentalists. The Parliament is at present controlled by the modernisers and the President is very much a moderniser, but if we carry on in this way we are simply undermining good will. That will lead to more stone-throwing, shooting and the rest of it.

Mr. David Lepper (Brighton, Pavilion): Notwithstanding what the hon. Gentleman has said, I wonder whether he shares the concern of members of the Baha'i faith about the fact that since the commission on human rights decided to suspend international monitoring in Iran in April 2002, there has been a marked increase in persecution of members of the Baha'i faith in that country.

Sir Teddy Taylor: The hon. Gentleman has made an important point. I have met and talked to members of the Baha'i faith and people from Iran. I am told by the representative of the Iranian Government that members of the Baha'i faith are entitled to move in and out of the country without difficulty. There is a problem with attendance at university, which seems to relate to whether we regard the Baha'i as a faith or a sect. That type of problem will have to be resolved. I certainly hope that it can be, because when all religions, and branches of religions, are treated fairly it makes for a stronger country. I can only tell the hon. Gentleman that my impression is that, overall, religious tolerance is better in Iran than in many of the surrounding countries, but I fully accept that his point is important and significant. I hope that the Minister will raise the issue with the Iranian authorities if he is allowed to meet them or speak to them.

I have referred to my concerns about the 45-day notice, but there are a number of other issues that I hope the Minister will consider. First, there is the basic issue of whether we should show some humility in our

dealings with Iran. Britain and the USA appear almost obsessed with arguing that we are fighting for the creation of democracy in the middle east. For example, we go around Iraq saying, "We want to make you free again and give you democracy." However, if I were Iranian, I would recall how only a few years ago Britain and its allies gave total and complete support to the hereditary Shah of Iran, who was elected by nobody and who was totally in charge of Iran. It seems that we only support democracy when it suits us.

When the Shah was replaced in the great revolution, the western powers, including Britain, appeared so concerned that we financed and armed an evil military despot in Iraq called Saddam Hussein so that he could invade Iran. There was a frightful war in which Iran survived only because of the determination of its people. There is no doubt about the weapons of mass destruction that were supplied to Saddam Hussein, because they are listed in the Reigle report, produced in America by the Senate. Of course, that is now rather difficult to get hold of, because circulation of such documents is not encouraged at present. However, the list is there, and it is clear and precise. The supply of those arms was in breach of the biological and toxic weapons convention, but I am told that such conventions are not meant to be applied to the nations of the west—according to the United States, anyway.

Then there was the dreadful destruction of the plane above the Persian gulf, which had 270 Iranians on it, almost all women and children. Not even an apology was given for that disaster. I make those points to explain that kindness and consideration has not always been shown to Iran, and we should bear that in mind when making fresh demands on the country.

What is the situation in Iran? There is no doubt that since the time of the Shah, Iran has introduced a form of democracy that enables the people to express their opinions in elections for their President and Parliament. In fairness, the power is shared to some degree between the supreme leadership and the President, but it is clear from all the recent elections that people are on the side of the liberal elements in society. Clearly, we should be encouraging them; instead we seem to be going out of our way to be negative in our dealings with Iran, thereby undermining the moderate and positive elements of Iranian society.

Has Iran helped or hindered in the battle against terrorism? We hear many reports about links with organisations, but we know that Iran was more than helpful in arguing for the release of persons detained in Lebanon and elsewhere, including Terry Waite. It was also helpful in the battle against the Taliban in Afghanistan. I understand that Iran would be glad to help in the battle against al-Qaeda, and it would be helpful if we could do something about those in Iraq who are causing troubles for Iran.

One of the recent, huge problems in Iraq, which the Prime Minister referred to at Question Time, is the shortage of public services. One such shortage, mentioned by the Prime Minister today, was that of electricity. Is it the case that the UK asked Iran to help with the provision of electricity to Iraq and that Iran gave a positive answer?

What are the Minister's views on Iran's attitude to women? Many of us have concerns about the extremists in the middle east and elsewhere who deprive women of their proper place in society and give them no rights or opportunities. Is it true that Iranian women are given greater opportunities and rights, and that more than half of the students in Iranian universities are women?

How do we respond? We still apply sanctions against Iran because of what we regard as defence matters—of course, the USA has more comprehensive sanctions. I am told that Iran's commercial and domestic airliners are terribly out of date and that there are huge safety problems as a consequence; will the Minister say whether that is right? The US declined to supply Iran with replacement aircraft, and I am told that negotiations for a fleet of Airbuses were suddenly and abruptly stopped. Is this the way to make friends? Do we treat Iran with dignity? It was reported in *The Guardian* on 4 September that the President of Iran had sent a letter to our Prime Minister assuring him that Iran was willing to meet its non-proliferation treaty obligations following a demand from the Government. However, the newspaper stated that no reply had been received.

Likewise, I would like an explanation from the Government on an issue that has caused huge concern in Iran: the arrest of Hade Soleimanpour—who was at one time Iran's ambassador in Argentina—at Durham university, where he was studying. The fact that he was an ambassador at the time of the alleged crime appeared to indicate that his arrest would be contrary to the Vienna convention. However, leaving that aside, it is known that he was not in Argentina at the time of the crime. As the Minister knows, the case was considered in court on 12 September and the High Court judge stated that there was no evidence that he was involved in the bomb attack nine years ago. In view of the fact that the whole business has caused huge concern in Iran, will the Government say why and how they acted as they did? Clearly there must be an explanation, and I would like to know what it is.

I could go on and on, but the one thing that most worries me is that there seem to be two separate foreign policies on Iran, as with so many other issues these days: one from the Foreign Office and one from No.10. The Foreign Office has shown some positive responses to Iran in the past and they were appreciated and produced results. However, it appears that since the July meeting, people have said that the Prime Minister has changed his mind and is now going to be negative towards Iran and that there has been a change of policy. I am not suggesting that some nations are perfect and others are disaster areas. I know that in Iran there are many problems, one of which, affecting the Baha'i, was referred to. However, I believe that Iran is a nation with a great history, which has sought to play a positive and meaningful role in the world, particularly in the middle east. Instead of trying to encourage and help it in its task, we seem now to be treating it with mere contempt.

My fear is that if we do not show a positive attitude to Iran, we shall probably be throwing away an opportunity to help to resolve the problems that exist in the middle east and which threaten the safety and security of the world. The Minister will know from contacts, from speaking to people and from listening to those in Iraq that the impression is that in the Arab world we are regarded, along with the Americans, as the

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

enemies of Islam, and as killers and invaders. Although such allegations may be terribly untrue, we must get friends in the Arab world if we are to win that battle. We must look for people who can help and be positive, so that we can show that we are not on our own and that our particular interests are worth while.

I am not an expert on this subject—I have never been to the country—but I hope that the Government and the Minister will consider these issues. I have a high regard for the hon. Gentleman and, although I know that he is restricted in what he can say as a Minister, I hope that he will make a positive contribution.

4 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Chris Mullin): I thank the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) for his kind words about me. Integrity and independence are two words that I also associate with him. My elevation to Government might bode well for him in some future—distant future, I hope—Conservative Government.

I will jump straight in at the deep end. The hon. Gentleman has raised several issues. He asked whether we recognise the importance of Iran and of treating it with respect, and whether we understand that it is not a totalitarian dictatorship and that it has made great progress in some areas. He specifically raised Iran's nuclear programme; co-operation with it over Iraq and terrorism; human rights, including women's issues; our embargo on arms-related sales to Iran; the recent correspondence between President Khatami and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister; and the case of Mr. Soleimanpour. I will try to deal with those points in order.

We are in no doubt that Iran is a country of growing international importance. Its size, population, key strategic position and natural resources are plain for all to see, and we have a strong national interest in the policies pursued by its Government. We can and do co-operate with the Iranian Government on questions where we share a common interest. There are respects in which we have a strong interest in encouraging the reformist tendencies that are active in many areas of Iranian life. There are other areas where we continue to have considerable concerns about the policies that the Iranian Government are pursuing. Together with our partners in the EU, it is our policy to pursue a constructive—and, where necessary, critical—engagement. The areas of common interest on which we engage with Iran include the fight against drugs—which is a great concern for many of our constituents and a major problem in Iran—international support for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, and the effort to stabilise Iraq.

For many years, Iran has hosted more than 2 million refugees from both Afghanistan and Iraq. We have provided a great deal of support for that—we have given more than £4.3 million in the past three years for refugee programmes in Iran, and we have also agreed to fund several projects involving United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisations.

We regularly discuss Iraq with our Iranian counterparts, including the possibilities for practical co-operation. Like the UK, Iran is committed to the maintenance of Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its borders. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has visited Iran four times in the past year and he maintains an active dialogue from week to week with his Iranian opposite number, Dr. Kharrazi. Our relationship with Iran allows us to support reform while maintaining a robust dialogue on areas of mutual concern. This has been made possible only by the changes that have taken place in Iran since President Khatami was first elected in May 1997.

That brings me to the hon. Gentleman's third point, which is whether we understand that Iran is not a totalitarian dictatorship. We support President Khatami's objective of bringing about an Islamic civil society based on the rule of law. We welcomed his re-election in June 2001 with an increased share of the vote, which demonstrated the Iranian people's clear will for reform and gave him a strong mandate. However, as the hon. Gentleman knows, the complex political situation in Iran has created many obstacles to the President's efforts to pursue his policies of political and economic reform. We hope he succeeds and we wish him well with those.

Those are positive developments. It would, however, be wrong of me not to take this opportunity to set out for the record the areas of Iranian policy that concern us most. We are worried by Iran's human rights record and by continuing Iranian support for terrorist groups, including those involved in the Israel-Palestine conflict. We are particularly worried by reports that Iran is developing weapons of mass destruction and about the uncertainties surrounding its nuclear programme. I shall return to that subject in a few moments.

We welcome the efforts of the Iranian Government and Parliament to improve the human rights situation and the position of women. I acknowledge, as the hon. Gentleman asked me to, that the position of women in Iran is a great deal more advanced than in many other middle eastern societies. However, we regret that because of the political stand-off between reformers and their conservative opponents, including some members of the judiciary, there is still a long way to go.

We take every opportunity to press Iran on its approach to the middle east peace process—peace there is in everyone's interests, including those of Iran. We believe that the attitude of the Iranians to the peace process should be more constructive and that they should support efforts to resolve the differences between those involved. We are concerned about Iranian resources being used by Palestinian groups that carry out atrocious and unacceptable attacks on civilians in Israel. We might argue about the definition of terrorism, but attacks on civilians can never be justified, whether in Israel or Palestine, or by terrorist groups in Iran. On wider anti-terrorism co-operation, Iran has told us that it has arrested al-Qaeda figures and that it will co-operate with us against international terrorism. We are pressing Iran to do so.

The hon. Gentleman raised a number of questions on United States Government policy on Iran, including on sanctions. I hope he will forgive me if I say that it would probably be better if those were addressed to the Government of the United States. He was correct to

state that there remains in place a national UK embargo on the sale of all military-listed items to Iran, including some dual-use items, but that does not affect the provision of medical supplies.

I should also like to reassure the hon. Gentleman that all letters from President Khatami to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister are treated with due respect. Replies are not necessarily sent according to a fixed time, but are sent after full consideration of both their content and the surrounding circumstances.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether, as a diplomat, Mr. Soleimanpour should have been immune from detention. The short answer is that he is not accredited as a diplomat here. He is a student at Durham university, and as such he enjoys no immunity in this country. The extradition process is currently a matter for the judicial authorities and I am sure that he will understand that the Government cannot interfere with that. It is therefore a matter of regret that some in Iran have consistently misrepresented the nature of the case and the role of the British Government. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will understand that I cannot comment further on a case that is now before the courts. However, I have something to say about some of the non-legal ramifications of that case.

I regret to say that on 14 September there was a further shooting incident outside one of the compounds of Her Majesty's embassy at Tehran. That was certainly the third, and perhaps the fourth, such shooting since the beginning of this month. We have protested strongly to the Iranian Government and have urged them to take the necessary measures to deal with the perpetrators to acknowledge that such systematic intimidation of an embassy is wrong, against Iranian law and will be met with the full force of the law, whoever is involved. We have also pressed them to ensure the full protection of our embassy, and we will continue to make these points strongly to the Iranian authorities. It is difficult to enjoy good relations with a country when some of its citizens are shooting at our embassy with apparent impunity.

I mentioned earlier that one of our particular concerns is Iran's nuclear programme. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the IAEA's governing board met in Vienna last week, and adopted by consensus a resolution setting specific steps that Iran should take to help restore international confidence in its nuclear intentions. We regret that ahead of that resolution Iran walked out of the meeting. The aim of the resolution was to set out a way for Iran to resolve outstanding issues with the IAEA, and walking out will not help achieve that. We call on Iran to comply with all the provisions of that resolution; doing so will provide the clearest possible demonstration of Iran's stated commitment to transparency and co-operation in this field.

In case there should be any misunderstanding, and as EU partners have repeatedly made clear, we recognise Iran's right to generate electricity by means of nuclear power, subject, of course, to the necessary international safeguards. However, ceasing to develop facilities by means of which fissile material could be produced indigenously, together with rapid implementation of an additional protocol to Iran's existing comprehensive safeguards agreement with the IAEA, would be key confidence-building steps.

The requirements set out in the resolution are no more than would be expected of any country that was a signatory to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, and about whose nuclear programmes there was continued uncertainty. The intention is to enable Iran to resolve its outstanding difficulties identified by the IAEA. I therefore welcome Iran's statement to the IAEA general conference on 16 September, reaffirming Iran's commitment to the non-proliferation treaty and to its safeguards agreement and its commitment to negotiate an additional protocol.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the issue of Iran. I know that he has a long-standing interest in this area. It is timely that he should have secured the debate now, given the events of the past few days—I do not suppose that they were on his mind when he requested the debate. I assure him and other hon. Members that the Foreign Office and the Government take Iran very seriously. There is the closest possible consultation between my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister. The Government are united in supporting a tough policy against terrorism and nuclear proliferation wherever it occurs, and we, together with our EU partners, will continue to do all we can to support the process of reform in Iran, launched by President Khatami in 1997. Engagement is a two-way process and we look forward to Iran's co-operation on the issues of concern that I have outlined.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Might we perhaps have some positive outcome from today's debate if the Minister and the Government agreed to try to co-operate to see whether we could sell Iran some Airbuses to replace the local aircraft that are falling apart? That would bring money and jobs to Europe and good will to Iran and might help to solve all the problems. Would that not be a sensible thing to do? Will the Minister discuss that with his colleagues?

Mr. Mullin: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will not expect me to clinch a deal in the closing minutes of the debate, but I assure him that I shall take his point away and ensure that it is heard in appropriate quarters.

Mr. Lepper: The Minister referred to the human rights situation in Iran, and I referred in my intervention to the persecution of the Baha'i. Can the Minister tell us whether, when such issues are drawn to the attention of Ministers, they are raised with counterparts in the Iranian Government, either face to face or through the European Union's human rights dialogue with that Government?

Mr. Mullin: Yes, I can confirm that the issue of the treatment of the Baha'i, and of Christian minorities, has been raised repeatedly with the Iranian Government, who are well aware of our views on the subject. The Iranians are fully aware that we believe that the persecution of individuals on the grounds of their religious beliefs is completely unacceptable. While that situation carries on, they will continue to hear from us about it.

National Curriculum

4.15 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Unlike some other politicians in recent times, I start from the premise that there is such a thing as society. I want the Government to do for social behaviour what they have done so successfully for literacy and numeracy. That policy was an outstanding success in the first few years of the Government. I want them to consider whether they have a vision to take social behaviour to the same levels that have been so well achieved for literacy and numeracy.

We hear a lot about antisocial behaviour. I commend the work of local councils, the Government and our public services to combat the problem. During recent years, it has dominated the postbags of hon. Members throughout the parliamentary spectrum, regardless of party. It blights the lives of ever more of my constituents in Nottingham, North and no doubt in your constituency, too, Mr. Benton.

The campaign must be organised on two fronts. As well as doing what we have done so well in the Anti-social Behaviour Bill and the Criminal Justice Bill by attacking antisocial behaviour, we need to promote positive social behaviour so that the problem is tackled on both wings—the carrot and the stick. I am setting out on my learning curve for the campaign and I have no prescriptions for action, other than a strong sense that a statutory element is needed in the national curriculum up to seven years of age, just as we have citizenship in the national curriculum at secondary level. We need something measurable if we are to initiate the required extra necessary or remedial work at the earliest moment in a child's life. Beyond that, my mind is open. Building on personal, social and health education, developing emotional intelligence and the ability of children to relate to each other without violence can all help to create good, rounded people regardless of academic achievement, which cannot help but increase when more young people are mentally equipped to learn.

I have been greatly encouraged by the good will surrounding the concept. A few weeks ago, David Bell of Ofsted courageously raised the issue publicly. Along with the Minister for Children and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills is already joining up Whitehall on such issues. He has suggested that I keep in touch with him on the agenda. Indeed, I wish to put it on the record that my right hon. Friend generously allowed me access to discussions with some helpful civil servants.

The former city council leader, Councillor Graham Chapman, is a constant inspiration to me when taking on the toughest issues in our local communities. The hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) realises, as I do, that the issue transcends party politics. All parties, Ministers and shadow Ministers have a lot to swallow and much to think about, not least the life-academic balance in education. That is necessary to enable good social behaviour, not merely disable the systems of antisocial behaviour.

I am not suggesting that schools alone should take responsibility for inculcating social behaviour in our children. On the contrary, it requires a collective effort in which families and carers will play a leading part. However, the plain truth is that, day by day throughout the country, teachers are being forced to assume that task on their own. They are having to cope with children who have never learned how to communicate, how to express their feelings and manage their emotions, how to follow rules and routines or how to act in company with others—in other words, children who have never been socialised.

My right hon. Friend the Minister will know from his postbag—I have learned this during my brief time in the House—that an ever larger percentage of the trouble is caused by us having to skew our efforts to deal with the problems created by children who have not been properly socialised. If nothing else, putting social behaviour on the national curriculum would reward the teacher who succeeded, often against all the odds, in getting persistently disruptive children to stay still and be quiet during their lessons. It would also give teachers some guidance and support in what I would argue is a most important yet scarcely recognised aspect of their job.

I suggest that putting social behaviour on the national curriculum would help to define the required standards, and would force all departments and agencies to examine their input and decide what policies are necessary to achieve appropriate social behaviour. All of us, in our public lives and as private citizens, have to live with the cost of our collective failure to develop social behaviour—parents whose children's classes are disrupted; teachers who have to practice crowd control to the exclusion of teaching; heads who want to include but are made to go through the process of exclusion; truant and welfare officers; and, later in life, staff in social services and housing departments, councillors, those involved in drug rehabilitation, police officers, youth offending teams, magistrates courts and prisons. It adds up to a lifetime of expensive and time-consuming public service input.

Then there are the wider victims—bullied kids, frightened neighbours, repressed communities and victims of criminality—who in turn have their own children, who are often brought up to perpetuate and widen the antisocial cycle. We must not forget the greatest victims of all—the children, who massively fail to realise their human potential, sometimes arriving on their first day at primary school already emotionally disfigured and permanently hobbled by ignorance. I often think that it would be much easier for us to get a handle on the problem if it took a more physical form, and the children showed up at the school gate visibly gnarled and malformed. Thankfully, however, that does not happen.

Academic studies show that good parenting has a higher educational impact than schooling. I am grateful to the Minister for Children for supplying me with the information to support that proposition. It is not about blaming parents in general, many of whom do heroic things to ensure the best for their children's development. Parents must take responsibility for their children, and we should help and encourage them to do so. We should not hanker after a parental golden age—it never existed—nor should we return to the practice of giving children so-called discipline.

We should look instead to a time when all children can enjoy the right to a decent life, and they should have the social toolkit to make the best of themselves inside and outside school. That will not drop off the Christmas tree; we have to work for it. We have to prepare for that and implement our plans. I hope that the Government will continue the great work that has already been done to ensure that all children are able to prepare for school in the right way.

Much of the problem starts before school. The problems of an antisocial youth can be regressed to the first day at primary school. Head teachers, as hon. Members know from talking to them, can spot the children who are going to go wrong. However, we can and must take that regression back even further—if necessary, back to birth.

What role do we envisage for the health visitor in spotting those children who may be at risk of not receiving appropriate behavioural education? Should additional resources be devoted to them, at the earliest and probably most effective time? Should the Child Support Agency be involved at that point to ensure that the father's responsibility is not merely financial? Should a named local public service officer—this is about devolving responsibilities and making people accountable—be responsible for monitoring a dozen local families and charting their progress through life? A loving mother and/or father armed with the right knowledge at that point is the strongest antidote to the development of an antisocial child.

Parenting classes should be pre-natal as well as post-natal and, in an appropriate form, should be a thread throughout a child's life in the teaching of what could be called a social behaviour hour in the mandatory national curriculum. Parents could make links with the national curriculum through family learning. Parenting programmes are producing some very encouraging results, but they must be complemented by developing programmes to prevent antisocial behaviour in young children, not merely by reacting to misbehaviour when it has occurred, as has to happen.

I hope to work towards some of the answers when I convene a brains trust of primary heads in Nottingham, North next month. Perhaps I can suggest that, as a practical outcome of this debate, the Minister or one of his colleagues write to hon. Members of all parties to encourage them to do the same. We should engage Members of Parliament in this issue, and ask them to convene meetings of primary heads, educational welfare officers and local councillors to pool expertise and perhaps deliver answers, then send reports to the Minister or Secretary of State. The Secretary of State or Prime Minister might then consider giving the matter the political profile that it needs and initiate a genuine national debate. That is not an idea that I necessarily want the Minister to snap up today, but perhaps he could give it some thought.

There is so much brilliant and innovative best practice, not only at Government and local government level but on the ground in primary, pre-school and post-natal education. I know that for a fact from my constituency, where sure start and PSHE teaching are making a real impact; but we must go further. We must set out for the next term and the term after that a vision of what we want to achieve on this very sensitive matter. It is also politically sensitive. It concerns all our electors and all our constituencies. One thread must be making best practice universal.

I may appear to be contradicting myself, but I believe that anything included in the national curriculum on social behaviour must have flexibility. It does not have to be prescriptive. As my right hon. Friend knows, Nottingham, North has the ward with the lowest educational attainment in the United Kingdom: it has the fewest kids going to university of any constituency in the UK and five of the bottom 25 comprehensives in the UK. How social behaviour would be taught in my constituency need not necessarily be the model for everywhere. We may have something to teach other people, but they may have something to teach us. Anything put into the national curriculum should have the flexibility to allow for individual circumstances.

If the Government wish to think further on this important topic, which is all that I ask of the Minister today, I am sure that we in Nottingham will do all that we can to pilot and develop the idea. We—and society as a whole—have so much to gain if we take it seriously.

4.28 pm

The Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education (Alan Johnson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on securing the debate. I hope that I can reassure him in my response of the Government's strong commitment to ensuring that children and young people can contribute fully to society through the development of positive social behaviour. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Children would very much like to have been here for this debate, because she is passionate about the issue—almost as much so as my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North. His is a really good idea, and changing the emphasis from antisocial behaviour to social behaviour has a parallel in social exclusion: we first started talking about social exclusion and then started to talk of social inclusion.

I want to outline the range of opportunities that is already available in the school curriculum for young people to learn about responsibilities, whether moral, social or parental, or those of citizens. I shall set out the work that we are doing to address antisocial behaviour in and out of schools before it becomes problematic, and shall refer to a variety of initiatives that support effective parenting and improve family functioning. Finally, I shall outline the plans set out in the recent Green Paper, "Every Child Matters", both to review family policy and to ensure that we have a coherent account of the work across Government that affects families. My hon. Friend's campaign, which we were at the launch of today, will be an important part of those deliberations.

The national curriculum ensures that schools provide a broad and balanced education for all pupils, and social behaviour is taught throughout the curriculum; however, citizenship, and personal, social and health education are the most important subjects for many schools. Giving pupils opportunities to learn about responsibilities is central to citizenship education, which is compulsory for all those between the ages of 11 and 16. My hon. Friend made the point about moving that range back, which we should consider. The programmes of study for citizenship ensure that pupils will learn

[Alan Johnson]

about the rights and responsibilities that underpin society. Studying citizenship complements the framework of PSHE, which provides for pupils in both primary and secondary schools to be taught about relationships, including marriage and those between friends and families, and to develop the skills to be effective in relationships. The framework also provides for those pupils to be taught about the role and feelings of parents and carers, the value of family life, the nature and importance of marriage for family life and bringing up children, the role and responsibilities of a parent, and the qualities of good parenting and its value to family life.

We want schools to have the freedom to explore with young people a broad range of issues, in relation to which we would all want them to behave responsibly as adults. We believe that PSHE and citizenship provide opportunities to teach about social behaviour in the curriculum and the responsibilities of parenthood and family life. The non-statutory nature of the PSHE framework means that teachers have the flexibility to deliver the subject in ways that best meet the needs of their pupils. Teaching beyond the curriculum, however, is just as important. The Robin Hood primary school in Nottinghamshire, for example, had concerns about poor standards of behaviour, which led to an extensive programme of out-of-hours learning, including football clubs. That built self-esteem and improved results.

It is crucial that good standards of behaviour are promoted and that any problem behaviour is identified and tackled quickly. However, surveys show that the vast majority of teachers consider pupil behaviour to be generally good, with a majority believing that standards are improving, although poor behaviour is of course a serious problem where it occurs. It has an impact not just on the individual pupil, but on the whole class. We are committed to raising standards further still and are investing almost £470 million over the next three years to do so. This September every LEA is being funded to appoint expert behaviour and attendance consultants, in order to help schools maintain and secure high levels of positive behaviour and attendance, and tackle bullying wherever it occurs. In addition, senior staff in all secondary and middle schools are being trained to use audits to identify current strengths and weaknesses in behaviour and attendance, and to draw up action plans.

It is crucial that we instil good standards of behaviour in children from an early age. This month we are rolling out a two-year attendance and behaviour pilot in primary schools in 25 LEAs. The pilot will test new social and emotional behaviour teaching materials developed in line with literacy and numeracy strategies for primary schools, so there is a link there with the points made by my hon. Friend. That will develop a model for supporting school improvement where behaviour and attendance are key issues, which could lead to a social behaviour hour, or a part of the day dedicated to that subject.

Some pupils have greater difficulties that impact on their behaviour and we have developed a range of support measures for those pupils, their families and teachers. They include multi-agency behaviour and educational support teams, which have proved highly effective by providing early professional intervention for pupils and their families to help them deal with behaviour issues and prevent problems from escalating. We are currently funding 93 of those teams in 36 local education authorities, and that will be extended to a further 27 LEAs early next year.

Learning support units are helping to minimise disruption in the classroom and reduce the number of exclusions by removing pupils with behavioural difficulties from mainstream classes. Such units provide a setting to educate those pupils and address their behavioural difficulties within the school so that they can be effectively reintegrated at the earliest opportunity.

Involving parents at an early stage of their child's antisocial behaviour helps prevent it from becoming entrenched. That is why we are proposing in the Anti-social Behaviour Bill that youth offending teams will have a statutory power to make parenting contracts with parents of children who are engaging, or are likely to engage, in offending or antisocial behaviour in the community. The introduction of parenting contracts will give youth offending teams an additional tool to tackle antisocial behaviour effectively, and give them some authority with the parents to whom they are offered.

Mr. Allen: I am very pleased to hear what the Minister has said so far. Aside from the cultural aim of ensuring that our estates return to a decent level of social behaviour, I appeal to him economically. He will be aware that given the amount of money that has to be spent on one disruptive child who may then encounter the criminal justice system or drug rehab, public service is paying for a lifetime of getting it wrong instead of spending a couple of thousand pounds on intervention early on in life. That is an economic argument; I know that the Minister is keen to expand the provision for education post-16 and perhaps he may be able to corner a little money if he gets the issue of social behaviour right too.

Alan Johnson: I agree that there is an economic case for early intervention and preventing the problems from arising in the first place. That is a very important part of the Green Paper that I shall mention in just a second.

Recent research commissioned by my Department highlights the crucial role of parenting in children's education. That is the nub of the debate this afternoon. In particular, it highlights the crucial role of parenting for primary age children. That is why our strong commitment to supporting families is central to our vision. Strong families are at the heart of strong communities, and successful and confident parenting is essential to help to create healthy families.

Our role as a Government is to enable parents to do the best they can for their children. Most parents strive to do so, but how they do that will vary according to individual parents' own experiences. An effective means of providing direct support in parenting is through the voluntary sector. For example, the new parenting fund will provide £25 million over three years for voluntary and community sector initiatives to help parents improve their parenting skills. Sure start children's centres—one of the most, if not the most successful

initiative of this Government—will also have an important role to play. Integrated support programmes provide services such as outreach support, home visits, community support, child minding networks, counselling and parenting classes.

Finally, it is important to identify areas in which more joined-up policy development may be necessary to ensure that work is as effective as possible. I am sure that my hon. Friend recognises that the creation of the department in the Department for Education and Skills, which under my right hon. Friend the Minister for Children is taking in all the various children's issues from other Government Departments, is a step in the right direction.

A review led by the family policy unit will map current Government work and provide a coherent account of what the Government are doing to support children and their families. The Green Paper, "Every Child Matters" did not receive much press coverage, but was an important document in this whole sphere and for education. In it, we set out our aim to ensure that every child has the chance to fulfil their potential. We described our proposals for building on the progress already made and the main areas for further action to improve children's lives. They include improving parenting and family support, and early intervention when problems are identified.

The range of measures that I have described to support the teaching of social behaviour in the classroom provides a firm foundation on which to build. Some of the suggestions made by my hon. Friend are important in taking that forward. We have the foundations and we now need to build on them.

Mr. Allen: I sense that my right hon. Friend is coming to the end of his comments and I want to draw him further on a couple of matters. As well as being a distinguished Minister, my right hon. Friend is a Member of Parliament for an area not dissimilar to mine. He must have seen the consequences of antisocial behaviour, weekend after weekend at his surgeries. He knows what it means to our electorate.

Will my right hon. Friend take back to our right hon. Friend the Minister for Children the idea of involving Members of Parliament as a sounding board on the possibilities that I have outlined today? Will he also take back to her the possibility of convening a group of Members of Parliament of all parties with an interest in the matter and using it as her own focus group or brains trust to try to bring forward some ideas from the very good practice that exists across the United Kingdom?

Alan Johnson: I certainly take that suggestion on board. It would be good for parliamentarians and Parliament to play such a co-ordinating role. I cannot think of any other person in a community better placed than the local Member of Parliament to galvanise action in that direction. I am sure that when my hon. Friend has his meeting with primary school heads in Nottingham, North shortly they will turn up in droves, as I am sure they would in west Hull and Bootle. My ministerial colleague will be very interested in that suggestion and in my hon. Friend's point that this is a cross-party issue with huge support throughout the House. Again, it will benefit Parliament to be seen to be acting in a cross-party way on such issues.

We have laid the foundations. Equally important is the range of initiatives to support parents in their role as children's first educators and enduring role models. Most of the social divisions in society and educational attainment problems are embedded by the age of three, which is why sure start was such an important initiative. Those measures and the proposals in the Green Paper to provide better early identification of problems are important.

Mr. Allen: In the last few seconds, could my right hon. Friend outline—he could write to me if he cannot answer immediately—the co-ordination that takes place, in addition to that through our right hon. Friend the Minister for Children, which is very welcome, at Cabinet and Cabinet Committee levels to ensure that social services and work and pensions issues are joined up throughout Whitehall? Everyone has an interest in the matter.

Alan Johnson: My right hon. Friend will write to my hon. Friend. She is very keen for it to work properly throughout Whitehall and the result will be more coherent support for the social development of every child, the result of which will be a better society.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes to Five o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 18 September 2003

[MR. EDWARD O'HARA *in the Chair*]

Higher Education

[Relevant documents: The Future of Higher Education–Fifth Report from the Education and Skills Committee, Session 2002–03, HC 425-I, and the Government response thereto, Cm 5932.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): It gives me great pleasure to introduce this debate on the report of the Select Committee on Education and Skills on the White Paper, "The Future of Higher Education".

As most of us know, the Select Committee system is very important. I believe that it involves some of the best activities that we parliamentarians indulge in. It is a great privilege to be the Chairman of the Education and Skills Committee. Its members are a good team, and we pride ourselves on the quality of our reports, particularly the one we are debating today.

Some of our colleagues may not know that if one wants to secure a debate of this nature, one must go to the Liaison Committee, which consists of the Chairmen of all the Select Committees, and fight for it. I was allocated a day to debate higher education, but the Government subsequently postponed the White Paper's publication considerably, and we had to suffer the indignity of the Government stealing our debate for their purposes. By being dogged, we managed to get it back, which we are pleased about. It was hard fought for.

We believe that the report is one of our best, although we are proud of all of them. The Government's response was disappointing, but we have seen some movement since they published that response. I will reveal how we reached our conclusions and recommendations.

Select Committees work in a particular way, and that involves taking evidence. In our higher education investigation, we asked for evidence and invited people to give oral evidence. We assiduously sought comment from all the interested parties. Anyone interested in higher education could write to us. Indeed, when some higher education institutions did not respond, we wrote and wrote again to ensure that none was left out. When there was insufficient time to hear all the oral evidence that we would have liked to hear, we got on trains and went to institutions such as the universities of Edinburgh, Belfast, Oxford and Cambridge, sometimes as a whole Committee, and sometimes individually to get a fair reflection. We did that work because we wanted to find out what those involved in higher education thought of the White Paper.

We were so assiduous because we believed that the development of higher education is at a pivotal point. We believe that we have an opportunity to ensure the right quantity and quality of investment in education, and that there would be serious consequences for the nation if that opportunity were missed.

In the report summary, we stated:

"we examine the proposals in the White Paper *The Future of Higher Education* and the implications of the large investment in higher education over the next three years, with spending rising from around £7.5 billion in 2002–03 to almost £10 billion in 2005–06—a real terms increase of more than 6 per cent. each year."

We believed that our aim was

"to make a positive contribution to improving the Government's White Paper."

We also said:

"Universities are vital to the future successful development of the potential of individuals and society as a whole. They are at the very heart of the maintenance of an intellectually vigorous and civilised society. They are also essential to the future prosperity of our nation."

Too many Governments and politicians tend to emphasise the second and not the first of those priorities. Higher education is about the maintenance of an intellectually vigorous and civilised society. Of course, it is also about the future prosperity of our economy and our country.

We reminded the Government that universities in the United Kingdom are basically very successful. If one looks at the spending pattern over recent years, one wonders how we have maintained a higher education system renowned for its quality. There is no question but that it is so renowned; we can judge that from who wants to come here to study. Most people in the world, when they are choosing somewhere to study at undergraduate or postgraduate level, choose the United Kingdom. Others might query whether the Ivy league universities in the United States are considered. However, the Ivy league is a small proportion of 3,000 higher education institutions there, and a very small proportion of those are attractive to incoming students from all over the world.

Our universities appeal across the piece. If anyone is of the view that it is only the likes of Oxford, Cambridge, the London School of Economics and Warwick that attract foreign students, they should dismiss that idea from their mind. Let us look at the facts. As we increased our knowledge and took evidence for the investigation, we found how little was known, and how many misconceptions there were about the nature of British higher education. It is still of high quality. We believe that we uncovered the secret of British higher education—its unique selling point, to use a commercial term—and that is excellence. That excellence is founded on the link between research and teaching in the same institution.

Running through our report was the view that the Government did not fully understand that this country's higher education system will be put in peril if we start to think that it is convenient to have some teaching universities and some research universities. The real strength of our system makes it much finer and more attractive than those of continental Europe, where so much undergraduate teaching is divorced from research; research has been spun off into doctoral and post-doctoral research institutes, and undergraduate teaching takes place in large classes and lecture groups with little personal tuition and contact, and with higher drop-out rates and poor retention.

[Mr. Barry Sheerman]

The United Kingdom has not gone down that route, although that is surprising if one looks at the 1990s and the disaster of funding in higher education. I do not want to make any political points, but the previous Administration reduced funding in higher education by something like 36 per cent. At the same time there was a vast expansion in higher education—and let us welcome that fact—but it was done very much on the cheap. It was up to the incoming Government in 1997 to put that right. They were quite slow to do so—let us be honest about that—but they had different priorities in education. The Government came in on a slogan of "education, education, education". Let us give credit where it is due: from 1997 to 2003, school capital increased by 80 per cent., for secondary education it increased by 69 per cent. and for under-fives by 60 per cent. Overall school spending has increased by 35 per cent. Even further education and adult education has had an increase of 38 per cent. By contrast, higher education has increased by 6 per cent. That puts matters in context.

To be fair, I shall mention the White Paper's foreword's reference to a much greater expansion in the next three years, from £7.5 billion to £10 billion—a real terms increase of 6 per cent. per year. However, it is important not only to put the quality of British higher education in context, but to explain the background. There has been a long period of famine, but with a great expansion in numbers, and there is no doubt that whatever party came to power in 1997 needed to make a choice about what was to happen to the world of higher education, on which so much of our country's future—its economy and society—depends.

We found some good things and some bad in the White Paper. However, we found something else as we took evidence over many weeks from Ministers, though since the Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education is new, we did not have an opportunity to grill him—his turn will come. We met the Secretary of State and many leading educationists. We found that the priorities were not all in one area. From the newspapers, one would think that the White Paper and our report were about only one issue—student finance. That is not so. A much broader brush is being applied. The document is about the future of higher education across the piece.

The people whom we interviewed or who communicated with the Committee seemed united by the question of research. The White Paper contains a commitment to a greater focus on and concentration of research in a few institutions. To be fair, the Government did not take the most extreme view, which is associated with the rector of Imperial college, London, Sir Richard Sykes. He is a fine man whom I have known for years, and who comes from Huddersfield. He takes a robust view of the future of higher education. I asked him whether he meant that he wanted a concentration of research in a handful of universities. He said yes. I asked whether he meant a handful, rather than five, six, seven or eight. No, he wanted five.

Many members of the Committee were worried about the notion of such a concentration of research, which would mean its being mainly in London and the south-east. There would be no regional spread, which would be of great concern to the many of us who want a vigorous regeneration of the regions and know how important higher education is to that.

There is a belief in the Government that greater concentration of research is the way to go. We said that they should think again, and we thought that their response to us was a little insipid. We made our case very strongly, and they did not really give an inch. We all know that there is an argument for higher concentration of research into big science, but only a few universities have the capacity to be in the big science game. Of course, good funding is necessary for those universities. However, there is much else that is important. Evidence that we took, even from the university with the smallest research budget, led us to a certain feeling about the matter. The vice-chancellor of the university of East Anglia made a relevant point.

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): A fine man.

Mr. Sheerman: Indeed, he is, and my hon. Friend says so for obvious reasons. A representative of a fine university was speaking up for the Anglia polytechnic university and saying that it has an extremely small research budget. However, it is important both psychologically and in that it keeps the flame of research alight. One can list universities that receive little research funding from the Government, but to which it is very important indeed.

To reintroduce—almost by the back door—a binary system of universities that are no longer deemed to be capable of research would be dangerous, particularly taken with the fact that one of the wonderful things about higher education in Britain in recent years has been its degree of turbulence. There is movement; we have a league system and institutions can move both up and down, as evidenced by *The Sunday Times* ranking of universities last Sunday in which York university was sixth and deemed the university of the year. Think of where York, Warwick or Bath—and any number of institutions that have developed into major players in research—started. Some universities are focused and some are not, on the big, big science game, but there has been a refreshing shake-up. On the other hand, we might also observe that universities that have rested on their laurels have sunk down the ratings.

Dr. Gibson: Does my hon. Friend agree that some of the most salient discoveries in science have been made at universities that are not in what he describes as the big league for science? One thinks of DNA and its forensic uses at universities such as Leicester, which is not in the top six, but is full of individuals who are exciting, enthusiastic and pretty bright.

Mr. Sheerman: I agree with my fellow Select Committee Chairman—the Select Committee on Science and Technology in his case—who knows a great deal about the subject and is a fine researcher. He will agree about getting the balance, keeping the flame alight and enjoying the mobility of a league system at the same time as preserving high investment in big science where such capacity is needed. There is nothing wrong with the Government's arguments about clustering and co-

operation. The message from the Committee was, "If you believe in investment in big science, invest in it, but do not rob Peter to pay Paul."

On funding, the Government told us that they were confident in what they were doing and did not believe that we were right. That was a disappointment. However, according to press reports of summer meetings of the Higher Education Funding Council for England and others, there is more refreshing news. I shall be interested to hear what the Minister says, because one senses that, perhaps, the Government have listened to the vice-chancellors, the Russell group and the vast majority of those who gave evidence to the Committee and have realised that the right course might be to achieve a balance that is slightly different from that in the White Paper.

An important area, on which we spent some time, was the Government's attitude to pay. That was where we felt that, to put it politely, the Government were using weasel words. They know that if a certain percentage of gross domestic product is put into higher education it should be used to pay higher salaries. If it is not put in, that cannot happen. One of our findings was that salaries in higher education had been too low for too long. All the evidence demonstrated that it is particularly acute in two areas: keeping bright young men and women doing their PhDs and encouraging them to stay on to become academics. During that transition period and in the first five to eight years of a career, salaries were very poor indeed. That cannot continue without an overall decline in the quality of the teachers and researchers entering higher education. We stated strongly that universities were their staff—the teachers and researchers—who must be looked after better.

The average salary of a school teacher is about £25,000, and it is about £23,000 for a university teacher. This is an interesting state of affairs. I told the Association of University Teachers, of which I am, vestigially, still a member, that I welcome its public spiritedness, because it does not really believe in any source of income for higher education other than from the income tax payer, but I left my profession in higher education in 1979 and there has, since then, been no increase in pay in real terms. I suggested that that was not quite the success that some university teachers might have wanted. Low pay in universities is no good to anyone, and it is not good enough for the Government to say that it is up to the institutions to decide how much they pay. With a salary increase of only 6 per cent., a vice-chancellor knows the limitations on the university's ability to pay, so the Government must accept responsibility and offer decent pay to the men and women who run our universities.

Dr. Gibson: I could say that the thing to do is to become an MP, as one would almost double one's salary, but that may be too crude a solution. Would my hon. Friend apply his comments not only to full-time academic staff, but to the men and—mainly—women in universities on short-term contracts, who sometimes have 20 such contracts in their academic lifetime and who suffer great uncertainty about whether the job will continue from one year to another? Some universities have 40 per cent. of their research staff on such contracts. What is my hon. Friend's view about that?

Mr. Sheerman: My hon. Friend knows my view, although the Select Committee did not take evidence on the point. I am not against a balance between short-term and longer-term contracts—universities have always had short-term contracts for certain purposes—but things have gone too far in the wrong direction. I mostly agree with my hon. Friend.

I hope that the Minister will return to the subject of university pay. It is not good enough to say that universities have expanded since 1997 but that there is no shortage of applications. There are shortage subjects at university. I believe, although I am willing to be corrected, that not a single UK student is studying for an economics PhD in the UK. That is astonishing. It is very difficult to get teachers for shortage subjects.

I am a governor at the London School of Economics. Things may be all right for institutions such as Oxford, Cambridge and several others, which have the capacity to pay the market rate for whatever professor they need. It is not all right, however, that a large number of other people are working at a much lower rate of pay.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): My hon. Friend talks about shortage subjects, which is a matter of concern, especially when one considers national needs for educational skills. Does he agree that there is a role for Government in trying to decide the proportion of students who should study particular subjects where there is a national shortage and where it is very important that we keep abreast of the rest of the world?

Mr. Sheerman: I agree with my hon. Friend. He and I have spent much time discussing these issues, and we agree on many of them.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Was there any evidence of a decline in quality of teaching or of educational outcomes in areas in which we identified a shortage of teachers or low pay as a problem?

Mr. Sheerman: Yes. When we took evidence and, more valuably, made visits, either individually or as a team, vice-chancellors would flag up the fact that although they had managed up to that point, there was fear of the next step. Many established university personnel are retiring—it is a generational thing. We are not worried about professorial salaries, but the message that I got when I met the Russell group was that we must get young men and women in, and keep them in the profession for the first five to eight years. There was concern about quality and how it would not be maintained unless something was done.

In relation to foundation degrees, we were rather disturbed by what the Minister with responsibility for higher education at the time said to the Committee and what she said outside, and by what the Government said in the White Paper on higher education, which seemed to link the expansion of higher education and their target of 50 per cent. with foundation degrees. We welcome foundation degrees because they offer an interesting and useful range of qualifications to young

[Mr. Sheerman]

and older people. However, linking the two—the increase to 50 per cent. through foundation degrees only, which vice-chancellors told the Committee was an instruction—would give foundation degrees a bad name. What will happen if, as the demand for university places grows naturally, people apply for an honours degree in whatever subject and are told, "No, no, you can only do a two-year foundation degree, because there's a cap"?

That point led us on to some interesting work. Some of the evidence given to the Committee on what people thought about the 50 per cent. target was interesting. Much was made of the target, but, interestingly enough, we have heard more recently about the Government's response. They are not walking away, but softening the importance or lowering the profile of the 50 per cent. target. That surprises me, because there is no doubt that recent research by the institute for higher education research at Oxford has shown just through demographics that there will be another 150,000 students queuing up to enter university by 2010. Although that institute is not, as far as I know, a political institute, it seems to believe that the reforms and educational investment lower down are working, but that another 100,000 people, at the minimum, will be coming through, fully qualified, to enter university.

Quite honestly, given the evidence that the Committee took, there is no doubt that simply sitting on one's hands and letting nature take its course will lead to 50 per cent. being achieved There has been discussion about that arbitrary figure, but thank goodness larger numbers of people can benefit from higher education in this modern age, in which, as the evidence we took showed time and again, graduate-type skills will be needed. That is the truth of the matter.

There is a fair degree of ignorance on both sides of the House about the statistics and the facts. I always point out that in my constituency about 18 per cent. would have gone to university. The average throughout the country in 1975 was only 4 per cent., but now it is 16 per cent. We have to pinch ourselves a bit. When people talk about 50 per cent., they ask, "Does more mean worse?", and, "Are we going to have enough plumbers and electricians?" At the last count, however, 84 per cent. of the student population of Huddersfield and 86 per cent. in the country at large were down to be plumbers and electricians.

There is room for millions of people to realise their potential through higher education. I have never believed that people in higher education do not merit it. My personal view is that such statements are absolute nonsense. We should look at the figures—not for our constituencies but for each local authority. It is salutary that, apart from London and the south-east, no one gets 25 per cent. That raises questions, but my right hon. Friend the Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education may not like the answer. We could ask whether only the taxpayer will pay for expansion in higher education, but most people in this country never benefited from higher education; they were not offered interest-free loans, and many of them left school at 16.

That brings me nicely to the last part of my speech, which I suppose is the most controversial. We tried to be helpful to the Government about student finance. I can nail one myth. Some excellent journalists work in the education sector, and some journalists outside the education sector write some pretty awful news stories about education. The story that we had recommended top-up fees of £5,000 rather than £3,000 was nonsense.

We were interested in what makes a market. On the one hand, we said that it would be wrong for the Government to impose a market, if they chose to have flexible fees, by saying what fees should be charged. However, the evidence showed that there is high probability that if £3,000 were decided upon, most universities would charge £3,000. That is the fact of the matter. The evidence was that £5,000 might have made a market, but not £3,000; and I still believe that to be the case.

Dr. Gibson: Did my hon. Friend include in that market the variation in fees between courses and universities, or did he assume that if a fee were going to be charged it would be £5,000 or nothing? What is the Committee's position on variable fees?

Mr. Sheerman: The Committee does not have a view; most of the universities that gave evidence were uncomfortable with the thought of charging different fees for different subjects. The general impression was that they would go for £3,000, but other members of the Committee may want to comment on that.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Is it not the case that fees are charged in almost every other area of our education system? That is so in the private sector for secondary and primary education, for part-time degree courses and postgraduate degree courses, and particularly in the further education sector. The principle of differential fees both between and within institutions has been accepted for half a century. Why should it be so different for full-time undergraduate degrees?

Mr. Sheerman: That is a good point, but my hon. Friend knows what evidence we heard. We did not make a recommendation on that aspect. I have taken a number of interventions and gone on for far too long, but I want to wind up with two points.

The push of our evidence on student fees was that we believe that the Government could maintain an income from student fees and also be fairer to poorer students. We took evidence from Professor Nick Barr and others who suggested various ways of doing that. As an illustration, we suggested charging interest instead of having interest-free loans, which are a large subsidy in the region of £1.2 billion. In the main, better-off students and their families benefit from that in interest-free loans. The apprentice in my constituency who left school at 16 and started a business did not receive the investment of £25,000 available for going on to higher education. He did not receive an interest-free loan when he wanted to employ people; he had to go to the bank. We suggest that some of the interest on the loans could pay for more generous bursaries and maintenance grants for poorer students.

Our remit was not to challenge the Government on whether education fees should be paid or whether they should be flexible, but to explain the repercussions of

their policies and to make helpful suggestions for helping the people who traditionally have not gone on to higher education.

The Select Committee has worked during the past two years to inquire into access to higher education, retention of people in higher education and finance for higher education. We accepted and welcomed the direction in which the Government were moving, but we believe that they could provide enhanced and better targeted support for those from low-income families. We gave an illustration of one way in which that could be done. We also suggested a change of attitude to the £1,200 when it becomes £3,000 and that all of it could be remitted for poorer students. That is another possibility.

We welcomed the abolition of up-front fees so that higher education is free at the point of entry. That seems to be a good direction in which to go. As we all know, there are no fees under the 2006 proposals for students coming into higher education.

I must make two small points because they are important. We did not find the case proven for the access regulator. Our previous work had assured us that the benchmarking system of the Higher Education Funding Council for England was sufficient. The Government criticised us because we criticised them for a tendency towards micromanagement of higher education. They deny that they are keen on micromanagement, but some would say that the access regulator is an example of micromanagement. It suggests that the universities cannot be trusted to respond to HEFCE benchmarking, even when it seems that matters are moving in the right direction using the HEFCE benchmarking process, and we thought that it was unnecessary to have an access regulator. Certainly, the evidence from the universities shows that most of them did not like it very much.

Finally, on micromanagement, there is always a tendency for Governments to micromanage and we said clearly what many hon. Members on both sides of the House tend not to want to hear. There is no doubt and there is wide and historic evidence that the more a higher education institution is dependent on Government whim and money, the less independent it is and the more dependent it is on its paymaster. We thought that that was bad. Most of the evidence shows—this is reflected in our report—that it is not good if a university must go to the Chancellor of the Exchequer with a begging bowl. There will be fat years and thin years, and we have just come through the long, thin years of the 1990s. Does any one want to return to them?

When we visited Queen's university, Belfast and Edinburgh university—the visit to Edinburgh was an individual one, and the Select Committee went to Belfast—it was interesting to hear how debate had changed in Scotland and Northern Ireland shortly after devolution. In Northern Ireland, the original view was for a zero increase in the higher education budget in the first year. People were quite shocked when senior staff said that it would be very nice to have an independent source of income for the institution. Some universities in Scotland have suddenly realised that they may be left behind in the research ratings—the capacity to carry out high-level research—in their competition with English universities.

Some colleagues do not like to hear that most members of the Select Committee have been very much convinced during our four inquiries by the argument for an independent source of income, however it is arrived at, that gives independence to higher education. I hope that the Minister addresses that point. Members of the Select Committee believe in the Dearing principles, as he and the Government have said that they do. The people who benefit from higher education should pay for it in part. That includes society through the taxpayer—as I said, 84 per cent. have not been to university—and the individual, who will have a very much better life, and not just in terms of income. We always talk about 50 per cent. more income, but those people will also be able to enjoy life to the full and to realise their full potential.

Dearing also mentioned employers. We had not thought that through much, but we were darned if we would not include something about an employers' contribution. The response to the Select Committee contained some weasel words. It said that there are all sorts of grants to encourage employers to invest in research and development. However, that was not our point. If it is fair that all three should pay, why should there not be a levy on companies that do not spend X per cent. on R and D? The money would go into a fund to support R and D work at universities. We want an even-handed approach. If we accept the Dearing principles, which, according to the Government's response, they do, we must accept them all.

With the interventions, I have gone on far too long. I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It may be helpful if I point out the conventional format of these debates. The debate may proceed until 5.30, but the convention is that the three Front-Bench winding-up speeches commence at 5 o'clock. That knowledge may help Members to gauge their presentation.

3.12 pm

Mr. Michael Portillo (Kensington and Chelsea): As someone who has never participated in a higher education debate, I feel rather fortunate to be participating in this one, and I am particularly fortunate to be able to speak so early in the proceedings. There are many experts on the subject among those who sit on the Labour Benches, those who sit on the Conservative Benches and those who were on the Conservative Benches but are now on the Labour Benches; they have a great deal of knowledge of the subject.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) and all the members of the Select Committee on the report. The hon. Gentleman said that it was one of their better reports, which I thought was a rather half-hearted way of commending his own report. I would go much further and say that the report is not bad at all.

I shall not detain the Chamber for any length of time but more or less confine myself to a single point on the first issue that was raised by the hon. Member for Huddersfield, which is the issue of research funds, specifically the concentration or dilution of such funds. I speak as the Member for the constituency of Kensington and Chelsea, which contains Imperial college. The rector of Imperial college, Sir Richard

[Mr. Michael Portillo]

Sykes, was one of the witnesses to appear before the Committee. He made his case strongly. I am worried that the Chairman of the Select Committee chose to describe his intervention as an extreme one. I do not think that that word is appropriate. Sir Richard has a strong point of view.

Mr. Sheerman: Robust.

Mr. Portillo: He has a robust point of view. Politics is the language of priorities—or whatever the phrase may be—and it is important when spending public money to spend it as well as we possibly can. If an individual with a great deal of experience—I shall go into that a little more in a moment—says that the reality staring us in the face is the need to concentrate our money to get the best effect from it, we should regard that not as an extreme position but as a challenging one. We should think very carefully about it.

The Select Committee's report is very good, but the section on research is not the best part of it. One reason I have attended today's debate is that when I read the report, it struck me that if one interviews several witnesses from around the country on a subject such as research concentration, a bias will of course be built into the sample. If one interviews a lot of people from institutions located all over the place, the majority of them will of course be against concentration. I came along today because I did not want the Imperial college point to go by default, and I want to ensure that it appears in the record of proceedings.

The Select Committee report is fair enough to quote Sir Richard Sykes extensively, and I shall quote him now so that we can get to the essence of the case. He said:

"If we want to have in a competitive world that is being driven today basically by science and technology, half a dozen top universities in this country, that can compete because they have excellence, not just in a few groups but across the whole panoply of scientific excellence, so you have got the critical mass that helps these people work together to address some of the world's biggest problems, then we can afford only a few of them."

That is an interesting and well-considered point in which every sub-clause is important. If we are to compete in the world, if we are to have the concentration of people to make things happen and to give us critical mass, and if that excellence is to be not only in one or two subjects but across the whole field of science, as a country we can afford only a few universities. That point is very well stated.

Despite the report's excellence, the Committee did not argue itself out of the Sykes proposition. I have considered its arguments carefully. It states that there is already quite a lot of concentration, so why should there be any more; but that is not an argument and does not excuse us from considering whether the concentration in the past has been a good thing and whether greater concentration would be an even better thing.

Before we get too carried away, I should say that according to a letter I have received from Imperial college, the concentration has so far involved the reallocation of £20 million, which is 2 per cent. of the Higher Education Funding Council research grant—we are discussing rather a small sum. The Minister nods, but I do not know whether he will nod at the next sentence. Imperial college goes on to say:

"A much larger redistribution of the teaching grant (of some £217 million or 6.7 per cent.) passed without much public comment. Overall, Imperial College benefited by £3.6 million from the re-distribution of the £20 million for research, but lost £2 million from its teaching grant this year and an estimated £1.5 million next year".

It has not been an enormous switch.

I listened with great attention to the hon. Member for Huddersfield. He made many good points, but I must say that I did not agree with most of them. For example, he said that we have a great deal of excellence in our universities and that we should be very proud of how we are competing. I will not be unpatriotic and contradict that head on, but how our universities are doing at any level is not a cause for complacency. It is a matter of constant competition. At the top level, I am not at all convinced that the likes of Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial college and University college London can be regarded as being in the same league as Harvard, Yale and other global competitors.

In most places, there is not a particularly strong connection between research and undergraduate teaching. I am, of course, being driven towards elitist arguments, which is a charge that I can take on the chin. The attempt to make equal that which is unequal in the field of higher education has been the bane of higher education policy in recent years. That is not a party political point because there was much of that policy under the last Conservative Government.

One cannot say that the education of all undergraduates, whatever their prospects may be, is strongly connected to a research presence in the university. It may be that some undergraduates who have the potential to go on to do very important work in a particular field, even in their undergraduate years, would benefit from a connection with research, but one cannot make the point in a more generalised way, as the hon. Member for Huddersfield has.

Mr. Chaytor: I was interested to hear the right hon. Gentleman's argument about the concentration of research. Does he accept that his argument about the advantages of differentiation ought to lead him inevitably to the conclusion that the Government's policy on differentiated fees is correct? Will he support their policy, and will he tell us his views on that policy before he completes his remarks?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman wants to trip me up, but I am perfectly capable of tripping myself up—I intend to do so later in my speech.

I did not have much sympathy with the point made by the hon. Member for Huddersfield about geographical spread. That is a tough one, because I am from not only the south-east but the very heart of London. The hon. Gentleman is from Huddersfield and he is likely to see the world differently. On a matter of such importance, we cannot use research funding as if it were some sort of adjunct to regional policy. We cannot use it as though it were some sort of outdoor relief. I know that I exaggerate to make the point, but I put it in those stark terms because I say to him that those considerations are inappropriate.

Returning to the global matter, I shall mention the credentials of Sir Richard Sykes: he is not only the rector of Imperial college, but he was the chairman of

GlaxoSmithKline. It is of fundamental importance that we have strong top-end research institutions to compete against the world. That is about not only education policy but—one might not expect a Conservative to say this—national policy. It is about how our country will maintain and improve its cutting edge.

I did not think that I needed to declare earlier in my speech that I am a director of BAE Systems, but I am, and, in that position too, one sees the importance of top-notch, concentrated science in our universities as a contribution to our efforts as a nation.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield said, with some despondency, that he had heard the Government's reply and that it was unequivocally negative—a pretty dusty answer. The Government were right, however, and I want to applaud them for that. I want to ensure that that particular point, which I have been keen to make, is not lost by default.

On student finance, I say to the hon. Gentleman that the Committee made an extremely valuable contribution to the debate. I do not blame the Committee for not wanting to get itself hooked on whether top-up fees are right or wrong and instead taking the rather elegant approach of assuming a Government policy and considering how it could be improved. Several of the Committee's recommendations, which were set out very ably by the hon. Gentleman, are very important contributions and could go some way to cracking the nut, which is a difficult one to crack.

The hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) made an extremely interesting intervention about differential fees for non-undergraduate courses outside the area that we are considering. There must be some read-across there. Anyone who is opposed to top-up fees, whether they are on the Back Benches or the Front Benches, has an obligation to read the report, to wrestle with its points and to understand some of the alleviations that the Committee mentioned.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield did us all a great service by emphasising recommendation 35, which states:

"We believe that there is much evidence to show that there is an inevitable link between diversity of funding and the ability of universities to develop and to operate with greater independence and freedom"—

spoken, sir, like a good Conservative. I found it heartwarming to hear that extremely good point made. I will sit down before I get myself into any more trouble.

3.24 pm

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): We are indebted to the Select Committee for a report that is always interesting and which articulates a range of important issues very well. The volume of evidence is a gold mine. There is a great deal that we can read with instruction and benefit. I congratulate the Select Committee. I also want to congratulate the Government on reversing the decline over so many years of the unit of resource for higher education and on their commitment to raise funding for the higher education system by substantial amounts in real terms year on year. I congratulate them on having grasped a good bunch of nettles—to use the phrase that R. A. Butler used in speaking of the Education Act 1944—in their White Paper. We may as well take these difficult problems together not least because we cannot have a coherent policy unless we do. If we get the reforms right, they could be as historic as the 1944 Act.

There are two imperatives for the higher education system. First, we must bring in substantially more money still, beyond that which can so far be foreseen. The higher education system has been miserably underfunded and, as my hon. Friend the Chairman of the Select Committee told us, universities have defied gravity in the way in which they have sustained quality during the period in which there has been rapid expansion at marginal cost, on the cheap.

I strongly endorse what my hon. Friend said about university pay. It is, as the Select Committee said, woefully low. Over the past 20 years, there has been a 4 per cent. increase in academic pay against a 45 per cent. increase in average earnings. We simply cannot expect to renew the academic system to the necessary quality if we fail to reward those who work in it, whether as academics or non-academics.

The Government have managed to increase public funding for research by substantial amounts, which is enormously to their credit. However, we need yet more funding for research. There is a backlog of tatty and inadequate facilities that it will cost a lot of money to make good. Students are impoverished, and there will be many more students in any case. We need more money.

The second imperative is to widen participation in higher education. That is appropriate in a just society—those who are qualified to enter higher education should be able to do so. That is a principle that everyone has accepted since Robbins. In our modern economy, in which intellectual skills are increasingly at a premium, it would also be foolish not to enable those who are qualified to receive a university education. As my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) mentioned, the demographic projection is that 150,000 more people will be qualified for higher education by 2010.

Mr. Andrew Turner: The right hon. Gentleman reiterates the Robbins principle that everyone who is qualified should be entitled. What does he believe constitutes being qualified? It seems that the number of people involved has increased remarkably in line with the number of places available. I wonder whether that is because of good planning by the Government or the fact that the qualification has changed.

Alan Howarth: The hon. Gentleman tempts me into an extensive debate that would be a digression from the themes that I wish to develop. Let me simply say that, as a rough rule of thumb, two A-levels are conventionally accepted as placing people at least on the threshold of eligibility for admission to university.

As some right hon. and hon. Members may dimly recall, I was higher education Minister between 1990 and 1992, and the more I thought about student finance during that period, the more I became convinced that top-up fees were the right way to go. Among those who influenced me at that time was Professor Barr, whom the hon. Member for Huddersfield mentioned, and who has contributed an exceptionally interesting piece of evidence, reprinted in the Select Committee's report. I commend it to anyone who takes a serious interest in this vexed topic.

[Alan Howarth]

I was tiptoeing towards that view politically, but my Secretary of State, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), intervened decisively to kybosh my tentative project on the grounds of administrative impracticality—which were more genuine then than they would be now—and of political expediency. That was a missed opportunity. When John Major asked if I would continue as higher education Minister after the 1992 election, I declined for a variety of reasons, among them that I was not willing to preside over a continuation of the erosion of the unit of resource. I already felt that the financial position of the universities was fragile.

I then witnessed, in the period between 1992 and 1997, a headlong expansion on the cheap. The hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), for whom I have the warmest affection and regard, presided over much of that process. We are still struggling to recover our balance. The universities are still struggling to recover from that systemic underfunding. I give way to the hon. Gentleman—I am tempted to refer to him as my hon. Friend.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): I shall stay neutral on that. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the record he will find that most of the expansion took place before I assumed office, following a short interregnum after his tenure. Partly through some control on student numbers, we retained a measure of stability through most of my time in office. I claim no credit for headlong expansion. Will the hon. Gentleman also acknowledge that there was a degree of consensuality in the expansion process in the very early 1990s, because it was caused partly by vice-chancellors taking on additional students at the margin, as he said, not simply by a Government edict that they should do so? All the Government's expansion targets at that time were exceeded.

Alan Howarth: There was much greater scope for legitimate efficiency gains at the start of the process than there was later, but I know that the hon. Gentleman, at the end of the day, always had the well-being of the university system at heart. One wonders whether the Conservatives can convincingly claim that now when they have clearly set their face against the necessary expansion of participation in higher education. The position that they are taking on expansion and top-up fees is opportunistic. It would deny opportunity to people who ought to have it, it would deny funding to universities and it is unrealistic fiscally because those additional young people in our society will have to be educated and trained, and that will have to be paid for. There is no reason why it should not be paid for at the academic level for which they qualify.

I believe that the Conservatives are wrong and that the Government are essentially right in the thrust of their policy: to allow increases in tuition fees; to cover the costs through loans to be repaid by graduates only as and when their incomes reasonably permit; to bring back maintenance grants to help people from low-income homes; to improve help for part-time students; and to support universities, schools and colleges in working together to raise educational aspirations. That must be the fairest way to go, and best for the well-being of the universities.

Why do I say that that way is fairer? The present system is regressive. The difference between the fees paid by students from the richest families and students from the poorest is only some £1,125. That difference is too little. The Government's policy of increased fees, covered by loans plus grants redistributes resources away from students in better-off families towards students from worse-off families—through the reintroduction of the grant— and to future graduates on low pay or no pay. That is a progressive policy.

At present, the imbalance between funding by way of taxation and funding by way of fees is too great. Of course higher education is a public good, and a large proportion of the cost ought to be met by general taxation. At the moment, the maximum student contribution is only 25 per cent. of the cost of tuition. Public expenditure on higher education is £6 billion, and fees account only for some £400 million of that. Higher education confers enormous private benefits, and taxes paid by relatively disadvantaged people are excessively subsidising those who are directly advantaged through the experience of higher education, which is regressive. Fees are fairer than taxes, and variable fees are fairer than flat-rate fees. The cost and the private benefit of different universities and different courses varies, and ought, in fairness, to be reflected in the fees.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that even within one university, different courses may lead to different financial rewards for graduates? Within one course it is quite possible for different graduates to go into entirely different careers, which may have different financial effects.

Alan Howarth: Yes, I do, and the policy response to that should be a matter for individual institutions. They should certainly have the freedom to set differential fees and should not be discouraged from doing so.

Government are addressing the sources of unequal opportunity through their strategy on access. Class differential in education attainment and denial of opportunity occur early. Of those working-class students qualified to go into university, 90 per cent. do, but the problem is for them to get to qualification. Only some 15 per cent. of children of unskilled workers reach that gateway. The Government's policies on sure start, child care, nursery education, school standards, university outreach into schools—the Aimhigher programme—and educational maintenance allowances all represent the way to attack the social class gap problem in higher education.

Why do I say that the Government's policy would also be better for the well-being of the universities? It is the only realistic prospect of bringing substantial amounts of additional money into the system. Taxpayers will not be willing to do so, nor should they be expected to do so.

If there is an increase in fees, we should see the burgeoning of a market in education. We need that. We need to reduce the dirigisme and bureaucracy—what the Select Committee refers to as micromanagement, as a theme in its report. The Government are becomingly self-conscious on the question of micromanagement. They acknowledge the issue and express their resolve to do better in the future by micromanaging less. That will

be very difficult if the Government are to be directly responsible for such a large proportion of the expenditure on universities. In any case, not only is all that bureaucracy burdensome, costly and distracting in relation to what universities are really there to do, but it is objectionable in a free society.

The Government's role is to see fair play, to strengthen incentives, to ensure that the information is there for the consumers of higher education, and to enable people to take the opportunities that they ought to have in higher education, but not to plan and run higher education to the extent that they now do.

In relation to the question of promoting the well-being of universities, I would again argue that variable fees are preferable. Where all institutions charge the same, there will not be competition or the pressure to identify and respond to student preferences. I perfectly understand why the Government judge that, when introducing top-up fees, it is wise to set a cap at £3,000.

Dr. Gibson: May I ask my right hon. Friend how he would judge mediaeval history against a physics course? Would the fees be chargeable at the same rate? How can one judge which should get the maximum and which should get less?

Alan Howarth: I would not make that judgment. It is for the vice-chancellor and his university colleagues to make such judgments.

We are dipping our toes in difficult waters. An initial cap of £3,000 may be appropriate, but I hope that the Government will look forward to lifting it at the earliest opportunity. I am concerned that they expect the cap to remain at that level for the whole of the next Parliament, which could be until as late as 2011. We will need more money sooner than that. When they come to legislate, I hope that they will at least deal with the figure in secondary legislation, as it would allow flexibility; I hope also that they will rule nothing out.

I would add that the more that can be raised from universities through fees, the more the Government will be released from the responsibility of funding tuition—and the more money will be available to fund research. I tend to agree more with my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield than with the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo), but the dichotomy between them is not absolute. We must, of course, fund our world-class research so that it remains world-class, but it would be improvident to fail to fund the 4-rated departments. The Government have offered them a reprieve, but we need confidence that the reprieve will be enduring—and we need to be sure that there will be enough money to support promising research, wherever it may be needed. In keeping with our properly cherished tradition of higher education, we should do all that we can to ensure that the cross-fertilisation of ideas between teaching and research is as extensive as possible.

The Government are on the right lines, but the package could be improved. The Government should go a little further, ensuring that higher education will be truly free at the point of use. By that, I mean that they should commit themselves to increasing loans for maintenance so that they allow a sum to cover realistic student living costs. They should abolish the means test. They should treat students not as kids who happen to be dependent on their parents longer than those who leave school at 16 but as people who are entering adulthood. Doing that will end the burden on parents, end student poverty, end that desperate juggling between paid work and study, and create independence for students. That would be attractive.

The Committee proposed that the interest rate subsidy should be ended. I see the advantages of being able to use that sum, which could be as much as £1.2 billion. The case could also be made that money should not be used to provide fee remission for students from less well-off households because of the principle that graduates should repay according to their earnings. It may be an attractive proposition in presentational terms, but it is not a logical part of the scheme.

If we were able to free resources in those two ways, we could produce a much more redistributive and attractive package of support. Increasing loans and grants and extending educational maintenance allowances would, in the end, be a better solution. We could also spend more on university outreach. We could spend more in supporting universities, in order to ensure that people from disadvantaged backgrounds successfully made the transition into higher education. Although all that may be further down the track, I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends not to rule it out.

We need more money for research. The Department of Trade and Industry proposes that the research councils should pay 65 per cent. of the true cost of the research that they pay for. It seems highly questionable that the missing 35 per cent. will be found from QR funding from the Higher Education Funding Council or from charities. That gap needs to be filled. The transparency review found that Departments themselves were not paying the true cost of the research that they commissioned, and I hope that my hon. Friend can assure us that the Government will do better in the future.

We need to find more money to support endowments. It is pleasing that both major parties are now committed to the principle of enabling universities to build up endowments. It is bound to be a long haul, but some money, at least initially, should be made available to enable universities to set up foundation offices in the way in which they have been assisted to set up business development offices.

A legitimate question is how I believe all that should be paid for. Unblushingly, I would say that Government borrowing should pay for it. The Government keep telling us that higher education is very good for the economy. We know that there is an increasing premium in the global economy on intellectual skills. We need to invest in human capital, and there is a very good business case for Britain borrowing to invest in it. I see no reason why we should not borrow, especially to cover the transitional period before the new arrangements become self-financing or more so.

I understand the political nervousness surrounding the issue. The changes proposed are radical. The subsidy for the middle classes will be somewhat reduced. Universities may become more differentiated through the operation of a market in higher education, and some academics may find the resulting comparisons odious.

[Alan Howarth]

There is much black propaganda, which is intensifying the anxieties that young people, especially those from working-class families, have about debt. Young people can foresee *the debt, which they assume will be like* credit-card or even loan-shark debt, much more clearly than they can foresee the benefits of the reforms. The policies are right, however, and are attractive, when properly understood, and I hope that the presentation of my right hon. and hon. Friends will be unapologetic and entirely confident.

3.46 pm

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): This is an opportune debate and I am sure that we will make avid progress with the issue in the next few months. There will be sharp conversations, which I welcome. We do not get many chances in a generation to talk about higher education, its revision and ensuring that we get it right. It is so important to this nation and, indeed, to the world.

The Select Committee report is very welcome. At this stage, I would give it a 2:1 bordering on a first, although the Committee may appeal. Many things in it are excellent. In particular, I welcome the discussion about the concentration of research funding—a system developed in this country through the Russell group, whereby 12 great universities and true used to meet in an hotel. The principle was that the universities had medical schools attached to them. That has now changed, due to this Government. Medical schools are developing in other universities, for example I might mention Manchester, its good work, its spin-off companies and all the other stuff that is going on there. I could also mention Dundee. When I was young, Dundee was a strange place. It had a bridge and that was about it. It now has a distinguished university, which is pre-eminent in cancer research worldwide. It may well be the next Nobel prize winner.

One can never tell what will happen when individuals have the determination to make things happen. That is what we want to encourage. Concentrating research funding sometimes devalues people, with the result that they are bribed and recruited elsewhere. A premier division is created: everyone wants a David Beckham, but it does not happen. Bright ideas come from strange places and great discoveries happen at a strange time on a Friday afternoon or at midnight in some strange laboratory.

Mr. Boswell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene, as it will allow me to cut out some of my remarks. To pursue his analogy about David Beckham, surely the point about research excellence is that a group of 11 people playing as a team at the highest level cannot possibly survive without a large pyramid of people playing in lower leagues and even at an amateur level. Width, as well as concentration, is needed to achieve the highest levels of attainment.

Dr. Gibson: The hon. Gentleman shows his age. No super football team now exists on just 11 players. There are 30 to 40 players in the first squad, who come from different parts of the world and interact in all sorts of strange ways that are unpredictable, and they need a manager to bring everything together, as well as a lot of money.

My second point is on research and teaching, which the report discusses clearly. My experience in teaching and in having talked to alumni and students since then is that it is not the first 40 or 45 minutes of a lecture that is important because that is dum-de-dum stuff that is written up in the textbooks so the students can dive off to the library for it. What is important is that the person teaching is pretty sure that what they have just taught is the perceived truth, but knows that there is something else to research and find out, and can enthuse young people into believing that that is the truth. Being up-to-date with research is so important.

For example, I remember when people researched prions but they were not in the textbooks and people did not really believe in them. Suddenly, prions—BSE and all that—became exceptionally important in our lives. Getting that excitement and questioning across is what higher education is about. It is about making people realise that we are 99 per cent. sure of the answers. That is why higher education in this country is so excellent. We have great teachers who are also involved in research. I accept that someone can be a great teacher without doing research but it is an added value, which we must encourage, wherever it is: Luton, Norwich, Dundee or anywhere else. We must get the people who are excited about research to continue to teach, not hive them off into distinguished centres such as Imperial college, where they closet themselves away and do great research but do not talk to and excite the next generation of young people in the arts or the sciences.

I am pleased that low academic pay has been mentioned and that we have discussed contracts, which really put people off academic life. Why would someone want to start in a profession if they do not know after two years whether their grant will be continued for another three years in a subject area in which they have not won a Nobel prize, but are doing something that they believe in and that might just, in five or six years, bear fruit? That is the same in the sciences and the arts. We are so good at research in this country and we must maintain it. I am sure that that comes through in the report. The Government recognise that and are making great strides in trying to ensure that we hold on to it.

No one can say that we do not need extra funding in higher education. It has been starved for years in terms of percentage of gross domestic product. We must get money into that system. We might rehearse elsewhere how to do that, and I might point out one or two ways to do more to get people excited enough to put money into the process, but we need the money now. My problem with any scheme is that I do not want it in 2020 or 2030. Universities need money now. Norwich university has this week had to set up a taskforce to handle angry parents, and young people from abroad and mature students who have nowhere to live. It is absolutely disgraceful that students throughout the country are having trouble finding places to live. An aggressive recruitment policy is under way, because bringing students in equals money, but the infrastructure is not there. We know of the problems with lecture theatres and so forth.

Those are the real problems, including academic pay, that we really must address. We need the money now. If we are to get the money down the line, we must find some process of delivering it to make our higher education sing at the highest level and to ensure that the people who are in it stay there. The tendency to drift away to the much richer colleges and universities in the United States and parts of Europe will always be there unless we tackle those basic issues. It is all right talking about doing great research, but not if the water is pouring through the roof. That does happen. I might exaggerate a little, but we can do better with our infrastructure.

Broadening access to universities is key. I and many other hon. Members have said that before. It is disgraceful that people from working-class backgrounds have not accessed higher education. It is not because they are incapable, but because there has not been a mechanism for bringing them in and encouraging them to aspire to the things that they want to achieve. My father said, "You don't want to go to university. They're a bunch of snotty individuals. They never talk to anybody when they come home. You stay home and play football—you'll be big in your local team." My mother directed me to university and I have never regretted it. Home life and parents are important influences on what one does in life. Teachers who not only inspire but guide and say, "You're capable of doing this," are also important. Sometimes I think that we are bad at encouraging people.

I do not know why the target is 50 per cent.—why not 60 per cent. or 70 per cent.? Sometimes I get a funny feeling about targets, because they can be reached by manipulation. My hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) suggests that foundation courses help to raise the percentage of students and he has his worries about that. If foundation courses bring people into learning then they are fine. However, I do not want to stop at 50 per cent. Why not push the target up?

I do not know why we have stopped at 18 to 30-year-olds. What is so magic about that age group? Some of the best students I have ever taught were mature students who came back at the age of 50 after their children had grown up and got first class and 2:1 degrees, which were as good as those obtained by any of the young people. They could also drink young people under the table at any time in the student bars, which are an important part of student life because students go there to interact and to discuss things.

We often focus on individuals in this debate. Giving an individual an opportunity to develop is fine, but higher education is broader than that. It gives so much to the nation and it binds people together. I get emetic when I hear about miners' sons paying for richer people to use higher education—the situation has been like that for ages. I can counter that point with arguments about the percentage of income tax that different social class groups pay.

I do not know what happens to my income tax. I do not have much say on whether it goes into defence or nuclear power, and we all have that problem. Such arguments will not move the debate on. We must work together as a nation to improve our higher education. Such arguments set person against person and class against class, which is not what we are trying to achieve through higher education. We are trying to get people from right across the nation to work together and to interact not only in scientific laboratories or arts classes, but socially. Universities are so good at getting people to discuss the sort of world that they come from and breaking down barriers.

Two weeks ago, I met alumni from the 1960s to the 1990s whom I taught over the years in the United States. I am so proud that not one of them is working in a field related to the subject that they studied at university. They have forgotten everything that we ever taught them, but we made them enthusiastic and keen to work at life and to get on with things. What people do at university should not matter.

I do not want to compare a dustman with a Nobel prize winner—we are all dustmen really because we all put out the bins in the morning. We all have social functions at all sorts of levels because we work together as a nation and as a community. We are not getting over the message about higher education and we are not winning the arguments. I understand why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State says that he would rather put money into other levels of education—we have not sold the value of higher education to people.

The vice-chancellors of higher education institutions exist in sleepy hollows and do not interact with local communities. Their idea of interacting with the community is having a pop concert and inviting some young people. They are very poor at interacting with schools in their community and making sure that the university is not a place up the road that is very difficult to get into, apart from once a year when people can visit to listen to a rock concert. Access to things of value should be opened up day and night, week-in and week-out, throughout the year.

I know about the splits, resentments and arguments among further education colleges. I have fought for years to make the higher education colleges in cities such as Norwich work together. There is no reason why the people in both sectors cannot cross over, but that does not happen because of personalities. The chief executives and the vice-chancellors do not want that. We must break down that attitude in political terms, which would break down some of the social and cultural differences.

Employers have much more to do in the process. I have worked in the United States and seen how much local employers put into local universities. Why? They know that many of the people who have been educated in their local university or college will end up working for them. Many people who came to Norwich and did not intend to stay there, ended up working for the Norwich Union. What has the Norwich Union put back into the local university? I am referring not to a couple of prizes, but to bringing bright people through the system who will eventually benefit the company. We have not cracked that.

I have recently started paying my old universities—Edinburgh and Norwich—to help them to develop their buildings and enterprises, but some alumni still hold up their hands and say, "Why should I give anything back to the university that educated me?" and that makes me queasy. It happens in the United States, where people's loyalty to their local university is amazing. Perhaps they do that because they are paid good money, but they also

[Dr. Gibson]

feel loyalty to their universities because they came through the system and gained the advantages, so they feel that they should help other people at those universities.

That brings me to top-up fees. I have serious problems with that idea—not with the principle, but with whether the money can be delivered now when we need it. The scheme would be variable and, as has been said, it happens in one sector. It is difficult to think of a more divisive scheme—coming from where we are now, with central control—than moving to a system of students paying more in one department than another. What worries me is that a student might choose a course because it is cheaper than another. I think that my right hon. Friend the Minister said this morning—he will tell me if I heard correctly, because it was early in the morning—that to get people into physics it might be a good idea to have a cheaper top-up fee. If I am wrong, I apologise, but I think that that is what he said. Reading physics is more expensive than reading fine arts because technicians, equipment, laboratory facilities and so on must be paid for. That is a fact of life.

A system would be set up under which universities—they have autonomy—would control the money coming in to pay not only bursaries but the departments that do not have enough to practise the black art, and my example would be physics. A dilemma would be created and I know how academics fight each other. Exceptionally articulate people talk for hours about issues and get nowhere. We do not want to set up such a system and that is a problem.

On top-up fees, £5,000 may be fine, but would it deliver enough? We can argy-bargy about that until the cows come home, but where would it stop? If Richard Sykes has his evil way, they would be £12,000 or £15,000, which is exactly what happens in the United States. There are league tables of student debt. There are also huge bursaries and most students receive some support based on their family's income.

What worries me is that worrying about debt is part of the British culture. That is a shame, but it is so. Young students, whatever their background, are frightened of debt. It is all right for middle-class students because mum and dad or someone else can just go without one skiing trip and pay off the debt—that happens. There is a real problem with telling young people that they will end up with a large debt. Young people at meetings with Members of Parliament have asked how they can come out of university without debts. That started in the 1980s and we must sell the idea to them, but it will not be easy.

Nevertheless, it is great that we are now looking into ways of bringing in money. I have mentioned taxation and graduate tax—I do not know the arguments against it and have not seen the documentation, but I know that it might take a long time to get the money up front. That could be the case with top-up fees too and I should like to see the comparison. We have not yet properly examined this country's potential for getting income from different sources to get enough money into a system that has ailed for too long.

4.4 pm

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): As a member of the Select Committee, I am delighted to have this opportunity to discuss the report, and also that the Government have initiated this in-depth discussion of the future of higher education. I endorse the summary at the front of the document and, before I speak about student funding, I shall highlight two areas.

The first is research funding. As somebody from a region—I represent Bristol—I feel that the DTI argument is strong and that there is a need for regional development. We cannot dissociate the universities from regional development and from links with business and industry in their areas. I urge large companies in the Bristol area, such as Lloyds bank, to make a Bristol-based contribution—my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) made a similar case for companies in Norwich. Lloyds is now based in Bristol and should have a greater involvement not only in research but in basic funding. There is a need for widespread consideration of research, and acknowledgement that in high-powered science the equipment alone necessitates a focus. However, that should not be restricted to the handful of institutions to which we have heard references.

Secondly, I want to highlight the short but important sentence, "Universities are their staff". I, too, was disappointed that the Government did not take that as seriously as I was expecting them to. The calibre of the staff in any university is soon reflected in the number of high-calibre students that it attracts and its national and international standing. It is disappointing that universities, above all, have failed to give equal funding to their women lecturers and professors. The fact that they have failed to take the equal pay legislation seriously is something that the Government should bear in mind when considering further funding.

Looking back, and wondering where some ideas had emerged, I stumbled by chance during the holidays on a Young Fabian document called "Students as Citizens: Focusing and widening access to higher education". I highly recommend it. It has some surprising things in it. Not so surprisingly, one of the then Parliamentary Private Secretaries, who gave it his blessing, talked about the importance of the document and went on to say that he could not endorse all of it. For example, he said,

"fee differentials would, in my view, have an adverse effect on access and participation, and be detrimental to the overall objectives of our higher education policy."

He went on, sensibly, to say,

"Despite this, I happily recommend this pamphlet to all those who value the British higher education system and seek to ensure that we have a high-quality, modernised and accessible system to take us into the new millennium."

None of us could disagree with that last section. Some of us, including me, might be a little ruffled to find out that this 1998 document endorses, in part at least, the need for students to pay fees and even for them to pay—there is no use of the phrase "top-up fees" at the time—differential fees. The Minister might be interested to read the document to see how such ideas emerged and consider the logic of the view, "If you pay fees, then, potentially, you pay differential fees." However, I draw his attention to a few other key sentences that link into the debate about high-quality, modern and accessible universities. We acknowledge

that high quality depends on funding. No one in the Chamber argues that we do not need to get more funding into universities.

What about modernisation? The Committee did not spend enough time considering how universities will deliver education in the future. We struggled with what the new schoolroom might look like in even five or 10 years, but I am not sure that we took up the challenge of what a modern university would be like. In future, when one signs on at a university, one might be given a CD of the initial, basic course lectures, which would allow staff more time for seminar work and research. Information technology could be used to deliver university courses outside the city or area that it is in. None of us has grappled sufficiently with how courses will be delivered and how the modernised university system will be styled. I heard a lecture recently at Bristol university by a professor from Portugal who was considering the increased need for course and research collaboration across Europe. We turn our eyes too readily to the American Ivy League group and not sufficiently to Europe.

Colleagues have congratulated the Government this afternoon, as I do, on the accessibility schemes that have allowed people from whatever background to obtain those vital qualifications needed to enter university. Sure start and the education and maintenance allowances are part of the debate about access to higher education.

We then come to the need for students to make their own contribution. I do not deny that they should. I have argued that point on the doorsteps of my city, where there are many undergraduates and—more challengingly at times—the parents of future undergraduates at the four excellent universities.

Interestingly—returning to the Fabian document—we have not been selling higher education. It suggested that we should have set up the tertiary education recruitment agency—a professional and voluntary group that should have gone into schools to explain higher education and to help young people, staff and parents fully to understand the potential of higher education, the courses, the cost and what was then the Government's student funding policy. Had we sold that idea and surmounted the initial, huge psychological barrier to accepting the need for a student contribution to fees, we would not now be in quite the same situation. All the feedback that I have received from my constituents has been opposed to differential and top-up fees. I shall list several reasons for that—they are in no particular qualitative or priority order.

The fees fall at the first hurdle because of their complexity. We have heard about the complexity of setting the tariff for courses and universities. Who will set the tariff? At present, the Government set it by capping the amount payable. The comment that we heard earlier—that £3,000 might be the cap in 2011—is a nonsense. I do not advocate pursuing that line. The Chairman of the Select Committee made it clear that the Committee does not advocate going to £5,000. The logic of the Government's argument must be that if they go into a marketplace, they must do something other than cap at £3,000.

The document takes it as read that, if fees must go up, the Government will, as in their earlier determination of school funding, pay the full cost for students from low-income families. The Government seem to be moving tentatively towards saying that £3,000 is the cap, but that for low-income families not only the first £1,000 but the whole lot will be paid. If they do that, they will hand to the universities the challenge of deciding what the cost should be. Low-income students will have it paid. It might rise to £5,000; if it rises to £15,000 at Imperial college the Government will pay £15,000. That completely undermines the argument about getting more funding into universities from students. We shall be back with the dilemma that arises from the Government making a much higher contribution, via the students, to the fee income.

Present Government policy has the worst of both worlds. They will not wholeheartedly embrace the idea that some people now tentatively accept, although I refuse to, that higher education is a market commodity that can be given to those who can afford it, provided that they have a certain willingness to work; nor do they say that they want to offer real access, in which case they cannot make themselves hostage to university boards by allowing them to decide where they will set the fee level. We must go back to absolute principles. The principle in my book is that funding is certainly needed.

The Select Committee report gives alternatives. The Government have not studied sufficiently carefully the possibility of even another 1 or 2 per cent. on the loan interest rate across the piece. Students are taking out loans at market level rates to subsidise the way they live today, so such an approach would help many of them. In addition, the report contains other ideas that should be seriously considered.

The Government should say that the state expects all students to make their contribution, as a member of the community, to whichever university they have determined is best for them. Students would not have to second-guess the likely fees and the length of time for which they would be repaying the loan. They would not be guessing their income on graduation and the length of time it would take to pay off the loan on that income. I agree with those who ask how it is possible to tell that a particular course at a particular fee will provide the relevant students with an income of £x thousand in the future. That approach is not an accessible one for many students, who unlike most people in this Room know the real benefit of university education for them in the future.

I accept that students should make a contribution. It should be a flat rate. I am prepared for an increase, but I am not prepared for a differential. That would make us a hostage to the universities, which would themselves have a difficult problem in identifying and sorting out a fee. In Bristol, the greatest number of applicants want to study English. Should the university raise the fees for English, because more people would pay and then cross-subsidise? Who will do that? Who is the Lady Bountiful who will set not only the fee but the bursary and the way in which it is determined?

The matter is hugely complex. Our report offers the Government some alternatives and that is why I wholeheartedly endorse it. I do not agree with every

[Valerie Davey]

suggestion, but it is a good paper, which the Government and universities should read in detail. I trust that that will help them to come up with something that offers good quality, modern, accessible higher education.

4.18 pm

Jeff Ennis (Barnsley, East and Mexborough): It is always a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) in debates of this kind. I agree with the Chairman of the Select Committee on Education and Skills who welcomed the increased contribution that the Government are to make to higher education over the next few years—a real-terms increase of more than 6 per cent. per annum. Like everyone else who has spoken, I regard the report as balanced. It gives the Government a good steer. Many of the points that I would have made have already been raised, so I shall try not to repeat them.

Barnsley, East and Mexborough has the lowest gross domestic product per capita of any constituency, at 62 per cent. of the European average. It also has some of the lowest rates of staying on for higher education, which is a direct consequence of its being a former mining area. It will be no surprise to my colleagues that one of my main interests in this debate is the agenda for widening access for poorer students.

I am sure that the Government will admit that they have so far failed to achieve the golden objective of widening access. The figures for 1995 show that 26 per cent. of higher education students came from the three lowest socio-economic groups. By 2000, that figure had increased by only 1 per cent. to 27 per cent. We can obviously do better. It cannot be right that only 15 per cent. of children from poorer families went to university last year, compared with 81 per cent. of those with professional parents. I am sure that the educational ministerial team shares my concern about that problem.

One cannot divorce higher education from the main route into it—namely, secondary education. The killer fact that I always quote in such debates was referred to by my right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth). It is that, irrespective of class background, 90 per cent. of all students who achieve two A-levels go on to university. Without doubt, the main priority for widening participation must be action in schools. The future 14-to-19 agenda will be extremely important in achieving that.

Considerable effort is needed in schools to raise aspirations and achievement among students from poorer backgrounds. That can be done only with the active and direct participation and support of the higher education sector, a point made forcibly by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson). I am glad to say that many enlightened universities are beginning to take the issue seriously, and my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West referred to Bristol university as a case in point.

The Dearing report, which had all-party support at the time of its launch, concluded that the cost of HE should be shared among those who benefit from it, with the individual, the state and employers all making a contribution. The Select Committee strongly supports that principle and recommends that the Government explore ways of encouraging a more substantial contribution from business. That has to be right, as my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North said. Equally, there is no doubt that the ending of up-front fees is a big step in the right direction.

The Committee also welcomes the reintroduction of maintenance grants, albeit at too low a level for poorer students. However, it urges the Government to consider the introduction of educational maintenance allowances as a more effective and seamless way of encouraging students who have successfully completed their sixth-form studies to continue into higher education. EMAs are certainly having the desired effect in Barnsley and Doncaster because, in the academic year 2001, the number of young people staying on in the sixth form rose by more than 6 per cent. in Barnsley, and by more than 5 per cent. in Doncaster, where the EMAs are being piloted.

It is my belief that EMAs will have a positive impact in encouraging students not only to stay on but to study more vocational A-levels and take more national vocational qualifications. That would assist our 14-to-19 agenda, which is attempting to increase vocational courses in our secondary education system and in foundation degrees. However, we need to monitor the type of courses that EMA students are doing—a subject that I have raised before. We do not currently have a monitoring mechanism; I think that learning and skills councils should do that, because the implementation of the EMAs from next year will lead to a drastic improvement in participation in vocational education over the next few years. I would like the Minister to respond to that point.

The notion of foundation degrees and their extension must be right if we are to expand vocational education. However, I agree with the report's conclusion that it is a mistake for the Government to make a strong link between the move to a 50 per cent. participation rate and foundation degrees. It would also be a mistake to assume that encouraging more students from poorer backgrounds into HE means steering them towards foundation degrees.

Higher national certificates and higher national diplomas are well established non-vocational qualifications, and they should not be phased out until it is clear that they have been superseded by foundation degrees—another recommendation from the report that I feel strongly about. Foundation degrees can be introduced into universities only when there is a genuine and clear demand from business, particularly local business, for that type of qualification. I hope that foundation degrees will lead to further integration and co-operation between further education colleges and universities. That must be welcome, but in order for it to succeed, the Government need to simplify funding procedures, and inspection and assessment regimes, in so far as they impact on higher education colleges.

Without going into too much detail, I believe that many of the report's proposals on student support mechanisms are extremely positive. For example, to name but three recommendations, if tuition fees rise, the Government should pay the full fee for poorer students. We also say that the increase in the income threshold

from £10,000 to £15,000 should be up to £25,000, which is the average national wage. Finally, full cost maintenance should be reintroduced.

The aspect of student support that the Government urgently need to revisit is differential tuition fees. I agree with many points made on that by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West. I have a great fear that if such fees are implemented, we will be in danger of creating more of a two-tier HE system than currently exists. In former mining communities, such as that in my constituency, where cash is still very much king, there is a great fear of debt. Under the Government's proposals, many students from poorer backgrounds will not be attracted to the best course for them, but to the most affordable one. Consequently, the two main criteria that some students will use to choose a university will be cheapness and closeness to home. If that proves to be the case, we shall fail to meet our golden objective of widening access.

Under the existing system for universities, Wolverhampton, Teesside, Newman college and North London have access rates of more than 40 per cent. for poorer students, while the access rate at Oxford and Cambridge is only 9 per cent. I would hate it if differential fees widened that already massive chasm.

Some difficult decisions need to be made about the future funding and expansion of HE. As with most difficult decisions in life, it is all a question of balance, as the Chairman of the Committee mentioned earlier. I hope that the report will give the Minister some assistance in getting the balance right.

4.28 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh): I am neither an educationist by background nor an expert by any means. I am also not a member of the Select Committee, which has produced an excellent report that hon. Members on both sides who are contributing to this debate would do well to read before they go out into the public arena to express their views on this complicated topic.

Despite that, I hope that I am well placed to comment because, without meaning to cause offence to my colleagues in the Room, I am perhaps the only person here who went to university under a mixed funding regime. In fact, I experienced the first year of student loans. I do not want this to be a sob story, but I also went to a comprehensive on Merseyside and then on to Cambridge university. I was in the first generation in my family to go to university, so I think that I can add a relevant, if personal perspective on the challenges that people from more deprived communities face in going to university.

I will start by admitting that, in the spring of 1989, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth) was putting the finishing touches to his student loans policy, I was marching through Cambridge on a "Grants not loans" march across Parker's Piece. I had long hair and flares—the lot. I was fairly convinced that that policy was the wrong way to go.

My brother, who was at the same school as me, was also on the march. He is now a teacher. In the Baron of Beef pub in Cambridge—a cracking pub that I would recommend to anyone—he said to me, "What on earth were you doing, a member of the Labour Party, on that march? That is naked self-interest that is at show there. These are people whose parents are wealthy. They are going to go into wealthy jobs, and they are parading through the streets of Cambridge saying that they shouldn't make any contribution and the people that you were at school with, who aren't at university—aren't in high paid jobs—should subsidise it." He rightly pointed out that of the 200 people in my school year at St. Aelred's Catholic comprehensive in Newton-le-Willows, 24 stayed on in the sixth form and, by my recollection, 12 went on to university. He rightly asked why those who did not go to university should subsidise the education that I was receiving. More to the point, why should they pay for me to lounge around reading Alexander Pope, as I was doing at the time?

One point on which I did agree with Margaret Thatcher was that my degrees were a luxury. I saw no reason why I, who was deriving personal benefit from them, should not make a contribution. It changed my view. I probably opposed the policy because the Tories were proposing it, but now I know that it was a Labour policy—a future Labour Minister was devising those proposals—I know why I belatedly came around to it.

The Conservatives were right to introduce a system in which individuals were asked to contribute to their courses through student loans, but where they were wrong—

Mr. Boswell: The hon. Gentleman is making a most winsome and appealing speech. I have no wish to complain about it, except to place one thing on the record, which is not clear from the way he has presented it: there were no tuition fees or charges for education under Conservative Governments. He is talking about student loans, which supported students' maintenance. That does not completely invalidate his argument, but it is important to place that on the record.

Andy Burnham: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for pointing that out. He is right. I was the beneficiary of a full maintenance grant, which was frozen in 1991. I then applied for a small student loan, which was the maximum available. However, the Conservatives introduced the principle that graduates should contribute to their education subsistence costs once they were employed. They were right to introduce that principle, but they were wrong to do so without concurrently increasing the funding going into universities from central Government through taxation. The two should have been done together. Their failure to do that led to under-investment in our universities, and to some of the problems with which the Minister is grappling today in presenting this package.

The Select Committee report is right to endorse the Dearing principle that the burden should be shared between the beneficiaries. The Chairman of the Select Committee made an interesting point about employers, which should be discussed further. The Committee was also right to conclude, in recommendation 37, that

"the deferral of payment of fees . . . removes one very significant disincentive to participation in higher education."

Those who say that top-up fees will do precisely the opposite should consider the details of the package that the Government propose.

All Labour Members agree on two clear points: universities need more money, and we need to carry on expanding access and opening up opportunities to those

[Andy Burnham]

from the lowest income families and the most deprived areas. Obviously, certain logical questions follow, such as: how much should that be done? How much do universities need? What is the right balance between personal contributions, taxation, and, possibly, employers' contributions?

I represent a constituency similar to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, East and Mexborough (Jeff Ennis). It is where I grew up. The deterrent effect of debt on working-class children is extremely serious. It would be a dereliction of duty for anyone representing constituencies such as ours not to give that point serious consideration before reaching a view on the subject, and I have given it serious consideration.

The alternative is to put greater sums of money into higher education and give universities what they need from general taxation. Would that be fairer for my constituency and the people I represent? Leigh has a post-16 staying-on rate of less than 15 per cent. As the Chairman of the Committee said, if the money were raised from general taxation, the people in Leigh would subsidise a service from their taxes that they have not used in comparison with other parts of the country and which their children, still today, will use proportionately much less than those in other more prosperous areas.

Dr. Gibson: Does my hon. Friend think that people who do not have children should pay for school education through their taxes?

Andy Burnham: I do, because I differentiate between school education and university education. School education is a service provided to the whole country—everybody, the whole society. University education—even today, given the expansion that happened under the Conservatives—does not benefit the whole of the population, so there is a big difference between the two.

Mr. Rendel: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that not everyone from 16 to 18 goes to school, yet it is free?

Andy Burnham: In my constituency, post-16 education is entirely free. When we were at school, there was no educational maintenance allowance. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, East and Mexborough, I thoroughly endorse it—it is long overdue. It is right that further education should be provided entirely free to encourage people into post-16 education. I make no differentiation between the two.

If money is to be raised from general taxation for education, my last priority out of primary, secondary, FE and HE would be HE, because people in my constituency are not being prepared at the other levels for the benefits of HE. The money needs to be spent earlier on in the system. I am afraid that I can come to no other conclusion than that the fairest solution for my constituents would be to make people benefiting from university contribute to it. That will remain my position until the staying-on rate is higher.

Leigh has a low staying-on rate for FE. It does not have local school sixth forms. As for the quality of FE provision, the college is good, but the quality of the buildings is very poor. I would like the Government to prioritise investment in FE and sixth form provision in deprived communities, because the young people from deprived backgrounds that we are talking about today will not even get near a university until we have that part of the equation absolutely right.

Yes, investment in secondary education is coming through in my constituency, as I suspect it is in others. The next challenge is post-16 education. University is not an option for 50 per cent. of my constituents, because they are not staying on. For those who do stay on, the quality needs to be better so that university is a realistic ambition for them. For too many, it is not at the moment. That is my main conclusion about whether students should be prepared to contribute.

On the perception of debt, the very fact that the spectre of top-up fees is being bandied about in this place is damaging the cause that some people who are raising the argument seek to further. My right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East referred to the matter. When young people hear this debate, they will be frightened, because it sounds as though they are being asked to contribute a great deal. We all have a duty to explain carefully what is meant. Up-front fees are being abolished—the Select Committee welcomed that. That is an important development, which means that parents in more deprived parts of the country will save money. It will take away an up-front cost that they have, which will make university education more attractive. That is getting lost in the fevered debate on top-up fees. We need to step back and think about what damage it may do when we are raising that spectre without doing justice to the detail of the package that the Minister proposes.

In my view, that package strikes a good balance. Will it put people off the best universities? When I went to Cambridge I was on a full maintenance grant. We did not have a great deal of money, but we knew that going to one of the best universities generally means better employment opportunities. That follows as night follows day. People would not go otherwise; that is why they do it. It might create a divided system, but can anyone in this Room tell me when the university system in this country was not either elitist or two-tier? It was made up of many tiers. It is probably the most divided public service in this country. From the very top to the bottom, there is a huge range of quality of provision. People must bear that in mind; it is closely linked to employment opportunities.

In closing, I shall mention three issues that should be considered in the context of the debate. The Select Committee in recommendation 25 suggests that the Government should look closely at the drop-out rate from university. I fully support that and ask that the Government take it seriously. However, it conflicts slightly with something that the Chairman of the Select Committee said, which was that universities should be left alone to manage their affairs much more.

Alan Howarth: Does my hon. Friend think that drop-out rates need not necessarily be the subject of concern that they are? While in university, students presumably learn and if they drop out for a while then return, as many do, that should be their right, which may suit them well. Is it not important that we ensure that there is a credit accumulation transfer system that really works.

and that we do not decry people who, possibly for entirely valid personal reasons, decide that for the time being they will desist from their courses?

Andy Burnham: I was not seeking to decry anyone who drops out, nor am I endorsing the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North, who seemingly wants people to lounge around the student union playing pool and drinking beer, which he thinks is great for the taxpayer. I am not of that view either. My point is that we need to give students who are in danger of dropping out more support, but we also need to do something about the culture of some of our universities. It is on that matter that I disagree with the Chairman of the Select Committee.

As a first-year student, I was waiting for the tap on the shoulder: "Come on. We've made a mistake. You were allowed in, but you shouldn't be here. On your bike." Oxbridge—this is probably true of other universities—replicates a public school culture, which is bewildering and overwhelming for children from state schools. It is a world that they have had no exposure to whatever.

It is extremely difficult to make the transition from state education to Oxbridge because a supervision system with one-on-one contact where adversarial argument is encouraged and people are asked to take others on goes against the grain of everything with which people from state schools have had to deal. Perhaps state schools should be better at preparing their pupils for the rigorous challenges of higher education. I also think that we need to be more interventionist in relation to some of the more unacceptable practices of the most elitist universities.

We need to look at what is being provided. There is an issue around media studies. It is no good putting people on courses and asking them to make a contribution when we are raising expectations about the jobs that they may do in the future. Universities have an obligation not only to entice students in with fancy sounding courses that they think people will sign up for, such as sports studies or media studies, but to ensure that those students can find employment once they have left university. In some cases, in the rush to fill places and get people on courses, they are raising expectations that cannot be fulfilled.

Should we differentiate courses that lead to careers in important public services such as teaching and medicine? Should the state provide more help for people on such courses than for people who will go into highly paid jobs in the private sector?

There will always be political difficulties when expanding contributions from individuals into areas that have been traditionally funded by taxation. This issue raises difficult questions, just as residential and nursing care still do. The left of our party, and the left generally, often loses its way in such debates. It sees the loss of universal free provision as an attack on those on low incomes, when the opposite is the case. Such systems cross-subsidise those on the lowest incomes.

The crucial difference in this debate is that we are talking about a group of people—graduates—who, by definition, all become middle class when they finish their studies. That is what an HE qualification does. When we live in an unequal country, why should the left argue for state subsidies for that group of people when we have such pressing needs earlier on in our education system at primary, secondary and FE level?

The Government have got the balance right. The big challenge is to invest in our secondary schools and FE, and to lift the horizons of secondary school pupils. Everyone has bleeding hearts about kids from deprived backgrounds. Let us invest in their schools and give them self-belief and the belief that they can go on and fulfil their potential. Let us get the money to the parts of the system in which everyone benefits.

4.46 pm

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I commend the report that has been produced under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman). This has been an interesting debate and there have been many valuable contributions. I draw attention, in particular, to what my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) said. Even though he ate a little into the time that I hoped to have for my speech, I thought it important that he spoke from his experience.

I think—perhaps the Minister agrees—that the arguments that have been made this afternoon supporting the Government's policy on tuition fees have started the process of shifting the balance of the wider parliamentary and political debate. I have always thought that, as more people engaged in the debate on tuition fees and differential fees, and as more Members informed themselves about the full implications of the policy, the negative reaction that the White Paper received in January, and which has continued since, would start to shift. This afternoon's debate is significant and could be a turning point in the debate on top-up fees.

Although the report deals with many significant issues, including research, admissions policies and links with business, I want to use my short time to focus on fees. I will start with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report published earlier this week and widely covered in the national press yesterday. Although it appeared to be mainly about the educational performance of 25 to 34-year-olds, who were educated under the Conservative Government, it contained an interesting statistic that related to the impact of university education in the United Kingdom. As I recall, only the *Financial Times* covered it.

The report showed that the graduate premium in the United Kingdom is far in excess of that in any other OECD country. In the debate on the reform of tuition fees, the Government have used the figure of 20 per cent. as a graduate premium. That is to say that, all things being equal, on average, a graduate will earn 20 per cent. more than a non-graduate throughout his or her lifetime. In the OECD's report, the figure of 61 per cent. is quoted as a graduate premium. That clearly needs further checking, but if that is the case, and British graduates earn, on average, 61 per cent. more throughout their lifetime than non-graduates, the case against what the Government are doing must collapse immediately. That is an absolutely crucial point.

Mr. Rendel: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that what is really important about the graduate premium is

[Mr. Rendel]

the difference between what is earned by someone who goes to university and what would be earned by that same person if they got up to A-level but did not go on to university? In practice, the OECD report looked at the average graduate salary compared with the average non-graduate salary for people who would never have got to university anyway. That is quite a different figure.

Mr. Chaytor: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. That is exactly why I said that we must look in more detail at what the OECD says. The fact remains that it is indisputable that the possession of a university education in Britain brings enormous financial advantages. Whether we are comparing non-graduates as a whole, or looking at what would have happened to the same person had they not gone to university, is frankly irrelevant.

Let us focus on the graduate premium. Here we see the precise justification for what the Government are trying to do. I reiterate the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, East and Mexborough (Jeff Ennis) who said that this is entirely about balance. Of course it is. It is not about a great ideological divide, but about the balance, quoted by Dearing in his report, between the contributions of the individual and the contributions of the state. In one sense, I am surprised that people get so excited by the issue, because the question is where the balance should lie. At the moment, 25 per cent. of tuition fees are paid by the individual on average, and 75 per cent. by the state. The debate is all about the powerful case for shifting that balance.

Before I move on to differential fees in general, I shall speak specifically about differential fees within universities, which has been touched on. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) is very much opposed to them on the grounds of who will make the decision. I have to tell her that such decisions are made every day of the week by managers in different educational institutions up and down the country. I spent much of the 10 years before I came into Parliament making precisely such judgments. That is partly what I was paid for. It is not terribly difficult. If the policy goes through, as I hope it will, that is what people in universities will be doing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) asked my right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth) about the relative costs of degrees in physics and mediaeval history. The question was not answered, but had it been put to me, I would have said that the answer is very simple. Most universities would make a judgment that they want to recruit more physicists because that is desperately in the national interest and will probably enhance the prestige of their university more than having even more mediaeval historians. I have nothing against mediaeval historians; some of my best friends are mediaeval historians, but it is indisputable that, in terms of the national interest of the United Kingdom, for the foreseeable future, we need significantly more physicists and slightly fewer mediaeval historians. The logic of that is that the fees set for physics degrees should be lower than the fees set for mediaeval history. I have to declare an interest because my son starts his physics degree next Monday; but setting that on one side, the point remains valid.

I turn to the wider issue of the so-called top-up fee and different fees at different universities. The question is one of balance, but it is also whether we want a university system that continues to thrive and that can compete with the best in the world. I have not yet heard anyone deny that that ought to be our national objective, but there is another question: do we want to continue to expand access to that world-class university system? Here is a divide because the Conservative party has made very clear its view that it wants to turn back the clock 25 years, restrict access to university and deny opportunities to large numbers of young people and mature students. My reading of the figures produced some weeks ago by the Higher Education Policy Institute suggests, allowing for the natural growth in demand for higher education as a result of the increasing number of students achieving the relevant A-levels, the population growth and the demographic factor which predicts an increasing number of 18-year-olds, that the Conservative party's policy of abolishing fees by cutting demand would result in a net loss of 464,000 university places by 2011.

Mr. Boswell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Chaytor: I will not, as I am short of time. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman can make his point in his winding-up speech.

The nub of the issue is whether we want to turn back the clock—not to maintain the status quo but to turn back the clock to an ever-more elitist system that denies opportunity to those who could benefit from it—or whether we should find another way of funding quality and expansion. The Liberal Democrats have decided that they want to fund it out of general taxation. I would have no problem with a 50 per cent. rate of income tax on earnings over £100,000. Indeed, given the opportunity, I would probably vote for it tomorrow. However, we must keep in mind the fact that no one can give a cast-iron guarantee that, in future spending rounds, university funding would take priority over pre-school, primary and secondary education, over further or higher education, or over policing, public transport or defence. I defy hon. Members to say that they could give such a guarantee.

I return to the question of the top-up fee. What is being proposed is an additional fee of £1,900 for each year of a three-year degree course. The Government have guaranteed that that sum will remain fixed until 2011, but with the impact of inflation on the basic fee, we will be talking of an increase of £1,750 for each year. If we consider the graduate premium of between 20 per cent., which was cited earlier, and 61 per cent., it is extremely difficult to see how graduates whose average earnings are now well over £30,000 a year and who, by the end of the decade, will be earning as much as £50,000, cannot afford to pay three times £1,750 over their working lives. That is particularly so when the protection is built into the system that the figure will remain at only 9 per cent. of earnings above £15,000. That is a comparatively modest amount.

Some may support the money being paid back over a graduate's working career, but through a graduate tax. I have to say that what happens now is a graduate tax by another name. However, it does not have some of the

weaknesses of a graduate tax, under which some people could avoid payment altogether. It will be difficult to avoid payment under the present system.

I come finally to debt. Many of us were the first in a thousand generations of our families to go to university. The question of debt is critical. I do not accept the romantic picture of a heroic, golden age, with working-class people refusing to get into debt. In the United Kingdom today, we see people of all socio-economic groups getting into debt; it is far more a part of life today. The fundamental distinction is not between debt and no debt, or between a willingness to get into debt and fear of debt. The distinction is the purpose of the debt.

Our problem—this is a wider issue about our political culture—is that we happily accept getting into debt for the purposes of consumption, but many have great difficulty in understanding the concept of debt for investment. People, especially younger people with very little money whose families also have very little money, will cheerfully borrow on their credit cards at exorbitant rates of interest in order to buy mobile phones and trainers. As they get older, they will borrow to buy motor cars and to go on foreign holidays. As they get older still, they will cheerfully borrow hundreds of thousands of pounds to buy houses. Why will they not borrow about £6,000 for the best investment that they could ever make?

4.59 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I am delighted that we have had yet another opportunity to debate higher education and how we pay for it, because it is one of the most glowering dividing lines in British politics. The Government want to pay for it out of tuition fees, the Liberal Democrats out of general taxation and the Conservatives by cutting the number of students. At stake is the future of our higher education system, which, as the Chairman of the Select Committee said, has a great deal going for it in terms of academic standards and international reputation, but which is struggling to cope with the legacy of years of under-investment. Student numbers have expanded while funding per student has dramatically declined for the last two and a half decades. The result is a threat to the quality of the education and research that universities are able to provide.

There is much to welcome in the Select Committee's report. It acknowledges the problems facing higher education. Apparently, only the Conservatives are oblivious to the fact that universities need more money—now—and to the powerful moral and economic case for wider participation and greater social equality in our universities. The Liberal Democrats agree with the Committee about the importance of teaching taking place in a research-active environment—a criticism of the Government's contention that the relationship between teaching and research is merely indirect. We also agree with the Committee about the concentration of research funding. I note that on both those issues the Government have managed to unite in opposition to what they are doing almost the entire higher education sector, including Universities UK, the Association of University Teachers, the University and College Lecturers Association and the National Union of Students.

The Committee is also right about the critical issue of academic pay and its influence on retention and recruitment. It points to the absence of any substantial improvement in academic and other salaries. In response, the Government say:

> "We do not see evidence of a generalised recruitment and retention problem."

However, has the Minister read the Treasury-commissioned study by Sir Gareth Roberts on the supply of science and engineering skills in the UK? That finds evidence to suggest that, given the expansion plans for higher education and the ageing demographic profile of academic staff in key disciplines, we face a staffing crisis grounded not least in the fact that academic pay is far too low.

I am delighted to pledge that my party would ensure that the universities received adequate funding to implement the proposals of the Bett report. The Liberal Democrats also agree with the Committee about an Office of Fair Access—"slim at best" is its verdict on the evidence as to why such a regulator is needed. The Government are

> "very conscious of the need to avoid creating new bureaucracy".

That is good news, but it is difficult to see Offa as part of that commitment.

The Committee also concluded, rightly, that the 50 per cent. target is completely arbitrary. Hon. Members might recall an investigation by the Public Accounts Committee, on which I am proud to serve, which found that definitions of the 50 per cent. target have changed over time and that the method of measuring participation—the initial entry rate—amounts, essentially, to guess work. I therefore welcome the Government's response to the Select Committee report, which states:

> "We are ultimately less concerned with the precise percentage rate of participation in any particular year than with the fact that increasing numbers of people can get the higher level of education and training that they and the economy need."

That is coming pretty close to what we have been saying all along.

More recently, Liberal Democrat research has shown that the proportion of school leavers applying to go to university is on the decline in England. If one looks at those aged 18,19 and 20, one sees that the number of university applicants increased by only 1.6 per cent. If the increase had been in line with demographic trends it would have been 3.2 per cent.—an extra 5,437 young people. That would just have retained the existing proportion of young people going to university, never mind increasing the proportion towards the Government's target.

It is interesting to compare the situation to that in Scotland, where the age group expanded by 2.1 per cent., but the number of university applicants from it increased by 5.7 per cent. That leads me to the key issue of student support and funding because of the glaring policy difference between England and Scotland, where the Scottish Executive have abolished tuition fees.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes) was the lone dissenting voice on the Select Committee, speaking out against tuition fees and top-up fees. It is revealing and sad that he received no support from its Conservative members, even though the

[Mr. David Rendel]

Conservative party now claims to oppose the levying of tuition fees. The Labour-Tory majority on the Committee is, in our view, quite wrong to be so complacent about this issue.

Recent surveys show that the student debt problem is increasing and will increase further if top-up fees are introduced. A study by Barclays bank estimates that the average student debt on graduation will triple by 2010 to an alarming £33,708. With inflation at 3 per cent., such debt will increase by more than £1,000 a year, which means that a graduate paying 9 per cent. interest will need to earn at least £11,000 above the threshold before their cash deficit begins to be paid off at all. Furthermore, that threshold is due to be increased to £15,000 and is rumoured to be under consideration for a further increase. I note that the Select Committee's report concluded that the threshold should go up to almost £25,000.

There is no doubt that debt acts as a significant disincentive to entry into higher education, especially for those young people from low-income backgrounds whom the Government say they most want to attract into our universities. There is particular concern about the disincentive to those considering longer courses such as medicine. The Committee notes critical evidence from the British Medical Association, the British Dental Association and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons on that point. The return of grants is welcome, but as the Committee notes:

"The general view of our witnesses was that the amount was too low to have any significant impact on students or potential students worried about their level of debt."

In passing, I hope that the Government will also take into account the point that top-up fees would also be a disincentive to those considering taking a gap year, especially in the year in which top-up fees are introduced. Many may decide not to take a gap year if a delay in university entry until the following year means that they will have to pay top-up fees.

There are two arguments for top-up fees, which seem superficially compelling but are both flawed. The first is that universities need the money. They do: everyone, except the Conservatives, accepts that. However, universities will not end up with a single extra penny as a result of top-up fees. Fee income will simply replace a cut in public grants. That is exactly what happened when tuition fees were introduced, which should have been a surprise to no one. When considering how much grant to allocate to HE, any Chancellor, of whatever party, is bound to decide how much of the nation's wealth can justifiably be spent on HE and take into consideration how much money the sector is receiving in tuition fees.

The Select Committee advances a second argument for tuition fees to refute the case for progressive taxation as the best and fairest way to fund higher education. It states:

"The price to be paid for that funding . . . is greater Government control of the sector",

and that there would be less "independence and freedom" for universities. However, public funding need not and should not imply Government micro-management. Public money is frequently spent by bodies such as Government agencies, which operate at arm's length from the Government.

In addition, the threat of interference by the funder is true of all types of funding, not least that from the private sector. By supporting some research projects rather than others, the private sector can also undermine academic freedom: the drugs industry is an obvious example. In such cases, public involvement can protect academic freedom.

The Select Committee heard evidence criticising tuition fees from the National Union of Students, the Association of University Teachers and NATFHE. According to the AUT, 88 per cent. of its members say that they would prefer HE to be funded through general taxation.

Andy Burnham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rendel: I am sorry, but I do not have the time.

According to NATFHE, its members are "overwhelmingly opposed" to top-up fees. Academic freedom is a central concern of university teachers and students, yet they accept the overwhelming case for funding through taxation.

I will deal briefly with the Conservatives. They are keen to trumpet their new policy to scrap tuition fees, but no one seems to have told their members on the Select Committee, who failed to turn up to meetings or who supported the Labour majority. We have had other opportunities to debate the ludicrous and dangerous nature of Conservative plans for HE. They say that students will not have to pay tuition fees, but in many cases that is only because those students will not be offered a place at university anyway. Separate studies by the Institute for Fiscal Studies and Professor Nicholas Barr of the LSE confirm that these cuts will hit the poorest the hardest. In addition, Universities UK and the Library have rubbished the Tory sums, which simply do not add up.

Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrats have consistently advanced the principled case against fees. I am proud to say that it was a Liberal Democrat MP who stood alone against the Labour-Tory majority on the Select Committee to speak out for a fair deal for students. I do, however, want to pay tribute to the many Members on the Labour Benches who are also taking a principled stand. They know that there are enough of them to force the Government to back down. If they stand firm, there are enough of them to win the day, but they will be faced during the next few months with all the threats and blandishments that Government Whips can think of. If they start to weaken and allow themselves to be persuaded, their electorates will never forgive them. The polls show that 80 per cent. of the people of England believe that top-up fees are wrong. The Labour rebels have a chance to save their party from electoral disaster, and I urge them to seize it.

5.10 pm

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): This has been a good debate, based on an interesting, challenging and generally positive report, well introduced by the Chairman of the Committee and spoken to by Committee members and others today. All the submissions and evidence provided have made a major contribution to adult education. That is something to be grateful for.

I hope—not least because in a moment I shall have critical things to say about Her Majesty's Government—that we can begin with some measure of consensus. I throw one point to the Government on which we can agree: I am delighted that they are introducing in their White Paper proposals for an arts and humanities research council. We—the right hon. Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth) and I—laid the foundations of that work in the early 1990s. That sort of thing always takes a long time.

Rather than go on with the pleasantries, let us try to concentrate on the main issues that have emerged today. First, a brief word on research funding. Much has been said on that. I strongly endorse the feelings of the Select Committee about the lack of notice of changes made in the middle of the research cycle; the likely pyramid effects of concentration; the equivocation at the distinction between research-rich and teaching-rich universities; the somewhat undistributed middle of knowledge transfer; and the fact that throughout the academic world things are never simple. I hope that the Government will, as they have shown some sign of doing, relent on the more extreme application of their somewhat dirigiste policies and remember that it is sometimes necessary to let a million flowers bloom. That has happened very successfully in British higher education. That very positive point was rightly brought out by the Chairman of the Select Committee.

I shall say a word on the Office for Fair Access because recommendation 27 advises the Government not to proceed with the introduction of OFFA. I strongly endorse that recommendation, and not primarily for resource reasons—neither the resources needed to govern it, nor the implementation and compliance costs for the sector. The Minister will remember that the PA report suggested compliance costs with regulation of some £250 million, before we have even started.

In all friendliness, I say to the Minister that the construction of OFFA has been a very Jekyll and Hyde affair, according to whichever Minister has been dominant at the time. At the time of the White Paper, I thought that OFFA was becoming regulation-light—or regulation-lite, no doubt—and that it was simply going to ensure that individual institutions were producing fair access arrangements and look at how they were considering admissions. The Committee and the Minister will be aware that Professor Schwarz is to make recommendations as early as next week on admissions conditions, and we look forward to that.

However, ministerial written answers this week have made it clear to me that OFFA will busy itself not simply with the process of admission, but with the continuing business of the offering of bursaries in the delivery of higher education. Although that may be understandable for access reasons, it means that the whole process of university activity will be a proper subject for further interference and—a matter on which I might touch again in a moment—litigation over compliance with those agreements during the course of studies. That will create a climate of regulation, which will be entirely unhelpful.

Tuition fees are today's major concern. I turn aside from my own comments to comment briefly on what has been said, in terrorem, by the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor). He said—not casually, because he repeated the assertion—that the Conservative proposals would set back participation by 25 years. I invite him to consider the age participation index in 1978 and then justify that assertion. The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), whom I will allow a degree of franchise for flippancy, said that no one would be going into higher education under the Conservative proposals. I take it that that is not a serious assertion that he would wish to sustain.

If one considers the figures, it is as well to remember, for example, that 60,000 students drop out of their courses before graduation. Bearing in mind the Minister's past remarks that only graduates would have to pay, all that students who drop out will have is a substantial residual burden of student debt.

I have four comments to make about tuition fees. First, the Government's policies are unclear. That is not entirely a negative, because it is right—*[Interruption.]* It is necessary for the Government to consider the details more closely, considering the Minister's reaction. Apart from the need for maintenance concessions, there is a need for flexibility, whether that is implemented in regulations or not. I am not thinking wholly of the fees cap—the hon. Member for Bury, North was unduly credulous in believing that it will never be lifted—but rather of all the difficulties with which the Minister will become familiar: intercalated students, students who were full-time and convert to part-time and students who change residency. Those issues are extremely complicated, and they need to be properly addressed.

There is also the question of prospectuses. Universities will issue their prospectuses in the new year, and there will be students—even those who are not worried about taking a gap year—who will read them on the assumption that they will be resident from autumn 2006, without having any indication of the access agreements.

My second and more substantial objection to tuition fees is their instability. The Select Committee—for reasons that are not solely financial—has already called for an increase in the cap to £5,000, which would make a huge difference to the residual debts. That is the problem with a forced market. There are clearly higher education institutions that would like a higher cap or to charge whatever they like.

It is also worth considering the sustainability of the student fee proposals. I concur with the hon. Member for Newbury when he argues that the Chancellor will pocket the fees. The fees will be taken into account in the public expenditure survey in exactly the same way the 1998 tuition fees were. The stress on resources is likely to lead to a breach of faith because of the 50 per cent. participation target, which will be subject, as has been said, to interpretation. Even more disturbingly, it has emerged that we may end up with one cohort of students paying for another. It has been suggested that as much as one third of the top-up fee will be milked to provide bursaries for other students and to promote access. Ministers need to reflect on the fact that the students from whom the money may be taken—paying with their own money for the facility—may not end up as the highest earners and those most likely to benefit from the courses. There is a degree of inequity there.

My biggest concern, which is touched on by the Select Committee but will need further discussion, is the impact of rolling up student loans. If we accommodate

[Mr. Tim Boswell]

that, and if we say that the resources are there and that the Government will cover them by loan, there is already an implicit subsidy of £800 million a year. It is likely, if the Government are going to cover anything like the cost to students, that that will escalate to £2 billion a year, and even if there is some cash flow back, it seems unsustainable to me. Although we would like to do as much as we can for higher education, there are other priorities, including some that have been mentioned in relation to education, quality of secondary schools and access.

My final objection is that the policy is simply unfair. It will prove very difficult where there are two or more siblings in the family, where there are long courses, in the handling of drop-outs who have to pay substantial sums with no apparent merit and in possible cross-subsidy between students. For poorer students there is an immediate deterrent.

Members of the Chamber will be aware that yesterday, innocently enough, I asked the Prime Minister whether he felt that he had sufficient Back-Bench support for the measure. The answer made me identify for the first time with Conan Doyle and "The Hound of the Baskervilles". It was the dog that did not bark that told the loudest story. All I would say to Labour Members who do not favour differential fees is that they ought to consider coming over to this side of the Chamber, where we shall charge no fees at all.

5.20 pm

The Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education (Alan Johnson): This has been a really excellent debate on an excellent report. To keep Back Benchers here for two hours after the House has adjourned on a Thursday is testimony to the quality of the debate. In the short time left to me, I want to do justice to the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) and pick up on some of the other issues.

One of the real benefits of the way my hon. Friend opened the debate is that he added a bit of poetry that is not in the White Paper about the importance of universities and the higher education sector. Lord Dearing has a good phrase for that, which I will pinch. He said that in the middle ages, communities were built around the castle; at the time of the industrial revolution, they were built around the factory. In the 21st century, communities will be built around universities. That is a really important point about the changing nature of university education.

There was a difference of opinion on whether there is complacency—particularly in the contribution by the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo)—in the Select Committee report. I do not think that there is and there is certainly no complacency in our White Paper. We are not saying that the higher education sector is declining. We are saying that it is in serious danger of falling behind its competitors, which is why we published the White Paper.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth) paraphrased Rab Butler and said that we are grasping a number of nettles. Why are we doing that? Why did we not just say that we have reversed the decline in cost per student? We are putting a real increase of 6 per cent. back into higher education during the next three years. By the end of the three-year spending review, the taxpayer will be putting £10 billion into higher education—£400 for every taxpayer in the country. Why did we not just leave it at that and not get involved with issues that are hardly focus group policies designed to pursue cheap popularity?

We did not do so—this applies to research as well as fees and funding—for the following reason. I have the figures that show what is happening around the world. The United States of America is planning an 8 per cent. increase in research and development in its universities this year. Canada is aiming to double public sector research and development spend as a proportion of gross domestic product by 2010. Between 2000 and 2005, Japan is increasing investment in science and technology by more than 16 per cent., and that is apart from what is happening in India and China. The world is changing very quickly and if we do not react, and show a bit of political courage in reacting to that challenge, our excellent higher education sector will decline and diminish.

In relation to research it is fair to say that there has been a modicum of controversy about our proposals, but we should be absolutely clear. I take a position that is balanced fairly, as always, between the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield and those made by the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea. We were moving 2 per cent. of the research budget around and we did that because it will be 2008 before the next research assessment exercise, which takes place every seven years. We were trying to respond to the pressures, as we saw them, in the changing world and we did so very quickly after publication of the White Paper. The Higher Education Funding Council for England report went out about two months after the White Paper and there was a great deal of tension about whether we might have moved too quickly.

To put the matter into context, we said in our response to the Select Committee report that we are not funding a few institutions. Already, 75 per cent. of research funding goes to 25 institutions. We are not saying that only a handful of institutions will receive extra money. We point out that next year more than 43 different institutions will receive more than £5 million each for research. However, that has created tensions.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State must feel like a character in a Bateman cartoon. The man who suggested that excellent teaching can exist in its own right, independent of cutting edge research, has created a furore. I seem to have interfered with the ark of the covenant in terms of higher education. I do not want the argument to continue and I do not want to be at loggerheads with the Select Committee or any other group that has made representations. I want some shared analysis. Given that the objective must be the same throughout the sector and among the various players, we must have shared analysis and repair some of the damage done by moving quickly without consultation early on. The HEFCE report, which is out for consultation, and the Gareth Roberts review of the research assessment exercise provide a vehicle for a proper debate. The Select Committee's

recommendation that we move that £21 million back again is what we are specifically rejecting and there are understandable reasons for that.

I must defend my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield because the Select Committee did not suggest a variable fee with a £5,000 cap. However, it recommended a real rate of interest being attached. We point out in the report the effect of that on low earners after graduation and the figures speak for themselves. It is worth noting that New Zealand went down that route and is now rowing back because of the problems it caused. That is the specific recommendation that we are rejecting.

There were so many good contributions, but in the few seconds left to me I want to speak about funding. This has been a good debate on the Select Committee's report because it is predicated on two central issues. First, should we expand higher education? Yes, we should, say the Select Committee, the Government and, to be fair, the Liberal Democrats. No, we should not, says today's Conservative party. I cannot understand that view and I am absolutely sure that the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) is as uncomfortable with it as everyone else. When we get past the stage of deciding whether to expand higher education, the question is: how should we fund it? The Select Committee said that the Dearing committee set out the principles. That was no fly-by-night, cobbled-together committee. It was a national committee of inquiry set up by the previous Government, who unanimously recommended that graduates should make a contribution.

When the Cubie committee in Scotland considered the issue, it specifically rejected all the arguments of the Opposition parties, which included the Liberal Democrats at the time, but who are now in coalition government, and the Conservatives. It said that graduates should make a contribution and that is why there is a non-means-tested contribution of £2,000 by every Scottish graduate after they have graduated. Not just Cubie, not just Dearing and not just the Select Committee, but everyone who analysed the matter properly said that graduates should make a contribution. So we are left with the real debate, which is, given the two issues of expanding higher education and graduates making a contribution, how do we do that?

My final point on whether contributions should be variable or fixed relates to the case made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey). I cannot understand why students should be denied the chance to choose the course that they want at a price that suits them or that universities should not offer them. If we have a system with protection, a reintroduced maintenance grant and income-contingent loans—my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) explained the issue more eloquently than I could and it is not credit card debt—the whole package, plus the introduction of help for part-timers for the first time, plus help for postgraduates is a good package.

This has been an excellent debate.

It being half-past Five o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

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SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2002–03

COMPRISING PERIOD
8 September—6 October 2003

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8 September 2003

Written Ministerial Statements

Monday 8 September 2003

DEFENCE

Trident Programme

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The current estimate of the total acquisition cost of the Trident programme, with payments already made expressed at the prices and exchange rates actually incurred and future spend at the current financial year exchange rate (the hybrid) estimate, is now £9,803 million. Leaving aside the effects of price inflation and exchange rate variation (+£1 million), there has been a real cost increase of £2 million. Expenditure on the Trident acquisition programme to 30 September 2002 represented over 99 per cent. of the total estimate. If all expenditure, past and projected, is brought up to this current year's economic conditions (the non-hybrid estimate) the estimate is £14,913 million.

The programme continues to show an overall réduction in real terms on its original 1982 estimate. This reduction, including the savings resulting from the decision to process missiles at the United States facility at Kings Bay, Georgia, now stands at over £3.6 billion at current prices.

The proportion of the estimate for work undertaken in the United Kingdom continues to be around 70 per cent.

Our four in-service Vanguard Class submarines are successfully maintaining continuous at-sea deterrence, with HMS Vanguard now undergoing a planned major overhaul.

Estimate Table *£million*

	US	*UK*	*TOTAL*
Hybrid			
Previous estimate (2002) at 2001–02 economic conditions (£1:$1.46)	2,884	6,916	9,800
Real changes	0	+2	+2
Price inflation on unspent balance	0	0	0
Exchange rate variation on unspent balance	+1		+1
Revised estimate at 2002–03 economic conditions (£1:$1.39)	2,885	6,918	9,803
Non-hybrid.			
Previous estimate (2002) at 2001–02 economic conditions	4,059	10,318	14,377
Real changes	0	+2	+2
Price inflation	+69	+258	+327
Exchange rate variation	+208		+208
Revised estimate at 2000–01 economic conditions (£1:$1.39)	4,336	10,578	14,913

Note:

Figures rounded to nearest £ million hence any apparent imbalances.

Iraq

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): Real progress has been made in Iraq over the last few months. Coalition forces continue to support Iraqi leaders both nationally and at the local level. Political progress has been made, with the increasing effectiveness of the Iraqi Governing Council and the recent appointment of Iraqi departmental Ministers. We now seek to accelerate progress in other areas, including enhanced security across the country, and the reliable provision of basic utilities

In the light of the evolving security situation in Iraq and the increasing military tasks arising out of the reconstruction efforts in the south of the country, the UK Divisional Commander in theatre has been conducting a formal review of UK forces and resources in Iraq. While the full scale of the requirement, which will be largely driven by initiatives of the Coalition Provisional Authority and the Department for International Development (DFID) to accelerate reconstruction activities in Iraq, has yet to be fully developed, there is an immediate requirement for two battalions and some additional specialist personnel, vehicles and equipment to allow him to fulfil the expanding range of tasks for UK forces in Multinational Division (South East) (MND(SE)).

Accordingly, we are deploying to Iraq the balance of 2nd Battalion The Light Infantry a company of which is already in theatre. This battalion will be involved in supporting current operations, and in offering additional protection to the Coalition Provisional Authority. They are currently based in Cyprus and were already identified as an "Over the Horizon Reserve" for Iraq. Their role in Cyprus will be filled by two batteries from 16 Regiment Royal Artillery.

In addition, 1st Battalion The Royal Green Jackets (1 RGJ) will deploy to Iraq immediately supported by some specialist personnel and equipment. This deployment will enable MND(SE) to increase force protection, accelerate training of the Iraqi Civil Defence Corps and to improve our information gathering capability in MND(SE). 1 RGJ are currently designated the Spearhead Land Element, are already at high readiness, and are therefore the most appropriate unit to call upon. They will be replaced as Spearhead Land Element by 42 Commando Royal Marines.

We plan to maintain the deployment of these units until around November, providing an interim additional capability to our commanders in theatre. Additional units would deploy to replace them in theatre if the requirement remained. We plan for some of the roles progressively to be conducted by Iraqi personnel.

In addition to the requirements that we have already fully identified, we anticipate additional tasks in the near future which will require military resources, in particular the provision of military support to critical infrastructure work planned by CPA(S) and DFID. This work will deliver a more stable power supply, improve fuel availability and significantly improve the delivery of water services to all sectors of the population in the MND(SE) area. The military capabilities needed will be identified as the detail of the plan's

implementation takes shape. We will immediately take steps to identify and reduce notice to move for some additional headquarters and units, to allow further deployments as rapidly as possible in response to this accelerating programme of work.

These measures will give extra capabilities to our commanders in theatre, allowing them to increase their proactive efforts to improve wider security across the region, and allowing them to support the essential reconstruction and regeneration efforts in their area of operations. The commitment of the United Kingdom and its Armed Forces to Iraq remains undeterred by recent events. We are determined to help the Iraqi people to forge a new, peaceful and secure future for themselves and we will meet this commitment with appropriate forces in Iraq for as long as required, and no longer.

TREASURY

Double Taxation Convention (Australia)

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): A new comprehensive Double Taxation Convention with Australia (which will replace the existing Agreement) was signed on 21 August 2003. After signature, the text of the Convention was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses and made available on the Inland Revenue's website. The text of the Convention has been scheduled to a draft Order in Council and is today being laid before the House of Commons.

2001 Census: Key Statistics for Health Areas

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Healey): : The report "*Key Statistics for health areas in England and Wales*", containing results from the 2001 Census, was laid before Parliament and published on 31 July 2003.

This report contains results from the 2001 Census for the areas covered by the 26 Strategic Health Authorities, over 300 Primary Care Trusts in England and the 22 Local Health Boards in Wales. The tables present similar information to that previously published for local authorities on 13 February 2003 and for wards on 30 June 2003. The data are also available on the Neighbourhood Statistics section of the National Statistics website.

Central Government Fees and Charges Recovery Policy

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): : The Treasury has reviewed the normal recovery policy for services where fees and charges are set by central government. The Treasury has concluded that the cost of capital rate in fees and charges where the norm is full cost recovery (and in appropriate exceptions from the norm) should be reduced from 6 to 3.5 per cent. in real terms (keeping parity with the reduction in the discount rate for appraisal and evaluation of projects in central government and with the cost of capital in government resource accounts and budgets). For commercial services where there is or may be private sector competition, and a profit may be appropriate in the interests of fair competition, the required rate of return of at least 8 per cent. in real terms has been replaced with an illustrative range starting with 5.5 per cent. Departments will need to make their own assessment of the appropriate rate of return for commercial services, but the rate is expected to fall in a range 5.5 per cent. to 15 per cent. in real terms (pre-tax), depending on factors such as the level of risk. In practice, the upper end of the range will rarely be used, as it is unusual for public sector bodies to engage in such high-risk activities.

The revised policy applies to central government departments, including agencies and Trading Funds, NHS Trusts and other NHS bodies and appropriate non-departmental public bodies. It will be used in determining fees and charges in the next Fees Order to be presented, or the equivalent point for commercial or other charges. Where a consequent change in fees and charges is required, it should be effective no later than 1 April 2004. This timetable should allow for consultation about the new fee levels where the legislation or customary procedure provides for consultation. However, the words "used in determining fees and charges" have been used advisedly. Capital is often a relatively small factor in total costs and the effect may be rather to moderate the increase to statutory fees arising from changes to other costs rather than to reduce fees. There may also be services which are intended to recover full costs, but have not been achieving this objective and may therefore continue to experience increased fees and charges; or commercial services where the price charged in a competitive market may already be consistent with the revised policy and therefore require no reduction. The purpose of the revised policy is to put the cost of, and return on, capital on to a more current basis, not to make reductions in fees and charges unless they flow naturally from the revised policy (or unless there are other good reasons for a reduction such as a fall in other costs).

As a consequence of the revised policy on fees and charges, the financial objectives of Government Trading Funds (the required rates of return) will also be reviewed. They will be adjusted where necessary by laying a Treasury Minute under the Government Trading Funds Act 1973 before the House during the financial year 2003–04. Trading Funds undertake a wide range of charging activities—statutory, commercial, inter- departmental or a mix of those. The further financial objective will therefore need to be determined individually for each Fund.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): Under s73(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I have appointed nine new Commissioners to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. They are:

Anne O'Reilly (Deputy Chief Commissioner)

Annie Campbell

Brian Carlin

Eileen Evason

Tom Haverty

Michael Rea

Audrey Simpson

Daphne Trimble

Derick Wilson

The appointments took effect from 2 August 2003 and last for three years.

Maghaberry Prison

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): On 5 August, we announced that there would be a short review in response to concerns expressed about the safety of prisoners and staff within Maghaberry Prison. The terms of reference for the review were as follows:

> To consider, in consultation with prison management, staff, their unions, prisoners and other interested groups and taking account of relevant practice in other jurisdictions, the options for improving conditions at Maghaberry Prison, particularly as they relate to safety, for all prisoners and staff, remembering the Prison Service's statutory obligations as set out at section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and bearing in mind the lessons of the past and the new environment created by the Good Friday Agreement, and to make recommendations to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

We invited John Steele, a former head of the Northern Ireland Prison Service, to lead the review and he was assisted by Father Kevin Donaghy, a former chaplain at the Maze Prison, and Canon Barry Dodds, a former chaplain at the Crumlin Road Prison in Belfast.

We are very grateful to John Steele, Fr Donaghy and Canon Dodds for conducting this review during the month of August and providing us with a number of timely and informative recommendations. The Government received the Steele Group's recommendations at the end of August and, having given them the most careful consideration, has decided to accept them in principle and has asked the Northern Ireland Prison Service to establish an additional regime for eligible paramilitary prisoners.

It will take some time to develop and implement these recommendations: the review was designed to provide the Government with ideas on how the safety issue might be addressed rather than the precise working arrangements that would need to be put in place, and these will take some time to develop. We will take what immediate steps we can in the interim and it is expected that the new regime should be in place as quickly as possible.

The key recommendation is that republican and loyalist paramilitary prisoners should be accommodated separately from each other and from the rest of the prison population. This is a significant change from the fully integrated prison regime that has been running at Maghaberry Prison for nearly 20 years. That regime has been successful for those who have chosen to make the most of the opportunities offered to them but, like any prison regime, it requires the co-operation of prisoners.

The Government's decision is no reflection on the professionalism and dedication of Northern Ireland Prison Service staff in pursuing a normal integrated regime. We still believe that integration is the safest regime for prisoners and staff when prisoners conform and co-operate. But we have to deal with the small minority of prisoners who have now refused that co-operation.

In the face of that, the Government has a responsibility to respond to these changed circumstances. In order to help protect the safety of prisoners and staff working with them, a separate regime must be put in place for eligible paramilitary prisoners.

This does not constitute a return to the conditions that existed at the Maze Prison; nor can we allow it to become a staging post on the road to Maze-style segregation. No one wants a return to the conditions that pertained at Maze where staff were threatened, intimidated and subjected to brutal attacks and where prisoners could threaten and intimidate other prisoners with impunity. Indeed, by far the majority of the most serious incidents that have taken place in Northern Ireland's prisons have happened under segregated conditions.

The crucial difference between what John Steele has recommended and what happened at the Maze is that Prison Officers must remain in control and the Government will do all that it can to ensure that this is the case. As the review team recommended, the Northern Ireland Prison Service will draw up and publish a compact which will detail what the eligibility criteria will be, what type of regime separated prisoners can expect and what the Prison Service will expect in return.

The success of the new arrangements will require the Prison Service management and staff to be given the wholehearted backing of the community and their representatives. The Government looks forward to them receiving that support for what we all recognise is a very difficult task.

We intend that this arrangement should not be to the detriment of the remainder of the prison population. The Northern Ireland Prison Service has made major advances towards a 'normal' prison system since the closure of the Maze. The Government believes that the resettlement of prisoners and reducing the risk of their reoffending is what the community wants its Prison Service to do. The Government hopes that they continue to build on that progress and that the majority of prisoners, who I am sure will wish to continue under integrated conditions, will take advantage of the opportunities offered to them.

The Steele Group also made a number of other recommendations, which the Northern Ireland Prison Service has started to address.

On behalf of the Government, I would like to express our deepest gratitude for the work of the prisons staff and to commend them for the way in which they carry out their duties often under extremely demanding conditions, and in the face of serious provocation and intimidation. The new arrangements will throw up many challenges for staff, but we know there is a wealth of experience and commitment to be drawn upon in implementing these recommendations.

A copy of the Steele Group's recommendations has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Forensic Science Service: Annual Report and Accounts 2002–03

The Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing, and Community Safety (Ms Hazel Blears): I have today laid before Parliament copies of the Forensic Science Service's Annual Report and Accounts for 2002/ 2003.

Performance against Agency targets 2002/ 2003

The FSS met seven of its nine targets and put in a strong financial performance.

Financial targets

A 23.4 per cent. return on capital employed was produced against a minimum target of 10 per cent.

A three-year rolling efficiency gain of 13.8 per cent. was achieved against a target of 10 per cent.

Service Delivery

A 74 day turnround time in 90 per cent. standard jobs (violent and volume crime cases) was achieved against a target of 70 days.

Dispatch dates in 94 per cent. of urgent, 93 per cent. critical cases and 96 per cent. in persistent young offenders cases were met against targets of 98 per cent., 98 per cent. and 99 per cent. respectively.

Dispatch dates in 93 per cent. of all categories of cases were [illegible]gainst a target of 93 per cent.

[illegible] per cent. increase on baseline in a transactional index of customer perception was achieved against a target of five per cent.

Service level agreements were put in place with 98 per cent. of police forces against a target of 92 per cent.

Application for 100 per cent. of Reporting Officers for accreditation to the Council for the Registration of Forensic Practitioners, where appropriate, was achieved against a target of 100 per cent.

External quality accreditation to ISO standards was maintained.

The main targets for 2003–04, the agency's fifth year of trading fund, are as follows. The targets are set out in full in Annex A.

Finance

Target: a minimum of 15 per cent. return on capital employed (three year rolling average)

Target: a real reduction in charges by limiting price increases to 75 per cent. of the Average Earnings Index.

Target: an increase in investment in development to 12 per cent. of turnover

Target: generate £1 million external funding for research and development

Non-Finance

Target: 14 day average to inform customers of DNA crime scene stain result.

Target: six day average to inform customers of DNA suspect sample result.

Target: turnaround time for 95 per cent. of jobs to be 42 days by year end

Target: maintain ISO accreditation.

Target: maintain Investors in People accreditation.

Target: introduce new diversity programme.

Annex A

The Forensic Science Service Agency targets for 2003/ 2004

Finance:

Target: a minimum of 15 per cent. return on capital employed (three year rolling average)

Target: a real reduction in charges by limiting price increases to 75 per cent. of the Average Earnings Index.

Target: an increase in investment in development to 12 per cent. of turnover.

Target: generate £1 million external funding for research and development.

Non-Finance:

Target: establish an internal FSS end to end case ownership process.

Target: to have processes in place with 25 per cent.of police forces within six months and 60 per cent. by year end that agree new definitions of timeliness based on investigative and evidential contributions of forensic science.

Target: set up a pilot with customer to get agreement to devise a new process of end to end case ownership.

Target: sign up 60 per cent. of customers (Police and CPS) at force level to service agreements (timeliness and charging) in context of National Protocol.

Target: to have a process in place for 25 per cent. in six months and 60 per cent. by year end of cases to have a dedicated FSS case officer.

Target: develop training packages to support New Ways of Working by the year end.

Target: to engage training organisations to roll out training for Police and CPS.

Target: to design and develop a link between the National DNA Database and The National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS).

Target: develop capability and capacity to deliver fast track processing of DNA samples within 48 hours.

Target: average time to analyse and inform customers of DNA crime scene stain results (normal track) of 14 days.

Target: 95 per cent. of DNA crime scene stain results to have a turnround time of 20 days

Target: average time to analyse and inform customers of DNA suspect sample results on The National DNA Database (normal track cases) of six days.

Target: 95 per cent. of DNA suspect sample results to have a turnround time of ten days

Target: increase forensic effectiveness by developing an index and benchmark with Police Standards Unit (PSU).

Target: turnround time for 95 per cent. of jobs to be 42 days by year end

Target: maintain ISO accreditation

Target: maintain Investors in People accreditation

Target: establish and implement a Diversity programme

Target: maintain Investors in People accreditation.

Target: introduce new diversity programme.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Regional Development Agencies

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): As part of a rolling programme of appointments, I have decided to appoint new Chairs to three of the Regional Development Agency boards

outside London; the Mayor of London makes appointments to the LDA. The new Chair for EEDA will be Richard Ellis; for One NorthEast, Margaret Fay; and for Yorkshire Forward, Terry Hodgkinson.

The appointments will begin on the 14 December 2003 and are for three years, expiring on 13 December 2006. The rolling programme enables the boards to be refreshed and bring new talent and ideas to the boards on a regular basis. I have placed further details of the new appointees in the Libraries of both Houses.

Decisions on the appointments have been made following open competition and consultation with key national and regional players.

Power Cuts (London/Kent)

The Minister for Energy, E-Commerce and Postal Services (Mr. Stephen Timms): Her Majesty's Government have noted with concern the problems that have recently occurred on the National Grid. I would like to inform the House of the events of Thursday 28th August, when power was temporarily lost to an area of South East London and Kent, and of a further loss of power on Friday 5 September in the Birmingham area, and on the actions taken since.

In the early evening, on 28 August, electricity supply was lost to some 410,000 customers in South London and parts of Kent. Power was restored to the transmission system within 30 minutes and within another 11 minutes the local distribution system was re-energised and normal power was restored in all areas.

However, the consequences of the power failure were serious. There was disruption to surface rail, underground, street lights and traffic systems, water supply and sewerage systems as well as to electricity users in homes and workplaces. While London's critical infrastructure does have back-up arrangements, there was significant disruption, especially to the transport service. I understand that all of the back-up plans are under review by those agencies involved in the light of the difficulties caused to passengers after the power cut.

On 29 August I wrote to National Grid Transco (NOT) registering my grave concern about the power disruption and asking them to provide me with a full report explaining why it happened; what actions were taken; what the risks were of a similar action occurring in the future and what measures they would undertake to prevent a recurrence. On the 29 August I also met with the Chief Executive of NGT. My officials have been in close contact with NGT and EDF throughout. I expect a full report from NGT later this week, which I will place in the Libraries of the House.

My officials in the Engineering Inspectorate will need to consider the report carefully, liaising with the companies concerned. Ofgem will do likewise and will be reporting by the end of September on their initial assessment and will be considering the incident in light of National Grid's obligations. It may therefore be a number of weeks before we have a full understanding of the events. The DTI Engineering Inspectorate has power to mount a full investigation and make recommendations should that be required.

Initial reports from NGT indicate that the power cut was a result of a transformer fault followed by another fault on a high voltage cable. As a result, electricity supplies could no longer be maintained to the affected areas and a power blackout ensued. EDF (the local distribution company in the area) was also affected, losing power to parts of its network.

It has been suggested that a lack of investment caused the problem. The Chief Executive of National Grid Transco told my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and myself, in a letter of 29 August, that this event "cannot be attributed to under-investment or to resource issues on the network". This issue will of course be considered further.

There has also been speculation that the fault was related to a shortage of generating capacity. However there was no shortage of generating capacity at the time, and the transmission system in the area would normally have been adequate to carry the electricity flow required. On present evidence it appears that the problem was solely a transmission failure.

I am very concerned that between 10.10 and 10.52 on 5 September another power failure should have occurred in the Midlands, this time affecting some 200,000 consumers. Again although I understand power was quickly restored, this second incident does raise questions about the reliability of the Transmission network that I am pursing as a matter of urgency with NGT.

Of course risks to complex systems such as the supply of energy cannot be completely eliminated, but I am determined to use this experience so that together with other Government agencies, the Regulator and the companies involved, we can help minimise and where necessary, manage them. The Secretary of State and I are determined to ensure that the necessary lessons are learnt.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

UN Convention Against Torture

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): I am pleased to be able to announce that, today, the UK has taken a significant step towards ratification of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT). I am today laying before Parliament an Explanatory Memorandum, which explains how the UK meets the provisions of the Protocol.

We hope that the ratification process can be completed with the United Nations by the end of this year. This will make the UK one of the very first UN member states to have ratified the Optional Protocol. We signed the Protocol on 26 June, becoming one of only six countries worldwide to have done so.

The UK is committed to the fight against torture. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Anti Torture Initiative, launched in 1998, continues to provide a focus for us on this issue. The follow-up to our ratification of the OPCAT will be an important part of the current

phase of the Initiative. We will undertake a lobbying campaign urging other countries to sign, ratify and implement both the Convention Against Torture and the Optional Protocol.

Wilton Park: Annual Report and Accounts 2002–03

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Chris Mullin): Wilton Park is an academically independent Executive Agency of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Its Annual Report and Accounts for 2002–03 were laid before the House on 17 July 2003.

Wilton Park's performance against agreed targets for the FY 2002–03, which work from framework targets for cost recovery, quality of conference programmes and standards of service, and the targets for the current year are shown in the table.

	2002–03 Target	*2002–03 Performance*	*2003–04 Target*
Total Income	£3,314,000	£3,591,000	£3,372,000
Excellent rating for programmes	56.7	57	57
Excellent rating for administration	89	87.4	89

Iraq: The Foreign Secretary's Letter to the Rt. Hon. Michael Ancram QC MP, 16 July 2003

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw):

"Dear Michael,

In our exchange on the floor of the House on 8 July I undertook to write to you to let you know when I first knew that the February briefing paper drew on the work of Dr Al-Marashi.

The first I knew of this was after the story was made public by Channel 4 on 6 February. This was after Colin Powell had spoken to the UN Security Council (5 February), and the Prime Minister's remarks to the House (3 February).

I am placing a copy of this in the Library, and in *Hansard* via a Written Ministerial Statement.

Yours ever,

Jack Straw"

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Liberia (Humanitarian Situation)

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Hilary Benn): Following the most recent fighting in Liberia, between 200,000–300,000 people had to leave their homes and seek shelter in over 100 different locations in Monrovia. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and a small number of NGOs have provided emergency humanitarian assistance throughout the crisis under extreme conditions, and in the last few weeks, the UN and additional NGOs have re-entered Liberia to increase the humanitarian effort. Malnutrition remains a major concern particularly amongst vulnerable groups, and safe drinking water as well as sanitation and basic hygiene remain critical issues, especially in the areas where refugees have moved to. Security remains a major concern for operational humanitarian agencies. Whilst the deployment of ECOWAS (ECOMIL) has stabilised a secure zone in and around central Monrovia, access is still very limited outside the city. Agencies are operating on the basis of ad-hoc negotiated access to rebel-controlled areas. In such difficult circumstances, it is crucial that the UN takes a strong lead in humanitarian co-ordination. After a difficult beginning, the agencies have reported that co-ordination with the UN has now dramatically improved.

On August 21 DFID committed an additional £4.7 million to support humanitarian needs in Liberia. The funds are being allocated to UN agencies, NGOs and the ICRC to provide an immediate response, This brings the UK's total humanitarian assistance to Liberia to £7.6 million this year. Our approach is to strengthen the UN system to take on a lead role in co-ordination and delivery of assistance, to support NGOs and the Red Cross in provision of immediate relief, and to ensure collaboration between the major donors in planning and monitoring of assistance. Last month we hosted a meeting of NGOs working in Liberia, or planning to do so, to discuss the situation and identify what help is needed on the ground. We have invited NGOs to put proposals to us and we have just agreed to fund a supplementary feeding programme for all refugee children under the age of five in Monrovia. Our strategy has been developed with advice from an assessment team who are currently based in Monrovia. This team will remain in the region to assess the evolving humanitarian situation in Liberia, and monitor DFID-funded operations.

The UK is committed to working closely with the international community to ensure that ECOMIL, and the UN Mission planned for Liberia, are successful in restoring peace and security. We have contributed £1m to ECOMIL and have seconded a military adviser to ECOWAS. We have also offered military advisors to the UN planning mission and headquarters. The UK is also working in the UN Security Council to ensure that the forthcoming Resolution authorises the deployment of a UN mission with a strong mandate to: restore and maintain security; establish peace-building initiatives; and provide the conditions to allow the Transitional Government to operate effectively and work towards holding free and fair elections. We are monitoring developments in the region closely to ensure that ex-combatants do not cause problems in neighbouring countries. A regional approach to Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) will be important if the region is to eliminate the guns for hire culture that has developed. We are discussing options for DDR with the UN, ECOWAS and other interested parties, and are considering how we can best support this process.

HEALTH

Contingencies Fund

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Dr. Stephen Ladyman): The Department of Health is to meet an urgent cash requirement for new services from the Contingencies Fund. Parliamentary approval for additional resources of £22 million for the set-up of these new services will be sought in a Supplementary Estimate for the Department. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £11.3 million will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

The expenditure is required to ensure the set-up of two new bodies detailed in the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill currently before Parliament. The Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection [CHAI] and the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) are planned to come into effect on 1 April 2004, subject to the successful passage of the Bill. This date is key for delivering operational effectiveness gains (including retention of valuable professional expertise and the goodwill of existing inspectors and staff) which would otherwise be lost or significantly delayed.

CHAI will take over the work of the Commission for Health Improvement (CHI), the Mental Health Act Commission (MHAC), the national NHS value for money work of the Audit Commission and the independent healthcare work of the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC). CSCI will take on the social care services work of NCSC, the work of the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) and the Joint Review team of the SSI/Audit Commission. SSI is currently a part of the Department of Health. The speedy integration of these constituent bodies will provide a strengthened inspection and audit function and thus improvements in the commissioning and delivery of health and social services.

The Contingencies Fund allows for cash advances to departments for expenditure on urgent services in anticipation of parliamentary approval.

National Care Standards Commission : Annual Report

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Dr. Stephen Ladyman): The National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) was established under the Care Standards Act 2000 as part of the Government's reforms to modernise the regulatory system for care services and independent healthcare. Its main aim is to drive up the quality of services and improve the level of protection for vulnerable people by the regulation of social care and independent health care services. It carries out regular inspections of services against national minimum standards set by the Secretary of State and has strong powers of enforcement to ensure that services meet the required standards. The NCSC is an independent, non-departmental public body, with its own chair, chief executive, board and inspection staff.

The NCSC's management statement sets out that, at the end of each financial year, the Commission shall publish an annual report, together with its audited annual accounts. The reports and accounts should outline the NCSC's main activities and performance during the previous financial year and set out a summary of its forward plans. The management statement also sets out that the report and accounts will be laid before Parliament.

The NCSC has just come to the end of its first year of operation. This will therefore be its first annual report.

Copies of the NCSC's annual report for 2002–03 have been placed in the Library.

Written Ministerial Statements

Tuesday 9 September 2003

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Council

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): The forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union from September 2003 to March 2004 is as follows:

Date	*Location*	*Event*
September 2003		
3–5	Viterbo	Telecommunications (Ministerial)
4–5	Benevento	Informal Youth Affairs (Ministerial Informal)
5–6	Riva del Garda	Gymnich (Informal Foreign)
5–6	Milan	Informal Health Ministerial
12–13	Stresa	ECOFIN (Informal Council)
12–13	Rome	Justice & Internal Affairs (Informal Council)
14–15	Syracuse	Informal Audio-Visual Telecoms and Culture Ministerial
20–23	Taormina	Informal Agriculture Council
22–23	Brussels	Competition (Internal Market, Industry & Research)
25–26	Lucca	Informal Children's Affairs
26–27	Erice	Community Regional Cohesion Policy (Ministerial Informal)
29–30	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations Council (GAERC)
29–30	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council
23–25	Cernobbio	Informal Terrestrial Digital
25	Catania	Informal Internal Market/Industry Ministerial
27	Brussels	Environment Council
October		
2–3	Brussels	Justice & Internal Affairs
3–4	Rome	Defence (Ministerial Informal)
7	Brussels	ECOFIN
9–10	Brussels	Transport, Telecom & Energy Council
13–14	Brussels	General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC)
13–14	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council
16–17	Brussels	European Council
20–21	Brussels	Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council
24–25	Brussels	Education, Youth & Culture Council
27–28	Brussels	Justice & Internal Affairs (Informal Council)
27	Brussels	Environment Council
November		
4	Brussels	ECOFIN
6	Brussels	Justice & Internal Affairs (Informal Council)
6–7	Catania	European Conference on Employment
17–18	Brussels	General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC)
17–18	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council
18	Milan	European Conference on Immigration & Labour Market
24–25	Brussels	ECOFIN
24–25	Brussels	Education, Youth & Culture Council
27–28	Brussels	Justice & Internal Affairs (Informal Council)
December		
1–2	Rome	Euromed Mecting
1–2	Brussels	Employment, Social Policy Health and Consumer Affairs Council
1–3	Rome	Informal Public Administration Ministerial
4–5	Brussels	Transport, Telecom & Energy Council
5–7	Rome	Closing Conference for the European Year of the Disabled
8–9	Brussels	General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC)
12–13	Brussels	European Council
15–17	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council
16	Brussels	ECOFIN
22	Brussels	Environment Council
January 2004		
8	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council
16–17	Brussels	Employment & Social Policy (Ministerial Informal)
16–17	Ireland (venue tbc)	Informal Employment and Social Policy
19	Brussels	Eurogroup
20	Brussels	ECOFIN
22–23	Ireland (venue tbc)	Justice & Home Affairs (Ministerial Informal)
26–27	Brussels	General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC)
February		
10	Brussels	ECOFIN
19	Brussels	Justice & Home Affairs (Ministerial Informal)
23–24	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations (GAERC)
23–24	Brussels	Justice & Home Affairs (Ministerial Informal)
26	Brussels	Education, Youth & Culture Council
March		
4–5	Brussels	Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs (Ministerial)
8–9	Brussels	Transport, Telecom & Energy Council
9	Brussels	ECOFIN
11	Brussels	Competitiveness Council
22–23	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations (GAERC)
22–23	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council
25–26	Brussels	European Council
31	Brussels	Justice & Home Affairs (Ministerial Informal)

HOME DEPARTMENT

Public Collections

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Fiona Mactaggart): I am today placing in the Library of this House copies of a consultation document on proposals for a new licensing scheme for public collections for charitable, philanthropic and benevolent purposes.

This consultation builds on the package of measures set out in our response to the Strategy Unit review of Charity Law and Regulation published on 16 July, and proposes the setting up of a new, updated and unified local authority licensing scheme for public collections to replace the present complex, outdated and fragmented legislation. The aim is to modernise the law, creating a fair and cost-effective system of licensing which facilitates responsible fundraising but deters bogus collections and prevents nuisance to the public. We want to enable a wide range of organisations to be more effective and innovative, whilst maintaining the high levels of public trust and confidence which are vital to the continued success of the sector.

PRIME MINISTER

Annual Reports

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): I have today laid before both Houses the Annual Reports for 2002 of the Interception of Communications Commissioner, the right hon. Sir Swinton Thomas, the Intelligence Services Commissioner, the right hon. Lord Justice Simon Brown and the Chief Surveillance Commissioner, the right hon. Sir Andrew Leggatt. Some sensitive information has been excluded from the reports of the Interception of Communications Commissioner and the Intelligence Services Commissioner in accordance with Section 58(7) and 60(5) of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act.

I am grateful to the Commissioners for their reports and the work that has gone into preparing them.

TRANSPORT

Crossrail

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): On 14 July, I announced that I intended to assemble an expert team to assess Cross London Rail Link's business case proposals for the East-West Crossrail project. I am pleased to announce today that Adrian Montague will lead the expert review team for the Crossrail project. He is the Deputy Chairman of Network Rail, the Chairman of British Energy and is a former head of HM Treasury's Private Finance Taskforce. He has enormous experience in both railway projects and corporate finance and is ideally suited to this important task.

The Government remain keen on the principle of a new East-West Crossrail link. Crossrail has the potential to relieve some of the serious congestion across central London. However, the costs are substantial. A project of this size needs the appropriate level of scrutiny and it must be funded in a way that reflects the distribution of the benefits.

I have therefore asked the team to look closely at CLRL's proposals to see whether they are likely to be deliverable to time, scope and budget, and, if so, whether they are likely to provide proper value for money. I have also asked the team to consider whether there are alternative ways of delivering a Crossrail project that would offer better performance than the proposals set out in the Business Case. I have asked the team to report to me as soon as practicable and hope that its findings will be available around the turn of the year. The final report will be published.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefit Fraud Inspectorate Report (Castle Morpeth Borough Council)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Chris Pond): On behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) inspection report on Castle Morpeth Borough Council was published on 29 July 2003 and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

Following the housing Green Paper "Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All", published in April 2000, the Department for Work and Pensions developed a performance framework for housing benefits. The performance standards for housing benefits allow local authorities to make a comprehensive self-assessment of whether they deliver benefit effectively and securely. They are the standards that the Department for Work and Pensions expects local authorities to aspire to and achieve in time.

The BFI inspected Castle Morpeth Borough Council against the Performance Standards. The report finds that the council is not at Standard for any of the seven functional areas of the Performance Standards—strategic management, customer services, processing of claims, working with landlords, internal security, counter-fraud, and overpayments.

The council needs to make considerable improvements if it is to achieve standard in any area, and there was little awareness at senior management or member level of the key areas.

Management information was very limited and there was little awareness of the issues affecting performance. There were significant backlogs in claims processing and overpayments, with claims taking on average 82 days to process. There was little deterrence to potential benefit fraudsters.

In July 2002, the council began to replace its existing IT systems. This was done with very little additional resource and has had an adverse impact on the council's housing benefit and council tax benefit performance, which was already poor. The council's ability to recover overpaid benefits has been hampered by a lack of effective management and IT problems.

The council assured BFI that it would act on the report to bring the benefits service up to standard. It had submitted bids for additional resources to the Department for Work and Pensions' Performance Standards Fund and Help Fund. In 2001–02, Castle Morpeth Borough Council administered some £3.8 million in housing benefits, about 29 per cent. of its total gross revenue expenditure.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address weaknesses and further to improve the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, as well as counter-fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to BFI's findings and recommendations.

Benefit Fraud Inspectorate Report (East Renfrewshire Council)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Chris Pond): On behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) inspection report on East Renfrewshire Council was published on 21 August 2003 and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

Following the housing Green Paper "Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All", published in April 2000, the Department for Work and Pensions developed a performance framework for housing benefits. The performance standards for housing benefits allow local authorities to make a comprehensive self-assessment of whether they deliver benefit effectively and securely. They are the standards that the Department for Work and Pensions expects local authorities to aspire to and achieve in time.

The BFI inspected East Renfrewshire Council against the Performance Standards. The report finds that the council is not at standard for any of the seven functional areas of the Performance Standards—strategic management, customer services, processing of claims, working with landlords, internal security, counter-fraud, and overpayments.

The BFI found evidence of the council's commitment to improving its benefit administration as it had provided additional resources. Responsibilities for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit administration and counter-fraud transferred to the Finance Department in 1998, when the full-time equivalent number of staff increased from 11 to 17. The council planned to increase this again by a further two staff in May 2003.

However, this increased commitment needs to be directed by a clear vision for the benefits service supported by a broad range of formal policies and clearly communicated performance targets.

The council also needs to undertake routine performance monitoring and regular reporting of performance results to senior managers and elected members to assure them that performance complies with regulations.

Such arrangements should help bring about required improvements in the quality of fraud investigations much needed management assurance from regularly performed management checks, and ensure that systems are adequately safeguarded. When completed, the council will be in a better position to progress to standard in all seven functional areas of the performance standards, particularly in the area of overpayments.

In 2001–02, East Renfrewshire Council administered some £11.7 million in housing benefits, about 7.6 per cent. of its total gross revenue expenditure.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address weaknesses and to improve the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, as well as counter-fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the BFI's findings and recommendations.

Benefit Fraud Inspectorate Report (London Borough of Harrow Council)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Chris Pond): On behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) follow-up inspection report on the London Borough of Harrow Council was published on 19 August 2003 and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

Following the housing Green Paper "Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All", published in April 2000, the Department for Work and Pensions developed a performance framework for housing benefits. The performance standards for housing benefits allow local authorities to make a comprehensive self-assessment of whether they deliver benefit effectively and securely. They are the standards that the Department for Work and Pensions expects local authorities to aspire to and achieve in time.

The BFI inspected the London Borough of Harrow Council against the performance standards to assess progress since the first BFI inspection report, published in September 2000.

The report finds that the council is not at standard for any of the seven functional areas of the Performance Standards—strategic management, customer services, processing of claims, working with landlords, internal security, counter-fraud, and overpayments.

The council had fully implemented 31 and partially implemented a further 22 of the 67 recommendations made by the BFI in the first inspection report. The council's failure to implement 11 recommendations on counter-fraud contributed to poor quality investigations and the incorrect use of sanctions.

Verification of benefit claims was strong. However, the backlog of claims outstanding had not decreased since the first inspection, with over 5,800 cases outstanding.

The average time taken to process a new claim for benefit was 78 days and only 47 per cent. of renewal claims were processed on time. There were also delays in dealing with changes of circumstances and appeals. The level of management checks was insufficient.

Customers experienced difficulties in contacting the council's benefits service with telephones and reception closed one day each week, and 43 per cent. of telephone calls made by customers were going unanswered.

The report identifies some good practices, for example in the training of staff, working relationships with registered social landlords, and document management. In 2001–02, the London Borough of Harrow Council administered some £60.6 million in housing benefits, about 16 per cent. of its total gross revenue expenditure.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address weaknesses and further to improve the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, as well as counter-fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the BFI's findings and recommendations.

Benefit Fraud Inspectorate Report (Manchester City Council)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Chris Pond): On behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) follow-up inspection report on Manchester city council was published on 31 July 2003 and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

Following the housing Green Paper "Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All", published in April 2000, the Department for Work and Pensions developed a performance framework for housing benefits. The performance standards for housing benefits allow local authorities to make a comprehensive self-assessment of whether they deliver benefit effectively and securely. They are the standards that the Department for Work and Pensions expects local authorities to aspire to and achieve in time.

The BFI inspected Manchester city council against the performance standards to assess progress since the first BFI inspection report, published in June 2001, and found clear evidence of performance improvements in the council's benefits service.

The report finds that the council is not at standard for any of the seven functional areas of the Performance Standards—strategic management, customer services, processing of claims, working with landlords, internal security, counter-fraud, and overpayments. However, the council had fully embraced the concept of performance standards, and had carried out a full self-assessment against them. The BFI found aspects within the individual standards where the council met or exceeded the criteria.

Manchester city council displayed commitment and professionalism in its efforts to improve benefits administration. The benefits service had strong support from senior officers and members, and there were clear improvements in performance. Processing times for claims and changes of circumstances were markedly better. Customer services had also improved, with longer opening hours, improvements to the public counter, better training for staff, and improved decision notices.

The council had not adopted the national verification framework, although it had made a commitment to begin introducing part of the framework from October 2003.

Overpayments work had improved significantly, supported by detailed business planning and improved management information. Counter-fraud activity had improved since the first inspection and the council had developed clear counter-fraud policies, and brought responsibility for prosecutions in-house to improve control. In 2001–02, Manchester city council administered some £245 million in housing benefits, about 20 per cent. of its total gross revenue expenditure.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address weaknesses and further to improve the administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit, as well as counter-fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the BFI's findings and recommendations.

Benefit Fraud Inspectorate Work Programme

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Chris Pond): On behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) has provided further details of its work programme of inspections, as part of its Phase 8 programme for 2003–04. This is in addition to the Phase 8 announcement made on 20 March 2003.

The BFI is an independent unit within the Department for Work and Pensions that inspects and reports directly to my right hon. Friend on the standard of benefit administration and counter-fraud activity in local authorities and departmental agencies.

As part of the additional Phase 8 activity, BFI will be undertaking a first inspection of the Isles of Scilly local authority. As this authority is unique in that the Housing Benefit team administers less than 100 claims, BFI proposes to produce a summary report.

Follow-up inspections on 12 other local authorities will also be undertaken. Seven of these authorities have been identified from post inspection monitoring of performance. Six were judged as poor or fair for their benefits services during the Comprehensive Performance Assessments in 2002, and another has failed to implement key recommendations from the first inspection.

The remaining five local authorities have been identified from management information provided by them. The local authorities chosen are some that have continuously been in the bottom quartile of best value performance indicators for 2002–03. These authorities have previously been inspected by BFI but have failed to improve in the administration of housing benefits.

BFI will also be assessing 197 district local authorities as part of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment programme, and five Scottish local authorities as part of the Scottish best value programme.

TREASURY

Overpaid Tax

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): For many years there has been symmetry within the direct tax system: the Inland Revenue normally has the right to go back six years to assess outstanding tax and those who have overpaid tax have the right to make claims to repayment for a similar period. A recent High Court case has the potential to upset this balance.

Yesterday I announced that legislation will be included in Finance Bill 2004 to restore this balance. The period for claiming repayments of overpaid tax will be generally limited to six years (or five years in Scotland) from the date of the original payment. The legislation will apply to proceedings commenced on or after 8 September 2003.

A copy of yesterday's Inland Revenue news release giving the relevant background to this measure and draft clauses for inclusion in the Finance Bill 2004 has been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses and is accessible on the Inland Revenue's website at http:/ www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk.

SCOTLAND

Staffing and Location (Scotland Office)

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Alistair Darling): I have agreed to proposals by the Head of the Scotland Office, in consultation with the Permanent Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs, for re-organising the Scotland Office. These will result in the number of posts reporting to me reducing from 96 to 65.

The reduction of 31 posts has already partly been achieved through transfers of responsibility (mainly Friends of Scotland) to the Scottish Executive and through not filling vacancies. Further reductions will be achieved by staff returning to the Scottish Executive or by redeployment with the Department for Constitutional Affairs. Individual staff will be consulted about their own future.

I have also agreed that the remaining staff based in Scotland should be concentrated in the Scotland Office headquarters at 1 Melville Crescent, Edinburgh. The Scotland Office accommodation at Meridian Court, Glasgow will be given up.

Thirty five legal and administrative staff will, in addition, continue to report separately to the Advocate-General for Scotland. The total of 100 posts compares with an agreed staffing level of 131 for the Scotland Office and the Advocate-General's staff together at 11 June 2003. The Advocate-General's staff in Edinburgh will continue to be based at Victoria Quay. The Scotland Office headquarters in London will continue to be at Dover House, Whitehall.

The target date to complete these changes is 31 December 2003. Total savings to Scotland Office running costs arising from both the reduction and relocation of staff will amount to approximately £1.7 million next year. In line with the statement of funding policy agreed between the United Kingdom Government and the Scottish Executive, the savings realised will reduce the Scotland Office's total call on the Scottish assigned budget by an equivalent amount and will therefore be available to the Scottish Executive.

The numbers and organisation of Scotland Office staff will be kept under review in the normal way in the light of workload and any further changes in responsibilities.

Written Ministerial Statements

Wednesday 10 September 2003

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefit Fraud Inspection (London Borough of Hackney)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Chris Pond): On behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) follow-up inspection report on the London Borough of Hackney Council was published today and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

Following the housing Green Paper "Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All", published in April 2000, the Department for Work and Pensions developed a performance framework for housing benefits. The performance standards for housing benefits allow local authorities to make a comprehensive self-assessment of whether they deliver benefit effectively and securely. They are the standards that the Department for Work and Pensions expects local authorities to aspire to and achieve in time.

The BFI inspected the London Borough of Hackney Council against the performance standards to assess progress since the first BFI inspection report published in March 2001, and a direction update report published in March 2002.

The report finds that the council is not at standard for any of the seven functional areas of the performance standards—strategic management, customer services, processing of claims, working with landlords, internal security, counter-fraud, and overpayments. However, the council had made real progress since the first inspection but had much work to do, particularly in the area of speed of claims processing.

The BFI was impressed with the professionalism and enthusiasm of staff and the support members showed for the benefits service. The council had fully or partly implemented 67 per cent. of the recommendations made in the first BFI report.

The report finds that the council's average number of days to process housing benefit claims has improved by 34 per cent. since the first inspection but it was still taking on average 136 days to process a claim. Performance for processing renewal claims without a break in payment had improved from 19 per cent. to 55 per cent. but this still falls well below the performance standards target of 83 per cent.

Performance for customer services and working with landlords was commendable and overpayments work had improved significantly since the first inspection. In 2002–03 the council recovered £3 million through its debt recovery work. This represents a major improvement on its previously poor performance in this area.

In 2001–02, the London Borough of Hackney Council administered some £181.4 million in housing benefits, about 21 per cent. of its total gross revenue expenditure.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address weaknesses and further to improve the administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit, as well as counter-fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the BFI's findings and recommendations.

In October 2001, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State applied a direction on the benefits service of the London Borough of Hackney Council. The BFI published a direction update report in March 2002 confirming that the direction had been met.

HEALTH

Sexual Health (Select Committee Report)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Miss Melanie Johnson): The Government's response to the Third Report of the House of Commons Select Committee on Health, on sexual health, Cm 5959, has been published today.

Copies have been placed in the Library.

DEFENCE

Logistic support

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The Ministry of Defence has recently completed a detailed review of the way in which we provide logistic support to land and air forces (including naval air and the royal marines). The End to End Review (E2E) was prompted by the recognition that today's expeditionary operations demand enhanced flexibility and responsiveness in the support of joint forces. Experience form various operations over the past decade, most recently in Iraq, has shown that there is scope to provide better logistic support to the front line.

The E2E Review is a fundamental and wide-ranging piece of work examining the totality of logistic support from industry to the front line. The process of assessing and implementing its recommendations is now under way but it is essential that we maintain momentum to ensure that the front line is supported most effectively and efficiently within the resources available.

As the work progresses there will be full consultation with the Trades Unions and any proposals which impact on civilian jobs or which require major investment will be subject to investment appraisal to establish costs and benefits of the options before decisions are taken. Changes to operational logistics will be tested before implementation. The ability of our forces to deliver operational capability remains paramount.

The E2E Review proposes that our future support strategy should configure logistic support for the most likely operational scenarios, but retain the flexibility to meet other eventualities; concentrate support materiel and resources to best effect and maintain and improve the effectiveness and reliability of the supply chain, whilst streamlining processes.

To achieve this a number of key changes are needed:

Support infrastructure in the air environment must be concentrated in key locations and rationalised from four to two levels of Forward and Depth support.

Support activity in the air environment should be concentrated where it can be carried out most effectively. This means some Forward support activities can be moved back into Depth support decreasing deployed infrastructure.

Land environment logistic support must be tailored for two states; peacetime support in barracks and deployed logistics, with robust arrangements for transition between the two.

A better focus is needed to ensure the arrival of materiel in the theatre of operations in the right order, at the right place and at the right time. A permanent, joint organisation is needed to establish and prioritise a joint supply chain that will be driven by the needs of the joint commander of operations.

Our approach to contracting must improve to maximise the role that industry can play and realise the benefits of competition.

The cost of logistic support must be made clearer to budget holders who should own the corresponding funding. The Chief of Defence Logistics must own the process from industry to the front line.

A summary of the conclusions of the report has been placed in the Library of the House. This is a wide ranging set of conclusions and more work is needed in some areas to determine how best to achieve these goals. The House will be kept fully informed of progress.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Reducing Regional disparities in Prosperity (Select Committee Report)

The Minister for Local Government, Regional Governance and Fire (Mr. Nick Raynsford): Today we are publishing the Government's response to the ODPM Select Committee report "Reducing Regional Disparities in Prosperity". Copies of the response have been deposited in the House Libraries and it is available on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's web site http://www.odpm.gov.uk/regions.

We welcome the Select Committee's report. It makes a number of important points which we are already attempting to address and others which will need to be considered in the context of work being undertaken to deliver the regional economic performance Public Service Agreement.

The Government's economic policies already provide a solid basis for the development of the regions. Interest and inflation rates are now lower and more stable than in any other period for a generation. There are more people in work than ever before and unemployment is at its lowest for a generation.

But we acknowledge the persistent disparities in regional economic performance. We have a work programme in place to deliver our regional economic performance public service agreement, which will be monitored through data on gross value added (GVA) and other indicators. Progress will be reported in July 2006.

Our strategy is not to set one region against another. It is focused on enabling every region to perform to its economic potential. That is the key to a successful British economy.

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 11 September 2003

HOME DEPARTMENT

Racially and Religiously Aggravated Crime

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Paul Goggins): I am pleased to announce that the Government is today laying an Order before Parliament which will extend the Attorney-General's powers in relation to unduly lenient sentences. This will enable certain racially and religiously aggravated offences to be referred to the Court of Appeal for review where it is felt that under-sentencing has occurred. The Order will come into effect on 13 October 2003 and will apply to any sentence imposed after that date.

This Order is being laid following a recommendation in the HM Crown Prosecution Service's Inspectorate Review of casework having a minority ethnic dimension that racially aggravated offences be included in the category of offences which can be referred under the unduly lenient sentencing provisions. The inclusion of religiously aggravated offences is necessary and logical to prevent anomalies in the protection offered to different groups. The Government will keep under review whether any further extensions should be made in future.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Draft Regional Planning Guidance (West Midlands)

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Keith Hill): My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is today publishing for public consultation Proposed Changes to the draft Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands (RPG11). They follow the Public Examination into draft RPG11 in June and July 2002.

The draft RPG was prepared and published by the Regional Planning Body (RPB). It provides a broad framework for the preparation of development plans and local development frameworks by the West Midlands local Planning authorities up to 2021. The overall strategy is to develop the major urban areas in such a way that they can increasingly meet their own economic and social needs in order to counter the unsustainable outward movement of people and jobs facilitated by previous strategies; address more effectively the major changes which are challenging the traditional roles of rural areas and the countryside; ensure that opportunities for growth are linked to meeting needs and that they help reduce social exclusion; and support the sustainable development of the region.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister support these aims, and as recommended by the panel, we are proposing changes to ensure the strategy is more clearly and succinctly expressed. It is important that the implications for development plans and other strategies are clear and unambiguous in order to make a real difference on the ground.

A key issue for the region is to bring about the urban renaissance of the major urban areas (MUAs) by creating a step change in urban regeneration processes and programmes. This is seen as essential to halt the drift of population to the surrounding shire areas. This objective, to encourage sustainable urban communities, is consistent with those of the communities plan (sustainable communities; building for the future).

The proposed changes support the draft RPG approach to housing provision. The major urban areas will increasingly meet their own housing needs, with reducing provision for migration to the surrounding shires and unitary areas. There is a transition from the former ratio of new housing development between the major urban areas and other areas of 1:2, through a position at 2007 where this is near 1:1, to 2011 where the ratio is in favour of the major urban areas.

The panel considered the need for the western bypasses for Wolverhampton and Stourbridge to support draft RPG's spatial strategy was not demonstrated, and recommended that they should be deleted. Instead of the Study proposed by the RPB, the Panel recommended a much wider sub-regional study to resolve issues within the Black Country, including housing capacity, employment, land, scope for environmental and town centre improvements, and improvements to access to regeneration sites particularly on its eastern side. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has supported this recommendation in his announcement on the West Midlands area multi-Modal Study and the Proposed Changes reflect this.

My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister supports the panel's recommendation that Brierley Hill should not be included in the list of strategic town and city centres. However, he does not agree with the panel's recommendations on further retail development at Merry Hill, and has made it clear that any decisions on this issue will need to be made in the light of the RPB having decided its regional priorities for focusing retail, leisure and office development. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister considers that the future of Brierley Hill/Merry Hill should also be considered as part of the Black Country study referred to above. Any expansion of Merry Hill would be subject to transport improvements.

In considering these proposed changes and carrying out any future review of RPG 11 it is important that account is taken of the principles set out in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill (published 4 December 2002), in particular the need to make RPG shorter and more strategic; more regionally specific; and more integrated and co-ordinated with other regional strategies; the increasing importance of introducing sub-regional policies within RPG's will also need to be addressed; and ensuring that the RPG process does not avoid making difficult decisions.

I have today written to the RPB with the proposed changes and indicating areas where views are particularly sought from any interested parties. There will now be a public consultation period on the proposed changes, which will end on 12 December 2003.

Copies of the relevant documents are available in the Libraries of the House and have been provided for all of the region's MPs, MEPs, and local authorities.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Jury Research

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. Christopher Leslie): In their report on the Criminal Justice Bill, the Home Affairs Select Committee invited the Government to consider the merits of repealing section 8 of the Contempt of Court Act 1981 in order to permit meaningful research into how the jury system operates. This invitation followed from recommendations made by Lord Justice Auld in his Review of the criminal courts.

To fully consider this issue, the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs, intends to publish a consultation paper towards the end of autumn to look at whether or not we should allow jury research to be conducted. The consultation paper will also consider the issue of jury impropriety, as recommended by Lord Justice Auld in his review.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

British Overseas Territories Act 2002

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): My right hon. Friend the Baroness Amos undertook to inform the House of the number of British overseas territories citizens that have applied for British citizen passports; and the number of new applicants seeking British overseas territories citizenship in the first year of implementation of the British Overseas Territories Act 2002.

A total of 7,079 British citizen passports were issued to British overseas territories citizens in the period May to December 2002 and 5,174 in the period January to May 2003. That is a total of 12,250 since the citizenship provisions of the British Overseas Territories Act came into force on 21 May 2002.

A total of 1,359 new applicants applied for British overseas territories citizenship in the first year of implementation of the citizenship provisions of the British Overseas Territories Act 2002.

Diplomatic Missions: Serious Offences

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): From a community of around 20,000 in the United Kingdom entitled to immunity, 20 serious offences, allegedly committed by such persons, were drawn to the attention of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 2002. Serious offences are defined in accordance with the 1985 White Paper on Diplomatic Immunities and Privileges, that is as offences that would in certain circumstances carry a penalty of 12 months or more imprisonment.

Diplomatic Missions: Unpaid Parking Fines

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Jack Straw): The figures recorded for the number of outstanding parking and other minor traffic violation fines incurred by diplomatic missions and international organisations in the United Kingdom during the year 1 January 2002 to 31 December 2002 totalled 4,302 (£173,180.00). In April this year the Foreign and Commonwealth Office wrote to all affected diplomatic missions and international organisations giving them the opportunity to either pay their outstanding fines or appeal against them if they considered that the fines had been issued incorrectly. As a result payments totalling £52,200.00 were received, leaving a total of 3,021 (£120,980.00) unpaid fines for 2002. The attached table details those diplomatic missions and international organisations that have 11 or more undisputed fines unpaid.

Diplomatic Mission/ International Organisation	*No. of fines Outstanding*	*Amount in £*
United Arab Emirates	323	12,830.00
Libya	226	8,940.00
China	195	7,790.00
Egypt	97	3,790.00
France	81	3,290.00
Algeria	80	3,020.00
Ghana	72	2,870.00
Morocco	71	2,970.00
Ukraine	71	2,840.00
Oman	69	2,710.00
Russia	67	2,670.00
Greece	59	2,350.00
Turkey	59	2,480.00
Iran	56	2,190.00
Uganda	52	2,100.00
Senegal	51	2,040.00
Yemen	50	1,970.00
Hungary	48	1,960.00
Phillippines	44	1,760.00
Pakistan	42	1,690.00
Afghanistan	38	1,520.00
Mozambique	38	1,520.00
Vietnam	38	1,520.00
Mongolia	37	1,470.00
Kazakhstan	36	1,440.00
Tunisia	36	1,440.00
Qatar	34	1,170.00
Jordan	31	1,280.00
Sudan	31	1,220.00
Zambia	31	1,210.00
Ethiopia	30	1,180.00
Kenya	30	1,200.00
Cyprus	28	1,140.00
Malaysia	26	1,040.00
Poland	25	1,000.00
United States of America	23	920.00
Georgia	23	930.00
Romania	21	880.00
Brazil	20	790.00
Commonwealth Secretariat	19	780.00
Cote D'Ivoire	19	770.00
Azerbaijan	18	740.00
Indonesia	18	720.00
Panama	18	740.00
Lithuania	17	660.00

Diplomatic Mission/ International Organisation	*No. of fines Outstanding*	*Amount in £*
Uzbekistan	17	670.00
Finland	16	680.00
Japan	16	640.00
Bahrain	15	610.00
Belgium	14	580.00
Peru	13	520.00
Bangladesh	13	520.00
Nepal	13	520.00
Nicaragua	13	520.00
Thailand	13	520.00
Albania	12	480.00
Latvia	12	470.00
Kuwait	11	500.00
Germany	11	480.00
South Africa	11	430.00
Total	2,698	107,680.00

Diplomatic Missions: Outstanding National Non-Domestic Rate Bills

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): Most diplomatic missions in the United Kingdom meet their obligations and pay the National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) requested from them. However, as at 31 July 2003 the following missions owed over £10,000 in respect of NNDR:

Country	*Amount*
Bulgaria	£143,346.09
Iran	£104,943.24
Algeria	£47,022.74
Sierra Leone	£43,320.65
Mozambique	£32,301.67
Cameroon	£30,109.53
Uganda	£27,801.89
Syria	£24,750.48
Bangladesh	£23,356.44
Zimbabwe	£21,016.08
Zambia	£19,276.56
Cote D'Ivoire	£16,392.46
Malawi	£12,606.03
Cuba	£12,349.06
Total	£558,592.92

Eleven additional Diplomatic Missions who owe £10,000 or more in respect of national non-domestic rates have made arrangements with the Valuation Office Agency to clear their outstanding debts and have not been included in this list. The total amount outstanding from all missions, including these additional diplomatic missions, is approximately £960,394.45.

PRIME MINISTER

Ninth Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (Government's Response)

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): I am today publishing the Government's response to the ninth report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life "Defining the Boundaries within the Executive: Ministers, special advisers and the permanent Civil Service". The Government has considered the Committee's report with great care, and I would like to place on record my thanks to the Committee for its thorough consideration of these issues. I am pleased to be able to announce the Government accepts the majority of the recommendations. Our response to the main recommendations is as follows:

Independent Ethics Adviser

the Government agrees to the appointment of an independent adviser to provide Ministers and Permanent Secretaries with an additional source of professional advice as required on the handling of complex financial issues.

Civil Service Act

the Government commits itself to publishing a draft bill for consultation once the Public Administration Select Committee's proposals for a Civil Service Act have been published.

Special advisers

the Government proposes a new section to the Code of Conduct for Special Advisers to clarify relationships between special advisers and permanent civil servants. An amendment to the Code is annexed to the Government's response.

First Civil Service Commissioner

the Government agrees that, in future, the appointment of the First Civil Service Commissioner will be made following consultation with the Leaders of the main opposition parties.

Appointments

the response makes clear that the Government is committed to maintaining a permanent and impartial Civil Service where selection is made on merit on the basis of fair and open competition. It also acknowledges the important role of the Civil Service Commissioners in the recruitment processes and in upholding the core values of the Civil Service. The response commits the Government to discussions with the Civil Service Commissioners to consider whether the different approaches to Civil Service and public appointments continue to be justified.

Copies of the Government's response [Cm5964] have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

TREASURY

Futurebuilders

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): Today I am announcing the result of collaborative work with the voluntary and community sector to design the futurebuilders fund.

I am publishing the final report on the fund, following consultation, along with a summary leaflet. I am also publishing a consultation report, which contains the key messages from the consultation. Copies of all three documents are being made available in the Vote Office and the Library of the House.

These reports are being published jointly with the Compact Working Group, reflecting the fact that the voluntary and community sector has been central in shaping the fund.

Futurebuilders will invest in voluntary and community organisations, and social enterprises, to assist them in their public service work. It will enable organisations to modernise their operations so that they can increase the scale and scope of their public service delivery. It is targeted at organisations working in or across the service areas of health and social care; crime; community cohesion; education and learning; and support for children and young people.

The fund will provide finance to acquire capital assets, through a range of funding solutions, including grants and different forms of loans. Advice and support will also be available to organisations to help them in accessing the fund.

The manager(s) of the fund will be appointed through open competition. Advertisements are being placed this week seeking expressions of interest.

Written Ministerial Statements

Monday 15 September 2003

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Planning Policy (Rural Areas)

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Keith Hill): The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) is today publishing a draft, for public consultation, of a new Planning Policy Statement (PPS) on Sustainable Development in Rural Areas in England. It is the Government's intention that the new PPS (PPS7) should, in due course, replace existing Planning Policy Guidance note 7 (PPG7), *The Countryside—Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development* (published February 1997).

The December 2001 planning Green Paper, *Planning—delivering a fundamental change*, announced that, as part of its proposals for reforming the planning system, the Government intend to review all its planning policy guidance to see whether it is needed; to seek greater clarity; and to remove from national policy guidance advice on practical implementation and policies which are better expressed at a regional or local level. In line with these proposals, the ODPM, in close consultation with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), carried out a review of PPG7. The conclusion of this review was that there remains a strong requirement for a distinct set of national planning policies that address the particular circumstances of rural areas and the wider countryside.

Consequently, a consultation draft of new PPS7 has been prepared, setting out key national planning policies for achieving thriving, sustainable rural communities, supporting development that meets the economic, social and recreational needs of all, and protecting the quality of the countryside and its landscapes. The PPS also recognises the importance of supporting a sustainable and diverse agricultural industry, and of the role of the tourism and leisure sectors in rural areas. When, in due course, they are issued in their final form, these policies will inform planning authorities, regional planning bodies and planning inspectors in carrying out their land use planning and development control responsibilities.

In the meantime, the Government are seeking views on draft PPS7 from a wide range of interested parties. The consultation period will run for twelve weeks, closing on 12 December 2003. Copies of the consultation document are being made available in the Libraries of both Houses.

Council Tax

The Minister for Local Government, Regional Governance and Fire (Mr. Nick Raynsford): Despite above inflation increases in grant for all English local authorities in 2003–04, we were disappointed that the average council tax increase was 12.9 per cent. Having looked at the budget returns from all English authorities, we have considered very carefully whether to use our powers under part IVA of the Local Government Act 1992 to cap any local authority budgets. We have decided against doing so this year.

Every local authority has a responsibility to its own taxpayers and electors. However, the Government are clear that the current trend in council tax rises is not sustainable. We will look at council tax rises very closely next year and we will also want to take account of the trend in increases over more than one year. Local authorities should be aware that we are prepared to use our targeted capping powers in 2004–05. In exceptional circumstances I do not rule out the possibility of capping authorities categorised as "good" or "excellent" in the current and future comprehensive performance assessments.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Sexual/Violent Offenders

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Paul Goggins): I am pleased to announce the publication today of the second annual report of the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (the MAPPA) of the 42 police and probation Areas in England and Wales.

The MAPPA have made a significant difference to the way the police and probation protect the public from the risks posed by sexual and other violent offenders. The MAPPA were established by the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 and introduced in April 2001. As a direct result there is now greater consistency and robustness in arrangements to manage these offenders and an increasing involvement of other agencies.

I am very pleased that the statutory arrangements we introduced are proving to be so effective. However, there is no room for complacency: to consolidate good practice we have included provision in the Criminal Justice Bill to formalise the involvement of other agencies in this very important area of public protection. I congratulate the police and probation services for their commitment and achievement in developing the MAPPA.

Each annual report contains the number of MAPPA offenders in that Area. The total number has increased; as expected, some offenders remain within the MAPPA longer than a year, some for life or for as long as they present a serious risk of harm to the public. The total number of MAPPA offenders increased 12 per cent. to 52,809, of which 21,413 are registered sex offenders.

For the first time annual reports contain information about the number of MAPPA offenders referred to the highest level of MAPPA activity—the Multi-Agency Public Protection Panels (MAPPPs). Offenders are referred to a MAPPP because they present a particularly high risk or difficulties. In England and Wales 2,843 offenders (5 per cent. of the total) were managed through referral to a MAPPP. Early indications are that the recidivism of offenders managed through MAPPPs is significantly reduced.

Public protection is one of this Government's highest priorities and the excellent work the police and probation services have done to improve it through the MAPPA deserves to be widely acknowledged.

I have placed in the Library a copy of each Area report together with other background information about the operation of the MAPPA.

DEFENCE

Armed Forces (Pension/Compensation Schemes)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): The Ministry of Defence has completed its reviews of the current Armed Forces pension and compensation arrangements. We have taken account of views expressed during the public consultation in 2001, in particular those serving in the Armed Forces, those representing the ex-Service community and the recommendations made by the House of Commons Defence Committee in March[1] 2002. In reaching our decisions we have also taken account of the changes in policy likely to emerge from the Inland Revenue paper on tax simplification[2]. Our proposals are also consistent with the policies recently published by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions[3]. The new schemes are designed to be fairer, to reflect modern practice and to meet the needs of the Armed Forces in the 21st century, and offer a high level of assurance for Service personnel. The Government intends to introduce the primary and secondary legislation required to implement these new schemes as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

A new Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS) will be introduced for new entrants on 6 April 2005 and we will give current members of the Armed Forces the opportunity to transfer to the new scheme as soon as possible, but no later than 6 April 2007. This decision to transfer will be entirely voluntary for each individual member. The new AFPS will remain a defined benefit scheme but will be based on final pensionable pay and will provide the same benefits for officers and other ranks. There are substantial new arrangements for dependants:

> a death-in-service benefit of four times pensionable pay (increased from up to one and a half times pensionable pay previously);
>
> an increase of 25 per cent. in widow(er)'s pension compared to the current scheme;
>
> an extension of dependants' benefits to unmarried partners where there is a substantial relationship.

These changes reflect key concerns raised during consultation and address the need to make proper provision for those who are left behind when personnel are killed in service.

The scheme has retained its normal retirement age of 55, but preserved pensions will be paid at age 65. The current early Immediate Pension provision has been replaced with an Early Departure Scheme, which is expected to ensure compliance with expected revisions to Inland Revenue policy with respect to the earliest date at which normal pension benefits can be paid. The Early Departure Scheme will offer a similar structure of benefits to the Immediate Pension, but with changes which help to fund some improvements in pension benefits and the cost of pensioners living longer. Overall, the changes will be broadly cost-neutral, taking account of the steps taken to cover increasing longevity costs.

The new compensation scheme will be introduced in April 2005 and will replace provisions under the War Pensions Scheme and attributable benefits under the current AFPS for incidents arising from that date. The new scheme reflects modern practice. It is fair, transparent, simple to understand and offers consistent outcomes, with more focus on the more severely disabled. It is a no-fault scheme. It provides a lump sum payment for pain and suffering, which is a new benefit not available under current arrangements. In addition, a Guaranteed Income Stream (GIS) will be awarded alongside higher level tariff awards for those who suffer significant loss of earnings capacity. Unlike the current arrangements, there will be in-service lump sum awards for pain and suffering, including for injuries resulting from war-like activities. Benefits will be provided for dependants where deaths result from service but will be extended to include unmarried partners, where there is a substantial relationship. There will be a time limit to claim of five years, with exceptions for late-onset conditions. Claims will be assessed using the "balance of probabilities" standard of proof, in line with civil law and common practice elsewhere. There will be an independent appeals tribunal system, compliant with European Convention on Human Rights, available for claimants who consider that their claim has not been handled fairly by the MOD.

The Ministry of Defence will also be extending the provisions introduced on 20 March 2003 which provided benefits to unmarried partners for attributable deaths related to conflict. The current AFPS will provide attributable benefits to unmarried partners where there is a substantial relationship for all attributable deaths with an effective date of 15 September 2003. The current AFPS does not provide unmarried partner benefits for non-attributable deaths, but this benefit will be available under the new AFPS.

I am making available more detailed information from the consultation process and further detailed explanation of the Schemes at http://www.mod.uk/issues/pensions. A copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

British Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Chris Mullin): Copies of the British Council's Trustees' Annual Report and Accounts for the financial year ended 31 March

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[1] *HCDC Third Report: The MoD Reviews of Armed Forces Pension and Compensation Arrangements (HC 666)—9 May 2002.*

HCDC Fifth Special Report: The MoD Reviews of Armed Forces Pension and Compensation Arrangements: Government's Response (HC 1115).

[2] *Simplifying the taxation of pensions: increasing choice for all (December 2002).*

[3] *Simplicity, Security and Choice: working and saving for retirement—Action on occupational pensions (June 2003).*

2003 will be placed today in the Library of the House. During the period the Council received £151.5 million grant-in-aid from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Volcanic Activity (Montserrat)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. Gareth Thomas): Further to the Statement on 17 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 86WS by my Hon. Friend the Minister of State for International Development, DFID has continued to work closely with the Montserratian authorities to alleviate the impact upon the island community of the volcanic activity in Montserrat between 12 and 14 July. This had involved substantial volcanic ashfalls throughout the island. We and regional donors made immediate assistance available for procurement of emergency ash masks, medical and drinking water supplies, ash clearing equipment and other materials. The Government of Montserrat have since worked quickly and effectively, with our support, to clear ash from most roads and public facilities (schools, hospital etc). However, because the scale of the ashing has been far greater than previously experienced in Montserrat, we are currently helping Montserrat to assess costs and requirements of substantial work needed to complete the clean-up.

Written Ministerial Statements

Tuesday 16 September 2003

HOME DEPARTMENT

Advisory Board on Restricted Patients

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Paul Goggins): The Home Secretary's Advisory Board on Restricted Patients will cease to function with effect from 16 September 2003.

Police Complaints Authority

The Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing and Community Safety (Hazel Blears): I am pleased to announce that the Annual Report of the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) will be laid before Parliament on 16 September 2003 and published on that day.

The report, as well as setting out the work completed in 2002–03 with regards to supervision of complaints, misconduct reviews and dispensations, also highlights the outcome of the projects that were carried out in order to pilot key aspects of the new complaints system (Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC). The IPCC will be replacing the PCA on 1 April 2004.

The PCA will be holding a press conference on 16 September to launch the report.

Copies of the report will be available in the Libraries of both Houses.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Public Guardianship Office's Annual Report and Accounts

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. David Lammy): The Public Guardianship Office's Annual Report and Accounts for 2002–03 have been laid before Parliament today. This document gives full details of the agency's performance and expenditure for that year.

Copies of the report have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

St. Helena: Air Access

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. Gareth Thomas): An international invitation for private sector participation and potential investment in possible development of access by air for St. Helena was launched on 7 April 2003. The invitation incorporated a provisional offer by the Department for International Development to contribute up to £26.3 million towards any proposal that may prove acceptable. This sum reflected the estimated capital cost of replacing the island's dedicated passenger/supply ship, as the alternative to developing air access.

Four expressions of interest, incorporating outline proposals, were received by the closing date of 25 July from:

Basil Read (Pty) Limited (South Africa);

John Laing International Limited;

Lagan Holdings Limited; and

St Helena Leisure Corporation Limited (SHELCO).

A full assessment of these proposals is now being made, with the help of expert advice, in consultation with the St. Helena Government. This process first will establish whether any or all of the proposals offer a suitable basis for proceeding further. If so, respondents may be invited to develop their proposals and, if appropriate, enter negotiations with the St. Helena and UK Governments. We hope to reach negotiation stage by early next year.

In addition, and in parallel, we intend to initiate a process of continuing an independent review using the "Gateway" model. This is advocated for large public investment projects by the Office of Government Commerce, which is advising DFID. It will test the business case for proceeding and help ensure that lessons of other public/private investment are taken into account.

Both the St. Helena Government and DFID have established internal teams to oversee and manage the process. The St Helena Government is now in the course of recruiting a local coordinator. Every effort will continue to be made to ensure that the people of St. Helena, as well as other interested parties, are kept as fully informed as possible of progress and next steps.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Oversight Commissioner's Report

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): I have today laid before this House a copy of the Oversight Commissioner's second statutory report for the year 2003 which is being published today, in accordance with Section 68(4)(a) of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000.

DEFENCE

Future Aircraft Carrier Programme

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): Further to the Statement to the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 30 January 2003, *Official Report*, columns 1026–42, I am pleased to announce that the Ministry of Defence has agreed contracts with BAE SYSTEMS (BAES) and Thales United Kingdom for the third stage of the Assessment Phase for the Future Aircraft Carrier (CVF) programme. This stage will be used to increase the maturity of the carrier design, and will pave the way for

placing contracts for the demonstration and manufacture (D&M) phase in Spring 2004 The work will be managed by a single, integrated team staffed by BAES and Thales UK.

Since the end of January, progress has been maintained in developing the design of the warship. In parallel, positive discussions have been conducted with BAE SYSTEMS and Thales UK on how to take forward the alliance approach to the programme set out by the Secretary of State in January. Discussions will continue between all three parties to refine the precise terms of the Alliance and the D&M contract, and will complete early next year. These discussions will be conducted concurrently with the Stage 3 design work, and will place the Department in a strong position to proceed quickly to place the D&M contract expected in Spring 2004.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Housing Corporation

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Keith Hill): Today the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister are announcing the start of an End-to-End Review of the Housing Corporation and its interaction with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and other agencies. The review will look at the links between the development of policy and delivery in the area of affordable housing. Part of this process will involve looking at ways of minimising administrative burdens on the Housing Corporation and the organisations with which it works.

With the new initiatives that are being put in place, particularly for delivering sustainable communities, a review of this sort is timely, and forms part of the Government's wider strategy for the reform of public services.

The review will be managed by a Project Board, which includes external members as well as representatives from the Housing Corporation and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. It will report in the spring.

Residual Neighbourhood Renewal Fund

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Yvette Cooper): Today we are announcing the distribution of the remaining £175 million of unallocated Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) resources for 2004–05 and 2005–06.

The NRF was launched in 2001–02, providing £900 million over three years as a time-limited component of the Government's long-term strategy for tackling deprivation in our poorest neighbourhoods. For over two years NRF has been assisting the 88 recipient local authorities and their fellow Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) members in establishing inclusive and effective partnership structures and strategic approaches to addressing the particular deprivation problems of each local area.

The Spending Review 2002 Settlement provided for further support for the NRF's challenging remit, continuing to give a targeted boost to ongoing increases in mainstream public service investment in deprived areas. SR2002 allocated to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister an additional £975 million of NRF resources—450 million in 2004–05 and £525 million in 2005–06. We announced the allocation of £800 million of these resources in April this year, confirming that the existing 88 eligible areas shall receive a further £400 million in total in each year.

Over the past few months we have given detailed consideration to the best way in which to distribute the residual £175 million of NRF resources for 2004–05 and 2005–06. After examining a range of options we have concluded that we should focus resources in those areas, which have great need in terms of health, education, crime and other aspects measured by the Government's floor target indicators. These floor targets are designed to ensure that the poorest areas do not get left behind and see significant improvements in outcomes on health, education and other measures. That is why we are announcing today that 26 local authority areas that are currently eligible for NRF are also eligible for a share of the residual £175 million. These 26 areas have been selected because they are ranked in the lowest 10 areas against two or more indicators used to measure progress towards the national Floor targets, ie they have the furthest distance to travel in order to meet these Floor targets. Tabled below is a list of the eligible areas and their allocations in 2004–05 and 2005–06.

There are several reasons why we are taking this approach. First is the fact that the achievement of the Floor targets is one of our top priorities. Delivering improvements for our most disadvantaged neighbourhoods is fundamental to the objectives we have set ourselves in the Communities Plan.

We also recognise the importance of NRF in helping local service providers work collectively through Local Strategic Partnerships to address local priorities, and to meet national floor targets at the local level. We are pleased with and greatly encouraged by the good progress already being made by the 88 NRF local authorities and their LSP colleagues. However, some areas have a greater task than others to deliver the improvements needed in areas such as the health of local people, educational achievement and preventing crime.

The £175 million of residual NRF resources will provide these 26 areas with additional financial support to meet this challenge.

Allocations of Residual Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) Resources for 2004–05 and 2005–06

Current NRF recipients also eligible for residual NRF	*2004–05 Allocation (£)*	*2005–06 Allocation (£)*
Bolsover	417,624	1,044,060
Bristol, City of	1,013,689	2,534,224
Camden	1,199,468	2,998,670
Derwentside	421,456	1,053,639
Easington	1,260,484	3,151,209

Allocations of Residual Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) Resources for 2004–05 and 2005–06

Current NRF recipients also eligible for residual NRF	*2004–05 Allocation (£)*	*2005–06 Allocation (£)*
Greenwich	1,103,589	2,758,972
Hackney	3,345,184	8,362,959
Halton	1,116,940	2,792,350
Haringey	1,516,814	3,792,035
Hartlepool	892,071	2,230,177
Islington	1,782,715	4,456,788
Kingston upon Hull, City of	2,134,495	5,336,238
Knowsley	2,101,419	5,253,547
Lambeth	688,542	1,721,356
Liverpool	5,724,205	14,310,513
Manchester	5,855,669	14,639,173
Middlesbrough	1,492,501	3,731,252
Newham	3,790,592	9,476,480
Nottingham	2,628,822	6,572,056
Salford	1,546,952	3,867,381
Sandwell	2,288,967	5,722,418
South Tyneside	1,530,285	3,825,713
Southwark	2,249,671	5,624,176
Tower Hamlets	3,020,552	7,551,380
Wansbeck	392,176	980,441
Wear Valley	485,117	1,212,793
TOTAL	50,000,000	125,000,000

HEALTH

Mental Health

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Ms Rosie Winterton): Yesterday I issued the thirteenth report prepared pursuant to Section 11 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 as amended, on development of services for people with a mental illness on England.

The report sets out the current policy and the developments in mental health services that have taken place since the twelfth report.

Copies of "Development of Services for People with a Mental Illness in England—Thirteenth Report" have been placed in the Library.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Discretionary Social Fund

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Chris Pond): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be making a number of minor changes to the discretionary social fund, with effect from 6 October 2003. The changes to the fund are minor clarifications of guidance and directions, and, in the main, are consequential to legislative changes being made in respect of other social security benefits.

Details of the changes have been placed in the Library.

Written Ministerial Statements

Wednesday 17 September 2003

TRANSPORT

Road Safety

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): The Government's Road Safety Strategy *Tomorrow's Roads—Safer for Everyone* set out ten-year targets for reducing road traffic casualties and recognised that more could be done to reduce the risks for those who use the roads for work purposes. A Task Group was set up by the Government and the Health and Safety Commission in May 2000 to consider ways to reduce at work road traffic incidents. The Task Group reported in November 2001. They concluded that existing health and safety law adequately covered work-related on-the-road activities and that there was no need for any new legislation. However, one of the Group's key recommendations was that the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) should publish generic guidance to help employers manage at work road risk.

Today the HSE, in partnership with the Department for Transport, has published a free booklet "Driving at Work—Managing Work Related Road Safety". There will be a small charge for bulk orders of the document to cover postage and packaging. It is also downloadable from the HSE web site http://www.hse.gov.uk/ without charge. The booklet contains generic advice on managing work-related road safety effectively and on integrating it into existing health and safety arrangements. The guidance will be useful to any employer, manager or supervisor with staff who drive or ride a motorcycle or bicycle at work.

The Department is arranging for over 48,000 copies of the booklet to be issued to road safety, local authority, police, employer and employee interests. Effective management of work-related road safety will help reduce the risk to employees and to other road users, including pedestrians. I hope that all employers will follow the simple guidance set out in the booklet and that the benefits from raised road safety awareness at work will also improve standards of private motoring.

Copies of the booklet are being placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Consultation Document

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Fiona Mactaggart): A Home Office consultation document on the development and funding of voluntary and community sector (VCS) infrastructure in England is being published today. The Government's aim is to help build a VCS, including social enterprise, which is fully engaged in shaping and delivering public services, underpinned by a high quality sustainable infrastructure that enables this to happen. Such support must meet the needs of a diverse sector and should complement support services available from the small business service and others.

As part of the Spending Review 2002, the Treasury undertook a cross-cutting review of the role of the VCS in service delivery, published in September 2002. The review identified that VCS infrastructure was patchy in distribution and in quality and that this was a barrier to increasing VCS involvement in service delivery. It recommended that

> "Government and the VCS should develop a coherent shared strategy to underpin capacity in the sector".

Consultation with voluntary and community organisations, and others interested in an effective sector, will inform a final strategy to be published early next year. This will include proposals to guide the investment of approximately £80 million of SR2002 funds.

The aim is to put a strategy in place which ensures:

> High quality support for voluntary and community organisations delivered as close to the point of need as is economically viable
>
> The existence of effective infrastructure locally, regionally and nationally. This may be supplemented by activity at a sub-regional level particularly activities that cannot be afforded more locally.
>
> Accessible, high quality support available across the VCS, including to support volunteering, black and minority ethnic and other diversity issues, social and community enterprise, community development, rural needs, and to support VCS use of information and communications technology.
>
> Strengthened specialist infrastructure organisations operating nationally—and regionally where needed—covering thematic areas of VCS activity and service delivery such as youth work, childcare, and vocational training.

Copies of the consultation document are available in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament and on the Home Office website. We would welcome views on the proposals and questions outlined in the paper by Monday 22 December 2003. A draft regulatory impact assessment is included with the consultation document.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

The Solicitor-General (Ms Harriet Harman): The Labour Party 2001 General Election Manifesto promised (at page 33):

> Despite an increase of 25 per cent. since 1997, we have too few prosecutors. By 2004, Labour pledges 300 new prosecutors.

At the time, in March 2001, there were 1,828 lawyers in the Crown Prosecution Service. The commitment had been met by October 2002. There were, by July 2003, 2,323 lawyers in the Crown Prosecution Service, an increase of 495 since March 2001.

DEFENCE

Veterans

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): I am announcing the publication of a new report entitled "Improving the Delivery of Cross Departmental Support and Services for Veterans", which my department commissioned from King's College London last year. The publication of this study demonstrates the commitment of the Government as a whole to the Veterans Initiative through the participation of a working group which included members from the Department of Health, Home Office, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Her Majesty's Treasury, Department for Work and Pensions and veterans organisations. The aim was to produce a map of veterans' needs, with emphasis on the more vulnerable veterans, match this against current provision and identify priority research gaps. This involved a literature survey, detailed interviews with 'at risk' personnel, and analysis and further interviews of an existing cohort of personnel for ex-Service outcomes.

This study is a preliminary scoping study and will inform the direction of policy and research. It therefore represents an important contribution to the Veterans Initiative. The report conclusions confirm that

"For many (indeed most) personnel military life is a great leveller; it is a positive experience (especially for disadvantaged youths who enter service early), allowing them to enjoy a more favourable life trajectory".

and that

"Over three quarters of service leavers do well and gain employment after leaving".

The report finds that there is little peer-reviewed published UK literature on outcomes of veterans, and that most published research concerns US Service and ex-Service personnel, from which it would be inaccurate to draw extrapolations. It also shows that mental health is an important issue—most personnel do not develop problems as a result of their Service, but the small percentage that do can face a range of difficulties in civilian life, including access to appropriate treatment.

The Government welcome this report and would like to thank Professor Wessely and his team for their work. The report recommends a number of actions, as well as further research on ways to help the most vulnerable groups. I can confirm that we will look in detail at these recommendations and will evaluate them against existing policies and activities.

A copy of the full report will be placed in the Library of the House, and also on the websites of the MOD and Veterans Agency, at http://www.mod.uk/ and http://www.veteransagency.mod.uk.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Voting Pilot Schemes

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. Christopher Leslie): The Government have today introduced a Bill to allow piloting of innovative voting methods at next year's European Parliamentary elections. The European Parliamentary and Local Elections (Pilots) Bill also provides for pilots at local elections where these are combined with and take place on the same day as elections for the European Parliament.

This legislation demonstrates the Government's commitment to their goal of making voting easier and more convenient and represents a marked scaling up from previous pilots. The Bill is needed as current legislation does not allow for piloting at European Parliamentary elections and the Government are keen to maintain the momentum gained through previous successful pilot schemes. Such schemes have included both all-postal ballots and multi-channelled e-voting and, at this year's local elections, were conducted in 61 local authorities covering 6.4 million eligible voters.

Decisions on which regions should be chosen for next year's pilots, and which methods should be used in those regions, will be informed by advice from the Electoral Commission. The Department for Constitutional Affairs and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister are today jointly writing to the Commission with guidance on this issue. The Commission—an independent body funded by Parliament—will consult with stakeholders and report back later in the year.

Alongside this legislation, the Government have also today launched a consultation on implementation of next year's pilot schemes. This consultation, to be conducted by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, will outline our plans for the pilots and seek comments from local authorities and other interested parties on our proposals.

Our proposals have been developed in the light of the Electoral Commission's strategic evaluation of the pilots held at the local elections earlier this year. Their report, "The Shape of Elections to Come", made a number of recommendations, which the Government have considered very carefully, and we have published today our formal response.

One of the main recommendations made by the Commission was that all-postal voting should be made the normal method of voting at local elections. We welcome that recommendation, but we recognise that it would involve a major change to our traditional electoral arrangements. Therefore, the Government intend to launch a public consultation on the detail of that recommendation later this year

HEALTH

NHS Pension Scheme

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): Further to my statement of 28 November 2002, I have now received and accepted the report of the Government Actuary on his investigation of the National Health Service Pension Scheme in England and Wales for the period 1 April 1994 to 31 March 1999. The report confirms that the rate of employer contributions should be 14 percent, from 1 April 2003.

Copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland (Monitoring Commission etc.) Bill

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has made the following statement under section 19(1)(a) of the Human Rights Act 1998:

In my view the provisions of the Northern Ireland (Monitoring Commission etc.) Bill [HL], are compatible with the Convention rights.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Iraq

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): Following consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Trade and Industry recently approved a licence to export Military List Goods to Iraq, The arms embargo against Iraq remains in place under United Nations Security Council resolution 1483 (2003), with the exception of

"arms and other related material required by the (Coalition Provisional) Authority to serve the purposes of this and other related resolutions".

Accordingly Her Majesty's Government consider it appropriate to grant exemptions for these goods to be exported on the basis that they are to used by a private security firm in the protection of the British Office in Baghdad. The work of the British Office in Baghdad forms part of the Authority's functions under resolution 1483 (2003). The export is consistent with the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria. Future applications will continue to be assessed on a case by case basis against the UN Embargo and Consolidated Criteria, taking into account the circumstances prevailing at the time.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

EU Structural and Cohesion Funds

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The Government's long-term economic goal is to achieve high and stable levels of growth and employment. Regional policy is at the heart of our efforts to achieve this goal—ensuring that every UK nation and region fulfils its economic potential, that all parts of the country share in rising prosperity, and that economic disparities between our nations and regions are identified and addressed.

In March, we put forward for consultation a proposal to reform the EU Structural and Cohesion Funds through the establishment of an EU Framework for Devolved Regional Policy. We argued that this offered the best way to reform EU regional policy so that it supported the domestic regional agenda and responded to the challenge of EU enlargement in a fair and sustainable way.

Since then, we have received almost three hundred written responses, and I would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to engage in the consultation, either in writing or through the consultation events that we have held throughout the UK. Our overall conclusion, in the light of the responses received, is that the Government's proposed EU Framework for Devolved Regional Policy provides the best context in which to develop future arrangements for EU and UK regional policy, that it can be built on to address the key points raised during the consultation exercise, and therefore that it should form the basis of our negotiating position in Europe.

I am making this short statement today because I wanted to take an early opportunity to explain how the Government propose to move forward in the light of the consultation. Further work, in consultation with key stakeholders, will now be set in hand to flesh out the details of our proposal and to respond to questions and concerns raised in the consultation. This will be the subject of a more detailed statement on the EU Framework and how we see it operating after the recess.

THE OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION

The proposals we put forward in the consultation were based on the following key objectives:

> We want a EU regional policy that fully supports, and adds value to, the ambitious devolution, decentralisation and regional development agenda already being pursued domestically.
>
> We want significantly simpler and more flexible implementation and monitoring arrangements, which are proportionate to the amount of funding available and which allow integration with other policies.
>
> We want EU regional policy actively to support the EU's agenda set at Lisbon and elsewhere for higher productivity and employment and for developing human resources.
>
> While being in no doubt about the continued need for strong regional policy in all Member States, we believe that it is both fair, and the most effective use of funds, to concentrate the EU's limited financial and administrative resources on the poorest Member States, where they will add most value.
>
> And we must also ensure that expenditure on EU regional policy, as with other elements of the EU budget, achieves a fair budgetary deal for the UK taxpayer.

The responses to the consultation are being published on the DTI website today. The vast majority of those who commented on the overall aims for reform of EU regional and cohesion policy supported these key objectives. On issues such as the need for increased flexibility, state aid reforms, and reduced bureaucracy, the majority of respondents also agreed that these should be priorities for reform. Many also supported our view that, in the context of enlargement, current arrangements are unsustainable, and a number of respondents recognised that the UK cannot expect its current level of EU Structural Fund receipts to be maintained after 2006.

On our proposed EU Framework for Devolved Regional Policy, a small number of respondents expressed wholehearted support for the approach. Some others were firmly against it, and favoured an alternative approach in which Structural Funds would be retained in all Member States including the UK. But the great majority emphasised a desire for more

information about the proposal and how it would operate in practice. The further work we are now setting in hand will respond to this.

More specifically, in consultation with others we shall be working to provide further information on:

- the structure and content of the EU Framework and how it would operate at Member State and European levels;
- the ways in which the Framework would complement our domestic regional policy agenda;
- how the Government's guarantee to increased domestic funding for regional policy would be met, in the event that the EU Framework approach is adopted, with more information on the scale and duration of the guarantee;
- possible delivery mechanisms for increased domestic funding, designed to ensure that the best aspects of Structural Funds are retained in a simpler and more streamlined system;
- the ways in which different domestic policy agendas, for example urban and rural regeneration and the need to continue to support activities in the National Action Plan for Employment, including priorities such as employability, skills and social inclusion, would be incorporated in the new approach;
- the relationship of the EU Framework approach to developments in other European policy areas such as reform of the State Aid Regime, the Common Agricultural Policy and the European Employment Strategy.

In addition to this work, officials will need to consider separately what the proposed approach should be to future PEACE funding in Northern Ireland.

CONCLUSION

The Government remain fully signed up to the objectives for European regional policy we set out in March. We welcome the support we have received for these objectives, and continue to believe that the EU Framework approach provides he best way forward to address them. We have concluded that the responses to the consultation exercise provide a basis for building on the approach set out so far, on which further work will now be taken forward. In the meantime the approach will now form the basis of the Government's position in forthcoming discussions and negotiations with our EU partners.

By responding to the challenge of enlargement, by focusing EU resources on the poorest member states, by agreeing EU-wide objectives and giving European regions greater flexibility within that framework, I believe we can achieve an outcome that is best for the new member states, for Europe, and for the nations and regions of the United Kingdom.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Business

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Peter Hain): The date of the Queen's Speech to Parliament will be Wednesday 26 November. I plan to announce the date of prorogation as soon as I am able.

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 18 September 2003

TRANSPORT

London Underground

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Tony McNulty): London Transport's (LT) expenditure on external consultancy in relation to the Public Private Partnership (PPP) for the modernisation of London Underground (LU) has been regularly reported to the House at six-monthly intervals since 13 January 1999.

LT's liabilities transferred to Transport for London (TfL) on 15 July 2003, so some residual final costs are being met by London Underground (LU) in TfL's ownership. The total consultancy costs concerned, from 20 March 1998 (the date of the Government's announcement of the PPP) up to the end of August 2003, is £103.16 million. The potential final cost is £103.5 million. Once all related expenditure has been paid I will report the final costs to the House.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Sanctions

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): As of today's date, the United Kingdom implements mandatory UN sanctions, imposed by the UN Security Council acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, in relation to Al Qa'ida and the Taliban, Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Iraq, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Somalia. UN sanctions in relation to Angola (UNITA) and Libya were lifted on 9 December 2002 and 12 September 2003 respectively. The full trade embargo and all-encompassing asset freeze in relation to Iraq have been lifted. But an arms embargo remains and UNSCR 1483(2003) placed a ban on trade in stolen cultural property and requests Member States to freeze and transfer certain Iraqi assets to the Development Fund for Iraq. The United Kingdom implements, in addition, sanctions imposed by the European Union in relation to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burma, China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (former President Milosevic and the persons associated with him continue to represent a threat to the consolidation of democracy in the area of the former Republic of Yugoslavia), Libya, Sudan and Zimbabwe. In accordance with a decision of the OSCE, the United Kingdom implements arms embargoes on Armenia and Azerbaijan. The UK has imposed a unilateral arms embargo adopted by national legislation on Iran and a ban in relation to the sale of certain equipment to the armed forces of either side on the island of Cyprus. A list of sanctions regimes implemented by the UK is in the Library of the House. Annexed to this is a summary of additional UK restrictions on the export of strategic goods. These documents are also available on the FCO website at http://www.fco.gov.uk/sanctions and are updated each time there are changes to sanctions regimes implemented by the UK, or to UK restrictions on the export of strategic goods.

British Terrorist Victims

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): Last week we remembered the victims of the 11 September terrorist attacks, two years ago. In a few weeks, we shall be marking the first anniversary of the Bali bombings. The Government responded to these tragic events with practical support for the families of the victims beyond the consular assistance we would normally provide following the death or injury of British nationals abroad. We did so because of the exceptional nature of terrorism, in which individuals are random victims of attacks directed at society as a whole. I am announcing today a package of measures designed to support the families of victims of future terrorist attacks abroad, which is based closely on what was provided for the families of victims of 11 September and Bali.

Those measures are:

- Return economy airfares to the airport nearest the site of the incident for two members of the victim's family.
- Accommodation for three to five nights.
- Travel insurance as appropriate and where available.
- Local Travel including transfers from airport to local hotel.
- Repatriation of bodies or remains.
- Immediate medical expenses of those killed or injured.
- Medical evacuation of those killed or injured to the nearest hospital.
- Return luggage costs of those killed or injured.

The provision of the exact package, and the details of the assistance offered to the families will, of course, depend on the particular circumstances, including whether any of the costs are already covered by existing insurance policies. As a matter of course, we provide consular advice and support, both in London and at the site of the incident. We also endeavour to arrange insurance cover for family members where it would not otherwise be available.

None of these measures can ever take away the pain and suffering which families will experience in these most horrendous of circumstances, but we sincerely hope they will at least remove some of the practical and administrative burdens from them when trying to cope with the trauma of the incident.

The question of what constitutes an act of terrorism remains a difficult one. In the case of 11 September, Bali and the compound bombings in Riyadh in May of this year, we were all in no doubt that we were dealing with acts of terrorism. Where there is doubt as to whether a violent death abroad is the result of an act of terrorism, we will consider the circumstances carefully and sympathetically. In essence, this package of measures is designed to assist the families of

members of the travelling and expatriate British public, who are inadvertently caught up in a terrorist incident; and where they are not covered by ordinary insurance policies.

FCO/TUC International Advisory Council

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): The FCO has been working to strengthen co-operation with British unions on issues of mutual interest overseas As economic decisions are increasingly made in a global context, so British trade unions are more involved with international organisations and counterparts overseas. British trade unions have long played a wider international role in helping promote, among other things, democracy and human rights.

To identify areas of concern and to facilitate discussion, the General Secretary of the TUC and I have agreed to set up an FCO/TUC international advisory council This Council will be led from the Foreign Office side by the Minister for Europe and will include participants from both the FCO and the trade union movement.

To brief interested parties on this expanded co-operation, the FCO and TUC agreed to produce a leaflet setting down in practical terms how British unions and the FCO are working together. This leaflet was circulated to delegates at the TUC General Congress last week. Copies of the leaflet, which have been placed in the Library of the House, will also be circulated to our embassies abroad and will be available on the FCO website http://www.fco.gov.uk/.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Rural Payments Agency

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality (Alun Michael): The 2002–03 Annual Report and Accounts for the Rural Payments Agency will be laid today and copies will be place in the Libraries of both Houses.

HEALTH

Dentistry

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Ms Rosie Winterton): Subject to the will of Parliament, the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill will give primary care trusts new duties for commissioning local national health service dental services. Primary care trusts will have a duty to secure the provision of primary dental services either through contracts with individual practices or by providing services themselves. With these new responsibilities, the £1.2 billion currently held centrally for funding dental services will pass to primary care trusts.

Until then, we will continue to work with the NHS and the dental profession to support NHS dentistry and to reform it to meet local needs. I am today announcing additional funding of £65.2 million to support change and help improve access, quality and choice for patients. The funding will be targeted at those primary care trusts where access is a real problem and will be on top of the £1.2 billion which is currently held centrally and which will in time go to primary care trusts.

The £65.2 million will be used as follows:

£35 million to enable primary care trusts to improve access, choice and quality for patients;

£30 million for information technology to integrate dentistry within the national information technology programme;

£200,000 to develop dental leadership skills within strategic health authorities and primary care trusts to support them with the dental change agenda.

This funding comes on top of the £9 million announced last month for the NHS support team that has been set up to work with those areas where it is hardest to find an NHS dentist and a further £1 million to help primary care trusts, local dental committees and dentists to prepare for the change in the way dental services are commissioned.

There are many examples of excellent NHS dental services and we want to reward NHS dentists and make practice in the NHS an attractive option. The programme of reform we are now embarked on will enable the NHS, dentists and patients to influence local services in the future.

As well as the changes flowing from the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill, we have also asked Harry Cayton, the director for patient experience and public involvement at the Department, to undertake a review of patient charges for NHS dentistry. This review involves patient groups and other stakeholders and will be reporting to Ministers by April 2004.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Opportunity for All

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Andrew Smith): Today I am publishing Opportunity for all—Fifth Annual Report 2003 (CM 5956). The report sets out our strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion, and reports on the indicators used to monitor progress. Copies have been placed in the Library, and are available to hon. Members from the Vote Office. A copy of the summary is being sent to all hon. Members.

Older Workers

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Andrew Smith): In the Government's consultation report "Simplicity, Security and Choice: Working and Saving for Retirement", December 2002, (CM 5677) I announced plans to introduce progressively a new package of more intensive back-to-work help for people aged 50 and over. Today I am pleased to announce further details about two elements of this work.

The sites for the pilot study to trial mandating the participation of people aged 50 to 59 who have been claiming JSA for 18 months in the New Deal 25 plus Intensive Activity Period, on the same basis as

currently exists for claimants aged 25–49, have been agreed and are listed below. 11 of the pilots will commence in April 2004, and three will commence in October 2004. The areas represent a mix of geographical and labour market areas and all will have fully integrated Jobcentre Plus offices. In addition, seven of the sites are also taking part in the Pathways to Work pilots for people on Incapacity Benefits.

The pilots will be evaluated comprehensively by independent qualitative and quantitative research and this will include the use of random assignment.

Pilot sites for a mandatory New Deal 25 plus Intensive Activity Period for people aged 50 to 59—Launch April 2004:

Bridgend [1]
Buckingham & Oxfordshire
Calderdale & Kirklees
Coventry & Warwickshire
East Lancashire [1]
Essex [1]
Hampshire
Leicester
Shropshire
Somerset [1]
Suffolk

Pilot sites for a mandatory New Deal 25 plus Intensive Activity Period for people aged 50 to 59—Launch October 2004:

Derbyshire [1]
Gateshead & South Tyneside [1]
Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, Argyll and Bute. [1]

Note:
[1] Also participating in the Pathways to Work pilots.

A national tendering exercise will be launched today on the Jobcentre Plus website http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/, inviting bids from private and voluntary sector organisations to extend information about back-to-work help and local job and volunteering opportunities to help improve the employment prospects of jobless people aged 50 and over.

The bids will be invited in areas with higher numbers of people aged over 50 claiming benefits, listed below. Successful bidders will begin work from April 2004, and contracts will be let for up to two years. The pilots will gather good practice information on the most effective ways of raising awareness about the availability of back to work help to people not currently in contact with Jobcentre Plus.

Proposed Jobcentre Plus districts for private and voluntary sector bids to raise awareness about the back to work help available through:

Jobcentre Plus
Lanarkshire
Liverpool
Leeds
Wigan
City of Sunderland
Bradford
Fife
Staffordshire
Dudley and Sandwell
Newcastle and North Tyne
Eastern Valleys
Cardiff and Vale

DEFENCE

Military Low-Flying System

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): The existing Night Low Flying System (NLFS) will remain unchanged in principle, but some adjustments are being made to its structure and management to improve the efficiency of the system and reflect an increasing requirement for helicopters to be able to train at night.

The NLFS is divided into two by a line from Swansea in the west to Colchester in the east. The southern area is allocated to rotary wing aircraft and the northern area to fixed wing aircraft, with small exceptions to account for locations where rotary wing aircraft are based in the fixed wing region and vice-versa. This basis remains unchanged but the area available to rotary-wing aircraft will be increased and the system made more flexible by the introduction of sectors that may now be allocated to either fixed wing or rotary aircraft. In addition, we are introducing some management changes to make the procedures that units use to book in to the system more efficient.

The Government understand that military low flying training is disturbing, and can reassure the House that there is not expected to be a significant impact for those on the ground as a result of these changes. The existing basis of the NLFS will remain, and for most of the country there will be no change to the structure of the system. Where change is being introduced, the impact is generally expected to be limited to the possibility that those on the ground may witness different aircraft types than may currently be the case, and will be small in scale. We have considered the requirement for a sustainability review and recognise that some parts of the changes may lead to such a requirement, although, as stated, the overall impact is likely to be small. Where necessary I can confirm that more detailed work may be carried out. Detailed environmental impact and sustainability studies are being carried out in respect of AH 64, which is likely to be one of the major users of the revised NLFS.

Finally, night flying is essential if our aircrews are going to meet the demands that are placed upon them. These changes will assist with these demands.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

British Energy Credit Facility Agreement

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Hewitt): On 7 March, *Official Report*, column 89WS, I informed the House that British Energy had repaid to my Department all outstanding amounts under the credit facility. On a contingency basis I decided, with the

company's agreement, to continue the facility, with the maximum amount available being reduced from £650 million to £200 million.

British Energy has subsequently utilised the facility in August. As the House was in recess at the time the drawing was made, my Department wrote to the Chairs of the Committee of Public Accounts and the Trade and Industry Committee to inform them of the fact. At the beginning of September, British Energy's outstanding drawdown on the facility was £13.1 million.

The stringent controls governing drawings on the facility by British Energy remain in place. As with the company's previous drawings, we expect further drawings to be repaid in full, including interest, as soon as the company is in a position to do so. British Energy's obligations under the credit facility agreement are secured by charges over the British Energy Group's assets. This security is in the nature of a senior charge, which would take priority over the claims of other creditors, should the company become insolvent.

British Energy continues to work on implementing its restructuring plan. It announced on 11 September that it had agreed the sale of its stake in its US joint venture, Amergen, subject to certain regulatory and other conditions. But there remain significant milestones ahead. Successful implementation of the restructuring plan will require a number of further conditions to be met, including satisfactory formal commitments from creditors to support the plan, completion of the Amergen sale and receipt of state aids approval from the European Commission. I will also need to be satisfied that implementation of the restructuring will lead to a viable restructured entity that will not be dependent on Government support in the long term. If these conditions cannot be met, the Government remain well prepared for administration.

TREASURY

HM Treasury Review

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): Cash Ratio Deposits are non-interest bearing assets deposited with the Bank of England by banks and building societies. They are used by the Bank to finance its unremunerated activities, in particular its sterling liquidity operations and its efforts to secure price stability and the stability of the financial system in general, from which these institutions are key beneficiaries. The Cash Ratio Deposit Scheme was placed on a statutory basis when the Bank of England Act became law in 1998. In February 2003, the Paymaster General announced by written statement a review of the operation of the statutory scheme in its first five years.

The review has reached the following conclusions. The cash ratio deposit scheme continues to be a suitable method of funding the Bank of England's monetary policy, financial stability and sterling liquidity operations. The definition of eligible liabilities, from which deposits are calculated, should not be brought into line with the definition of deposits used by the Financial Services Authority (FSA) as a basis for calculating the fees it collects from deposit taking institutions. This is because the Cash Ratio Deposit scheme is aimed at sterling deposit taking institutions, whereas the FSA's regulatory activity, and its definition of deposits, also covers foreign exchange deposits. The cash ratio for calculating deposits should remain at 0.15 per cent. The Government will keep the ratio under review. The minimum threshold for making deposits should be raised to £500 million, freeing 18 institutions from the scheme and benefiting all remaining contributing institutions by reducing the level of their deposits by £150,000 each. The Bank of England should consider ways in which the transparency of the scheme could be enhanced, for instance by publishing a more detailed breakdown of expenditure by function. The Government will continue to monitor the effect of the cash ratio deposit scheme under review and will conduct a further formal review at the latest in five years' time.

The proposal to raise the minimum threshold for making deposits would require a change to secondary legislation under the Bank of England Act 1998. HM Treasury is therefore consulting publicly about this change and inviting views on the other proposals of the review.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Local Government Finance

The Minister for Local Government, Regional Governance and Fire (Mr. Nick Raynsford): The December 2001 White Paper "Strong Local Leadership, Quality Public Services" (CM 5237) included a commitment to

> work with local government with the aim of introducing a safety valve grant in 2004–05. The grant will be available to authorities with high levels of council tax and low unit costs, but which do not benefit from the new grant formulae.

The concept behind the safety valve mechanism was that there might be a small number of authorities whose circumstances do not fit adequately into national funding formulae and as a result experience severe underfunding.

We have been unable to find any authorities that qualify for a safety valve grant. After taking technical advice from local government, which pointed strongly against a mechanism we no longer intend to introduce a safety valve grant.

Written Answers to Questions

The following answers were received between Tuesday 2 September and Friday 5 September 2003

DEFENCE

Clansman Radio System

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reports he has received on the performance of Clansman radio systems in Iraq. [124671]

Mr. Ingram: The Information and Communications System Support IPT has requested formal and specific feedback on the performance of Clansman during Operation Telic. A positive report was received on 18 August 2003 from Headquarters Land Command on the performance of Clansman radio systems during Operation T*ELIC* in Iraq, which stated that Clansman "performed well in availability terms". No formal reports have yet been received on the performance of Clansman in terms of its effectiveness as a Combat Net Radio System. Additionally, no formal complaints have been received in respect of Clansman performance.

Medical Treatment

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money was paid for *(a)* private and *(b)* NHS medical treatment of service personnel in each calendar year since 1997. [117883]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 9 June 2003]:* The information requested is only held by financial year. The cost of private treatment in respect of centrally run treatment initiatives and single service schemes in the United Kingdom in each of the years from 2001–02 to 2002–03 is shown as follows. No figures for private treatment have been recorded centrally for years prior to 2000–01.

	£ million
2000–01	0.769
2001–02	4.095
2002–03	3.326

Expenditure on NHS providers between 1996–97 and 2002–03 was as follows:

	£ million
1996–97	0.137
1997–98	2.294
1998–99	7.419
1999–2000	8.560
2000–01	15.168
2001–02	23.209
2002–03	25.725

The figures represent payments under the Service Level Agreements between the Ministry of Defence and the NHS Hospital Trusts which host the MOD Hospital Units (MDHUs) as they became established, the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine (RCDM) from 2001–02 onwards, and the Royal Surrey County Hospital from 2000–01 onwards (for oromaxillofacial treatment only).

The figures for 1996–97 to 2000–01 represent the net costs to MOD after offsetting the payments received from the host Trusts in respect of military personnel serving in MDHU's, the RCDM and the Royal Surrey County Hospital. With effect from 1 April 2001, the two sets of costs were separated and figures shown for that year onwards represent gross treatment costs.

Services Training

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many trainees have been *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured in the last 10 years; and in each case what the type of training being undertaken and the cause of injury or death was. [123950]

Mr. Caplin: Between 1 January 1993 and 31 December 2002 there were 112 Regular Service trainees killed through fatal injuries. It is not possible to provide individual details for each trainee as this would compromise service personnel confidentiality. Comprehensive information on non-fatal injuries is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The following table provides details of the deaths of the trainees killed as a result of injuries, broken down by cause.

Regular armed forces trainee personnel killed due to fatal injuries: 1993–2002

Cause of death	*Number killed*
Training and Exercises-Accidents	10
Firearms	3
Environmental factors (e.g. Excessive heat/cold pressure)	3
Road traffic accidents	1
Drowning	1
Falls, twisting, turning, slipping etc.	2
On-Duty Accidents	10
Road traffic accidents	5
Firearms[1]	2
Aircraft	2
Parachute	1
Off-Duty Accidents	68
Road traffic accidents	46
Poisoning	6
Hanging, suffocation, strangulation etc.	5
Falls, twisting, turning, slipping etc.	4
Firearms[1]	2
Drowning	2
Aircraft	1
Machinery and tools	1
Water transport	1
Suicide[2]	23
Off duty criminal shooting	1
Total killed	112

[1] Includes deaths awaiting coroner's verdicts.

[2] Defined as coroner's verdicts of suicide and open. Please note that suicide and open verdicts are subject to change as outstanding coroner's verdicts are reported.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions between 31 March 2002 and 31 March 2003 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [126670]

Mr. Caplin: Between 1 April 2002 and 31 March 2003, special advisers in the Ministry of Defence travelled abroad on 12 occasions and visited the following countries:

Bahrain
Belgium
Crete
Czech Republic
France
Germany
Italy
Kuwait
Poland
Qatar
Turkey
USA

The average cost of each visit was £1,398.

All travel by special advisers is undertaken fully in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Management Code.

HEALTH

Adverse Reactions to Drugs (Children)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children suffered adverse effects last year from prescribed drugs that required hospital treatment. [126718]

Dr. Ladyman: Data from Hospital Episode Statistics indicates that there were 2,778 admissions to hospital of children under 16 years due to adverse effects from drugs, medicines and biological substances in therapeutic use in national health service hospitals in England in 2001–02. These data include adverse effects from all medicines, whether prescribed or taken without prescription. It is important to note that these figures do not represent the number of patients, as a person may have been admitted to hospital more than once in the year.

Cancer Care

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions his Department has had with strategic health authorities and primary care trusts to ensure cancer is treated as a primary care priority in line with his Department's national guidance; and what steps his Department is taking to ensure cancer is treated as a primary care priority in line with his Department's national guidance. [123255]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The NHS Cancedr Plan made clear the crucial role that family doctors and community nurses have to play at all stages along the cancer patient pathway. One of the actions in the NHS Cancer Plan was the establishment of a new partnership between the National Health Service and Macmillan Cancer Relief to provide around £3 million a year for three years to support a lead clinician in cancer within every primary care trust (PCT). These leads have a key role to play by providing strategic leadership within the PCT, contributing to the development of cancer networks, improving communication between sectors, raising standards of cancer care through the PCTs and ensuring services are responsive to the needs of people affected by cancer.

A recent workshop to develop a vision for primary care cancer services examined the role of community-based services in all aspects of cancer care including patients at risk of cancer, patients with symptoms suggesting a possible diagnosis of cancer and the care of patients with known cancer. The workshop was attended by a number of stakeholders including representatives from PCTs. It also provided an opportunity to consider the cancer elements of the proposed general medical services contract quality and outcomes framework. This includes some cancer and palliative care specific indicators as well as other generic organisational indicators that are of particular relevance to cancer patients wuch as sharing information out of hours.

Responsibility for commissioning of cancer services now rests with PCTs and it is for PCTs in parnership with strategic health authorities (SHAs) and other local stakeholders to determine how best to meet national priorities, including the targets set for cancer, in "Improvement, Expansion and Reform: the next three years—Priorities and Planning Framework 2003 to 2006".

PCTs and SHAs were required to produce local delivery plans (LDPs) for the three years 2003–04 to 2005–06 setting out how the would deliver the national targets set out in the Priorities and Planning Framework and supporting guidance was provided to assist with this. It is the SHA who are responsible for delivering the targets or outcomes in their LDP.

Cancer Treatment

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the latest average waiting time is from referral to *(a)* imaging treatment, *(b)* endoscopy treatment and *(c)* radiotherapy treatment for NHS cancer patients. [126990]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Data are not collected centrally on waiting times for scans, endoscopy or radiotherapy treatment. The length of time that a patient may have to wait is dependent on their clinical condition. Emergency cases need to be seen immediately. Other cases will be carried out as quickly as possible, dependent on the clinical priority of all patients waiting to be treated.

Where these procedures form part of the pathway for cancer patients the NHS Cancer Plan set out maximum waiting time targets for first definitive cancer treatment. From 2001, there was a one month maximum wait from diagnosis to first treatment for breast cancer and a one month wait from urgent referral to first treatment for

children's cancers, testicular cancer and acute leukaemia. From 2002, there was a maximum two month wait from urgent referral to treatment for breast cancer. By 2005, there will be a maximum one month wait from diagnosis to first treatment and a maximum two months from urgent referral to first treatment for all cancers. Performance data on current cancer waiting times targets are published on the Departments website at www.doh.gov.uk/cancerwaits.

Cosmetic Surgery

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to ensure that cosmetic surgery clinics check the qualifications and expertise of the surgeons they employ. [126829]

Mr. Hutton: Under the Care Standards Act 2000, from 1 April 2002 all independent health care providers have been regulated by the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC). The NCSC has a health directorate devoted to the inspection and regulation of independent health care providers, who are required to meet national minimum standards. These require that cosmetic surgeons are registered with the General Medical Council and that pre and post employment checks are carried out, including validation of qualifications, and that employment references are sought.

If the NCSC discovers that an independent hospital is not complying with these standards, it has the power to take appropriate regulatory action to ensure they are met.

Emergency Planning

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards training *(a)* general practitioners, *(b)* staff at NHS Direct and *(c)* accident and emergency staff to spot outbreaks of infectious diseases. [122103]

Mr. Hutton: Training is long established for health care workers to respond to routine outbreaks of infectious diseases. Since 11 September 2001, training to spot outbreaks of infectious diseases caused by the deliberate release of biological agents has increased. This has included educational articles in national and international medical journals, authoritative and up-to-date advice on the Department of Health and Health Protection Agency's web-sites and seminars/conferences for specific groups of healthcare workers. These seminars follow the principle of "Training the Trainer" and will be cascaded to other health care professionals. More are planned this year. Training for a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear incident is now the responsibility of the Health Protection Agency [HPA].

For general practitioners, a conference was organised by the Department of Health and the Royal College of General Practitioners in early July.

All NHS Direct staff have been trained in the rationale, mechanism and importance of their surveillance programme, set up to detect outbreaks of infectious diseases. Analysts have been trained to deliver daily surveillance reports and a training module is being developed, in collaboration with the HPA, on emergency planning.

Accident and emergency staff have been trained through seminars for example 'Silent Weapons' and advanced life support group training.

Healthcare-associated Infections

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the targeted action plans for healthcare-associated infections and antimicrobial resistance as set out in "Getting Ahead of the Curve" for tackling HAI. [126842]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The targeted action plans for healthcare associated infection and antimicrobial resistance as set out in "Getting Ahead of the Curve" will contribute to the Government's longer term strategy to prevent and reduce healthcare associated infections.

Hospital Hygiene

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the traffic light league tables for hospital cleanliness; what plans he has to change the system; and if he will make a statement. [126358]

Mr. Hutton: The patient environment action team programme, and the resulting 'traffic light' ratings awarded to hospitals, have been significant factors in improving the environmental conditions, including standards of cleanliness, in hospitals.

Since the introduction of the system the number of 'Green' hospitals has increased from 22.3 per cent. to 60 per cent. (2000–02) while the number being assessed as 'Red' has fallen from 35.5 per cent. to zero over the same period.

There are no plans to change the system.

Hospital Laundry Facilities

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals do not have laundry facilities on site; and whether he intends to require all hospitals to have internal laundries. [126416]

Mr. Hutton: No information is held centrally on the number of hospitals with on-site laundry facilities.

There is no intention to require all hospitals to have laundries on site. The management and control of hospital linen is administered at local level. National health service trusts are required to have risk management protocols with regard to effective laundry practice.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has for requiring nurses and medical staff to keep their uniforms at work to be laundered after each use rather than travelling to work in uniform. [126417]

Mr. Hutton: Provision and laundering of staff uniforms is a matter for individual trusts to determine. There are no proposals to require staff to leave uniforms at work for trusts to launder.

Maternity Care

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many full-time equivalent midwives were employed in the NHS in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [126997]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Between 2000 and 2002, there has been an increase of 460 whole-time equivalent midwives as training numbers have increased and recruitment and retention strategies have been implemented.

NHS midwives as at 30 September each year

	Whole-time equivalents
1998	18,168
1999	17,876
2000	17,662
2001	18,048
2002	18,119

Source:
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce census

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanisms the NHS has for offering homebirth and natural birthing opportunities to expectant mothers. [126998]

Dr. Ladyman: The national health service provides a variety of types of care for women during pregnancy and childbirth, including home birth and natural birthing opportunities. The Department of Health advocates local decision making in designing appropriate, effective services that fit in with the ethos of woman-centred care. It is inevitable that the requirements of women will vary in different parts of the country and this is why it is so important that decisions about service provision are made at a local level.

The Department of Health is currently developing the children's national service framework (NSF) which includes a maternity module. The NSF will focus on extending maternity choices, so that women in all parts of the country have a greater choice in the place and type of birth.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the numbers of consultant obstetricians in labour units in the NHS; what guidelines he has issued on the *(a)* optimum and *(b)* minimum coverage of labour units by consultant obstetricians; and what the average number of consultant obstetricians in labour units in (i) England and (ii) each strategic health authority is. [124224]

Dr. Ladyman: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Department of Health officials have received a number of representations on numbers of consultants in obstetrics and gynaecology on labour units, in particular, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecology.

These include contributions to the report to the children task force from the maternity and neonatal workforce group, annual speciality review meetings and the maternity module of the children's national service framework.

The Department of Health does not issue professional guidance on labour ward cover. This is a matter for the professional bodies and for local determination according to a units circumstances and requirements.

We do not collect figures on the number of consultant obstetricians in labour units in England. The number of consultants with an obstetric and gynaecology speciality in each strategic health authority is shown in the table.

Hospital medical consultants with an obstetrics and gynaecology speciality by strategic health authority—as at 30 September 2002—(headcount)

		Numbers
	England	1,308
Q01	Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire	57
Q02	Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire	31
Q03	Essex	27
Q04	North West London	70
Q05	North Central London	49
Q06	North East London	63
Q07	South East London	52
Q08	South West London	36
Q09	Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	47
Q10	County Durham and Tees Valley	38
Q11	North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire	36
Q12	West Yorkshire	51
Q13	Cumbria and Lancashire	43
Q14	Greater Manchester	74
Q15	Cheshire and Merseyside	69
Q16	Thames Valley	48
Q17	Hampshire and Isle of Wight	40
Q18	Kent and Medway	43
Q19	Surrey and Sussex	61
Q20	Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire	53
Q21	South West Peninsula	30
Q22	Dorset and Somerset	24
Q23	South Yorkshire	47
Q24	Trent	55
Q25	Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland	38
Q26	Shropshire and Staffordshire	26
Q27	Birmingham and the Black Country	65
Q28	Coventry, Warwickshire, Hertfordshire and Worcestershire	35

Source:
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average number of babies born per bed per day in labour units in *(a)* England and *(b)* each strategic health authority has been in each year since 1997. [124227]

Dr. Ladyman: The information is not available in the format requested. Information about maternities and maternity beds in England is shown in the table. However, information by strategic health authority is not available.

Number of maternities and available maternity beds, England, 1997–98 to 2002–02

Year	*Maternities*	*Available maternity beds*	*Maternities per bed per day*
1997–98	585,000	10,781	0.15
1998–99	577,500	10,398	0.15
1999–2000	565,300	10,303	0.15
2000–01	549,600	9,767	0.15
2001–02	541,700	9,812	0.15

Source:
Maternities—DH SD3G; available beds—DH hospital activity statistics

Ministerial Visits

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* foreign and *(b)* UK visits he has made since 1 April; what the cost was to public funds of each trip; who he met; and what gifts were received. [126892]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Since 1 April 2003 the Secretary of State for Health has made the following foreign and UK visits.

My right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Milburn) made one foreign visit and seven UK visits:

Geneva
To attend the World Health Assembly Meeting. To meet various international Health Ministers. The cost of the visit was £668.00.

Pontefract General Infirmary
To meet Lord Geoffrey Lofthouse (Trust Chairman and former MP for Pontefract) and Roger French (Chief Executive) and staff.

St. George's Health Centre, Leeds
To meet staff.

Westminster Eye Ward, Countess of Chester Health Park
To meet the Chair and Chief Executive, Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Trust), Christine Russell MP, Cllr Bob Rudd.

Jubilee Day Surgery Centre, Chester
Official opening and to meet staff and Christine Russell MP, Cllr Bob Rudd.

West Chester Hospital
Laying of sod at the site of the new West Chester Hospital to meet Christine Russell MP, Cllr Bob Rudd.

University College Hospital, London
To meet the Chairman, Chief Executive, Medical Director, Consultant (Radiology), General Manager (Imaging), Superintendent Radiographer, Director of Cancer Services, General Manager, Cancer Services, Director of Services North London Cancer Network.

Wansbeck Hospital
Opening the new £20 million Phase 2 at Wansbeck Hospital and to meet the Chief Executive, the Chairman, the Chairman of the Northumberland Tyne and Wear Strategic Health Authority, the Chief Executive of the Northumberland Tyne and Wear Strategic Health Authority, the Chief Executive and the Chairman of the Northumberland PCT, the Deputy Chief Executive and a Gleesons/Canmore representative.

Since 13 June 2003 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health (Dr. John Reid) made no foreign visits and three UK visits.

Soho Walk-in Centre
To meet the Centre Manager and staff.

Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital
To meet a Genetics Nurse, a Dietician, and Cardiac Physiotherapist and medical staff.

Bromley by Bow Healthy Living Centre
To meet the Director of the Bromley by Bow Centre, the Chief Executive of the Strategic Health Authority and the GP.

The Secretary of State received a gift of 'Sunbather' in green soapstone by Paula Haughney at Bromley. He has received no other gifts.

Neurology Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 4 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 541W, on neurological registrars, how many senior house officers specialising in neurology there were in each region in each year. [126343]

Mr. Hutton: The number of senior house officers (SHOs) within neurology, in each national health service region, in 1997, 1998 and 2001 is shown in table 1.

In 1998, the Department validated data returns against information held by the Royal Colleges which resulted in the reclassification of some specialities. Therefore, the decrease shown in SHO neurology numbers in 1998 is largely an issue of reclassification rather than a reduction.

From 2002, data are no longer collected by regional office. Table 2 contains data by strategic health authority.

Table 1: Hospital medical senior house officers in the neurology specialty by region

As at 30 September	*1997*	*1998*	*2001*
England	141	119	122
Northern and Yorkshire	25	22	19
Trent	11	7	10
West Midlands	11	12	9
North West	14	14	14
Eastern	8	11	11
London	44	34	34
South East	21	13	14
South Western	7	6	11

Source:
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census.

Table 2: Hospital medical senior house officers in the neurology specialty by strategic health authority—2002

As at 30 September	*Numbers (headcount)*
England	123
Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire	3
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire	1
Birmingham and the Black Country	7
Cheshire and Merseyside	4
County Durham and Tees Valley	1
Coventry, Warwickshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire	0
Cumbria and Lancashire	3
Dorset and Somerset	0
Essex	1
Greater Manchester	6
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	3
Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland	4
Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire	8
North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire	2
North Central London	12
North East London	6
North West London	7
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	7
Shropshire and Staffordshire	2
South East London	10
South West London	3
South West Peninsula	0
South Yorkshire	8
Surrey and Sussex	2

Table 2: Hospital medical senior house officers in the neurology specialty by strategic health authority—2002

As at 30 September	Numbers (headcount)
Thames Valley	10
Trent	1
West Yorkshire	12

Source:
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census.

NHS Pay

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* nurses and *(b)* doctors in NHS hospitals were paid on average in 1997; and what they are paid now. [112839]

Mr. Hutton: The estimated average amounts per whole-time equivalent paid to nurses and doctors in national health service hospitals in 1997, and the latest estimates, are given in the following table.

£

	1997	2002
Qualified nurses	18,900	24,400
Doctors in NHS hospitals	40,400	54,500

Source:
Department of Health's August 1997 and 2000 NHS staff earnings survey.

The information in this answer relates to England only. Pay for NHS staff in Scotland and Wales is a matter for the devolved Administrations. While the institutions in Northern Ireland are dissolved, responsibility rests with Ministers in Northern Ireland.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the National Institute for Clinical Excellence's research into the use of riluzole for the treatment of motor neurone disease. [127028]

Dr. Ladyman: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) issued guidance in January 2001 on the use of riluzole in the treatment of motor neurone disease. This guidance is due to be reviewed in 2004. Further details are available on NICE's website at www.nice.org.uk.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the National Institute for Clinical Excellence's research into the diagnosis, management and treatment of Parkinson's disease in primary and secondary care. [127029]

Dr. Ladyman: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) is currently preparing a guideline on the diagnosis, management and treatment of Parkinson's disease in primary and secondary care. The anticipated publication date for the guideline is July 2005. Further details are available from NICE's website at www.nice.org.uk

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the National Institute for Clinical Excellence's research into the use of *(a)* lamotrigine, *(b)* vigabatrin, *(c)* gabapentin, *(d)* oxcarbazepine, *(e)* topiramate and *(f)* tiagabine for the treatment of epilepsy in (i) children and (ii) adults. [127030]

Dr. Ladyman: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) is carrying out appraisals of these drugs and expects to publish its guidance in November 2003. Full details are on NICE's website at www.nice.org.uk.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the National Institute for Clinical Excellence's research into the use of *(a)* memantine, *(b)* donepezil, *(c)* rivastigmine and *(d)* galantamine for the treatment of Alzheimer's disease. [127031]

Dr. Ladyman: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) issued guidance on the use of donepezil, rivastigmine and galantamine for the treatment of mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease in January 2001. It will be conducting a review of its guidance and expects to publish revised guidance in May 2005. Memantine (for the treatment of moderate to severe Alzheimer's disease) is currently being appraised by NICE. The anticipated publication date of guidance is also May 2005. Full details are available on the website for NICE at www.nice.org.uk.

Radiographers

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole time equivalent radiographers were working in the NHS in each of the last five years. [126993]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Sine 1998, the number of whole-time equivalent radiographers employed in the national health service has increased by 670, or 7 per cent.

Whole-time equivalents

As at 30 September each year	All radiographers	Diagnostic	Therapeutic
1998	10,193	8,860	1,333
1999	10,368	9,009	1,358
2000	10,478	9,169	1,309
2001	10,655	9,264	1,391
2002	10,863	9,489	1,374

Source:
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census

Rough Sleepers

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of health and improvement modernisation plans set out a policy on rough sleepers. [125850]

Mr. Hutton: Primary care trusts (PCTs) are now the lead organisation responsible for planning health care services that better meet local needs. PCTs have the key role, through local delivery plans (LDPs), in representing the national health service in broader local planning arrangements around health improvement and partnerships with key local agencies. PCTs have the freedom to determine locally how they best address issues such as rough sleeping through their LDPs. As it is a matter for local decision making, the Department would not prescribe or monitor centrally how PCTs have locally addressed this particular issue.

Smallpox and TB Vaccines

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions his Department has had with companies involved in the bidding process for contracts to supply *(a)* smallpox vaccines and *(b)* TB vaccines; and whether Dr. Paul Drayson was referred to. [109092]

Mr. Hutton: The Department awarded a contract for the supply of smallpox vaccine on 11 April 2002. Prior to this, officials from the Department met with Powderject on 22 January 2002 as part of confidential discussions held with the five major pharmaceutical companies known to have smallpox vaccine manufacturing capability.

The meeting was to inform the companies of our requirements for smallpox vaccine and to find out whether the company was in a position to meet our requirements and if so, to invite them to submit their written proposals for vaccine supply. Since the award of the contract to Powderject, there were regular ad hoc meetings between officials from the Department and the Ministry of Defence with Powderject to resolve matters of detail concerning labelling and packaging and delivery of the vaccine. As all discussions with the company were confidential, the names of those present can not be revealed in accordance with normal policy.

The Department will shortly be completing a second tranche of smallpox procurement. On 10 January 2003, officials from the Department met with representatives of all companies who had expressed an interest in bidding for the contract. An adjudication meeting was held on 12 May 2003 with representatives of two companies whose bids met the criteria for supply. On 30 July, the Government announced its intention to award the contract to Aventis Pasteur MSD. It is regarded as best practice, for reasons of commercial confidentiality, that the names of those unsuccessful companies who submitted bids are not revealed.

The Department has had no discussions with companies involved in the bidding process for BCG and Tuberculin PPD. These contract negotiations are dealt with by the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency on behalf of the Department.

Waiting Times

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were waiting *(a)* 0–4 weeks, *(b)* 4–13 weeks, *(c)* 13–17 weeks, *(d)* 17–21 weeks, *(e)* 21–26 weeks and *(f)* more than 26 weeks from the receipt of a GP written referral request to a first specialty outpatient attendance in (i) pain management and (ii) ophthalmology in each quarter since Quarter 1 of 1996–97 for each NHS trust and primary care trust and for England as a whole. [127025]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is being held in the Library. Patients still waiting over 26 weeks for first consultant outpatient appointment following general practitioner written referral have reduced from end of quarter 1 1996–97 for the ophthalmology specialty from 4,845 to 3 in quarter 4 2002–03. Prior to quarter 1 1997–98 the pain management specialty was a sub-set of the anaesthetic specialty. For the pain management specialty, the reduction in patients still waiting over 26 weeks was 479 in quarter 1 1997–98 to 0 in quarter 4 2002–03.

Monday 8 September 2003

CABINET OFFICE

Government E-services

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office whether his additional duties as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster encompass the Government's UK online agenda responsibilities. [127080]

Mr. Alexander: As Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster I am responsible to the Sovereign for the administration of the Duchy.

Among other wider Cabinet Office responsibilities, I am responsible for leading and supporting the e-transformation in government of which UK online is part. This falls to me in my role as Minister for the Cabinet Office with oversight of the Office of the e-Envoy and not in my role as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what action he is taking to make more on-line Government services available to people over 65. [128200]

Mr. Alexander: Ensuring high levels of take-up of online services by all users is an essential part of the e-government strategy. The Government is acting upon the recommendations of the National Audit Office report, "Progress in making e-services accessible to all—access and use by older people" to ensure that people over 65 are encouraged to take advantage of online services.

This report highlights that older people are more likely to use online services when they can access them in places they would normally visit, such as libraries and community centres. The Government has established over 6,000 UK online centres in these locations where people can access the internet for free or at low cost with support to help them do so.

The report also mentions that one factor preventing older people from using the internet, especially among those who have never used computers, is the feeling that it is of no relevance to them. One of the challenges for government is to demonstrate the benefits of the internet to older people. This we have done during the "Get Started" campaign which ran throughout May and June. The retirement pension is just one of the government services regularly used by older people that we are prioritising as part of our e-government programme.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what assessment he has made of the recommendations made by the Comptroller and Auditor General in the February report on offering Government services electronically to older people. [128195]

Mr. Alexander: The National Audit Office report provided a valuable means of focusing attention on

what needs to be done to increase the numbers of older people in the UK accessing and benefiting from the internet and electronic services. My officials in the Office of the e-Envoy are working closely with colleagues at the Department for Education and Skills to look at implementing the report's recommendations.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make a statement on progress made in ensuring that all Government services are available on-line by 2005. [128197]

Mr. Alexander: We are committed to ensuring that central government services are made available electronically by 2005 and that key services achieve high levels of use. The latest Electronic Service Delivery survey shows that 63 per cent. of services were e-enabled at the end of 2002 and departments have forecast that they are on track for the 2005 target.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what assessment he has made of the number of users in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* other countries who access Government services through the internet. [128198]

Mr. Alexander: The Office for National Statistics publishes survey results on a quarterly basis of e-government use within the UK. The Office of the e-Envoy published an analysis of international comparisons of e-government use in the 2002 benchmarking study The World's Most Effective Policies for the e-Economy, a copy of which is held in the House Library.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what action he is taking to encourage more people to access Government services through the internet. [128199]

Mr. Alexander: The Government's target of getting all e-Government services online by 2005 has been enhanced to include the commitment "with key services achieving high levels of use". In order to achieve this, the Office of the e-Envoy is currently developing a methodology, definitions and targets for each of the key services. In order to encourage further take-up, the Office of the e-Envoy is working with Departments to develop strategies for ensuring maximum use of key services.

Levels of internet access continue to rise, with 54 per cent. of adults now regular internet users. 47 per cent. of adults using internet in the last 12 months had accessed a government or public authority website (ONS, July 2003). In May we launched the "Get Started" campaign to promote the benefits of the internet to key groups such as the elderly, those with disabilities and the unemployed.

It is vital that government websites are as accessible and as easy to use as possible. A report, the "Quality Framework for UK Government Website Design", was published on 24 July; it sets out clear guidance for government web managers to ensure they incorporate users' needs in their web design process. The report is available on the Office of the e-Envoy's website (http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/Resources/WebGuidelines/fs/en).

SCOTLAND

Caledonian MacBrayne

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what assessment he has made of the part played by Caledonian MacBrayne in supporting island economies; [128021]

(2) when he last met the Secretary of State for Transport to discuss the future of Caledonian MacBrayne ferries; [128022]

(3) how much grant was provided to Caledonian MacBrayne in each of the last six years; [128027]

(4) what plans he has to meet employee representatives to discuss the future of Caledonian MacBrayne. [128035]

Mrs. McGuire: Matters affecting the internal Scottish ferry services operated by Caledonian MacBrayne are devolved to the Scottish Parliament and fall within the responsibility of Scottish Ministers.

Campbeltown-Ballycastle Ferry

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent assessment has been made of the effectiveness of Government support for the Campbeltown to Ballycastle ferry service. [127869]

Mrs. McGuire: Assistance for the ferry service between Campbeltown and Ballycastle is a matter for the Scottish Executive.

Electoral Boundaries

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received from the Scottish Executive on difficulties arising out of non-coterminous electoral boundaries in Scotland. [128012]

Mrs. McGuire: No representations have been received recently from the Scottish Executive on non-coterminous constituency boundaries. However, the Executive's response in March 2002 to the Scotland Office's consultation on the size of the Scottish Parliament included its views on the possible difficulties that might arise from having different constituency boundaries between Westminster and Holyrood. These are recorded in the summary of the consultation responses which was placed in the Library of the House on 18 December 2002.

Regional Statistics

Mr. Alex Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on regional gross value added statistics. [127201]

Mrs. McGuire: The regional gross value added statistics published by the Office for National Statistics provide a useful measure of economic activity across the countries and regions of the UK.

Robin Rigg Wind Farm

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he was consulted by the Scottish Executive before their decision not to grant a public inquiry on the Robin Rigg wind farm. [127862]

Mrs. McGuire: My right. hon. Friend was not consulted by the Scottish Executive on this matter. The functions under the Electricity Act 1989 relating to the determination of applications for consent under section 36 of that Act, including those concerning a Public Local Inquiry, were executively devolved to the Scottish Ministers in 1999 by S.I. 1999/1750.

Rosyth Ferry Terminal

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment has been made of the impact of the Rosyth ferry terminal traffic on the economies of *(a)* Fife and *(b)* Scotland. [128023]

Mrs. McGuire: The Rosyth to Zeebrugge ferry service is Scotland's only direct, daily, passenger and vehicle ferry service to mainland Europe and provides new transport and communication opportunities for business, tourism and freight operations. Assessing the economic impact of the ferry service for Fife and Scotland as a whole is a matter for Scottish Ministers.

Scotland Act

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to amend the Scotland Act 1998 in respect of representation by elected members; and if he will make a statement. [126512]

Mrs. McGuire: Section 86 of the Scotland Act 1998 sets out in detail how the reduction in the number of hon. Members representing Scottish constituencies in this House is to be made. The Government has no plans to amend these arrangements.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND

Engagements

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Advocate-General how many official Scotland Office engagements she has undertaken in the last 12 months. [128026]

The Advocate-General for Scotland: I have undertaken a number of Scotland Office official engagements over the last 12 months.

PRIME MINISTER

Boundary Commission for Scotland

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Prime Minister whether it is his policy that the fifth periodic review of the Boundary Commission for Scotland should be effected before the next general election. [128014]

The Prime Minister: Implementing the Boundary Commission for Scotland's recommendations on Scottish parliamentary constituencies before the next general election will depend on when the Commission reports and on the date of that election. The Government is required, as soon as may be after the Commission has submitted its report, to lay this before Parliament, together with a draft Order in Council giving effect, with or without modifications, to the report's recommendations.

Chechnya

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Prime Minister whether he raised the issue of unauthorised killings by Russians in Chechnya when he met President Putin in June. [127911]

The Prime Minister: I discussed the situation in Chechnya with President Putin, although this specific issue was not raised.

Downing Street Staff (Security Clearance)

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 16 July to the hon. Member for New Forest, East ref. 126089, to what level of clearance Downing Street officials, whose roles may include seeing intelligence material, are vetted. [127909]

The Prime Minister: All staff are subject to the necessary level of security vetting.

European Constitution

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish the text of the amendments to the draft European Union Constitution which are sought by the United Kingdom. [125002]

Mr. MacShane: I have been asked to reply.

The Government's proposed amendments to the Convention's draft Constitutional Treaty are available on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website (www.fco.gov.uk).

Iraq

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the support expressed by Chechen leader Aslam Maskhadov for the US and UK decision to invade Iraq. [127910]

The Prime Minister: We have noted Mr. Maskhadov's statement.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 15 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 173W, on Iraq, what percentage of the total volume of the second dossier he estimates was taken from the three internet articles by Ibrahim al-Marishi, Sean Boyne and Ken Gause. [127912]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave on 15 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 173–74W. Sections one and three of the document were based on intelligence material, as were elements of section two which were detailed in Alastair Campbell's supplementary memorandum to the FAC, dated 24 June, Foreign Affairs Committee Report HC 813–II, paragraphs 3 and 6, pages EV10 to 11.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library the full text of the legal opinion of the Attorney-General in relation to the war in Iraq. [128266]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) on 22 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 914–15W.

Israel

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the recent detention of John Morgan from West Belfast in Israel. [127966]

The Prime Minister: Mr. Sean O'Muireagain (also known as John Morgan) was arrested in the West Bank on 12 July 2003 and questioned by Israeli security authorities on suspicion of being connected with terrorist activities. The Israeli authorities found no evidence to implicate Mr. O'Muireagain in terrorist activities. He was released on 16 July 2003 and flew back to the UK later the same day. The FCO were in regular contact with Mr. O'Muireagain's family throughout.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Age Discrimination

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on age discrimination. [127843]

Malcolm Wicks: In June 1999, the Government published the Code of Practice on Age Diversity. This was issued to employers with the aim of reducing age discrimination in the work place. A programme of research to evaluate the impact of the Code was carried out between March 1999 and December 2000. A full report of the findings from the evaluation was published by my Department in December 2001 entitled "Evaluation of the Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment: Report of Research Findings". A copy is available in the Library.

Autism Spectrum Disorders

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will amend the eligibility criteria for disability benefits for people with autism spectrum disorders. [127854]

Maria Eagle: No. People with autism spectrum disorders are entitled to disability living allowance and attendance allowance on the same basis as anyone else with a severe disability. They will qualify if they meet the entitlement conditions for the benefit, which depend on the effects that severe physical or mental disability have on a person's need for personal care and/or their ability to walk and not on particular disabilities or diagnoses.

The numbers of people receiving the benefits as a result of the effects of autism spectrum disorders are not recorded separately, but are included in the more general category of those with 'learning difficulties'. As at February 2003, over 239,000 people whose main disabling condition is recorded as learning difficulties were receiving disability living allowance.

Child Support (Consolatory Payments)

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many Child Support Agency cases have been referred for consideration for consolatory payments in the last year, broken down by month; how many payments have been accepted and made in the last year, broken down by month; what has been the overall cost of such payments; and if he will make a statement. [125933]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mr. Doug Smith, dated September 2003:

The Secretary of State in replying to your recent Parliamentary question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You ask how many Child Support Agency cases have been referred for consideration for consolatory payments in the last year broken down by month; how many payments have been accepted and made in the last year broken down by month; and what has been the overall cost of such payments; and if he will make a statement.

It is not possible to determine the number of referrals made for consideration of consolatory payments, but I can tell you the number of consolatory payments made in 2002/03:

April	1,012
May	873
June	630
July	853
August	757
September	506
October	673
November	648
December	518
January	752
February	593
March	628
Total	8,443

The overall cost of consolatory payments in 2002/03 was £660,615.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 16 June 2003 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. M. Willingham. [127745]

Maria Eagle: I replied to my right hon. Friend on 23 July 2003.

Employers' Liability Compulsory Insurance

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the progress of the work being carried out by his Department on employers' liability compulsory insurance. [127798]

Mr. Browne: The Department published the First Stage Report of its review of Employers' Liability Compulsory Insurance (ELCI) on 3 June 2003. The report identified a number of significant areas for further action. These include working with interested parties to help develop the basis for more risk-related premiums; working with stakeholders to maximise the benefits for EL of current initiatives within the legal system; engaging with business, industry and other stakeholders to further evaluate the evidence for separating long-term occupational disease risks from

accident risks; making rehabilitation play a more central role in the UK workers' compensation system; and reforming the arrangements for enforcement of EL.

We will report in autumn on the progress that has been made and any further steps we intend to take.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate the Department has made of the eligibility for receipt of the minimum income guarantee among the elderly in the UK; and what his latest estimate is of the take-up rate. [127396]

Malcolm Wicks: The latest information is contained in the publication, "Income Related Benefits: Estimates of Take Up in 2000–01". A copy is held in the Library.

Pension Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 10 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 979W, on pension credit, whether a pensioner who purchases an annuity after making a successful claim for pension credit will have to report that annuity purchase to the Department. [127231]

Malcolm Wicks: On applying for pension credit from age 65, pensioners are asked about any changes they expect to their pension income over the next 12 months. If additional income will become available within the next 12 months, but the amount is not yet known, their award will be fixed for reassessment at that date. If a change is expected in more than 12 months, their assessment will be fixed for the full five-year period allowed, during which any increases in pension income will be ignored. People who are entitled to any pension income which they have not yet drawn (including for instance an annuity from a personal pension) are treated as having that income available to them.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much he estimates the average pension credit recipient will receive in pension credit payments per year. [127170]

Malcolm Wicks: The average Pension Credit each recipient is estimated to receive per year is £2,250.

Notes

1 The estimates were arrived at by dividing forecast expenditure on Pension Credit y the forecast caseload and rounding to the nearest £50.

2 Estimates relate to 2004–05, the first full year of Pension Credit and are in cash terms.

3 All figures are based on published forecasts from Budget 2003, and are consistent with the DWP Departmental Report 2003.

4 These estimates are based on planning assumptions of Pension Credit and should be treated with caution.

Tax Credit Claims Forms

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the average time taken to complete claim form TC 600; and what useability tests his Department has undertaken for completing the form. [124311]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

The time taken to complete a Tax Credits claim form will depend on the particular circumstances of the claimant. Claims for which no further information is required, and which pass the various pre award checks, go through the stages of calculating the award quickly and will normally be in payment within a few days.

The form was subjected to rigorous usability testing before being introduced. This testing involved a sample number of existing Tax Credit recipients. The form was subjected to rigorous usability testing before being introduced. This testing involved a sample number of existing Tax Credit recipients.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Awards for All (Scotland)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she last received representations from the Scottish Executive on the operation of Awards for All in Scotland; and if she will make a statement. [128002]

Estelle Morris: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received no representations from the Scottish Executive specifically on the operation of Awards for All in Scotland. However, there was correspondence in June 2003, before we published the National Lottery Funding Decision Document. That document proposes to increase the upper grant limit of Awards for All in England. We believe that given the local community focus of Awards for All, any changes to the programme in other parts of the United Kingdom should be considered separately within Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

BBC Freeview

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the proportion of the population of *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Scotland who are unable to receive BBC Freeview services. [128018]

Estelle Morris: I understand from the BBC that 73.1 per cent. of the UK households can now receive Freeview's services via digital terrestrial television. In Scotland, this figure is higher at 80.5 per cent. of households due to the nature of population distribution. Further information can be found on the website: www.freeview.co.uk.

Channels 4 and 5

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the proportion of the UK population who are able to receive *(a)* Channel 4 and *(b)* Channel 5. [128019]

Estelle Morris: I understand from the ITC that Channel 4 analogue services reach over 99.4 per cent. of the UK population and analogue Five coverage reaches about 80 per cent. of the UK population. Channel 4 and Five services are available across the whole UK via digital satellite and are also delivered by digital

terrestrial television and cable. Further information on digital television coverage can be found on the website: www.dtg.org.uk.

Community Fund

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to simplify the system of applying for Community Fund grants. [128000]

Estelle Morris: We intend to make it easier for all potential applicants to apply for Lottery funding. The Decision Document on Lottery funding, which DCMS published earlier this month, outlined ways in which the application process could be simplified for all Lottery distributors. Our proposals include making the new community distributor the first port of call for all applicants seeking advice or guidance, expanding the Awards for All scheme and piloting a new micro grants programme, improved turnaround times for smaller grants, and greater standardisation of Lottery application forms, customer care charters and complaints procedures across all distributors.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has for redeployment of members of her Department out of London and the South East. [125363]

Mr. Caborn: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary (John Healey) on 11 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 1021W.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* press officers, *(c)* civil servants, *(d)* advisers to civil servants and *(e)* permanent staff were working for her Department in each year since 1996. [126480]

Mr. Caborn: I refer the hon. Member to Table C of the annual publication 'Civil Service Statistics' which provides staff numbers, including press officers, in each department and agency from 1995 to 2002, copies of which are available in the Libraries of both Houses.

The number of special advisers working in the department since 1996 are set out in the following table:

Year	[1]*Number*
1996	2
1997	2
1998	3
1999	3
2000	2
2001	4
2002	2
2003	2

[1] Total of 10 Special Advisers (full-time equivalents)

In addition, there have also been two Ministerial Sports Advisers, two Ministerial Tourism Advisers and two Ministerial Music Advisers since 1996.

Environmental Impact

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many of the Department's policies have been screened for their environmental impact since June 2001; how many environmental appraisals have been conducted, and on what policy issues; and what information has been published about these screenings and appraisals. [124718]

Estelle Morris: Environmental impact screening is undertaken as an integral part of the policy making process and separate records are not maintained.

In respect of legislation, DCMS complies with guidelines by compiling Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) for proposals that have an impact on business, charities and the voluntary sector. RIAs include details of the obvious costs, risks and benefits of the proposal but also the wider economic, social and environmental impacts. There is no separate section within an RIA specifically for environmental impacts, but where a proposal has an impact on the environment, it should be set out in the RIA. The impact will usually be included in the analysis of the costs and benefits of the proposal, or may be covered in the unintended consequences section.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the EU directives implemented by the Department since 8 June 2001. [126599]

Mr. Caborn: No EU directives have been implemented by the Department since 8 June 2001. I have nothing to add to my previous answers of 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 200–01W, and 29 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 336W.

National Lottery

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the objective will be of the good cause to be helped by the new lottery fund which will supersede the Community Fund and the New Opportunities Fund; and what types of organisations are planned to be its principal beneficiaries. [127991]

Estelle Morris: The Department's Decision Document on Lottery funding, published earlier this month, confirmed our intention to create a new community distributor, which will take on the functions of both the Community Fund and New Opportunities Fund. It is proposed that the new distributor will act as a fund for transformation, supporting projects to revitalise and regenerate communities, particularly those at greatest disadvantage, across the UK. As with the two existing distributors, funding will be available to a wide range of organisations, with the focus being on projects which transform communities.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what interim arrangements she intends to put in place for the creation of the new lottery fund which will supersede the Community Fund and the New Opportunities Fund. [127992]

Estelle Morris: The Department's decision Document on Lottery funding, published earlier this month, confirmed our intention to create a new community distributor, which will take on the functions of both the Community Fund and New Opportunities Fund.

Legislation will be needed fully to establish the new distributor. The two bodies have welcomed the proposal, and in the interim period have agreed to work together to look at bringing together their administrative and operational functions over the coming months.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the total balance held by each of the Lottery distributors was on 17 July; and if she will make a statement. [127997]

Estelle Morris: The information requested is shown in the table.

Distributor	*Balance (£)*
Heritage Lottery Fund	982,700,272.70
Community Fund	256,374,661.71
Millennium Commission	198,814,261.94
New Opportunities Fund	851,399,441.55
Arts Council of England	234,702,785.11
Arts Council of Scotland	47,396,474.64
Arts Council of Wales	29,444,506.67
Arts Council of Northern Ireland	34,505,269.50
Film Council	71,454,508.56
Scottish Screen	914,754.59
Sport England	246,332,374.13
Sport Scotland	75,419,089.41
Sports Council of Wales	27,875,487.54
Sports Council of Northern Ireland	22,326,010.34
UK Sport	928,373.01
Total	3,080,588,271.40

The total balance as at the end of June 2003 was the lowest month end balance since August 1997. All of this money has been committed to projects by distributors.

This Department recently published the National Lottery Funding Decision Document, which sets out a number of proposals aimed at reducing further the balances held by distributors. These include issuing guidance on balance management to distributors and revising the Financial Directions distributors operate under in order to speed up the funding of smaller, low risk projects. There are also a number of other proposals which would require legislation. I have placed copies of the document in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to review the system whereby projects can only be supported by the National Lottery for a set period of time. [127998]

Estelle Morris: There are no plans at present to review the period of support for projects by the lottery. Funding is generally time-limited and usually for a maximum of three years. Following extensive consultations last year, however, the Heritage Lottery Fund extended the length of the maximum period of support for their revenue projects from three to five years. There is an opportunity for grants to be renewed to allow projects to continue in operation but such follow-on funding is unlikely to be repeated indefinitely.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on her projected timescale for implementing common branding for National Lottery supported projects. [127999]

Estelle Morris: The Government recognise that the simplest way of establishing the necessary link between buying a Lottery ticket and funding a Lottery project is to use the same brand for both. The Lottery Distributors are currently working with Camelot to develop an appropriate design. It is expected that, from autumn 2004, this will be offered on a voluntary basis to projects which have received Lottery funding. The display of the logo will then become mandatory for most future Lottery awards. Over a longer timescale, other ways of using the crossed fingers logo throughout the whole distribution process will be explored.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many staff are employed on the Young People's Fund of the National Lottery. [128003]

Estelle Morris: The Department announced that we were considering setting up a Young People's Fund, and the Decision Document published earlier this month confirmed that this will be fully established within a year, with an initial budget of £200 million. It is envisaged that the Fund will initially be managed by the New Opportunities Fund, but we have not yet reached the stage where staff have been allocated specifically to run the scheme.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the proportion of National Lottery ticket sales made to *(a)* the young and *(b)* low income groups. [128004]

Estelle Morris: The available information is contained in an independent report on expenditure on the National Lottery (undertaken by Kerry Sproston) which was commissioned by the National Lottery Commission and published earlier this year. The report indicated that 17 per cent. of those aged 16–24 participated in the National Lottery, which was the lowest rate of participation for any age range. It also indicated that those on the lowest incomes (below £9,499 per annum) spent significantly less per week than those on incomes above this.

The report is available on the Commission's website www.natlotcom.gov.uk. I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the extent of *(a)* overlap and *(b)* duplication in the work of the (i) Community Fund and (ii) New Opportunities Fund. [128005]

Estelle Morris: The Department's Decision Document on Lottery funding, published earlier this month, confirmed our intention to create a new community distributor, which will take on the functions of both the Community Fund and New Opportunities Fund. We believe there is significant overlap between the work of the two distributors, particularly in supporting local communities and the voluntary sector. The new distributor is intended to take advantage of these synergies to transform the lives of local people and communities across the UK.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on her policy on designating a National Lottery Day. [128006]

Estelle Morris: The Government's proposal for a National Lottery Day is designed to provide an annual focus on the Lottery and its achievements, to let the public see what their lottery money goes to fund. It will be an opportunity for Lottery funded projects throughout the UK wherever possible to open their doors or otherwise celebrate the Lottery's contribution. The exact form the day will take is still to be finalised, but it will have a strong regional and local focus and major prizes will be available to players.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the options being considered for giving the devolved Administrations more influence over how National Lottery funding is allocated. [128008]

Estelle Morris: Our provisional view is that we should retain a UK structure for distribution but that the devolved Administrations should have more influence in setting specific priorities and strategies, taking account of the needs and wishes of local communities and service providers there. We will consider how this should be done, consulting with devolved Administrations before coming to a final decision.

OFCOM

Mr. Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the total salary budget is of OFCOM. [126316]

Estelle Morris: OFCOM are currently in the process of matching staff across from the existing regulators and, where necessarily, recruiting competitively. The pay bill for OFCOM in 2004–05 is projected, on a like for like basis, to be 5 per cent. below estimates of the combined salary bills for staff in the existing regulators.

Playing Fields

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether a formal review of the work of the Playing Fields Monitoring Group is planned. [128612]

Mr. Caborn: Not at present.

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the next set of playing field statistics will be published; and whether these will include comparative statistics for the last two years. [128611]

Mr. Caborn: The 2002–03 playing fields statistics will be published shortly. They will be published in a form similar to the 2001–02 figures published on 14 July 2003, which will allow for easy comparison.

Public Service Contracts

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many public service contracts were awarded by her Department *(a)* in total and *(b)* to small and medium enterprises in each year since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [127799]

Mr. Caborn: The public service contracts awarded since 1997 for the Department and its Agency, with the number of contracts awarded each year to SMEs are as follows.

Year	*Number of Contracts*			*SMEs*
Department for Culture, Media and Sport				
2003:	(a)	26	(b)	11
2002:	(a)	36	(b)	10
2001:	(a)	34	(b)	19
2000:	(a)	26	(b)	11
1999:	(a)	38	(b)	10
1998:	(a)	61	(b)	28
1997:	(a)	20	(b)	9
Royal Parks Agency				
2003:	(a)	7	(b)	5
2002:	(a)	14	(b)	7
2001:	(a)	4	(b)	2
2000:	(a)	12	(b)	4
1999:	(a)	7	(b)	1
1998:	(a)	10	(b)	5
1997:	(a)	10	(b)	7

Scottish Land Fund

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of future demand for grants from the Scottish Land Fund. [128001]

Estelle Morris: The New Opportunities Fund's Scottish Land Fund programme has generated strong interest among rural communities in Scotland in its first two years of operation. 129 applications have been made to the Scottish Land Fund to date, and 103 of these have been successful. The Fund currently receives around 20 eligible inquiries for funding per month and it estimates that this level of demand is likely to continue throughout the lifetime of the programme.

Secondment

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her Department's policy is on employing secondees from the private sector; how many secondees from the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sectors her Department employed in each year since 1997; from which companies and organisations they were seconded; at what level they were employed; and if she will make a statement. [127067]

Mr. Caborn: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport welcomes inward interchange from both the private and public sectors in our areas of responsibility. It enables us to build effective relationships through sharing and exchanging people, ideas and expertise and also fosters a more diverse environment in which we can draw on the experience and ideas of people from a wide range of backgrounds.

The Department has had no members of staff seconded from the private sector since May 1997.

The information in respect of secondees from the public sector is contained in the following table. Grades are given in the old unified grading system.

Date started	*Secondment from*	*Grade*
1997	NDPB	HEO/SEO
1998	Local authority	Principal
	Eastern Arts	SCS
	Arts Council for England	EO
	Arts Council for England	Principal

Date started	Secondment from	Grade
	PACE	HEO/SEO
	Comm. for Architecture and Built Environment	HEO/SEO
	English Sports Council	HEO/SEO
1999	Local Government Association	Principal
	National Heritage Memorial Fund	EO
	English Heritage	Principal
	National Heritage Memorial Fund	EO
	National Heritage Memorial Fund	EO
	National Heritage Memorial Fund	HEO/SEO
	National Heritage Memorial Fund	EO
	National Heritage Memorial Fund	HEO/SEO
2000	French Government	Principal
	London borough grants	Principal
	British Library	AA/AO
2001	Oxford city council	Principal
	British Library	EO
	Prince's Trust	HEO/SEO
	English Heritage	EO
	National Campaign for Arts	EO
	Comm. for Architecture and Built Environment	EO
2002	Sport England	Principal
	Comm. for Health Improvement	HEO/SEO
	British Museum	HEO/SEO
	Hackney council	HEO/SEO
	British Library	HEO/SEO
	Arts Council	EO
	National Lottery Commission	Principal
	British Museum	HEO/SEO
2003	English Heritage	EO
	English Heritage	HEO/SEO
	V & A Museum	EO
	Historic Manuscripts Commission	EO
	English Heritage	EO

Supporters Direct

Mr. Bailey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much money she has given to Supporters Direct to promote more democratic participation in the management of football clubs; and what related discussions she has had with the Football Association on the conversion of football clubs to mutual organisations. [127828]

Mr. Caborn: The Government launched Supporters Direct in 2000 to assist and advise supporters' trust groups to get involved in the responsible running of clubs. Most Premier and Football League clubs now have club trusts, and majority shareholdings are now held by supporters' representatives at three clubs. Supporters Direct received £250,000 a year in public funding for 2000–01 to 2002–03, and will receive core funding of £325,000 for 2003–04. These amounts were, and will be, "top-sliced" from the Football Foundation's income from the Reduction in Pool Betting Duty.

Supporters Direct has recently become an Industrial and Provident Society organised along mutual lines, and has suggested that professional football clubs could also benefit from the adoption of that status. I intend to discuss the issue with the football authorities once they have considered that suggestion in detail.

Tourism

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action the Government are taking to make the British tourism industry more competitive. [128574]

Mr. Caborn: The Government are encouraging competitiveness in the tourism industry by concentrating on measures that will encourage improvements to the quality of the product offered by individual tourism businesses through improvement in the skills base across the sector and encouraging effective investment in quality.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport works with other Whitehall Departments to ensure that issues such as planning policy reform meets the industry's needs and removes barriers to investment in the more productive types of tourism businesses. The Department is also represented on the board of the Best Practice Forum, which is part-funded by the Department for Trade and Industry. The Forum's Profit Through Productivity initiative provides business and enterprise support for the sector and aims to raise competitiveness and productivity across the sector.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what contribution in percentage terms was made by tourism in the South West to GDP in each financial year since 1997. [127820]

Mr. Caborn: Sub-national data of tourism's contribution to GDP are not generally available. South West Tourism is however currently producing a report on the economic value of tourism to the region which, I understand, is due to be published within the next month.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many tourists from overseas visited the South West in each financial year since 1997; and what percentage of overseas tourists to the UK this represented in each case. [127821]

Mr. Caborn: These data are shown in the table.

Financial year	Staying visits by overseas tourists to the South West (million)	As a percentage of all staying visits by overseas tourists to the UK (percentage)
1997–98	1.88	9.0
1998–99	2.04	9.3
1999–2000	1.97	8.4
2000–01	1.99	8.6
2001–02[1]	1.73	8.4

[1] Provisional

Source:
International Passenger Survey, National Statistics

TV Licences (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people have television licences in Northern Ireland. [126500]

Estelle Morris: The number of television licences in force in Northern Ireland as at 31 March 2003 was 546,000, excluding Accommodation for Residential Care composite form licences, records for which are not available for individual nations and regions.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many prosecutions there were in 2002 for failure to hold a television licence in Northern Ireland. [126501]

Estelle Morris: The number of prosecutions proceeded with by TV Licensing in Northern Ireland in 2002 for installation or use of television without a licence was 1,448.

World Sports Events

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to promote the United Kingdom as a venue for world sports events. [128235]

Mr. Caborn: The Government are in the process of developing a long-term major events strategy aimed at attracting further world class sporting events to the UK. This plan will enable us to identify suitable major events and will help us to develop effective strategies to improve our chances of bidding for these events successfully.

On 15 May 2003, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced the Government's decision to support a bid to host the Olympics and Paralympics in London in 2012. We will work enthusiastically with the other stakeholders, the Mayor of London, and the British Olympic Association, and with London 2012, to ensure that the bid to bring the Games to London and the United Kingdom is a winning one.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

No Win, No Fee Cases

Brian Cotter: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs if he will make a statement on the implications for the insurance industry of legal costs in relation to no win, no fee cases. [127804]

Mr. Lammy: Conditional Fee Agreements (CFAs), the most common type of 'no win no fee' agreements, were first introduced in 1995. In April 2000 success fees and after the event insurance premiums were made recoverable from the losing party to help redress the problem of the legal system being open only to people who were legally aided or who had adequate private means. The intention was to make it easier and more affordable for a wider range of people to enforce their rights. The reforms also provided defendants and their insurers with a fairer system by which to recover costs in successfully defended cases, whereas under Legal Aid, defendants were rarely entitled to recover costs from their legally aided opponent. The reforms provided increased deterrents to the bringing or defending of weak claims and stronger incentives for parties to settle cases early and cheaply because of the increased potential liability in costs.

It is not possible to say yet whether legal costs to insurers have increased directly as a result of the introduction of CFAs, recoverable success fees and ATE insurance premiums. Recent research by Fenn, Gray and Rickman (January 2003) for the Civil Justice Council on the cost of road traffic accident cases up to £15,000 in value found that data on costs and damages from around April 2002 onwards showed large fluctuations in the volume and duration of settled claims and could not be relied upon. However, the research did indicate that there seemed to be little difference between CFA and non-CFA claims with respect to agreed base costs and disbursements, and that success fees and ATE premiums remain a relatively small part of overall costs recovered from insurers.

The OFT commented in its recent fact finding study of the liability insurance market that it seemed unlikely the cost of individual claims has risen substantially as a result of the reforms and it was unclear whether they have had a significant impact on the frequency of claims. The OFT also said that while it had frequently been suggested the number of claims has risen because the reforms have made the claiming process easier and associated publicity has drawn more attention to the availability of compensation, the evidence for this was in fact largely anecdotal.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs if he will list the EU directives implemented by the Department and its predecessors since 8 June 2001. [126595]

Mr. Lammy: No Directives have been implemented by the Department for Constitutional Affairs or the former Lord Chancellor's Department in the period from 8 June 2001.

European Constitution

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what discussions he has had with *(a)* colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and *(b)* counterparts in the European Union about the legislative competencies covered by the draft European Constitution. [124784]

Mr. Lammy: As part of the normal Whitehall process, I and my officials have had regular correspondence with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to discuss all aspects of the Convention, including legislative competences. We have also had regular contact with Member and Accession States to discuss issues arising in the Convention. In line with exemptions 1 and 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, it is not the normal practice of Governments to disclose details about internal discussions, or information whose disclosure would harm the conduct of international relations or affairs.

Judicial Appointments

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what research he has commissioned into judicial appointments since Judicial Appointments: the European and North American end to possible implications for the United Kingdom, published in 1997. [127876]

Mr. Leslie: My Department has not commissioned further external research on this matter. However, in drafting the consultation paper on the new Judicial Appointments Commission, Department for Constitutional Affairs officials carried out research using a variety of sources, which included making inquiries via the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in order to make any necessary amendments to update the information contained in the 1997 papers.

Ministerial Visits

David Davis: To ask the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Constitutional Affairs if he will list the *(a)* foreign and *(b)* UK visits the Secretary of State has made since 1st April; what the cost was to public funds of each trip; who he met; and what gifts were received. [126893]

Mr. Leslie: The Government publishes the overall costs of all Ministerial overseas travel and a list of all visits overseas by Cabinet Ministers costing in excess of £500 on an annual basis. The list for the period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003 was published by the Prime Minister on 16 July 2003 *Official Report* column 327W. The next list for the period 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004 will be published at the end of the financial year.

In respect of gifts received, I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 14 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 482W.

With regards to domestic visits undertaken since 1 April 2003, the Lord Chancellor visited the Channel Islands at a cost of £1713.43 where he met members of the Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney and Sark Governments. He received a miniature milk churn, a tie, a paperweight and a book about Jersey.

He also visited Stratford-upon-Avon, at a cost of £288.00, where he met members of the Justices' Clerks' Society; Manchester, at a cost of £807.00, where he met members of the North West Law Centres Federation and the Solicitors Pro Bono Group; Hemsworth, at a costof £769.35, where he met various members of the public, and, the Isle of Man, at a cost of £551.32, where he met Her Majesty The Queen, HRH the Duke of Edinburgh and representatives of the Manx Government.

The Lord Chancellor also visited Belfast, at a cost of £311.05, where he met the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland; Edinburgh, at a cost of £358.00, where he met Lord Cullen and Lord Gill; Preston, at a cost of £513.30, where he met members of the Lancashire Local Criminal Justice Board; and, Newcastle, at a cost of £877.43, where he met members of the Northumbrian Local Criminal Justice Board.

Office for the Supervision of Solicitors

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs when he established the most recent review of the work of the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors. [127402]

Mr. Lammy: The Department continuously monitors the situation at the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors (OSS) closely. The most recent large-scale review of the work of the OSS was completed in July.

School Exclusions

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many unsuccessful judicial appeals against fixed term exclusions from secondary schools in the UK have proceeded to the High Court in the last five years; and what has been the legal cost of defending these cases. [116937]

Mr. Lammy: The information requested is not collected centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Taylor House

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many cases were dealt with at Taylor House on Monday 14 July. [127403]

Mr. Lammy: On Monday 14 July the Immigration Appellate Authority at Taylor House dealt with 90 oral substantive hearings of which 80 were asylum hearings and 10 were immigration hearings.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Affordable Housing

Mr. Gray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his plans are for affordable housing in the South West region; and whether he plans to increase investment in the region in the next comprehensive spending review. [126933]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister plans for affordable housing in the South West region were set out in "Sustainable Communities in the South West" (February 2003).

Funding for the provision of affordable housing in the South West has increased to £81 million for 2003–04, compared to just under £62 million for 2002–03. The programme is expected to deliver around 2,000 new affordable homes for the region in 2003–04.

From 2004–05 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is strengthening the role of the regions to ensure housing investment is targeted more effectively on local and regional investment priorities. Regional Housing Boards will advise on the best use of resources to support identified priorities in regional housing strategies.

Decisions on future investment plans cannot be taken in advance of the next spending review.

Communities Plan

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment his Department has made of the numbers of trained people needed in the building industry with reference to the Communities Plan; and if he will make a statement. [127763]

Keith Hill: The Communities Plan is clear that, in order to deliver my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister's vision of thriving, sustainable communities, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister needs to increase skills and capacity across the building industry.

Sir John Egan has therefore been asked to conduct a review of the skills and training that built-environment professionals required to deliver sustainable communities. He will consider what skills these groups need to work collaboratively and how any skills gap can best be bridged.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is also working with other Government Departments, agencies and the building industry to address the issues that are preventing young people from making construction their career of first choice.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the EU directives implemented by the Department since 8 June 2001. [126594]

Keith Hill: No European Union directives have been implemented by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister since its creation in May 2002. We are in the course of implementing Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects on the environment of certain plans and programmes (the "strategic environmental assessment Directive"), and Directive 2002/91/EC on the energy performance of buildings.

Green Burial Sites

Mr. Fabian Hamilton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to issue planning policy guidance to local authorities on green burial sites. [127182]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has no plans to issue specific policy guidance on 'green' burial sites.

Homeless Population

Linda Perham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent representations he has received on the *(a)* size and *(b)* condition of the homeless population. [127840]

Keith Hill: The most recent national estimate of the number of rough sleepers was derived from the 2002 Housing Investment Programme return from local authorities and shows a figure of 596—based on single night street counts and estimates.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's latest Statistical Release on statutory homelessness, from returns to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister by local authorities covering figures for England up to the end of March 2003, was published on 17 June.

Information summarised in Table 4, "Acceptances by category of Priority Need", shows that 129,320 households were accepted as homeless and in priority need by local authorities in England during 2002–03.

National and regional P1E-based figures—which include estimates for non-responding local authorities —appear in a quarterly Statistical Release, available in the Library of the House and via the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister website. An accompanying Supplementary Table presents key data at regional and local authority level. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister website link is http://www.housing.odpm.gov.uk/statistics/publicat/homelessness/index.htm#quarterly

In May the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister issued a consultation document on "Improving Standards of Accommodation for Homeless Households in Temporary Accommodation". This seeks views on proposals to give the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Bed and Breakfasts target full statutory force and to raise standards in all forms of temporary accommodation, particularly Bed and Breakfasts and to ensure that households in Bed and Breakfast hotels have access to health education and social services.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is working closely with the Department of Health to tackle the health inequalities that homeless people face as outlined in "Tackling Health Inequalities—A programme for Action".

Local Authority Staff

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many whole-time equivalent staff posts there were in each local authority in England in the last year for which figures are available. [127205]

Keith Hill: The Local Government Employment Survey 2002 conducted by the Employers Organisation for Local Government found that as of June 2002 there were 2,023,983 employee jobs in local authorities in England. I have placed a breakdown of this figure, showing the number of employees in each local authority in England as at June 2002, in the Library of the House.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Ministerial Visits

David Davis: To ask the Leader of the House if he will list the *(a)* foreign and *(b)* UK visits he has made since 1 April; what the cost was to public funds of each trip; whom he met; and what gifts were received. [126888]

Mr. Hain: As Leader of the House of Commons, I have not made any foreign or UK visits.

Written Ministerial Statements

Mr. Flook: To ask the Leader of the House how many written ministerial statements were made on each day during the 2002–03 Session. [127825]

Mr. Hain: From the start of the 2003–03 session until 17 July inclusive, 1,103 written ministerial statements have been made. This is, on average, 8 per sitting day.

WALES

Consultation Documents

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the consultation documents issued by the Wales Office in each of the last four years; what the cost was of producing each of these; how many documents were issued in each consultation; and how many responses were received in each consultation. [124568]

Mr. Touhig: The information is not readily available in the format requested. However since its creation in July 1999 the Wales Office has undertaken these consultations:

July 1999. Countryside and Rights of Way Bill. 81 responses.

December 1999. "Key issues and options for dealing with the problems caused by high hedges". 142 responses.

February 2000. "Greater Protection and Better Management of Common Land in England and Wales".

April 2000. "Amendments to the Government's Proposals for New Assisted Areas". 104 documents issued at no cost to the Wales Office and 18 representations received.

July 2000. "Proposals to change the Administration of the Housing Transfer Programme".

March 2001. "Government Proposal for the Reform of Business Tenancies" (jointly with Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions).

May 2002. "Draft NHS (Wales) Bill". 42 responses received.

June 2002. "Draft Mental Health Bill" (jointly with Department of Health).

June 2002. Timing of Rent Increases Regulatory Reform Order (jointly)

August 2002. "Draft Welsh Language Scheme for the Wales Office". Seven responses received.

2002. Regulatory Reform (Housing Management Agreements) Order. 51 responses received.

December 2002. "Ombudsmen's services in Wales: Time for Change?" Cost some £700. Some 700 copies issued and 50 responses received.

April 2003. "Draft Public Audit (Wales) Bill". Over 130 documents were issued. 15 responses were received.

July 2003. "Proposals for a Regulatory Reform Order to enable the Welsh Administration Ombudsman to undertake investigations as Commissioner for Local Administration in Wales".

NHS Treatment Delays

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Health and the Welsh Assembly concerning a definition for an unreasonable period of delay for treatment within the NHS, as phrased in the European Court of Justice ruling on treatment of patients abroad for patients from Wales. [109878]

Mr. Touhig: Treatment under the national health service is a matter in Wales for the National Assembly for Wales. The National Assembly for Wales is in regular contact with the Department of Health and the other UK health departments with regard to EU and other international health matters.

Race Relations

Angela Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made in his Department and non-departmental public bodies on implementing the requirements of the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000; and if he will publish the results of the monitoring required by the Act. [117467]

Mr. Hain: On this matter the Wales Office will implement the policies of the Department for Constitutional Affairs and I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to her on 1 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 782W, by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Constitutional Affairs.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his Department's regulatory impact assessment procedure; and how many RIAs have been reviewed in respect of the Department over the last year. [120744]

Mr. Touhig: A Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) is completed for all Wales Office regulatory proposals that have more than a negligible impact on businesses, charities or the voluntary sector.

No RIAs have been reviewed in respect of the Department in the last year.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions between 31 March 2002 and 31 March 2003 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [126675]

Mr. Hain: A Wales Office special adviser accompanied the Secretary of State to Spain in April 2002 and to France in July 2002. The costs of these trips by the special adviser was some £900 and some £700 respectively.

DEFENCE

Armed Forces (Logistic Support)

23. **Laura Moffatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent steps he has taken to enhance the cost-effectiveness of the logistic support to the armed forces. [128440]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (David Wright) on 8 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 18.

Royal Navy (Procurement)

24. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress on the procurement of new ships for the Royal Navy. [128441]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has embarked on the largest procurement programme of new ships for the Royal Navy in many years. There are currently some 10 projects at various stages of the procurement process. In the last three years, 15 new ships have been ordered, comprising six Type 45 destroyers, four Landing Ships Dock (Auxiliary), two survey vessels and three offshore patrol vessels. Future plans include the purchase of two new aircraft carriers, further ASTUTE class submarines and Type 45 destroyers, the future surface combatant and a number of support vessels.

Armed Forces (Register of Electors)

25. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department has taken to ensure that service men and women are aware of the requirement to renew their entry on the armed forces register of electors on an annual basis. [128442]

Mr. Caplin: The Ministry of Defence issues an annual Defence Council Instruction explaining voting arrangements in detail to all members of the armed forces. The last was issued on 31 January 2003.

Accommodation

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on expenditure on improvements and furnishings for the accommodation assigned to commanding officers; and if he will make a statement. [127114]

Mr. Caplin: The Defence Housing Executive (DHE)'s Key Targets require it to upgrade all of the core stock of Service Family Accommodation in Great Britain to Standard 1 for Condition, as funding allows. In this respect, no distinction is made between houses lived in by commanding officers and those lived in by any other service personnel and their families.

All Service personnel are entitled to furnished accommodation, with the furnishings provided being of a standard quality, regardless of the occupant's rank. The exceptions to this are very senior officers and officers who hold 'Command Appointments', where, due to their appointment, they are required to provide official entertainment, and so they are entitled to have an enhanced standard of furnishings in public areas. Maintenance of furnishings in all properties is carried out within funding constraints, and items are only replaced when they become unserviceable.

Armed Forces (Electoral Registration)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken to ensure that members of Her Majesty's armed forces are aware of the new requirement to register to vote on an annual basis. [127748]

Mr. Caplin: It is the individual responsibility of each member of the armed forces to register to vote annually. The Ministry of Defence issues an annual Defence Council Instruction explaining this requirement in detail. The last was issued on 31 January 2003.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what procedures have been put in place to facilitate annual entry on the Service register of electors for Servicemen and women who are overseas or on active Service. [127749]

Mr. Caplin: It is the individual responsibility of each member of the armed forces to register to vote annually. Service personnel overseas can choose to register as Service voters by means of a Service declaration, but they can then only vote by proxy. Those who choose to register on their local electoral register will be able to vote either by post or proxy if they are overseas or away from home during any election. Every effort is made by ships, units, and stations to give reasonable assistance to personnel overseas to register or vote in line with their individual electoral registration choice.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of HM armed forces were registered to vote on the Service register of electors in each of the last three years. [127754]

Mr. Caplin: Information on the number of registered Service voters is no longer held centrally. With the introduction of the new voting arrangements from 16 February 2001, those armed forces personnel that now choose to be Service registered voters register annually with the individual electoral registration officers of their choice.

Armed Forces (Community Support)

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to maintain a military presence in each area of the UK for the purposes of *(a)* recruitment and *(b)* community support. [127246]

Mr. Ingram: For the purposes of recruitment, a military presence is maintained in each area of the United Kingdom by way of the nationwide network of Armed Forces Careers Offices and satellite recruiting offices, totalling over 130 recruiting offices. In addition all three Services' Schools and Recruiting Presentation Teams, and Ethnic Minority Recruiting and Diversity Action Teams remain highly proactive; they will continue with their full programme of visits to schools, colleges, careers fairs and exhibitions, graduate fairs, regional and local communities, youth clubs, local events exhibitions and sporting events, the length and breadth of the country.

The armed forces provide, and will continue to provide, a broad range of support across the country to the community. This includes support through a wide range of youth and educational programmes, such as Skill Force and the Army Cadet Force Outreach programme.

The Department is committed to providing military assistance to civil authorities across the country in response to emergencies —for example, the response to foot and mouth disease. Operation FRESCO, Search and Rescue, and bomb disposal. Civil Contingencies Reaction Forces (CCRFs) are also being formed in each region to enhance our ability to support the police and other authorities during civil emergencies. The CCRFs are drawn from the Armed Forces Reserves for a number of reasons, including the fact that the Reserves 'footprint' across the country matches more closely the centres of population than the footprint of the Regular forces.

Body Armour

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether all front line unit personnel serving on Operation Telic had body armour before combat operations started; [126096]

(2) what kind of body armour was issued to soldiers serving with the Seventh Armoured Brigade in Basra; whether there was a reissue; and if he will make a statement. [112026]

Mr. Ingram: The majority of 7 Armoured Brigade had full combat armour at the start of combat operations. Body armour consists of a fabric cover and filler which confers a level of ballistic protection, and additional ceramic plates which provide an enhanced level of protection.

Over 36,000 full sets of Enhanced Combat Body Armour were delivered to theatre, enough for all personnel who needed it. However, not all units received ceramic plates due to supply difficulties within theatre. To minimise any operational risk that might have resulted, approximately 500 sets of Enhanced Combat Body Armour were reallocated to units assessed to have higher operational need.

Bosnia

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to further reduce the number of troops serving in Bosnia. [128537]

Mr. Ingram: The United Kingdom remains committed to safeguarding the security and stability of the Balkans, and continues to play a full role in the international community's objectives for the region.

No reductions are planned for the UK's contribution to the Stabilisation Force (SFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which currently stands at 1,400 troops. NATO is currently conducting its autumn Periodic Mission Review (PMR), which will consider the NATO force structure. The UK will review its force contribution to SFOR in the light of the PMR's recommendations.

Drinking Water Coolant

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what provision was made during *(a)* TELIC 1 and *(b)* TELIC 2 for the provision of drinking water coolant. [127107]

Mr. Ingram: Throughout the deployment and subsequent operations in both Kuwait and Iraq during Operations TELIC 1 and 2, bottled drinking water has been provided through the Ministry of Defence Food Supply Contractor. The quantities supplied have been consistent with the medical advice provided at the time. Sources of supply are subject to stringent quality controls to ensure that supplies meet, or exceed, EU quality standards. At static locations, where operational conditions allow, water is stored in refrigerated containers.

Drummore Harbour

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next plans to dredge Drummore harbour; and for what reason the timescale has been changed. [127849]

Mr. Caplin: The Ministry of Defence has no plans to dredge Drummore harbour.

Entertainment

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he has entertained Labour hon. Members at public expense in the last 12 months; and at what cost. [106397]

Mr. Caplin: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence hosted the annual Defence Council Reception to which Members of all parties with a defence interest were invited. A small reception was also held for all Members of the House of Commons Defence Select Committee. The combined cost of these two functions was £7,848.

Defence Ministers also host lunches and dinners for foreign defence Ministers who are visiting the United Kingdom on official business. A Member with a connection to that country, for example the Chair of an all-Party group, may be invited to this even irrespective of party.

Any other expenditure is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

All expenditure incurred is in accordance with Paragraph 65 of the Ministerial Code.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his plans are for increasing the recruitment of women to the armed services; whether he has set a target; and if he will make a statement. [128157]

Mr. Caplin: The Armed Forces do not operate separate recruiting targets for women and recruiting initiatives are generally gender free. Nevertheless, the Services' recruiting organisation includes female personnel to assist a fair gender representation in recruiting activities. Furthermore all three Services have School Presentation

and Recruiting Teams which visit many schools, including girl-only schools, each year. Recruit advertising also appears in female orientated magazines.

These and other initiatives helped the Armed Forces to recruit 3,230 women in 2002–03, an increase of 540 over the previous year.

European Rapid Reaction Force

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the European Rapid Reaction Force. [128424]

Mr. Hoon: Most of the 144 Capability targets which make up the Headline Goal have been met but there remain areas of significant shortfalls, some in key areas such as strategic lift, support helicopters and air-to-air refuelling. At Thessaloniki in June, the European Council agreed that the EU now has operational capability across the full range of Petersberg Tasks, limited and constrained by recognised shortfalls, which can be alleviated by the further development of the EU's military capabilities.

Although EU nations are strengthening their military capabilities, there is no standing European Rapid Reaction Force nor any EU agreement to create one. Existing national or multinational forces, declared under the Helsinki Headline Goal, will be made available to the EU on a voluntary, case-by-case basis when required for a crisis management operation.

HMS St. Albans

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much it cost to repair HMS St Albans; what costs were recovered from the ferry company involved; and if he will make a statement. [127254]

Mr. Ingram: The total cost of the repairs to HMS St. Albans has yet to be finalised but is expected to be in the region of £2,5 million. The process to recover costs has started.

Hydrographic and Oceanographic Survey Vessels

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the extent to which his Department's PFI partner, Vosper Thornycroft, was responsible for the delay in the building of *(a)* HMS Echo and *(b)* HMS Enterprise. [127189]

Mr. Ingram: An assessment of the extent to which the prime contractor, Vosper Thornycroft, is responsible for delays in building these vessels has been completed by the Ministry of Defence and the conclusions discussed and agreed with the company. I am withholding this information in accordance with Exemption 7 (Effective Management and Operations of the Public Service) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

The Survey Vessels contract is not under PFI terms, although Vosper Thornycroft is a PFI partner of the Ministry of Defence on other contracts.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers have been airlifted out of Iraq suffering from heat exhaustion. [128433]

Mr. Caplin: Since the start of military operations in Iraq, around 160 soldiers have been evacuated from Iraq suffering from heat-related illness.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on measures to secure Iraq's borders. [128421]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. Mackay), 8 September 2003, *Official Report*, columns 3–4.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates and circumstances of civilian deaths in *(a)* Basra and *(b)* Umm Qasr since 20 March which have involved British military personnel. [121537]

Mr. Ingram: We make every effort to minimise the impact of military operations on the Iraqi civilian population. We do not, and could not, record the numbers of Iraqi military personnel or civilians that have been killed or injured during the coalition's military action.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* armed Services personnel, *(b)* other non-Iraqi personnel and *(c)* Iraqi personnel are involved in maintaining peace and law and order in Iraq; in which areas these personnel operate; and if he will list (i) violent incidents in which they have been involved, (ii) fatalities and (iii) casualties since 23 April 2003. [122473]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 3 July 2003]:* There are some 160 United Kingdom Royal Military Police and Military Police operating in Iraq at present, assisting in maintaining law and order in southern Iraq. The Coalition Provisional Authority reports that there are some 31,000 Iraqi police now at work across Iraq. We do not centrally record the number of violent incidents in Iraq. But 17 UK Service personnel have died since 23 April 2003.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Military Policemen are deployed in Iraq; what their role is; and if he will make a statement on what protection is afforded to them whilst carrying out their tasks. [123838]

Mr. Ingram: As of 28 August 2003, there were approximately 180 Royal Military Police (RMP) in theatre serving on Operation Telic. Their duties include Force Protection, liaison with host nations, Prisoner-of-War handling, Close Protection and general police duties at military establishments. The Special Investigations Branch, which investigates incidents and allegations involving members of the UK armed forces, is also part of the RMP. Members of the RMP are afforded force protection measures appropriate to the duties they are carrying out.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the intelligence sources to which reference is made in the section on intelligence, at page 15 of his Department's recent report on first reflections on operations in Iraq, include the intelligence sources drawn upon in the preparation of the dossiers on Iraq's military capabilities published in *(a)* September 2002 and *(b)* February 2003 by the Government. [126922]

Mr. Ingram: The intelligence sources referred to in the Ministry of Defence's Iraq First Reflections Report are all the intelligence sources available to support the planning and conduct of the military operation including defence intelligence, intelligence from national agencies and intelligence from allies. However, the report's focus is on the intelligence on Iraqi military intentions in the period immediately before and during the conflict. The Government's Assessment of Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction described the role of intelligence in Part 1, Chapter 1 which lists the principal sources as the United Kingdom's intelligence and analysis agencies and intelligence from close allies.

Mr. Bailey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are for the installation of air conditioning at Ministry of Defence troop bases in Iraq. [127128]

Mr. Ingram: At present, approximately half of all United Kingdom Service personnel deployed in Iraq have access to air-conditioned accommodation. Work is continuing to provide further air conditioning in accommodation areas throughout the area of operations. The majority of personnel should be provided with air-conditioned accommodation by the end of September 2003.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the Government's reply to the 56th Report from the Public Accounts Committee, Session 2001–02, what measures were taken, prior to the war in Iraq, to *(a)* invest in equipment, *(b)* raise awareness throughout the land forces and *(c)* refine tactics, techniques and procedures to improve Combat Identification in the land environment. [127307]

Mr. Hoon: Combat Identification is fundamental to combat effectiveness and enables us to minimise the risk of fratricide. We therefore have a continuing programme to support our armed forces' Combat Identification capability through investment in equipment, training and continuous review of tactics, techniques and procedures. Prior to war-fighting operations in Iraq we worked to ensure, as we do before any military operation, that robust Combat Identification arrangements were in place and that the best Combat Identification equipment available for this operation was provided.

We worked very closely with the United States in the planning phase on a coalition concept of operations for Combat Identification. This related principally to specific marking systems for ground forces. We acquired a range of new equipment to ensure that UK land forces capabilities either complied with or exceeded the mandated standard. We also acquired sufficient sets of the US's recently developed satellite-based Blue Force Tracking tool to help our units operate with US forces. GPS navigation aids and the short-range Personal Role Radio, a part of the Bowman programme brought into service early, were widely available.

UK and US forces also set up liaison arrangements to maintain dialogue on tactics, techniques and procedures for the operation and took steps to familiarise themselves with each other's forces.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civil servants are in Iraq searching for weapons of mass destruction; and when they were sent. [128309]

Mr. Ingram: On 1 September 2003 there were 19 civil servants in Iraq working for the Iraq Survey Group employed in its task of searching for Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. They arrived in theatre from 13 June 2003. This number will continue to change as new staff join and others complete their periods of duty.

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of British forces in Iraq are engaged in making safe unexploded ordnance; how many devices have been disarmed; and what other agencies are assisting in this work. [114516]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 May 2003]:* The United Kingdom currently has 10 Explosive Ordnance Disposal teams in Iraq consisting of 99 personnel.

As at 4 September some 116,000 individual items of unexploded ordnance had been cleared. We estimate that over 220,000 rounds of small arms ammunition have also been cleared. The vast majority of unexploded ordnance is of Iraqi origin.

A number of Non-Governmental Organisations have been conducting EOD clearance under the supervision of the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Team, including Minetech and Intersos.

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what British resources have been devoted to investigating deaths by friendly fire during the Iraq conflict, broken down by number of people investigating and their Service. [115792]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 3 June 2003]:* All incidents where friendly fire is suspected are investigated fully. In the case of incidents arising from Operation Telic, most are being investigated by personnel from the Royal Military Police Special Investigations Branch. Eight personnel are currently employed on these tasks. Where appropriate, the incidents will also be the subject of individual Service Boards of Inquiry.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he is taking to protect recently discovered mass graves in Iraq. [117059]

Mr. Caplin: The United Kingdom Government continue to believe that those who have been responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in Iraq should be brought to justice. Where it is suspected

that a mass grave site has been found, details of the site are passed to Coalition Joint Task Force 7 (CJTF7) Crime Investigation Division. Where possible, UK Forces will provide protection to such sites, but this requirement has to be balanced against other demands for their services.

Maintenance Costs

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how often audits are made of maintenance programmes *(a)* involving Ministry of Defence agencies and *(b)* with outside contractors. [121250]

Mr. Ingram: Internal audits within the Ministry of Defence are conducted primarily by Defence Internal Audit (DIA) but there are also audit-style reviews by functional and business unit compliance teams as well as specific quality inspections against formal standards. The periodicity of internal audit review is now governed by an assessment of the risks inherent within any particular system or process and agreed by the Defence Audit Committee. As such, there are no longer routine or cyclical audits per se. It is not therefore possible to state how often audits of maintenance programmes may occur. Judgments regarding risk are made by senior managers responsible for the delivery of defence objectives rather than by auditors.

There remains, however, flexibility within the internal audit process to undertake ad hoc reviews as well as consultancy and business development assignments and in recent years DIA has undertaken individual audits examining repair processes, prime contracting and estates maintenance at the request of management.

Military Police Training School

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role the Royal Military Police Training School has played in supporting civilian services in emergencies in West Sussex in the last six years; and if he will list the occasions when they did so. [127247]

Mr. Caplin: There have been two occasions in the past six years when the Royal Military Police Training School has provided assistance in emergency situations. These were in November 2001 when there was flooding in the area and the School provided accommodation, catering equipment and personnel to assist in relief operations and damage prevention. From October 2002 to June 2003, during the recent firefighters dispute, the school provided accommodation, catering and equipment to military fire-fighters and civil police escorts.

Shoeburyness

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints about noise caused by explosions at Shoeburyness were received in each of the last 20 years from residents living in *(a)* Maldon District, *(b)* Chelmsford Borough, *(c)* Rochford District, *(d)* Colchester Borough, *(e)* Tendriny District, *(f)* Southend-on-Sea Unitary Authority, *(g)* Castlepoint District and *(h)* Kent. [128088]

Mr. Caplin: Complaints were not recorded before 1990. Between 1990 and 1994, complaints were divided into three broad geographical areas the first covering the immediate locality, the second North Essex and the third Kent. Since 1995, complaints have been recorded for the areas listed. The numbers of complaints from 1990 about noise from the range arising from demolitions, explosions and gunfire are as follows:

Ref / *District*	*A* *Maldon*	*B* *Chelmsford*	*C* *Rochford*	*D* *Colchester*	*E* *Tendring*	*F* *Southend*	*G* *Castlepoint*	*(c,f,g)* *Local*	*(a,b,d,e)* *North Essex*	*H* *Kent*	*Totals*
1990								21	27	25	73
1991								21	23	3	47
1992								58	88	77	223
1993								124	194	102	420
1994								32	555	325	912
1995	56	5	60	12	107	33	2			360	635
1996	91	2	48	44	206	109	1			155	656
1997	23	0	45	5	79	30	6			91	279
1998	49	0	31	20	129	65	5			335	634
1999	58	1	86	23	222	52	10			543	995
2000	48	0	48	38	322	48	1			333	838
2001	51	0	74	22	239	35	3			477	901
2002	50	0	16	14	154	25	0			217	476
2003 to date	9	2	2	12	104	0	0			30	159

Oshkosh Transporters

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many kilometres on average an armoured brigade moves in 24 hours; and what the equivalent figures will be after the introduction of the Oshkosh transporters; [127111]

(2) what change in capability there will be arising from the change from 120 Heavy Equipment Transporters for Square Brigade to 92 Oshkosh Tank Transporters. [127110]

Mr. Ingram: It is not possible to provide a meaningful assessment of the distance an armoured brigade can travel in 24 hours because the rate of progress is governed by a wide range of variable factors, such as the type of terrain, climatic conditions, and the nature of any hostilities.

The introduction of the new Oshkosh transporters will, however, introduce a significant increase in capability. Even though there will be 28 fewer transporters than we currently hold, the old vehicles have become increasingly difficult to maintain and the availability levels are therefore low. The new Oshkosh Tank Transporter fleet will be operated under a public private partnership

initiative and payment is based on performance. Availability levels will be guaranteed, using vehicles leased from civilian hauliers if necessary.

Additionally, the Oshkosh has a number of features that vastly improve its capability. These include a Central Tyre Inflation System (CTIS) giving the fleet an increased off road capability. It also has a dual winch system and can double load Warrior Armoured Fighting Vehicles unlike the Scammell Commander which was restricted to carrying only single Warriors. This double loading capability frees up considerable trailer space for the movement of Challenger 2 Tanks vital in the deployment of an Armoured Brigade.

P2000 Coastal Training Craft

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his plans are for the deployment and utilisation of P2000 coastal training craft; and whether further vessels will be used for patrolling duties. [127120]

Mr. Ingram: In United Kingdom waters, P2000 craft are used to train members of the University Royal Naval Units in various sea going disciplines including ship handling, navigation and replenishment at sea. P2000 are also used for patrol duties and security duties off Gibraltar and Cyprus.

RAF Chilmark

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost of clearing ordnance and contaminated land from the site of RAF Chilmark; and whether the land will be disposed of without liabilities on the purchaser. [126334]

Mr. Caplin: Since closure in April 1995, the cost of clearing ordnance from RAF Chilmark, including the preparation of Land Quality Assessments and remediation, has been approximately £1.8 million.

Parts of the site have already been sold. It is Ministry of Defence policy to 'sell with knowledge'. Following completion of explosive ordnance clearance, the Land Quality Assessment and details of any remediation work will be made available to prospective purchasers, and will be taken fully into account in agreeing the terms of sale including price. Remediation of contamination prior to transfer will generally be confined to the removal of ordnance and other defence specific contaminants, such as chemical agents or radioactive and micro-biological material that a civilian contractor might not have the relevant experience to deal with.

RAF Police

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether an RAF Policeman has the same level of training at the completion of Phase 2 as an Army Military Policeman to deal with *(a)* theft, *(b)* assault, *(c)* criminal damage and *(d)* other investigation work. [127245]

Mr. Ingram: Phase 2 training for the RAF Police and the Army's Royal Military Police (RMP) covers criminal damage, assault and theft. As the RMP course places greater emphasis on practical training and includes Investigative Interview Techniques, it lasts approximately 13 weeks longer than the RAF Police course. From 11 September 2003, Phase 2 training for the RAF Police will be extended to cover all aspects of practical training and the course period will then exceed that of the existing RMP course.

Rifles

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total cost was to his Department to make the modifications to the SA80 rifle to bring it to SA80A2 standard; and how many SA80A2 rifles are in service with HM forces. [127115]

Mr. Ingram: The SA80 modification programme began in December 2001 and is expected to be completed by March 2006. A total of 190,000 weapons will be modified at a cost of £92 million including trials and training. As at 1 August 2003 some 79,000 SA80 A2 had been issued to units.

Royal Fleet Auxiliary

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the projected cost and commissioning date of auxiliary oilers *(a)* Wave Knight and *(b)* Wave Ruler were when the contract was let; what the date of commissioning and the final cost are; and if he will make a statement. [127277]

Mr. Ingram: At the time the contact was let, in March 1997, the projected construction cost for Wave Knight and Wave Ruler was some £200 million. The contract cost for both vessels has still to be finalised but is expected to be between £210–£215 million. The increase reflects an addition to the contract for the procurement of spares and minor configuration changes to the ships' design over the period of the contract.

The planned In Service Dates for Wave Knight and Wave Ruler when the contract was let were February 2001 and March 2002, respectively. Wave Knight was accepted into service in March 2003 and Wave Ruler in April 2003. The programme slippage arose as a result of shipyard loading and technical difficulties.

Royal Navy

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cadets from university Royal Naval units have joined the Royal Navy in each year since 1997. [127118]

Mr. Caplin: University Royal Naval Units (URNUs) produce a steady flow of recruits to the Royal Navy, but the numbers are not held as a unique statistic and the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. URNUs are not primarily intended to be used as a recruiting tool but to develop in undergraduates an awareness of the need for, and role of, the Royal Navy, with the aim of fostering an understanding of the Service within society at large.

Service Personnel

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what proposals he has to make all methods of contact with families free for all armed services personnel; [128119]

(2) by what methods servicemen are able to contact their families when on overseas operations; and what proposals he has to improve links when on longer term operations. [128117]

Mr. Caplin: The ability of deployed personnel to maintain contact with their families is a key part of the Operational Welfare Package (OWP) which was introduced in 2001 to replace the ad hoc welfare provision which had previously varied between operations, The OWP followed a comprehensive review of operational welfare, completed in December 1999, which took into account the views of hundreds of Service personnel across a wide range of operational theatres, as well as drawing on lessons from our allies. The OWP communications package includes free use of Forces Aerogrammes ('Blueys') and electronic-Blueys, 20 minutes of publicly funded telephone calls per week and access to internet and email facilities. The Ministry of Defence recognises the need to continually keep under review its Welfare Support Policy. In light of the experience's gained on various operational deployments during the last two years the Department is currently in the process of reviewing and evaluating the policy. It is too early to say what the outcome will be of this review.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many *(a)* Service personnel of officer rank, *(b)* Service personnel of other ranks, *(c)* industrial civilian personnel and *(d)* non-industrial civilian personnel were employed by the (i) RAF Maintenance Group Defence Agency and (ii) Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation in each year from inception to reorganisation as part of the Defence Aviation Repair Agency; how many were employed in Scotland in each case; what the total manning costs were for each category in each year, what the manning costs were for Scotland in each year, and if he will make a statement; [128041]

(2) how many *(a)* Service personnel of officer rank, *(b)* Service personnel of other ranks, *(c)* industrial civilian personnel and *(d)* non-industrial civilian personnel were employed by the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency in each year from its inception to its disestablishment on 1 July 2001; how many of these were employed in Scotland; what the total manning costs were for each category in each year; what the manning costs were for Scotland in each year; and if he will make a statement; [128039]

(3) how many *(a)* Service personnel of officer rank, *(b)* Service personnel of other ranks, *(c)* industrial civilian personnel and *(d)* non-industrial civilian personnel were employed by the (i) Defence Aviation Repair Agency, (ii) Meteorological Office, (iii) Hydrographic Office, (iv) Defence Services Organisation, (v) British Forces Post Office Agency, (vi) Defence Medical Education and Training Agency, (vii) Defence Medical Services Department, (viii) Defence Estates, (ix) Army Base Repair Organisation, (x) Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, (xi) Defence Procurement Agency, (xii) Warship Support Agency, (xiii) Disposal Services Agency, (xiv) Director General Commercial and (xv) Ministry of Defence Police in each year since inception; how many were employed in Scotland in each case; what the total manning costs were for each category in each year; what the manning costs were for Scotland in each year; and if he will make a statement; [128040]

(4) how many *(a)* Service personnel of officer rank, *(b)* Service personnel of other ranks, *(c)* industrial civilian personnel and *(d)* non-industrial civilian personnel were employed by the Defence Secondary Care Agency in each year from its inception to its dissolution on 31 March; how many of these were employed in Scotland; what the total manning costs were for each category in each year; what the manning costs were for Scotland in each year; and if he will make a statement. [128038]

Mr. Caplin: Figures for Service and civilian personnel relating to each organisation have been placed in the Library of the House. Information on numbers of Service personnel working in Scotland, overall manning costs, and details prior to 1993, are not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Sir John Moore Barracks (Winchester)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will make an announcement regarding the site at Sir John Moore Barracks in Winchester, and if he will make a statement. [127100]

Mr. Caplin: Sir John Moore Barracks at Winchester is currently the home of the Army Training Regiment, Winchester, part of the Initial Training Group, an Operating Division of the Army Training and Recruiting Agency (ATRA). As part of its strategy to achieve a more flexible approach to Initial Training, ATRA is examining alternative entry routes into the Army, with relevant training to meet the Army's future needs. A number of options are under consideration at the present time, but no decision on the way forward is likely before about April of next year. Whatever the outcome, no changes to the role of Sir John Moore Barracks are envisaged for the foreseeable future.

Strategic Defence Review

Mr. Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures are being taken to improve the ability of Britain's armed forces to be more rapidly deployable as set out in the strategic defence review. [128429]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor), 8 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 12.

Suez Canal (Medals)

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects UK veterans of the Suez Canal Zone military operations in the 1950s to receive their campaign medals. [128315]

Mr. Caplin: The Ministry of Defence will start issuing medals to eligible veterans as soon as The Queen has seen and agreed the detailed qualifying criteria for the medal. The criteria are currently under consideration by the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals.

Target Practice

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which ships his Department has used for target practice during the past five years. [127116]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has a continuous requirement to trial and evaluate, under live conditions, the operational effectiveness of its weapon systems—in particular to prove their effectiveness against predicted results from modelling. As part of this requirement, the RN periodically conducts High Seas Firings (HSF) against targets, and uses the results to aid the continued tactical development of its weapons systems whilst also supporting research on survivability of current and future United Kingdom warship design and protection of personnel.

During the past five years, the Department has arranged one HSF using ex-HMS Sirius as the target vessel. This was conducted between 28–29 September 1998. The RN also participated in two HSF exercises arranged by and at the invitation of the US Navy using ex USS Ashtabula and ex USS Wainwright on 14 October 2000 and 11 June 2002 respectively.

Trained Personnel

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his Answer of 11th July, Official Report, column 1033W, on trained personnel, what research his Department has carried out into the numbers of Royal Naval personnel who have gone absent without leave since 1995; and if he will make a statement. [127069]

Mr. Caplin: No research has been carried out since 1995 into the numbers of Royal Naval personnel who have gone absent without leave , although the reasons for absence are routinely collected and reviewed. The increase in the number of Naval Service absences since 2000 shown in my answer, *Official Report*, column 1033W of 11 July 2003 was due to a change in the arrangements for reporting absence. Until then, no warrant for arrest was issued until the eighth day of an absence, and absentees who returned before then were not formally recorded. Since 2000 a warrant has been raised and absence has been formally recorded as soon as the absence has been established. This has had the effect of increasing the number of absences formally recorded, but is not indicative of an underlying increase in unauthorised absences.

US Military Sites

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) which military sites in the UK are leased to the US Government; when each military base was first leased; what the date for termination is in each case; and what parliamentary approval was sought for the present lease arrangements; [127141]

(2) what plans there are to lease further British military bases, or parts thereof, to the United States Government. [127144]

Mr. Ingram: As I stated in my answer to my hon. Friend on 10 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 940W, there are no such lease arrangements. Neither have we plans to enter into any such arrangements.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the arrangements are for the storage and possible deployment of nuclear weapons from military bases leased to the United States Government. [127143]

Mr. Ingram: The use of facilities on United Kingdom territory by the United States is a matter for joint decision by the two Governments in the light of the circumstances prevailing at the time. No UK military bases are leased to the United States.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether an individual accused of trespass onto a military base in the UK leased to the United States Government will be tried by *(a)* US and *(b)* British justice; [127145]

(2) what control the UK Government can exert on activities taking place on military bases in the UK leased to the United States Government. [127142]

Mr. Ingram: No United Kingdom military bases are leased to the United States Government. Military bases are made available to the US visiting forces under the NATO Status of Forces Agreement of 1951, and other additional confidential agreements. An individual accused of trespass on to one of these bases would be subject to British justice, with any decision on prosecution being taken by UK authorities.

Activities taking place on such bases is a matter for joint decision between the UK and US Governments in the light of the circumstances prevailing at the time.

War Pensions (East Devon)

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are in receipt of war and war widows' pensions in East Devon. [128129]

Mr. Caplin: As at 31 March 2003, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 1,220 war disablement pensions and 235 war widows pensions in payment to people in East Devon.

Warship Deployments

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Royal Navy warships are at sea without their full complement. [127113]

Mr. Ingram: As at 27 August, the Destroyer HMS Manchester, Frigates, HMSs Cornwall, Kent, Lancaster, Norfolk, Portland, Sutherland, Mine Counter Measure ships HMSs Quorn, Atherstone, Penzance and Cottesmore, the Survey Ship HMS Scott and the Patrol Vessel HMS Leeds Castle are at sea without full complements. Ships' complements are, however, carefully matched to the demands of operational tasking. Manning across the Fleet is constantly monitored to ensure that the sufficient levels of manpower are maintained for both current and contingent operations.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Pensioners

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to enable pensioners to participate more fully in community activities [128135]

Fiona Mactaggart: The Government has a target of increasing community participation by five per cent by 2006. We believe that increasing the engagement of older people in their communities is particularly important.

The Home Office Active Community Unit leads the cross Government effort to achieve the target. It provides strategic funding for organisations such as Reach, RSVP and the Experience Corps to increase the levels of volunteering by older people. Funding is also given to several mentoring projects that involve older people either as the mentors or mentess.

The ACU also works with other Government Departments to achieve the target, such as the recent collaboration with the Department of Work and Pensions on the production of a pre-retirement pack.

The strategy for increasing community participation is currently being reviewed. Any new strategy will maintain a focus on older volunteers, both at national and local level.

Asylum

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum applications have been made in Northern Ireland since 1 January. [126572]

Beverley Hughes: No statistics are kept on the numbers of asylum applicants in Northern Ireland, or any other geographic region in the UK, except by port of application. The requested information could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost by examination of individual case records.

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers he has to ensure that the Law Society complies in full with requests by the Immigration Services Commissioner for disclosure of information in respect of complaints against solicitors in asylum and immigration cases. [126830]

Beverley Hughes: We are considering the comments made about The Law Society in the Immigration Services Commissioner's Annual Report for 2002–03 and will discuss them with my right hon. Friend The Lord Chancellor before deciding what action to take.

Correspondence

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Glasgow Shettleston to the MPCS section of Immigration and Nationality Directorate Croydon of 23 February, 7 April, 12 May and 12 June regarding Mr.Abdullah Turgut. [126511]

Beverley Hughes: I understand that the Immigration and Nationality Directorate replied to your letters of 23 February, 7 April, 12 May and 12 June on 17 July.

Crime (Rural Areas)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the level of crime in rural areas in the 12 months up to *(a)* 31 March 1999, *(b)* 31 March 2001 and *(c)* 31 March 2003. [125892]

Ms Blears: According to the British Crime Survey (BCS) 2000, the BCS 2001, Crime in England and Wales 2001–02 and Crime in England and Wales 2002–03, levels of crime were substantially lower in rural areas than in non-rural areas in 1999, 2000 and the 12 months to March 2002 and March 2003. Data are not available for the 12 months to March 2001 due to the methodological changes in the BCS from calendar to financial year. The available information on crime levels for this period is as follows:

Incidence of crime per 10,000 households

	BCS 2000 Crime in 12 months to December 1999		*BCS 2001 Crime in 12 months to December 2000*		*BCS 2001–02 Interviews in 12 months to March 2002*		*BCS 2002–03 Interviews in 12 months to March 2003*	
	Rural	*Non-rural*	*Rural*	*Non-rural*	*Rural*	*Non-rural*	*Rural*	*Non-rural*
Burglary	340	665	234	560	236	499	272	**488
Violent crime	506	937	543	645	398	748	*497	**715
Vehicle related theft[1]	1,258	1,990	938	1,787	1,015	1,686	**932	**1,563

[1] Based on vehicle owners only.

Notes:

1. Data for BCS 2000, 2001–02 and 2002–03 uses the new calibration weights, data for BCS 2001 does not.

2. The statistical significance of changes between BCS 2000 and BCS 2002–03 and also between BCS 2001–02 and BCS 2002–03 has been calculated.

* Indicates a statistically significant change between BCS 2001–02 and BCS 2002–03 (there has been a statistically significant rise between BCS 2001–02 and BCS 2002–03 in rural violent crime and a statistically significant fall in non-rural vehicle related theft).

** Indicates a statistically significant change between BCS 2000 and BCS 2002–03 (there have been statistically significant falls between BCS 2000 and BCS 2002–03 in rural vehicle related theft and in non-rural burglary, violent crime and vehicle related theft).

The likelihood of becoming a victim of crime is also substantially lower in rural areas than non-rural areas during these periods. In 2002–03, 18 per cent. of victims of burglary lived in rural areas, similarly only 16 per cent. of victims of violence and 20 per cent. of victims of vehicle related theft (based on vehicle owners only) lived in rural areas. The available data is set out as follows.

Prevalence of Crime (percentage of victim once or more)

	BCS 2000 Crime in 1999		*BCS 2001 Crime in 2000*		*BCS 2001–02 Interviews in 12 months to March 2002*		*BCS 2002–03 Interviews in 12 months to March 2003*	
	Rural	*Non-rural*	*Rural*	*Non-rural*	*Rural*	*Non-rural*	*Rural*	*Non-rural*
Burglary	2.6	4.8	1.9	3.9	2.0	3.9	2.5	3.7
Violent crime	2.6	4.7	2.4	4.1	2.4	4.5	2.9	4.4
Vehicle related theft[1]	9.0	14.0	6.9	12.5	7.9	12.6	7.7	11.8

[1] Based on vehicle owners only.

Note:

1. Data for BCS 2001–02 and 2002–03 uses the new calibration weights, data for BCS 2000 and 2001 do not.

Departmental Entertainment Budget

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his Department's hospitality budget *(a)* is in 2002–03 and *(b)* was in each of the last three years; and how much was left unspent at the end of each financial year. [99507]

Fiona Mactaggart: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 14 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 533W.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of regional variations in staff turnover in his Department. [112744]

Fiona Mactaggart: The Home Office has not made a comprehensive study of regional variations in staff turnover.

However, employee turnover is an important factor in considering payment of locational allowances for recruitment and retention purposes. Her Majesty's Treasury 2003 Pay Remit guidance specifically requires that local pay be considered, and analysis of employee turnover forms part of the Home Office's approach to this task.

Departmental Website

Dr. Vincent Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what actions he has taken or is taking to ensure that the websites of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies are accessible to partially sighted and blind people; and if he will make a statement. [117333]

Fiona Mactaggart: The Home Office requires that all websites under its management be designed to meet government and international guidelines on accessibility. All new websites will be accessibility tested before publication, taking account of the guidelines recently issued by the e-Envoy as part of the Quality Framework for UK Government Website Design.

Although some existing sites may not meet all of the criteria required, a review is being planned within a project to redevelop the Home Office website with the intention that these rigorous standards should be applied retrospectively.

Depleted Uranium Thefts

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the security implications of the theft of 30lb of depleted uranium from a site in Thurrock in July. [126329]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 17 July 2003]:* I understand from Essex Police that the incident is being treated as a crime of theft of a vehicle. The van contained a box made of depleted uranium which was part of the normal emergency equipment carried in case there should be a problem with a radiation source in an instrument used for site radiography. The box was empty at the time of the theft and did not itself pose a significant risk from radioactivity.

There is no indication the theft was in any way connected to terrorism.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions depleted uranium has been stolen from *(a)* the plant in Thurrock and *(b)* from other sites elsewhere in the United Kingdom over the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [126314]

Mr. Blunkett: In the past five years, the Health and Safety Executive have received only one report of depleted uranium being stolen or missing from the site in Thurrock. That was following the theft of a van on 7 July 2003. The van contained a box made of depleted uranium which was part of the normal emergency equipment carried in case there should be a problem with a radiation source in an instrument used for site radiography. The box was empty at the time of the theft and did not itself pose a significant risk from radioactivity.

Thurrock have made no other reports of depleted uranium being stolen or lost. Records for the UK are not held centrally.

Domestic Violence

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 31 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 577W, on domestic violence, how much of the funding that will be made available over the next three years to support work to develop mainstream responses to domestic violence will be provided to Surrey; and when the funds will be available. [126056]

Ms Blears: The Home Office is conducting a mapping exercise involving Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) and Government offices, to inform the allocation of this funding; which will then be available to CDRPs and Government offices from the second half of this year.

IT Contracts

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many outsourced IT contracts have been signed by his Department in each year since 1997; how much each of these contracts is worth; with whom they are signed; how many have been renegotiated; how many are still in place; and if he will make a statement. [126198]

Fiona Mactaggart: Since 1997 the Home Office, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) have outsourced the following IT services, which are listed:

Home Office (central)

1. 2000—HO central—Provision of IT infrastructure services for the core Home Office: signed with Sirius consortium (Fujitsu (formally ICL) supported by IBM (formally PWC) and Global Crossing). Contract value £209 million. Not renegotiated. Contract still in place.

2. 2001—NPD—Provision infrastructure services: signed with Steria Group. Contract value £50 million. Not renegotiated. Contract still in place.

Agencies

1. 1998—UKPA—Provision of front end passport scanning: signed with Siemens Business Services. Contract value £80–100 million. Not renegotiated. Contract still in place.

2. 1998—UKPA—Passport printing service: signed with Security Printing and Systems Ltd. Contract value £134.2 million. Not renegotiated. Contract still in place.

3. 1999—UKPA—Provision of IT infrastructure services: signed with SEMA. Contract value £3.8 million. Not renegotiated. Contract still in place.

4. 2000—Prison Service—Provision of IT infrastructure services: EDS supported by PA and Global Crossing (Quantum). Contract value £200 million. Renegotiated in 2002. Contract still in place.

5. 2000—Crime Reduction Bureau—Provision of IT infrastructure services (10 years): signed with Capita group. Contract value £400 million. Not renegotiated. Contract still in place.

6. 2000—Criminal Cases Review Commission—Provision of IT managed service: signed with Integris/Steria. Contract value £1,370,956. 2000–04. Renegotiated 2002. Contract still in place.

NDPB

1. 2000—National Intelligence Service (seven years)—Provision of IS support services: signed with Capita group. Contract value £2.5 million per year. The contract is due to be renegotiated in September 2003. Contract still in place.

Khat

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the level of consumption of Khat in the UK; what plans he has to *(a)* control and *(b)* reduce Khat consumption; and if he will make a statement. [127515]

Caroline Flint: There are no centrally collected figures for the level of cat (or Khat) consumption, but Her Majesty's Customs and Excise estimates that between seven and 10 tonnes of the plant are imported into the United Kingdom each week.

The Government has no plans at present to control Khat under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, but the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, which advises on these matters, keeps its legal status under review. The Home Office's Drugs and Alcohol Research Unit is shortly to embark on a detailed study to assess the level of harm caused by Khat. It is expected that a final report will be completed in September 2004, with interim findings being available in April 2004. The report will inform future decisions on whether Khat should be controlled within the 1971 Act.

The Government is considering ways to address the problems of Khat misuse as part of a wider diversity initiative to ensure that the national drug strategy meets the needs of all our communities. This will include the development of appropriate drug prevention materials and information to raise awareness about the Khat misuse.

Leighton Buzzard Police Station

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what grants are available from his Department to improve Leighton Buzzard police station, with particular reference to enabling *(a)* the restoration of a custody suite, *(b)* longer opening hours and *(c)* the provision of space for a greater officer establishment. [126374]

Ms Blears: Police authorities receive general capital grant and credit (borrowing) approvals to support funding their capital plans.

In 2002–03 my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary established the Premises Improvement Fund to assist police authorities further in modernising the police estate and communications technology. The fund of £20 million is a matched funding initiative.

Police authorities have been invited to submit bids for a second round of the scheme. Results will be announced later in the year.

Passports

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long it takes for a passport to be renewed; and if he will make a statement on charges levied to British citizens for their applications. [128094]

Ms Blears: In the week ending 20 July 2003 the average processing time for a single straightforward properly completed application made by post was four days for a renewal.

An increase in passport fees was announced on 18 July. The new fees which come into effect on 2 October 2003 are in the table.

	Partner/ postal (£)	*Fast track (£)*	*Premium (£)*
Adult	42.00	70.00	89.00
Child	25.00	60.00	71.00
Jumbo[1]	54.50	71.00	95.50
Collectives	39.00	N/a	N/a

[1] Forty-eight page

Passport fees are set to recover the costs of UK Passport Service's issuing passports and those incurred by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) on providing consular protection to British nationals in need of assistance overseas. The new fees will allow investment in enhanced anti-fraud measures and the Passport Service's customer improvement programme.

Police Staff

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* civilian support staff there were in each English constabulary in the last year for which figures are available. [127207]

Ms Blears: The latest available police officer strength figure is for 31 December 2002, that for police staff is for 31 March 2002.

The figures are set out in the table.

Police and civilian support staff strength

Force	*Police officer strength as at 31 December 2002*	*Police staff strength as at 31 March 2002*
Avon and Somerset	3,172	1,611
Bedfordshire	1,097	524
Cambridgeshire	1,388	733
Cheshire	2,084	884
Cleveland	1,561	626
Cumbria	1,121	631
Derbyshire	2,010	953
Devon and Cornwall	3,176	1,639
Dorset	1,403	741
Durham	1,645	660
Essex	2,995	1,571
Gloucestershire	1,187	545
Greater Manchester	7,347	3,135
Hampshire	3,636	1,597
Hertfordshire	1,920	1,121
Humberside	2,113	816
Kent	3,441	1,958
Lancashire	3,368	1,442
Leicestershire	2,099	816
Lincolnshire	1,224	600
London, City of	797	247
Merseyside	4,180	1,532
Metropolitan Police	27,229	10,459
Norfolk	1,503	819
Northamptonshire	1,192	742
Northumbria	3,976	1,403
North Yorkshire	1,379	743
Nottinghamshire	2,407	1,087
South Yorkshire	3,183	1,352
Staffordshire	2,228	1,030
Suffolk	1,236	692
Surrey	1,983	1,043
Sussex	2,937	1,507
Thames Valley	3,852	2,061
Warwickshire	993	459
West Mercia	2,160	1,116
West Midlands	7,792	3,007
West Yorkshire	5,029	2,364
Wiltshire	1,121	649
Total (England)	123,163	54,913

Departmental Policy Areas

Mr. Dominic Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the policy areas covered by each of the activities listed in Table 5, page 173 of the Home Office Annual Departmental Report 2003. [123356]

Mr. Blunkett: The policy areas covered are as follows:

Activity area	*Policy areas covered*
Reduction in crime and the fear of crime	Policing, police standards and reform, reduction of crime (including Crime and Disorder Partnerships) and the fear of crime, street crime and community safety; youth crime prevention; anti-social behaviour; football disorder; criminal records; road safety enforcement, firearms
Reduction of organised and international crime	Counter-terrorism, international and European law enforcement and judicial cooperation, extradition; policing of organised and financial crime, high tech crime
Ensuring the effective delivery of justice	Overall responsibility for reform and modernisation of the criminal justice system (CJS), including CJS IT, building confidence in the CJS, narrowing the justice gap for victims and witnesses. Criminal law and criminal policy, legislation including Criminal Justice Bill and Sexual Offences Bill, policy on criminal procedure and evidence, CJS race issues
Delivering effective custodial and community sentences to reduce re-offending and protect the public	Effective enforcement of the sentences of the courts; public protection, rehabilitation and reducing re-offending; managing performance of the prison, probation and youth justice services
Reducing the availability and abuse of dangerous drugs	Overall responsibility for the anti-drugs strategy; enforcement and criminal justice interventions
Regulating entry to and settlement in the UK effectively, in the interests of sustainable growth and social inclusion	Nationality, immigration and asylum, including work permits; citizenship and inward migration; UK Passport Service
Supporting strong and active communities in which people of all races and backgrounds are valued and participate	Race equality and community cohesion; civil renewal, active citizenship and the voluntary and community sector. Regulation and licensing of animal scientific procedures; coroners; entitlement cards. Home Office input to policy on young people and families
Central services	Research and statistics; human resources; finance (including departmental unallocated provision); corporate development and support

Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many unaccompanied asylum seekers under 18 received a custodial sentence broken down by *(a)* age, *(b)* sex and *(c)* establishment in 2002. [126968]

Beverley Hughes: I regret that the information requested is not available from existing data collection systems and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. Details of the immigration status of unaccompanied asylum seekers under 18 who have received a custodial sentence are not collated centrally and will not necessarily be recorded by the courts or the Prison Service.

Information on asylum applications is published quarterly on the Home Office website at: *http:/www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.* The next publication will be available from the end of August and will cover the second quarter of 2003.

Youth Justice Board

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the membership of the Youth Justice Board. [126569]

Paul Goggins: In February 2003 my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary appointed two new members, Christopher Holmes CBE and Jackie Ballard. In June my right hon. Friend re-appointed three members and asked Sir Charles Pollard to serve as acting chair when Lord Warner left the board and has launched an open public competition to recruit a substantive chair.

Four other existing board members' terms of appointment expire in September 2004. My right hon. Friend will be considering future membership once we have appointed a chair.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Liberia

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make a statement on the political situation in Liberia; [128189]

(2) what assessment the Department has made of the effects of the political situation in Liberia on neighbouring countries; [128226]

(3) what discussions he has had with *(a)* the United Nations, *(b)* the United States, *(c)* the African Union and *(d)* the Liberian Government on (i) the deployment of peacekeeping troops to Liberia and (ii) measures to end the civil war there. [128225]

Mr. Mullin: Liberia has been at the heart of conflict in west Africa for over 20 years. The departure of Charles Taylor, and the subsequent peace deal, presents an important opportunity to work towards lasting peace in the region. The UK is committed to working closely with the international community, to ensure that the present Multi-National Force, and the UN Mission planned for Liberia, are successful in restoring peace and security to Liberia.

We have committed £1 million to the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS) Multi-National Force that deployed on 4 August and have seconded a military adviser to ECOWAS. We have also offered military advisors to the UN planning mission and Head Quarters. The UK is also working in the UN Security Council to ensure that the forthcoming Resolution authorising the deployment of a UN mission will provide a robust mandate.

We are monitoring developments in the region closely to ensure that ex-combatants do not export instability to neighbouring countries.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the timetable the British Government has set for ratifying the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. [127962]

Mr. Rammell: The United Kingdom signed this Optional Protocol in September 2000 and intends to ratify it at the earliest opportunity. To be able to ratify, we need to introduce a range of new offences to ensure that we are fully compliant with the instrument. Several of these, relating to trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation and the sexual exploitation of children for gain, are included in the Sexual Offences Bill currently before Parliament.

The Optional Protocol also requires the criminalisation of behaviour which does not fall within the scope of the Sexual Offences Bill, such as trafficking people with the aim of: exploiting their labour; organ transfer and illegal adoptions. These measures are being pursued separately and will also require primary legislation. It is not therefore possible to say precisely when we will be able to ratify the instrument.

Afghanistan

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the timetable is for elimination of poppy production in Afghanistan; and what strategies are in place to fill any loss to local economies caused by the eradication of opium production. [127131]

Mr. Rammell: The Afghan Transitional Administration adopted a national drug strategy on 19 May 2003. Its objective is to eliminate the cultivation, processing and trafficking of illegal drugs in Afghanistan within 10 years. The UK has committed £70 million over the next three years to fund activities that will contribute to achievement of this objective.

However, sustainable reductions in the Afghan drugs trade will be achieved only as progress is made on broader development and security. The UK is leading a Provincial Reconstruction team in Mazar-e-Sharif and has pledged £200 million of development assistance to help create the conditions in which viable alternatives to poppy cultivation can emerge.

African Union

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has held with African leaders about the appointment of President Robert Mugabe by the African Union as its ambassador for southern Africa. [127140]

Mr. Mullin: Robert Mugabe was not appointed by the African Union (AU) as an Ambassador for southern Africa at the recent AU Summit. Zimbabwe was appointed as one of the 14 regional vice-chairs, who together with the current AU Chairperson, President Chissano of Mozambique, form the Bureau of the AU Assembly when it meets in session.

The election of office-bearers, and the items included on the AU Summit agenda, are matters for the African Union.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions he has had and intends to have with *(a)* the United Nations, *(b)* the United States, *(c)* the African Union and *(d)* President Mbeki of South Africa regarding Mr. Robert Mugabe's appointment as the African Union's ambassador for southern Africa; [128184]

(2) what discussions he has had and intends to have with *(a)* the United Nations, *(b)* the United States, *(c)* the African Union and *(d)* President Mbeki of South Africa regarding the presence of Zimbabwe on the agenda of the African Union summit. [128193]

Mr. Mullin: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Martin Caton) today (UIN 127140).

Angola

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) on 20 May 2003, *Official Report*, columns 722–23W, whether the embassy in Luanda has received an answer to his Department's offer of United Kingdom security assistance; what further discussions *(a)* he, *(b)* members of his Department, *(c)* members of the embassy in Luanda have had with representatives of the government of Angola on this issue; and if he will make a statement. [128241]

Mr. Mullin: The British embassy in Luanda remains in touch with senior members of the Angolan Government and the Angolan military on the offer of UK assistance in Security Sector Reform. The most recent discussions were on 25 July. So far, the Angolan Government has not confirmed whether they wish to accept our offer.

Burundi

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to assist the process of peace in Burundi; and if he will make a statement. [127816]

Mr. Mullin: The British Government are committed to supporting the Arusha process and the transitional government institutions. We have given extensive support to South African Vice President Zuma and his facilitation team. We are also supporting the African Mission in Burundi, both financially and politically.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to ensure that the African Union mission in Burundi is effective and supported; and if he will make a statement. [127817]

Mr. Mullin: The UK is actively supporting the African Union's African Mission in Burundi (AMIB), both financially and politically. We have provided up to £3.9 million to supply vital equipment to the Mozambican contingent. We maintain regular contact with our international partners, the African Union, the UN and senior AMIB personnel, to ensure that AMIB is able to carry out its function.

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with *(a)* the United Nations, *(b)* the United States, *(c)* the African Union and *(d)* the Burundi Government regarding international efforts to encourage rebel groups in Burundi to enter into peace negotiations with the Government of Burundi. [128123]

Mr. Mullin: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met President Ndayizeye on 11 July to discuss the peace process. The UK maintains close contacts with the government of Burundi, the regional facilitation teams, the African Union and the UN, and our other partners in the international community in pursuit of peace in Burundi.

China

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Chinese Government regarding the pending execution of Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche. [128185]

Mr. Rammell: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Richmond Park Jenny Tonge on 20 March 2003 *Official Report* column 881W.

We have noted the recent release of some of those arrested at the same time as Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche and shall continue to raise our concerns with the Chinese about this case.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had and intends to have with the Chinese Government on holding trials of Tibetan religious leaders in the presence of international observers before sentence is passed. [128187]

Mr. Rammell: We and our EU partners have made clear to the Chinese authorities that all trials should be free and fair and respect due process.

We continue to urge the Chinese authorities to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had and intends to have with the Chinese Government regarding its refusal to drop pre-conditions to negotiations with the Tibetan Government in exile. [128188]

Mr. Rammell: We have made clear to the Chinese authorities our view that a long-term, peaceful solution to the Tibet issue can be found only through dialogue and continue to urge them to engage in dialogue with the Dalai Lama. We have welcomed the recent visits to China by representatives of the Dalai Lama.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised Tibet with Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing on 25 June, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister discussed the issue with the Chinese leadership during his recent visit to China.

Colombia

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will press for action in the Council of Ministers to encourage the Colombian Government to respect human rights and international humanitarian law; and if he will make a statement. [127105]

Mr. Rammell: The Council of Ministers took such action in their Conclusions in December 2002. We work closely with our EU Partners on Colombia and human rights. The need to respect human rights and international law was reiterated in the Chairperson's Statement on the Human Rights Situation in Colombia at the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva in April. The EU played a substantive role in the drafting of the Statement.

In July EU member states attended the London Meeting on International Support for Colombia. The EU adhered fully to the London Declaration following the meeting, which again made clear the importance of human rights and international humanitarian law.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what monitoring of the activities of international forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is undertaken by the UK; and if he will make a statement. [127394]

Mr. Mullin: The UK monitors the activities of both MONUC (the UN Organisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)) and the EU-led Interim Emergency Multinational Force (IEMF) in Bunia (north-eastern DRC), which is now ending its operations. We have received reports from the UN Secretary General and from the Operation Commander of the IEMF (who reports to the EU's Political and Security Committee in Brussels).

The present peace agreements require the withdrawal from DRC of the forces of other foreign governments. Rwanda and Uganda maintain that they have withdrawn all their troops. We continue to monitor the situation closely.

Diamond Trade

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Governments of compliant countries in the Kimberley Process regarding the trade in and export of illegal conflict diamonds in *(a)* Nigeria, *(b)* Angola, *(c)* Kenya, *(d)* Uganda and *(e)* Cameroon. [128130]

Mr. Rammell: Participating Governments met at the Kimberley Process plenary in April to discuss conflict diamonds. The meeting focussed on compliance by all participants with the minimum common standards set by the Kimberley Process certification scheme. Angola is one of 40 participants in the scheme.

Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda and Cameroon are not major diamond producers or traders and are not participants in the scheme. There have been no recent discussions within the Kimberley Process about these countries.

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Governments of *(a)* Nigeria, *(b)* Angola, *(c)* Kenya, *(d)* Uganda and *(e)* Cameroon regarding the trade in and export of illegal conflict diamonds. [128131]

Mr. Rammell: There have been no recent discussions on diamond trading with these Governments, other than Angola in its capacity as a participant in the Kimberley Process.

Nagorno-Karabakh

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. [127874]

Mr. Rammell: Our policy on the Nagorno Karabakh dispute is that we will support any mechanism for its resolution which both parties can accept and which has a realistic chance of delivering a lasting political settlement. The framework for discussing such mechanisms is the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group. The three co-chairs of the Minsk Group, Russia, US and France, have worked very hard to try to move a political process forward.

The UK will be funding a £2 million three year project aiming to improve the prospects for a permanent settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. We shall continue to encourage the governments of both Azerbaijan and Armenia to look to the future and build a better relationship between their two countries.

Sao Tome and Principe

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions he has had with his Portuguese counterpart on the military coup in Sao Tome and Principe; what joint action has been decided; and if he will make a statement; [127256]

(2) when he last held discussions with the Foreign Minister of Sao Tome; what the outcome of those discussions was; when he next plans to meet with him; and if he will make a statement; [127257]

(3) what discussions he has had with his Nigerian counterpart on the military coup in Sao Tome and Principe; when these discussions took place; what the conclusion of the discussions was; and if he will make a statement; [127258]

(4) what discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on the EU's role in securing a speedy return to constitutional order of Sao Tome and Principe; what plans have been made to achieve this; and if he will make a statement. [127263]

Mr. Mullin: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has had no discussions with his counterpart on the military coup in Sao Tome and Principe. Efforts to mediate a resolution to the political crisis in Sao Tome—following the attempted coup of 16 July—have so far been led by the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries, the Chairman of the African Union and the Acting President of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). We continue to monitor the situation in consultation with EU Partners, in particular the Portuguese. The UK is represented in Sao Tome by our ambassador in Angola, who has had informal discussions with his EU counterparts.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will estimate the cost of peace-keeping forces in Sierra Leone up to the present time; what additional aid and investment have resulted from that action; and if he will make a statement. [127806]

Mr. Mullin: The UN peacekeeping operation in Sierra Leone. UNAMSIL, was established in 1999. The total cost to the end of the present financial year (31 March 2004) is estimated at £1,894 million, of which the UK's contribution will be £92 million. The secure environment which UNAMSIL has helped to establish has allowed aid programmes to restart and the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of over 50,000 ex-combatants. UNAMSIL has now begun to reduce its numbers and is expected to complete withdrawal from the country in late 2004.

The UK has provided £70 million in aid to Sierra Leone since the war ended in 2001. We have committed ourselves to a ten-year programme of support and have pledged £120 million towards the social and economic development of Sierra Leone over the next three years. Delivery of these funds is dependent on progress by the Government of Sierra Leone on key areas such as security sector reform, regulation of the diamond industry, corruption, government and media reforms, and the development of a poverty reduction strategy.

In October 2002 the first British trade mission in over a decade visited Sierra Leone. Another trade mission will visit later this month and a delegation from the construction and consultancy industries is planned for early 2004.

Somalia

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what participation in the Somali peace process has been undertaken by UK representatives; and if he will make a statement. [127176]

Mr. Mullin: An official from our High Commission in Nairobi is a member of the international observer group giving informal advice to the reconciliation conference's Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Technical Committee (and its Chair, Ambassador Kiplagat). Britain has also contributed to a number of other initiatives designed to assist the talks, which continue to work towards reconciliation and agreement on an effective and inclusive government for Somalia.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs with what Somali groups and human rights organisations his officials have had discussions in the past year; and what his Department's assessment is of the human rights situation in Somalia. [127177]

Mr. Mullin: Officials in Addis Ababa, Nairobi and London have had extensive and regular contacts with large numbers of Somali civil society organisations with an interest in human rights. Without any effective central government in Somalia, and given the number of disparate armed groups, citizens' rights are routinely abused, especially in southern areas in conflict, However, the situation in Somaliland, which has a democratic government and functioning institutions, is better, with no reports of gross human rights violations.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what UK diplomatic staff have visited Mogadishu in the past year. [127178]

Mr. Mullin: None.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contacts UK representatives have with the effective Government of Somaliland in Hargeisa; and what plans the Government has to grant it diplomatic recognition. [127179]

Mr. Mullin: The British Ambassador in Addis Ababa, his consular and political officers, representatives from our High Commission in Nairobi, and representatives from other Whitehall Departments all visit Hargeisa regularly to meet representatives of the authorities there. There have also been several contacts in Addis Ababa and London. We have no plans to recognise an independent Somaliland.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of the number of Somali people in refugee camps in countries neighbouring Somalia who wish to join their families in the United Kingdom; and what facilities are offered in British missions in *(a)* Addis Ababa and *(b)* Nairobi to facilitate this. [127512]

Mr. Mullin: There are no reliable data on numbers of Somalis in refugee camps wishing to join relatives with leave to remain in the United Kingdom. Our diplomatic mission in Addis Ababa routinely receives and processes applications from Somalis wishing to settle in Britain. Nairobi suspended its processing operation for Somali settlement visas in November 2002 due to security concerns arising from the Mombasa bombing. Following a recent review, it plans to resume this service on a limited basis in the next few months.

Uganda

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the impact of proposed changes to the constitution of Uganda with regard to presidential term limits on *(a)* the democratic development of Uganda and *(b)* the political stability of Uganda; and if he will make a statement. [128042]

Mr. Mullin: Changes to the Ugandan Constitution are being considered by a Constitutional Review Commission (CRC). The CRC is now finalising its report. We are taking a close interest in its work, and look forward to the publication of the report. Open and inclusive debate of the CRC's recommendations should help promote stability at a time of political change.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of Sudanese support of the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda; what discussions he has had on this matter with *(a)* the Government of Sudan and *(b)* the Government of Uganda; what the result of the discussions was; and if he will make a statement. [128043]

Mr. Mullin: We have seen no hard evidence that the Sudanese Government is providing support to the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda. The UK Special Envoy for Sudan discussed the LRA with President Museveni of Uganda and with the Sudanese Prime Minister in late August. The Government of Sudan said that officers in the Sudanese army who had supplied the LRA on a personal basis had been disciplined, and that there was no official Sudanese support for the LRA.

We welcome the recent appointment of a Ugandan ambassador to Khartoum and the recent visit of senior Ugandan Ministers, and hope that these initiatives will contribute to better understanding and cooperation between the two governments.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the Government of Uganda about proposed changes to the constitution of Uganda with particular reference to presidential term limits; when these discussions took place; what the outcome was; and if he will make a statement. [128045]

Mr. Mullin: My noble Friend the Secretary of State for International Development, discussed the current process of constitutional reform with President Museveni on her visit to Uganda in early August.

An independent Constitutional Review Commission (CRC) in Uganda is currently looking at possible constitutional changes. We are taking a close interest in its important work. It is expected to make recommendations soon. We hope that its proposals will pave the way for a transition to a properly constituted multi-party democracy in Uganda.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Accident Group

Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had concerning payment of redundancy payments to employees of the Accident Group; and if she will make a statement. [121284]

Jacqui Smith: The Birmingham Redundancy Payments Office has received 1,870 claims from former employees of the Accident Group. Most of these workers have received payments or will do so in the next few days.

Russian Northern Fleet

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her role in the recent grant of financial aid to the Russian Northern fleet in respect to nuclear decommissioning; and from which budget this assistance came. [128167]

Mr. Timms: The Department manages a £32.5 million per annum programme of financial and technical assistance to Russia and other Former Soviet Union countries to address nuclear legacy issues. It includes a number of projects to help Russia deal with Spent Nuclear Fuel from decommissioned nuclear submarines as well as contributing to their dismantlement as part of the initiative launched by G8 leaders at the Kananaskis summit in 2002. Our initial portfolio of projects was announced during President Putin's state visit to the UK in June 2003. These include the dismantlement of two nuclear submarines, the construction of a new storage facilities for Spent Nuclear Fuel, and a series of projects to assist in the eventual safe removal of Spent Nuclear Fuel from Andreeva Bay—a former Russian Navy storage site for Spent Fuel from navy vessels and ice breakers. During this visit the Foreign Secretary signed a bilateral Agreement with the Russian Foreign Minister, which provides the legal cover for these projects to proceed. During the visit the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin) also signed the Arctic Military Cooperation Agreement (AMEC) that will allow a number of environmental nuclear clean up projects associated with submarine dismantlement to proceed. The AMEC assistance projects will be managed and provided with financial support under the DTI managed FSU Programme. In undertaking all these projects , the Department is working closely with both the MOD and FCO together with our Moscow embassy. We plan to publish by the end of the year a detailed report setting out the achievements in establishing this programme over the past two years. Further information on the programme and projects in Russia is available from the DTI website—www.dti.gov.uk/energy/nuclear/fsu/index.shtml

Arms Exports

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the export licences on the Military and Dual Lists granted to companies in the UK or to a *(a)* UK registered company and

(b) overseas national which have been (i) varied and (ii) revoked in each year since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [125666]

Nigel Griffiths: The details of export licences that have been revoked are published in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls, copies of which are the available from the Libraries of the House. The Annual Report also contains details of Open Individual Export Licences that have been varied so as to exclude a particular destination.

Variations to licences may be made for a number of reasons and it would entail disproportionate cost to list all export licences that have been varied since 2 May 1997.

The Department of Trade and Industry's Export Control Organisation does not record the nationality of applicants for an export licence.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the licences granted for the export of military equipment to Indonesia since 2002. [127042]

Nigel Griffiths: Between 1 January 2003 and 11 July 2003, the Department of Trade and Industry's Export Control Organisation issued 54 Standard Individual Export Licences and two Open Individual Export Licences, authorising the export of items on the Military List, where the end users were in Indonesia, with the following ratings:

ML1

ML4

ML5

ML6

ML10

ML11

ML13

ML22

PL5017.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what vehicle models are specified in the open licence for the export to Indonesia of armoured all wheel drive vehicles; what the terms are of the licence; and for what reason an open licence was granted. [127043]

Nigel Griffiths: The Department of Trade and Industry's Export Control Organisation issued an Open Individual Export Licence (OIEL) on 4 March 2002, authorising the export of no more than 3 CAMAC CAV 100 armoured all wheel drive vehicles to provide protection for BBC correspondents in Indonesia.

The standard conditions set out in every OIEL include, for example, the right of the Department of Trade and Industry to revoke the licence at any time.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what components or associated equipment for Hawk aircraft and Scorpion tanks were licensed for export to Indonesia in 2002. [127044]

Nigel Griffiths: The details of all relevant export licences are published by destination in the Government's Annual Report on Strategic Export Controls. A copy of the 2002 Annual Report is available from the Libraries of the House.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will list the model and value of *(a)* aircraft cannons and *(b)* military use vehicles for which licences were granted for export to Indonesia in 2002; [127045]

(2) if she will list the models of *(a)* aircraft cannons, *(b)* armoured fighting vehicles, *(c)* armoured personnel carriers, *(d)* combat aircraft, *(e)* combat helicopters and *(f)* general military aircraft for which components or associated equipment were licensed for export to Indonesia in 2002; and what the nature was of the components or associated equipment in each case. [127046]

Nigel Griffiths: The details of all relevant export licences are published by destination in the Government's Annual Report on Strategic Export Controls. A copy of the 2002 Annual Report is available from the Libraries of the House.

It would entail disproportionate cost to provide information on the models, values, components and associated equipment for which licences were granted for the proposed export to Indonesia since 2 May 1997.

BNFL

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much public money has been invested by BNFL in the US Nuclear Energy Institute in each year from 1997 to date. [119537]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 16 June 2003]:* Subscriptions made by BNFL Inc. and Westinghouse Electric Company to the US Nuclear Energy Institute are a matter for BNFL.

Departmental Costs

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost was to her Department for *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers, *(b)* taxis, *(c)* train travel, *(d)* the use of helicopters, *(e)* airline tickets and *(f)* chartered aeroplanes in each year since 1997. [123078]

Ms Hewitt: For parts (*a* and *f*) of the question I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 17 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 500W.

For parts (*b*, *c*, *d* and *e*) the DTI has devolved to local management the authorisation of travel claims for its staff, subject to checking procedures. It does not record the cost of taxis, train travel, helicopters or airline tickets used by staff separately. To obtain accurate data for the information requested would entail disproportionate cost.

Egg Industry

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the impact of possible reductions in European Union import tariffs on the UK egg industry. [127617]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have been asked to reply.

The Government are in favour of substantial market liberalisation and it is our policy to encourage international trade. Reductions in import tariffs will open the EU market to greater competition but the UK egg industry is in a strong position to compete through its ability to adapt quickly to market needs including through the operation of quality assurance schemes.

Electricity Supply Companies

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the companies supplying electricity to domestic consumers, indicating the nationality of the individuals and organisations holding a controlling interest. [128299]

Mr. Timms: The largest domestic electricity supply companies are Powergen, Innogy, Centrica, EDF Energy, Scottish Power, Scottish and Southern Energy.

Centrica, Scottish Power and Scottish and Southern Energy are British owned. EDF Energy is owned by Electricite de France; Powergen is owned by German utility; EON and Innogy is also owned by a German company, RWE.

There are also many smaller independent companies providing electricity to consumers.

Further details of all the companies licensed to supply domestic electricity in the UK can be found on the Ofgem website: www.ofgem.gov.uk

European Constitution

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with *(a)* colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and *(b)* counterparts in the European Union about the legislative competencies covered by the draft European constitution. [124773]

Jacqui Smith: As part of the normal Whitehall process, my officials and I have had regular correspondence with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to discuss all aspects of the Convention, including legislative competences. We have also had regular contact with member and accession states to discuss issues arising in the Convention. In line with exemptions 1 and 2 of the 'Code of Practice on Access to Government Information', it is not the normal practice of Governments to disclose details about internal discussions, or information whose disclosure would harm the conduct of international relations or affairs.

International Regulation

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on working towards international regulations on the practices of companies operating in developing countries in areas where voluntary codes of practice have proved ineffective. [125900]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government do not believe that a blanket regulatory approach at the international level would be a helpful or practicable one in respect of the wide variety of circumstances and impacts related to the activities of companies in developing countries. The Government will, however, continue actively promoting awareness of, and behaviour consistent, with the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises which provide recommendations on responsible business conduct and adherence to standards of behaviour supplemental to applicable law in individual countries.

Ministerial Visits

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the *(a)* foreign and *(b)* UK visits she has made since 1 April 2003; what the cost was to public funds of each trip; who she met; and what gifts were received. [126871]

Ms Hewitt: The Government publish the overall costs of all ministerial overseas travel and a list of all visits overseas by Cabinet Ministers costing in excess of £500 on an annual basis. The list for the period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003 was published by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 16 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 482W. The next list for the period 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004 will be published at the end of the financial year.

In respect of gifts received, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 14 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 482W.

Since 1 April 2003, I have undertaken the following visits in the UK:

2003	*UK visits*
2 April	Visit to Oxford Engineering in Abingdon for the launch of the Manufacturing Advisory Service Report
15 April	Visit to Landrover/Jaguar at Browns Lane, Coventry
20 June	Visit to CO2US plant on Teesside
4 July	Opening of East Midlands airport new terminal building and opening of the new Price Waterhouse building at Pegasus Business Park, Nottingham followed by an East Midlands in Europe lunch with business people at Autofil Ltd., Annesley, Nottinghamshire

The cost of travel for my visits in the UK between 1 April and 31 July 2003 is £2,000. This figure includes travel costs for the accompanying Private Secretary which cannot be separated out.

Post Offices

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices were closed due to *(a)* unprofitability and *(b)* the reorganisation of the Post Office in (i) 1997, (ii) 1998, (iii) 1999, (iv) 2000, (v) 2001, (vi) 2002 and (vii) 2003. [128385]

Mr. Timms: I understand from Post Office Ltd. that no data is held on the profitability or unprofitability of privately owned sub post offices that close. I also understand that net post office closures in the last six financial years were as follows.

	Number
Year to end March 1998	243
Year to end March 1999	233
Year to end March 2000	382
Year to end March 2001	547
Year to end March 2002	262
Year to end March 2003	[1]345

[1] The figure for the year to end March 2003 includes 102 post office closures under the urban reinvention programme.

Public Sector Contracts

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans her Department has to improve small business access to public sector contracts; and if she will make a statement. [127803]

Nigel Griffiths: A cross Government response to the Better Regulation Task Force report is due later in September and the DTI will take appropriate measures to support small business in implementing the response.

Recycled Paper

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what volume of recycled paper was exported in each year from 1997 to date to *(a)* China, *(b)* the Middle East and *(c)* the Far East; and what percentage of the total volume of recycled paper in the UK in each of those years this represented. [127223]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information requested is not available because the system of classification used to record trade does not separately identify recycled paper.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the effects of investment in renewable energy on reversing *(a)* climate change and *(b)* energy shortage. [128219]

Mr. Timms: The Energy White Paper, published earlier this year, estimated that by 2020 carbon emissions could be reduced by three to five million tonnes by achieving our aspiration of doubling the renewable share of electricity generation between 2010 and 2020. Diversification of our sources of energy supply will also contribute to increasing security of supply.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much of the Government's 2010 target for renewables *(a)* has been met and *(b)* is outstanding. [127193]

Mr. Timms: The information is as follows:

(a) In 2002, the most recent year for which figures are available, 1.7 per cent. of our electricity came from renewable sources eligible for the Renewables Obligation. (Generation from all renewable sources, including large-scale hydro, was 3.0 per cent.)

(b) The outstanding amount to reach a target of 10 per cent. of our electricity from renewables eligible for the Renewables Obligation is therefore 8.3 per cent.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in what ways she is working with the Scottish Executive on targets to meet renewable energy. [127196]

Mr. Timms: The Department works closely with the Scottish Executive on renewable energy issues. There is a regular dialogue between Departments to share information and to monitor the progress that renewable energy sources are making.

The Department has responsibility for the overall UK renewable energy target of 10 per cent. of electricity supplies to be generated from renewable sources by 2010. Renewable targets set within Scotland are a matter for the devolved Administration.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with her counterparts in other countries in Europe on their experience in renewables. [127197]

Mr. Timms: DTI Ministers and officials regularly engage with their European counterparts on the subject of renewables through such fora as the European Commission and the International Energy Agency, as well as bilateral meetings. Most recently, I met with my European counterparts during the joint energy and environment informal meeting at Montecatini in July, organised by the Italian Presidency, where much of the focus was on renewables.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she is taking to encourage electricity companies to invest in renewable energy. [128218]

Mr. Timms: The Government have introduced a range of measures to encourage electricity companies to invest in renewable energy. The recently published Energy White Paper, "Our Energy Future—Creating a Low Carbon Economy", sets out the policy on the increasing role renewable technologies will play in our overall energy policy, and highlights many of the successes that have already been achieved.

Our initial target is that 10 per cent. of the UK's electricity sales should be from renewable-sourced electricity by 2010. To help achieve the necessary growth to reach that target, we have introduced a number of initiatives:

The Renewables Obligation (and associated Renewables Obligation Scotland). Introduced in April 2001, these require all licensed electricity suppliers in Great Britain to supply a specified and growing proportion of their sales from renewable sources.

The Obligation is underpinned by a package of funding worth nearly £350 million, which will support our on-going New and Renewable R&D programme, and extensive programmes of capital grants for new and emerging technologies such as energy crops and other forms of bio-energy, offshore wind, solar photovoltaics, wave and tidal power.

In order to develop our offshore wind potential, last year we published a consultation entitled "Future Offshore", which sets out a strategic framework to support the development of that industry. We have announced that future development should take place in three strategically significant areas—namely the North West (including Liverpool Bay), the Greater Wash and

the Thames Estuary and plan to announce next month the names of successful bidders for projects within those areas.

The Renewables UK unit to was set up last year within DTI with the specific aim of maximizing the benefits of renew ables to UK industry, and to help that industry develop.

Industrial users of renewable sourced electricity also benefit from exemption from Climate Change Levy payments.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of her Department's support for renewable energy research. [127867]

Mr. Timms: A renewables innovation review is in progress and should be completed by end November 2003. It includes an assessment of past and present support programmes. A key aim is to ensure the Department's support is targeted so as to achieve maximum effect.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Mr. Caton: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will make a statement on progress made with the alternative livelihoods elements of the drug strategy in Afghanistan. [127132]

Hilary Benn: Eliminating illicit opium production in Afghanistan is a long-term challenge. The Afghan Government has set a target for eliminating cultivation within 10 years. The development of alternative livelihoods for poor people currently involved in opium production will take time. But work has started on a number of livelihoods programmes.

The Department for International Development (DFID) is providing £20 million over three years to our livelihoods programme in Afghanistan. We are working with the Afghanistan Transitional Administration and maintaining coordination with other donors to develop and implement a coherent national sustainable livelihoods strategy for Afghanistan.

Our main contribution to implementing the Afghan national counter-narcotics strategy is in facilitating opportunities for those currently involved in poppy cultivation to obtain alternative livelihoods, based on legal activities either in agriculture, small businesses or employment.

We are funding with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (£3.75 million) and the Aga Khan Development Network (£1 million) to pilot targeted livelihoods projects in areas affected by poppy cultivation. Lessons learnt from these projects can then be built on and incorporated into the national strategy.

We are also funding programmes under the National Development Budget, such as the National Solidarity Programme (£2 million in this financial year), to provide greater social protection and better natural resource management. In support of these programmes we are working with other donors to provide a flexible package of technical assistance and training resources to increase the capacity of the Ministries of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and Agriculture and Animal Husbandry to manage priority investment programmes relevant to rebuilding livelihoods.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what liaison there will be between NGOs, UN agencies and the Transitional Administration in implementing Afghanistan's budget programmes. [127134]

Hilary Benn: The Afghan Government has established a system of Consultative Groups, which cover a wide range of policy areas crucial to the reconstruction process such as Health, Education, Infrastructure, Refugees and Returnees and Security amongst others. The Consultative Groups facilitate effective cooperation between the various donor governments, NGOs, UN agencies and other aid organisations in the planning, financing and implementation of the goals outlined in the National Development Budget for Afghanistan.

Linda Perham: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what recent representations the Department has received on international investment in Afghanistan. [127790]

Hilary Benn: DFID has received recent representations from a UK based International Management Consultancy, McKinsey and Company. The company has developed a proposal on behalf of the Afghan Minister of Finance for a Venture Capital Fund to be launched in November 2003. The Fund will provide entrepreneurs with capital and business coaching. The proposal is being considered by officials.

My Department has also received representations from Standard Chartered Bank. It will, as soon as relevant banking legislation is passed, be the first international bank operating in Afghanistan.

John Barrett: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will make a statement on the humanitarian consequences of the flooding of *(a)* southern and *(b)* north eastern districts of Afghanistan. [127936]

Hilary Benn: Recent wet weather has brought relief to Afghanistan after years of drought; however many houses in the poverty-stricken country are held together with mud and timber and are ill-equipped to cope with heavy rains.

In May of this year three people were killed, 30 houses destroyed and 70 partially damaged as a result of heavy rainfall and flash floods in Baghlan, Kunduz and Takhar provinces in north eastern Afghanistan. Most personal belongings and food reserves were destroyed or buried in mud. Large swathes of arable land were also covered in mud following the floods.

In the southern province of Helmand, at least 30 people were killed after powerful floods washed away their houses on 20 April.

DFID is supporting the work of the UNHCR in Afghanistan (£5.8 million so far in 2003) who supplied tents, soap and food items to affected families through

the local disaster management structure. Also the FAO has provided advice on remedial action, which can be taken by farmers to salvage their crops.

Botswana

Angus Robertson: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what criteria the Department applies to the classification of groups of people as indigenous peoples; how these criteria apply to the classification of the *(a)* Gana, *(b)* Gwi and *(c)* Bakgalagadi peoples of Botswana; what discussions the Department has had with the Government of Botswana on this issue; and if he will make a statement. [128044]

Hilary Benn: There is no universally agreed definition of the criteria for classifying certain groups as indigenous people. The Government does not have its own hard and fast definition. We recognise that indigenous people are often particularly poor and vulnerable, and encourage governments to consult carefully with them about their needs and interests. We have discussed the situation of San communities in Botswana at ministerial level on several recent occasions.

Burundi

Mr. Love: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what action the Department has taken to assist in improving the systems of justice to deal with war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burundi; and if he will make a statement. [127819]

Hilary Benn: A number of donor countries are providing support to the justice sector in Burundi, particularly Belgium. DFID's support therefore focuses on a number of other areas equally critical to Burundi's prospects where we feel we can have an important role. These include political and financial help to support the delivery of a lasting ceasefire and implementation of the Arusha Accords; support for demobilisation and reintegration and security sector reform; development and implementation of a national poverty reduction strategy; increased management capacity to ensure macro-economic stability; the implementation of a national plan for HIV/AIDS prevention; as well as on-going humanitarian assistance. We are working closely with our international partners to achieve these objectives.

John Robertson: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment he has made of the humanitarian situation in Bujumbura, Burundi. [128150]

Hilary Benn: The general humanitarian situation in Burundi remains poor, with very high levels of malnutrition, and, resulting from this, high levels of mortality. There are serious problems of access to some communities.

So far this financial year we have provided funding of £400,000 through Medecins Sans Frontieres for medical support in Bujumbura Rural and nutrition programmes in Karuzi. We are about to make a contribution of £500,000 to the UN Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal 2003 and are currently considering a number of humanitarian proposals from other international NGOs and agencies.

We stand ready to make further responses to the humanitarian needs of those most vulnerable, focusing on health and nutrition support through international relief organisations.

John Robertson: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assistance his Department is giving to displaced persons on Bujumbura, Burundi. [128145]

Hilary Benn: The UK's humanitarian support to Burundi includes a £400,000 grant to Medecins Sans Frontieres for emergency health work, which benefits displaced persons in Bujumbura by increasing access to basic health and to emergency surgical services. We envisage a further £500,000 contribution to the UN Consolidated Appeal in the near future. We continue to monitor the humanitarian situation and will continue to respond to requests for support in line with perceived humanitarian priorities.

Chad

John Barrett: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what action his Department is taking to help Central African Republic refugees living in southern Chad. [127933]

Hilary Benn: We do not provide bilateral assistance to the Central African Republic or to the Republic of Chad. Our development assistance is provided throughmultilateral channels such as the EC and the UN agencies that operate in the two countries.

Common Agricultural Policy

John Barrett: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what impact recent reforms to the Common Agricultural Policy will have on developing countries. [127940]

Hilary Benn: The deal agreed by the Agriculture Council on 26 June represents a real shift in agricultural policy which will benefit developing countries as well as European farmers and taxpayers. The most important change is the de-linking of support from production, but there have also been significant changes to some commodity regimes. The reforms should connect European farmers more closely to the market and begin to reduce excessive production which results in dumping and harms developing countries. The deal will also pave the way for reforms to other EU commodity regimes and most importantly should give new momentum to the current round of WTO agriculture negotiations.

Ethiopia

John Barrett: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will make a statement on the drought in southern Ethiopia. [127937]

Hilary Benn: Inadequate rainfall affected food production in many parts of the country, leading vulnerable communities to experience food shortages and nutrition related illnesses. In response, food aid has

been distributed, and supplementary and therapeutic feeding programmes have been established to assist those most affected.

This response has helped to reduce levels of malnutrition. However recent reports have indicated high levels of child malnutrition persisting in some parts of southern region. In these districts, government and NGOs are distributing dry ration (cereals), targeted supplementary food and have established additional therapeutic feeding centres.

The situation has now stabilised. We will continue to monitor the situation closely and are prepared to provide additional support as necessary.

John Barrett: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will make a statement on the levels of child prostitution in Ethiopia. [127943]

Hilary Benn: In May this year the Ethiopian Government ratified the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (182) which commits it to take immediate and effective measures to secure prohibition and elimination of extreme forms of child labour including the use, procuring or offering of children for prostitution or pornography. We do not currently have access to published statistics specifying the extent of the problem in Ethiopia.

DFID has funded an Information Communications Technologies project (ICT) in partnership with civil society organisations and the private sector, which seeks to provide street children with skills to enable them to gain beneficial employment. Specific project outputs include: ICT-based support to a girls club for the prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation of children, and ICT delivery of health related and life skills established through a drop-in centre for the prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation of children.

John Barrett: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what work his Department is undertaking with the Government of Ethiopia to ensure that all Ethiopians suffering from the HIV and aids virus have access to anti-retroviral drugs; and if he will make a statement. [127944]

Hilary Benn: An estimated 2.1 million people are infected with HIV/AIDS in Ethiopia, from a population of 67 million.

The Government of Ethiopia are continuing to work on necessary health regulatory systems such as anti-retroviral guidelines on formulation and dosage, and on the procurement, distribution and use of anti-retroviral drugs in Ethiopia. In July 2003, anti-retroviral drugs (generic and brand names) were legally introduced in Ethiopia for paying patients. However, due to scarcity of resources, the Government of Ethiopia are unable to provide free anti-retroviral drugs to all.

DFID is funding Medecins Sans Frontiers to undertake a pilot HIV/AIDS project in Humera in West Tigray to distribute anti-retroviral drugs for treating HIV/AIDS patients. This is being done in close collaboration with the Regional Health Bureau and National HIV/AIDS Council and will serve as a pilot for larger scale schemes.

Internet

John Robertson: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment he has made of the use of the internet for communities in the developing world as a tool for self-reliance. [128141]

Hilary Benn: DFID promotes the internet's use by communities in the developing world as a tool for self-reliance in several of its programmes in the field of Information communication technologies for development. For each of these programmes careful and thorough consideration has been given to ensure their effectiveness and extent to which they could be used as a tool for self-reliance. We also provide support for research into wider potential impact of the internet in local communities in developing countries.

John Robertson: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what action the Department is taking to expand the use of *(a)* internet access and *(b)* electronic information to communities in developing countries. [128143]

Hilary Benn: *(a)* DFID is carrying out a number of initiatives designed to expand internet access in developing countries. These include:

Catalysing Access to Information Communications Technologies in Africa (CATIA) 2003–06 which promotes reform and affordable access to new and traditional Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) across Africa and forms part of our response to the G8 Africa Action Plan.

Building Digital Opportunities consists of a package of cross-sectoral initiatives that address some of the key barriers and opportunities for ICTs in achieving development targets.

(b) DFID is also funding the Open Knowledge Network, an innovative project using ICTs to enable poor people to create and exchange local information and knowledge electronically, eventually on a global basis.

Liberia

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what discussions the Department has had with non-governmental organisations on efforts to prevent cholera, gastro-enteritis, diarrhoea and dehydration in the refugee camps in and around Monrovia, Liberia. [128221]

Hilary Benn: DFID has had a humanitarian assessment mission in Liberia since 15 August 2003, which has conducted assessments into the needs of the displaced populations in and around Monrovia. With overcrowding in the centres of displacement, and inadequate water and sanitation facilities, diarrhoeal diseases are reported to have increased, and cholera has been recorded (1,203 new cases were registered between 11 and 17 August in Monrovia, up from 727 cases in the previous week). We have had detailed discussions with the NGOs that are working in the health sector. Epidemic prevention measures are under way, and adequate quantities of supplies have been flown in and pre-positioned. An inter-NGO task force is monitoring the situation and coordinating prevention efforts. To date, we have committed £2.9 million in 2003 to the NGOs and international agencies providing health care

in and around Monrovia. We have committed a further £4.7 million for additional humanitarian support. We are currently reviewing proposals submitted to us.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what discussions the Department has had with non-governmental organisations on the level of relief supplies in refugee camps in and around Monrovia, Liberia. [128222]

Hilary Benn: DFID has had a humanitarian assessment mission in Liberia since 15 August 2003 which has had extensive discussions with NGOs and conducted extensive assessments into the needs of the refugees camps in and around Monrovia. These have drawn attention to critical shortfalls in refugees' access to clean water, health services, food, sanitation facilities, and nutritional care. To help address these needs, we have committed £4.7 million to support the humanitarian work of the UN, the International Committee of the Red Cross and NGOs. This is in addition to the £2.9 million we have provided to international agencies and NGOs in Liberia so far this year.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assistance the Department is giving to displaced persons in Liberia. [128223]

Hilary Benn: DFID has had a humanitarian assessment team in the region since 1 August 2003, and on the ground in Liberia since 15 August 2003. They have been assessing all aspects of the humanitarian crisis, including the needs of the displaced populations in and around Monrovia. The assessment has drawn attention to critical shortfalls in the displaced and host-population's access to clean water, health services, food, sanitation facilities and nutritional care. To address these needs, we have committed £4.7 million to support the humanitarian work of the UN, the International Committee of the Red Cross and NGOs. This is in addition to the £2.9 million we have provided to international agencies and NGOs in Liberia so far this year.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment the Department has made of the level of clean water, medical supplies and other essential provisions in refugee camps in and around Monrovia, Liberia. [128224]

Hilary Benn: DFID has had a humanitarian assessment mission in Liberia since 15 August 2003, which has conducted extensive assessments into the needs of the displaced populations in and around Monrovia. The assessment has drawn attention to critical shortfalls in the displaced and host-population's access to clean water, health services, food, sanitation facilities, and nutrition. To address these needs, DFID has approved £4.7 million to support the humanitarian work of the UN, the International Committee of the Red Cross and NGOs. This is in addition to the £2.9 million we have provided to international agencies and NGOs in Liberia so far this year.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment the Department has made of the humanitarian situation in Liberia. [128227]

Hilary Benn: DFID has had a humanitarian assessment team in the region since 1 August 2003, and on the ground in Liberia since 15 August 2003. They have been assessing all aspects of the on-going humanitarian crisis, including the food, health, nutrition, water and sanitation sectors, and have been liaising with all humanitarian partners from the UN, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the NGO community. Based on the team's assessment, we have finalised a humanitarian response strategy to which we have committed £4.7 million. This will bring the UK's total humanitarian assistance to Liberia to £7.6 million for 2003. We will continue to keep the situation under close review and focus funding on those agencies that have the best access to those most in need.

New Partnership for Africa's Development

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment he has made of progress on the New Partnership for Africa's Development plan in southern African countries. [128192]

Hilary Benn: The New Partnership of for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is a continent-wide plan with ambitious aims of tackling poverty in the whole of Africa through increased investment, better governance and a partnership with donors based on mutual accountability. The UK fully supports the aims of NEPAD and recognises that it is a long-term plan.

NEPAD has made substantial progress since it was founded in 2001. 16 countries have signed up to the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), a voluntary initiative to improve political, economic and corporate governance in Africa. The first reviews are due to take place later this year. NEPAD has also made progress in drawing up plans for an African Peace Keeping Capacity, and plans on priority areas including infrastructure, agriculture and environment. This progress will lead to long-term improvements in governance, peace keeping and investment in southern Africa as well as other African regions.

Of the southern African countries, both Mozambique and South Africa have signed up to the APRM. Presidents Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique are particularly keen supporters of NEPAD and both Presidents are on the Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee of NEPAD. NEPAD is reflected in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Regional Indicative Strategic Paper. The Government of South Africa has a NEPAD outreach programme and a NEPAD coordinating point in its Department of Foreign Affairs- it is also seeking to establish NEPAD focal points in all Ministries. NEPAD is a long-term programme, it will take time to deliver, but it is gaining increasing support across the continent.

New Technology Provision

John Robertson: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what action he is taking to ensure that new technology provided to communities in developing countries is appropriate for need, sensibly deployed and that local people are consulted about their requirements. [128142]

Hilary Benn: DFID funds several projects helping to provide new technology to developing country communities. Each of these has emerged from extensive consultation with key stakeholders, including representatives of the communities themselves, to ensure that the provision is fit for purpose and appropriate to their needs.

In addition, DFID is widely engaged in research and advocacy through, for example, the UN Information Communication Technologies Task Force and the World Summit on the Information Society aimed at focusing new technology policy on the needs and interests of poor people in developing countries.

Nigeria

John Barrett: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what progress is being made towards the immunisation of people in Nigeria against polio. [127942]

Hilary Benn: Routine immunization coverage in Nigeria reaches about 27 per cent. of children with Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV). Due to the poor state of routine immunization services, the Federal Government of Nigeria established in 1997 the National Programme on Immunization (NPI). The NPI has focussed on providing supplementary, door-to-door coverage with OPV using National and Sub-national Immunization Days (NIDs and SNIDs). Around 40 million doses are administered through NIDs and SNIDs every year.

Interruption of the transmission of Wild Polio Virus (WPV) had been achieved in 29 out of 37 states by 2001, but unfortunately the situation has again worsened, with confirmed cases in 15 states in the first half of 2003. All these states are in the north, and the south remains polio-free. Adverse propaganda by religious leaders is alienating some sections of the population from the immunization workers.

My Department is working with the Nigerian Government and with other international partners to meet the challenge of polio eradication in Nigeria. This includes a grant of £50 million to the World Health Organization for polio work in the ten global priority countries.

Palestinian Refugees

Mr. Love: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what support the Department provides to Palestinian refugees in *(a)* Jordan, *(b)* Lebanon and *(c)* Syria for (i) health programmes and (ii) relief of poverty; and if he will make a statement. [127813]

Hilary Benn: The great majority of DFID's support to Palestinian refugees is through contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) General Fund. This provides education, health, relief and social services to Palestinian refugees in all five fields of operations: Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. UNRWA determines the allocations between fields, and between sectors. In 2002, DFID contributed £13 million to UNRWA's General Fund. A similar contribution is planned for 2003. In addition, we fund various technical cooperation projects, including health programmes in Lebanon.

Sao Tome and Principe

Angus Robertson: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development (1) what analysis the Department has made of the effect of the military coup on *(a)* aid spending and *(b)* international development projects in Sao Tome and Principe; and if he will make a statement; [127259]

(2) how much aid is spent directly by the Department in Sao Tome and Principe; and if he will make a statement. [127260]

Hilary Benn: The UK does not have a development programme in Sao Tome and Principe. The main bilateral donors are Portugal, France, Spain and Taiwan and the principal multilateral donors are the World Bank, European Community and the African Development Bank. Most development projects focus on infrastructure, agriculture, health and education. The recent coup brought the country to a standstill for a few days. But apart from temporarily slowing down the efforts of the donor community, recent events seem to have had no other negative impact on development programmes.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what projects in Sao Tome and Principe are funded through aid from the Department; and if he will make a statement. [127262]

Hilary Benn: DFID does not have a country programme for Sao Tome and Principe and therefore does not provide funding for particular projects in the country, apart from a small grants scheme for Angola and Sao Tome and Principe managed by the British Embassy in Luanda.

Secondments

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what the Department's policy is on employing secondees from the private sector; how many secondees from the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sectors the Department employed in each year since 1997; from which companies and organisations they were seconded; at what level they were employed; and if he will make a statement. [127060]

Hilary Benn: DFID encourages secondments from a wide range of organisations in both the private and public sectors.

Information on inward secondments for the period 1997–98 to 1999–2000 is not readily available. The folowing statistics relate to secondments into DFID in each financial year from 2000–01.

Seconded to DFID	Private Sector	NGO	Public Sector	Organisations	Grade[1]	Total
2000–01	3		1	1 Marconi 1 Virgin One 1 Cisco Systems 1 Other Government Dept	1 SCS 3 Band A	4
2001–02		1	6	1 International Alert 2 Other Government Dept 1 Met Police 1 Crown Agents 2 European Commission	4 Band A 3 Band B	7
2002–03			15	14 Other Government Dept 1 European Commission	2 SCS 1 Band A 12 Band B	15
2003–04	1	1	8	1 Rio Tinto 1 Christian Aid 8 Other Government Dept	7 Band A 3 Band B	10

[1] SCS: Senior Civil Service
[1] Band A: Senior Executive Officer to Senior Principal [Grade 6]
[1] Band 8: Executive Officer, Higher Executive Officer, Civil Service Fast Stream

Sierra Leone

Mr. Love: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what aid has been provided to Sierra Leone in each of the last five years; what private investment has taken place as a result; and if he will make a statement. [127807]

Hilary Benn: The total value of UK official aid to Sierra Leone in each of the last five financial years is as follows:

	£ thousand
1998–99	9,153
1999–2000	30,044
2000–01	35,148
2001–02	37,177
2002–03	32,756

Our programme does not include direct measures to promote investment. We have focussed on reconstruction and recovery programmes, security sector and governance reforms and budgetary support. The programme is intended to assist the development of safety and security and accountable and effective governance. These are essential conditions for investors. Key areas of our support for the promotion of investor confidence are public financial management, audit and public procurement reform, law reform, support to the Anti Corruption Commission and effective regulation of the diamond industry.

We have recently carried out a review of programmes by the Government of Sierra Leone and other donors to support employment and investment, and are considering the possibility of supporting such programmes. We have also agreed a request by the Government to support a post of adviser on privatisation and investment in the Office of the President.

Sudan

John Barrett: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what steps he is taking to encourage a free press in Sudan. [127938]

Hilary Benn: We have regularly raised press freedom with the Government of Sudan bilaterally and through the EU-Sudan Political Dialogue, including at its most recent meeting on 21 July when EU Heads of Mission raised the closure of newspapers and restrictions on reporting. On 9 August President Beshir announced the complete lifting of press censorship. Our Embassy in Khartoum will monitor implementation of this arrangement. In 2003–04 DFID is funding a £9,570 training package for 60 selected young Sudanese journalists in modern journalist skills including editing, publishing and translation.

John Barrett: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment he has made of the warning of the World Food Programme that food rations in Sudan may be cut by 50 per cent.due to a lack of funding. [127939]

Hilary Benn: We remain concerned over World Food Programme reports that only 30 per cent. of their programmes are funded at present. We have provided two and a half million pounds so far this year and will consider further contributions as the need arises, in order that food is provided to vulnerable populations throughout Sudan.

We welcome the progress both the United Nations and World Food Programme have made in recent months to expand humanitarian access; after a gap of five years, the World Food Programme has recently completed a successful barge operation delivering 2000 MT of food to 500,000 people (some for the first time)—and at a considerable saving when compared to the costs of air travel.

We are also aware of the discussions between United States and Government of Sudan over the latter's change in policy regarding the import of genetically modified foods, and hope this can be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties.

Uganda

John Barrett: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what estimate he has made of the number of child soldiers in Uganda. [127932]

Hilary Benn: Exact numbers of child soldiers within the regular Ugandan Army have yet to be confirmed. We believe that the Government of Uganda is taking serious steps to address this issue. In May 2002 it ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It has reinforced army recruitment systems in an attempt to screen out underage recruits. The issue remains a problem for the auxiliary forces, although the numbers are believed to be relatively small. UNICEF, diplomatic missions (including the UK) and the Uganda Human Rights Commission have brought specific cases to the Army's attention. With UNICEF's co-operation, we understand that these children are in the process of being demobilised. We will continue to monitor this issue closely.

UNICEF Uganda also estimates that the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel group operating in Northern Uganda, has abducted 20,400 children since 1990. Abduction and forced conscription of children is the chief recruitment method of the LRA. 6,000 of these children have yet to be accounted for.

World Trade Organisation

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development whether the Government will provide human resources to aid developing nations in the negotiation process at the forthcoming WTO meeting in Cancun. [127298]

Hilary Benn: The UK trade related capacity building programme continues to provide support to developing countries to build their capacity to negotiate favourable deals in trade negotiations, interpret trade agreements, take advantage of new trading opportunities and reduce any negative effects of trade liberalisation. This includes support to organisations in Geneva offering independent advice, information on WTO issues and networking opportunities for countries with common interests or concerns. This will enable developing countries to draw up informed negotiating positions and connect with other countries with similar interests.

Zimbabwe

John Barrett: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what the latest crop forecasts are in Zimbabwe; and if he will make a statement. [127934]

Hilary Benn: Zimbabwe's maize crop was harvested in May. A joint FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission to Zimbabwe (19 June 2003) indicated that although national cereal production was considerably up on last year, a significant food gap remains.

The Report estimated that cereal production for consumption in 2003–04 will be 980,000 tonnes. This is 41 per cent. higher than last year, but 51 per cent. below the 2000–01 harvest, which was itself significantly below average. Production of maize, the main staple, is forecast at 803,000 tonnes. This is 61 per cent. up on last year, but 46 per cent. lower than in 2000–01 and represents less than half of the national requirement. Wheat production has dramatically declined.

Although food is now available in many areas, some areas (such as Matabeleland), will require food throughout the year. By January/February of 2004, the UN estimate that 5.5 million Zimbabweans will need help obtaining food. The UK government have just approved support for another £8 million for food aid through organisations such as CAFOD, Save the Children and Christian Aid. This includes food aid for vulnerable groups such as farm workers, children and the chronically ill. The European Commission has also contributed €25 million (of which the UK share is about €5 million) to this year's WFP emergency appeal.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment the Department has made of the effects of the food crisis in Zimbabwe on neighbouring countries. [128190]

Hilary Benn: The food crisis in Zimbabwe is part of a wider crisis of economic collapse and failure of governance. There is no definitive account of the overall effect on the region. However, it is clear that the dramatic shift in Zimbabwe's fortunes from a significant exporter of food to a massive importer—with the majority of its population needing food aid last year and perhaps half this year—has affected food security throughout the region. Food security in other countries in the region has improved significantly following the May harvests. While this short-term progress is welcome, long-term efforts to reduce the likelihood of further food crises in Southern Africa will be unlikely to succeed without significant policy reform and economic recovery in Zimbabwe.

Long-term efforts to increase investment and build economies in Southern Africa will also be hampered so long as present Zimbabwean policies continue. There has been a significant fall in trade with Zimbabwe; increased debt arrears to its neighbours primarily by Zimbabwean state-owned enterprises; and a negative regional image to investors, which has affected levels of foreign direct investment. The poor control of foot and mouth disease now widespread in Zimbabwe has also affected Botswana and threatens South Africa. The increase in illegal trade avoiding government controls between Zimbabwe and its neighbours is an additional negative impact.

The crisis is also leading to higher vulnerability to HIV infection through greater movement of people and higher levels of unsafe prostitution, and has prevented more positive measures to control this pandemic in Zimbabwe, which will impact on the region in years to come. Large-scale migration has also occurred, especially to Botswana and South Africa. This has had a negative impact in terms of the numbers, and sparsely populated Botswana's capacity to absorb such large numbers makes it especially affected. However given the relatively high levels of education of Zimbabweans, it will also have a positive impact on their economies at great cost to Zimbabwe.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment the Department has made of the humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe. [128191]

Hilary Benn: Zimbabwe's maize crop was harvested in April/May, but some parts of the country are already in need of food aid. Although the maize crop is 41 per cent. higher than last year's, this is still less than half of the 2001 crop. The Government of Zimbabwe has prepared its appeal for humanitarian assistance, but has committed few resources of its own due to the dire state of the economy. The amount of food requested from the international community is therefore greater than last year.

The UN and Non-Governmental Organisations are starting to scale up feeding operations. The World Food Programme fed just over one million people in July and this has increased to 1.5 million in August. Approximately another one million are being fed by other international organisations. The UN predicts that 5.5 million people in Zimbabwe (46 per cent. of the population) will require humanitarian assistance by the end of the year. The UK government has just approved support for another £8 million for food aid through organisations such as CAFOD, Save the Children and Christian Aid. This includes food aid for vulnerable groups such as farm workers, children and the chronically ill. The European Commission has also contributed euro 25 million (of which the UK share is about euro 5 million) to this year's WFP emergency appeal.

The UK Government, along with other development partners, is concerned that a new Government of Zimbabwe policy on NGOs could undermine the independence of NGO controlled feeding programme. The UN has already informed Zimbabwe Government that this policy is undermining contributions to this year's emergency appeal. We will be monitoring the situation on the ground carefully and will be prepared to suspend feeding programmes if there are reports of political interference in food distribution.

TREASURY

Cancer (Gullet)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many patients were diagnosed with cancer of the gullet in *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1994, *(d)* 1990, *(e)* 1986 and *(f)* 1982. [127451]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Simon Burns, dated 8 September 2003:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning how many patients were diagnosed with cancer of the gullet in *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1994, *(d)* 1990, *(e)* 1986 and *(f)* 1982. [127451].

Oesophageal cancer is commonly referred to as "cancer of the gullet". The numbers of registrations of newly diagnosed cases of cancer of the oesophagus in England for the years requested are given in the table below.

Figures for 2002 are not available. The latest published figures are for 1999, as shown in the table. The first release of registrations of newly diagnosed cases of cancer in England for 2000 will be published on the National Statistics website at the end of August 2003.

Registrations of newly diagnosed cases for oesophageal[1] cancer in England, persons, selected years

	[1]*Malignant neoplasm of oesophagus*
1982	3,924
1986	4,339
1990	4,981
1994	5,611
1998	5,730
1999	5,893

Note:
For the years 1991 to 1994, International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision Code (ICD-9), code 150. For the years 1995 to 1999, International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10), code C15.
Source:
Office for National Statistics.

Pre-eclampsia

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many babies *(a)* died and *(b)* were stillborn as a result of pre-eclampsia in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [127447]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Simon Burns, dated 8 September 2003:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on the number of babies that *(a)* died or *(b)* were stillborn as a result of pre-eclampsia, during the last twelve months for which figures are available. (127447)

In January 1986, with the introduction of a neonatal and stillbirth certificate in England and Wales, it is no longer possible to identify a single underlying cause of death, as equal weighting is given to the main conditions in the infant and the mother.

In England and Wales for 2001, 60 babies under the age of one and 123 stillbirths had a mention of pre-eclampsia and eclampsia on the death certificate, including Hemolysis anaemia, Elevated Liver enzymes, Low Platelet count syndrome.

There were also 17 babies under the age of one and 37 stillbirths that had a mention of pregnancy induced hypertension which was not specified as eclampsia or pre-eclampsia.

Strokes

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people died from strokes and stroke-related diseases in each year between 1995 and 2002. [127700]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Chris Grayling, dated 8 September 2003:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning how many people died from strokes and stroke-related diseases in each year between 1995 and 2002. (127700)

I refer you to the answer given in Hansard on 17 July 2003, column 463W to Paul Burstow MP. This indicated that figures are to be found in the annual reference volumes "Mortality Statistics: Cause DH2" and provided an explanation of changes in the data series in 2001. The latest publication in this series contains figures for stroke for 2001 and is available on the National Statistics website at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_health/Dh2_28/DH2No28.pdf.

Aggregates Levy

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been raised from the aggregates levy in each region in the UK since the levy was introduced. [127212]

John Healey: Aggregate Levy revenue receipts and forecast revenues were published in Table C8 of this year's Financial Statement and Budget Report [HC 500]. These are provided for the UK as a whole and are not available by geographical region.

Mr. Mates: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much was raised by the aggregates levy on *(a)* virgin aggregate and *(b)* processed aggregate products in Northern Ireland in financial year 2002–03; and how much is forecast to be raised by the levy on each in Northern Ireland in each financial year from 2003–04 to 2006–07; [127740]

(2) what steps he has taken to monitor the environmental effects of the aggregates levy in *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* Northern Ireland; and what the results have been; [127741]

(3) when his officials last visited Northern Ireland to assess the impact of the aggregates levy on *(a)* the economy and *(b)* the environment in Northern Ireland. [127742]

John Healey: Data for revenue collected under the aggregates levy come from levy returns submitted by aggregates businesses and so do not include information on different types of aggregate exploited. These data are recorded for the UK as a whole and are not separately available for Northern Ireland. Revenue forecasts for the aggregates levy are also made for the UK as a whole, and not by region. Revenue raised by the aggregates levy in 2002–03 is published in Table 2.1D of Financial Statistics, June 2003, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. Revenue forecasts for 2003–04 are given in Table C8 of this year's Financial Statement and Budge Report (HC 500).

Customs and Excise officials with policy and operational policy responsibility for the levy have visited Northern Ireland on a number of occasions to meet officials and industry representatives. The most recent meeting was in June and further meetings are planned.

As with all taxes, the Government continue to monitor the impact of the aggregates levy as part of the Budget process. We recently commissioned further independent research into the effects of the levy in Northern Ireland and this research is continuing. The Northern Ireland aggregates industry has welcomed this further research and is fully involved in discussion with those undertaking it. The findings will help to inform policy relating to the levy in Northern Ireland.

ASPIRE Programme

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the suppliers with whom Inland Revenue held discussions with regard to the Inland Revenue ASPIRE programme; whether bidders for the ASPIRE programme had been subject to an Inland Revenue compliance investigation in the previous three years; and what tax and interest recoveries had been made from the potential bidders for the ASPIRE programme. [125019]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue had discussions with a large number of potential suppliers in the early stages of the ASPIRE competition who expressed an interest in bidding for the contract. These bidders were reduced to a short-list of BT plc, Cap Gemini Ernst & Young, and EDS in July 2002. As part of the development of their bids these three suppliers formed consortia with the following:

BT plc are working with Computer Sciences Corporation and SchlumbergerSema.

Cap Gemini Ernst & Young are working with Fujitsu Services.

EDS are working with Accenture.

The Inland Revenue has had frequent discussions with all seven companies since the short-listed bidders were announced.

A provision in the ASPIRE Invitation to Tender (ITT) allowed the Inland Revenue to undertake a review of the tax affairs of the companies that responded to the ITT. These reports were used as a factor in the ASPIRE evaluation.

Census

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research he has commissioned into the effectiveness of current methods of research used to collect data for the United Kingdom's census; and if he will make a statement. [127405]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Stephen O'Brien, dated 8 September 2003:

As National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking about research into the effectiveness of the Census. (127405)

Work is continuing within the Office for National Statistics (ONS), taking account of the evaluation of all aspects of the 2001 Census, to gain in particular, a better understanding of differences between the Census results and the previous mid-year population estimates. This research is wide ranging, including address-matching studies in Westminster and Manchester, a review of migration statistics and comparisons of census results with national and local administrative data sources.

ONS recently published 'A demographic statistics service for the 21st century', a wide ranging review of population statistics issues that set out the areas for development in the next decade.

More specific research into the future of the census is also underway, considering the modifications that could be made to a traditional census, taking account of the lessons from the 2001 Census and the potential of new technologies. Alternatives to the traditional census approach are also being explored including: a rolling census, covering successive sections of the population each year; a sample census, only covering a percentage of the population; producing statistics from existing person-based data held by government for administrative purposes; or some combination of these. The first phase of this research will result in recommendations being published in late 2003.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total cost was in real terms of compiling data for the *(a)* 1981, *(b)* 1991 and *(c)* 2001 census. [127407]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Stephen O'Brien, dated 8 September 2003:

As National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking what the total cost was in real terms of compiling data for the *(a)* 1981, *(b)* 1991 and *(c)* 2001 Censuses (127407)

The cost for the 2001 Census in England and Wales, is £207m over the life of the project (1993–94 to 2005–06). This cost includes amounts in respect of initial planning, development, for the funding of major tests in 1997 and the conduct of the Census Rehearsal in 1999. Costs also include scheduled contract payments, recruitment and training of all the field staff, the publicity campaign and those incurred in making any final adjustments, prior to live running, to procedures and systems following the Rehearsal.

Compared to the previous Census in 1991, the 2001 Census incurred additional real costs to cope with increases in the number of households and the increased difficulty in contacting households in today's social conditions. There were also costs resulting from expanding the census outputs to meet more demanding user requirements. However, there were savings derived from the introduction of automation of many processes.

The 2001 Census included the processing of 100% of responses to all questions, which was a major user requirement. This was not a viable option for the 1981 and 1991 Censuses using the technology available at the time, and for a number of questions only a 10 per cent sample of forms from these Censuses were processed. The cost of the 2001 Census also included the Census Coverage Survey as a key part of the methodology. This was a validation exercise on a much larger scale than the small post-enumeration surveys carried out in previous Censuses.

Child Tax Credit

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate how long it takes on average to *(a)* complete and *(b)* process the application form for child tax credit; and whether his Department has a target for the number of applications to be processed. [121581]

Dawn Primarolo: The time taken to complete a tax credits claim form will depend on the particular circumstances of the claimant. Claims for which no further information is required, and which pass the various pre-award checks, go through the stages of calculating the award quickly and will normally be in payment within a few days.

The form was subjected to rigorous usability testing before being introduced. This testing involved a sample number of existing tax credit recipients.

Credit Unions

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussion is taking place with the credit union trade associations on the process of establishing a simple representative body for credit unions in Britain; and if he will make a statement. [127808]

Mr. Boateng: No such discussion is taking place. Credit unions are free to affiliate to any, or none, of the main trade associations, and to change their affiliation from time to time.

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many members of credit unions and assets of credit unions there were, broken down by *(a)* affiliation to each credit union trade association and *(b)* no affiliation to a credit union trade association for the year ended 30 September 2002. [127809]

Mr. Boateng: The latest available statistics on the credit union sector in Great Britain, for the end of 2001, have been published by the Financial Services Authority on its website, to which I refer the hon. Member. At the end of 2001, there were 365,934 members of credit unions in Great Britain, and their total assets were £263.4 million. Statistics for end of 2002 are not yet available, as not all the underlying returns have been received by the Financial Services Authority.

The Financial Services Authority does not at present aggregate credit union returns information according to the separate affiliation of individual credit unions, so the breakdown of information requested is not available.

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to amend industrial and provident society legislation to bring it into line with company law; and if he will make a statement. [127818]

Mr. Boateng: The Government is keen to see, where appropriate, a level playing field between industrial and provident societies and companies. The Industrial and Provident Society Act 2002 enables the Treasury to update industrial and provident society law, via secondary legislation, in line with changes in company legislation. The "Modernising Company Law White Paper", published in July 2002, announced a wide-ranging review of company law. In order to provide for a strategic, consistent and up-to-date approach, the Government believe that the general modernisation of industrial and provident society legislation in this area should be considered in the light of that review.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how he estimates the new investment announced for Customs will improve the service at *(a)* Newhaven, *(b)* Poole, *(c)* Isle of Wight, *(d)* Portsmouth and *(e)* Southampton; and if he will make a statement. [127148]

John Healey: The investment will be used by Customs to deploy new technology and extra operational activity at ports and airports to strengthen security at the UK frontier.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest assessment of the total cost per year is of employing mobile Customs teams to cover the ports of Newhaven, Poole and the Isle of Wight rather than a limited permanent presence; and if he will make a statement. [127150]

John Healey: For the fiscal year 2003–04, the current allocation of funds to cover travel and subsistence costs for Customs detection south region, which includes Newhaven, Poole and the Isle of Wight, is £1.7 million.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors underlay the decision to remove the permanent Customs presence from Poole, the Isle of

Wight and Newhaven ports; if he will perform a risk analysis of these plans; if he will overturn the decision; and if he will make a statement. [127151]

John Healey: To meet the challenge of modern smugglers, Customs across the UK are changing their tactics and becoming more intelligence-led and less predictable. While it is important to maintain a level of deterrence at all locations—both at high-traffic, high-risk ports or airports, and at smaller, lower-risk locations—Customs cannot provide an effective detection capability nor any meaningful deterrence with small numbers of staff on regular and predictable rotas. Flexible, mobile teams can be deployed in larger numbers and with greater impact. Customs managers use risk assessment when deploying these teams to locations in the south and south west where they will have the greater impact on smuggling.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff will be allocated to the flexible customs team to be located at Plymouth under the Customs and Excise Business Plan; what their terms of reference will be; and what the team's *(a)* average and *(b)* maximum response times are expected to be. [127301]

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of days per year that the proposed mobile Customs teams will be able to have a presence in *(a)* Newhaven, *(b)* Poole and *(c)* Isle of Wight ports. [127149]

John Healey: Customs do not normally make available information concerning the deployment of operational law enforcement staff. Exemptions 4(b) and 7(b) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information apply.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about HM Customs and Excise operations in *(a)* Chester, *(b)* Pembroke and *(c)* Swansea. [127408]

John Healey: Customs and Excise law enforcement operations in Chester, Pembroke and Swansea will be intelligence-led, supported by flexible, mobile teams. Customs also have offices in these locations undertaking a range of VAT, International Trade and Excise work.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the use of mobile teams in the work of HM Customs and Excise. [127410]

John Healey: Experience demonstrates that flexible mobile teams allow Customs to deploy officers in larger numbers, less predictably and with greater impact, to any area of the UK, wherever intelligence identifies a risk.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the value of goods seized by HM Customs in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003. [127946]

John Healey: Customs record the goods they seize by quantity not value. Many seized goods do not have a specific monetary value and an aggregate figure for the value of all goods seized by Customs is therefore not available.

Departmental Costs

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost was to his Department for *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers, *(b)* taxis, *(c)* train travel, *(d)* the use of helicopters, *(e)* airline tickets and *(f)* chartered aeroplanes in each year since 1997. [123074]

John Healey: Information relating to the cost of ministerial cars and drivers and of planes chartered for ministerial travel is the responsibility of the Cabinet Office.

For expenditure by the Treasury on taxis up to 2000–01 I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by the then Economic Secretary (Ruth Kelly) on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 698W.

Information in respect of spending on taxis by the Treasury in 2001–02 and 2002–03, and on all other travel between 1997–98 and 2002–03, is set out in the table.

£

	Taxis	*Other travel*
1997–98	—	945,450
1998–99	—	1,320,078
1999–2000	—	1,510,944
2000–01	—	1,578,198
2001–02	120,189	1,508,016
2002–03	129,503	1,387,813

All official travel is undertaken in accordance with the rules contained in the Department's staff handbook. All ministerial travel is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the publication "The Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

ECOFIN

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the outcome was of the ECOFIN Council held on 16 July; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [127303]

Ruth Kelly: At the ECOFIN Council on 15 July, the UK was represented by our Permanent Representative to the EU and by the Treasury's Managing Director of Macroeconomic Policy and International Finance.

The Italian Presidency presented its work programme. Following an exchange of views on the Presidency's Action Plan for Growth, Council Conclusions were agreed that invited the Commission and the EIB to conduct a needs assessment and make proposals for a programme to support growth and integration by improving and/or increasing overall investment and private sector involvement in TENs and R&D projects.

EFC will assess these interim reports and prepare the Council discussion of the issue at the 7 October ECOFIN Council. The UK said that the highest priority was the Lisbon structural reform agenda and that the new initiative should be complementary.

The Council agreed without debate a recommendation on the Netherlands' Stability programme.

The Council agreed, without discussion, to a recommendation that Jean-Claude Trichet be appointed the President of the European Central Bank for a term of office of eight years. Under the provisions of the EC Treaty, only the member states which have adopted the euro can be involved in the appointment of the president of the ECB. The UK Protocol makes it clear that the UK does not participate in such appointments.

The Council also agreed a mandate for the Financial Services Committee to prepare a report on the progress of financial integration and its economic benefits and to look further into areas where this integration might deliver significant increased economic benefits to the EU. This report will prepare a debate in the 2004 spring Council on key areas for further action.

ECOFIN agreed Conclusions on the adoption of International Accounting Standards (IAS), stressing the importance of their adoption from 2005, including the immediate adoption of all existing IAS except those on financial instruments and the adoption of standards on financial instruments as soon as possible. The UK supported the adoption of all the relevant existing IAS. Its concerns were fully covered by the Conclusions.

Under any other business, the Council exchanged views on the Commission's proposed VAT Reduced Rates Review. The UK welcomed the review, but noted that it would not accept any proposal which would remove its zero rates on children's clothes and shoes.

No votes were taken at the meeting.

Euro

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what funds have been allocated by his Department for the Government's campaign to promote UK entry to the European single currency. [127411]

Mr. Boateng: I refer to the answer the Economic Secretary gave to the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) on 20 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 458W.

European Economic Convergence

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 3 July, *Official Report*, column 370W, on European Economic Convergence, what research he has commissioned into using discretionary fiscal policy to offset inflationary pressures; and if he will publish the results of this research. [127615]

Mr. Boateng: The Treasury published a paper "Fiscal Stabilisation and EMU" that included a discussion of these issues.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 14 July, *Official Report*, column 132W, on European Economic Convergence, what the element of pre-commitment is. [127616]

Mr. Boateng: In the context of my answer of 14 July, *Official Report*, column 132W, on European Economic Convergence, and with reference to the discussion paper "Fiscal Stabilisation and EMU", the element of pre-commitment refers to the institutional arrangements that would be put in place to demonstrate that stabilisation policy was credible, symmetric and consistent with sound public finances.

Fuel Duty Rebates

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what value he attributed in pence per litre to *(a)* carbon dioxide saving, *(b)* improved local air quality, *(c)* diversity of supply and *(d)* economic development benefits in calculating duty rebates for (i) LPG and (ii) biodiesel and bioethanol. [127190]

John Healey: The Government offers lower duty rates for less environmentally-damaging fuels by offering duty differentials relative to the main road fuels. These differentials are intended primarily to reflect the relative environmental benefits of the fuel in question, but they also take account of other factors, such as costs of production and supply, and wider social and economic benefits, including fuel security and the potential to encourage the recycling of waste products. In the light of all these factors, we have set a duty incentive of 20 pence per litre in the case of biodiesel and bioethanol. For road fuel gases the incentives, when converted from pence per kilogram to the equivalent pence per litre, are 39.72 pence per litre for natural gases and 40.42 pence per litre for liquefied petroleum gas.

It would not, however, be appropriate to compare the duty incentive for biofuels with those for road fuel gases. The latter are directed predominantly at improvement in local air quality rather than as a carbon saving measure. They also face significant market barriers: they require a dedicated and separate re-fuelling infrastructure and vehicles have to be converted or be specifically designed to use gaseous fuels. In contrast, incentives for biofuels are focused on climate change issues and greenhouse gas reductions. Biofuel blends can be supplied through the existing re-fuelling infrastructure and used in existing vehicles.

Home Improvements (Finance)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what recent representations he has received asking him to reduce VAT on home improvements; and if he will make a statement; [126247]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* other government departments, *(b)* housing bodies and *(c)* other interested bodies on VAT on home improvements for poor housing; and if he will make a statement; [126248]

(3) what recent representations he has received on improving poor housing stock and tackling problems of empty homes through financial grants; and if he will make a statement. [126249]

John Healey: The Government have already taken targeted and efficient action through the tax system and through public spending to support the regeneration of the UK's existing housing stock, including the introduction of reduced VAT rates on the renovation of empty properties and the £500 million housing market renewal fund for Pathfinder areas.

The Government continues to receive representations from a wide range of interested bodies seeking additional reduced rates of VAT or additional grant

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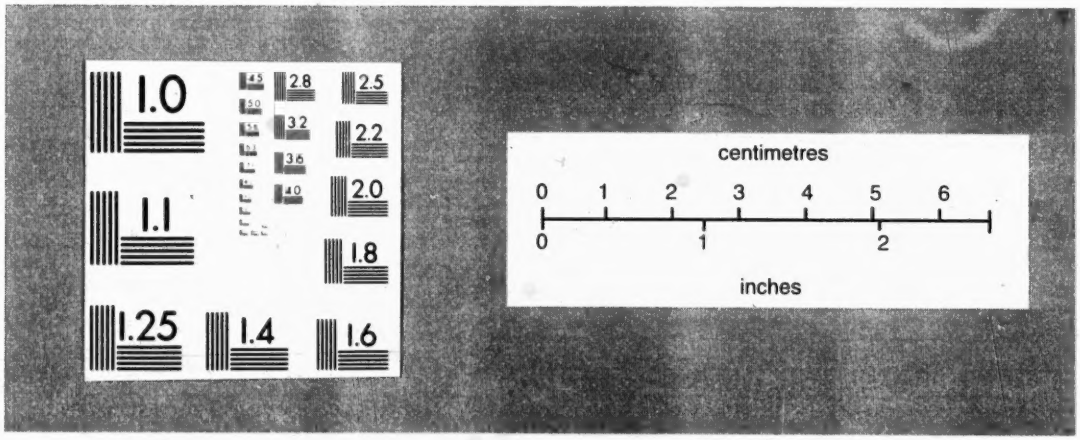

funding to assist further in the renewal of the UK's housing stock and discussions take place on a regular basis where necessary to explore these proposals in more detail.

The Government will consider all representations for new reduced rates in the context of the European Commission's upcoming review of the reduced rates provisions in the EC Sixth VAT Directive, and will consider all representations for increases in public spending in the context of the next Spending Review.

Inland Revenue

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Inland Revenue submitted the Supplementary Memorandum published in the 29th Report of the Committee of Public Accounts, Session 2002–03, HC 332; how the adjustments in transfer pricing cases in the three years to 31 March 2002 referred to in the memorandum arose in each year; and how many adjustments arose from *(a)* LBO and *(b)* International Division-led cases in each year. [126364]

Dawn Primarolo: The number of adjustments was as follows:

	LBO led	*Revenue policy (international) led*
1999–2000	158	105
2000–01	195	72
2001–02	166	72

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the criteria were by which the Commissioners of Inland Revenue individually qualified for performance pay in each year since 1999–2000; and what performance pay they *(a)* might have been paid and *(b)* were paid in each year. [126365]

Dawn Primarolo: The Commissioners are members of the Senior Civil Service (SCS), and as such subject to the rules for SCS pay. In accordance with Government policy on pay in the civil service those rules provide for consolidated base pay and bonuses to be performance related. So in all years since 1999–2000 the Commissioners could receive performance related pay.

The pay of senior civil servants is reviewed annually by the Government, advised by the Senior Salaries Review Body. The pay of Permanent Secretaries, including the Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue, is determined by the Permanent Secretaries Remuneration Committee; in its deliberations, the Committee has decided to follow the broad lines of the pay system which applies to senior civil servants generally.

The table sets out the range of performance related base pay and bonus awards which the Commissioners might have been paid.

	Base pay (Percentage)	*Bonus*
1999–2000	0 to 10.5	Circa £300 to £400
2000–01	0 to 11	£300
2001–02	0 to 11	£300
2002–03	0 to10	High 4.23 per cent., Medium 3 per cent.
2003–04	0 to 9	High 10.2 per cent., Medium 5.2 per cent.

The pay of the Commissioners and other Board members is set out, in bands of £5,000, in the Inland Revenue Annual Reports. Details of performance appraisal, and of consequential pay adjustments, are considered to be confidential to the individual concerned.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what percentage of Inland Revenue postal enquiries received a complete response within 15 working days in each of the last 12 months. [126380]

Dawn Primarolo: The total volume of correspondence, and the percentage dealt with in the Inland Revenue local office network within 15 working days, in each of the last 12 months were as follows:

	Total post received (million)	*Percentage dealt with within 15 days*
2002		
June	6.501	79.9
July	4.971	77.0
August	6.447	77.7
September	5.249	73.4
October	5.547	72.3
November	6.674	75.8
December	5.309	77.6
2003		
January	6.619	78.4
February	5.957	83.3
March	6.104	84.0
April	5.503	85.6
May	7.568	79.6

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what percentage of telephone calls to local Inland Revenue offices were answered at the switchboard within 20 seconds in each of the last 12 months. [126381]

Dawn Primarolo: The number and percentage of telephone calls answered within 20 seconds in the Inland Revenue local office network in each of the last 12 months were as follows:

	Number (million)	*Percentage*
2002		
June	2.575	89.6
July	3.296	88.5
August	2.763	90.4
September	2.959	88.8
October	3.129	92.7
November	2.982	93.3
December	2.231	92.0
2003		
January	2.473	87.6
February	2.754	91.2
March	3.130	86.4
April	3.107	85.5
May	3.286	80.9
June	3.243	83.1

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what percentage of callers to Inland Revenue enquiry centres without an appointment were attended to within 15 minutes in each of the last 12 months. [126385]

Dawn Primarolo: The number and percentage of personal callers to Inland Revenue Enquiry Centres attended to within 15 minutes in each of the last 12 months is as follows:

	Number of callers attended to in 15 minutes (000s)	*Percentage*
2002		
July	289.5	96.7
August	327.9	97.0
September	331.1	96.4
October	277.5	98.0
November	294.5	98.7
December	171.6	98.9
2003		
January	561.2	97.6
February	283.7	97.9
March	298.7	97.5
April	318.2	88.3
May	465.3	69.3
June	336.3	72.1

Iraq

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the projected cost is of British troops being stationed in Iraq for a further *(a)* six months, *(b)* 12 months, *(c)* 18 months and *(d)* 24 months. [127412]

Mr. Boateng: The Government remains committed to maintaining appropriate forces in Iraq for as long as is necessary. Parliament will be invited to vote on provision for 2003–04 in Supplementary Estimates.

Office for National Statistics

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the projected budget for the Office of National Statistics is for *(a)* 2003–04 and *(b)* 2004–05. [127216]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Alex Salmond, dated 8 September 2003:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning the projected budget for the Office for National Statistics for *(a)* 2003–04 and *(b)* 2004–05. (127216)

Information on the planned budget for 2003–04 and 2004–05 can be found in Table 1 of the Office for National Statistics 2003 Spring Departmental Report (Cm 5931), copies of which are available in the House of Commons library. A copy of the Report is also available on the National Statistics website at the following reference: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_other/ONS_Spring03_Departmental_Report.pdf

Regional Gross Value Added

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the most recent estimates are for regional gross value added; and when new estimates will be released. [127215]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Alex Salmond, dated 8 September 2003:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question on what are the most recent estimates for regional Gross Value Added; and when new estimates will be released. (127215)

The most recent estimates of regional Gross Value Added were published on 14 August 2003 (for revised 1989–1999 data) and 20 August 2003 (for 2000–2001 data).

The data are available in the House of Commons Library and on the Office for National Statistics web site at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/regionalaccounts.

Regional (NUTS level 1) Gross Value Added estimates for 2002 are due to be published in March 2004. Sub-regional (NUTS levels 2 and 3) estimates of Gross Value Added for 2001 are due to be published in October 2003.

Store Cards

John Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effects of high interest rates on store cards on consumer spending. [128147]

Mr. Boateng: The Government's latest forecast of household expenditure was published in the Financial Statement and Budget Report (HC 500) on 9 April and took into account all relevant factors. Interest rates on store cards are unlikely to have a material influence on overall consumer spending.

Tax Credits (Delayed Payment)

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have been reimbursed for bank charges incurred as a result of delayed payment of tax credits. [121720]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) on 12 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 23W.

Treasury Accommodation

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff will transfer to the HM Treasury building at 1 Horse Guards road, London from *(a)* the Inland Revenue and *(b)* HM Customs and Excise when construction work is completed; and what area in square feet will be occupied by staff transferring from (i) the Inland Revenue and (ii) HM Customs and Excise. [127065]

John Healey: Final decisions about numbers and space requirements will be taken once the outcome of the O'Donnell review of organisations dealing with tax policy and administration is known.

Venture Capital

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact on the venture capital industry of taxing carried interest through income taxing rather than capital gains tax. [127078]

Dawn Primarolo: There has been no change to the taxation of carried interest and therefore no assessment has been made of the impact of taxation of carried interest on the venture capital industry. The tax treatment of carried interest has not been changed by the introduction of Schedule 22 in Finance Act 2003.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the British Venture Capital Association in respect of taxation measures announced in the Budget; and if he will make a statement. [127079]

Dawn Primarolo: A meeting took place between the British Venture Capital Association (BVCA) and Inland Revenue officials on 9 June to discuss the impact of the new legislation in Schedule 22 Finance Act 2003 and this was followed by exchanges of correspondence. On 25 July, the Revenue published on their website two "Memoranda of Understanding" between the BVCA and the Inland Revenue clarifying, respectively, the Income Tax treatment of carried interests in Venture Capital Limited Partnerships and the Income Tax treatment of Managers' Equity Investments in Management Buyouts. They have also published on their web-site guidance on the income tax treatment of "Earn-outs" which are often a feature of venture capital arrangements.

Working Tax Credit

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total cost was of the advertising of working tax credit; what *(a)* the installation and *(b)* the running costs of the helpline were; what evaluation is due to take place of the advertisement campaign; and if he will make a statement. [114959]

Dawn Primarolo: With regard to the total cost of advertising new tax credits (working tax credit and child tax credit) I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) on 18 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 681W. The advertising campaign is being evaluated by tracking research and media audits carried out by independent external agencies managed by COI Communications on behalf of the Inland Revenue.

As to the costs of setting up and running the helpline I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) on 12 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 25W.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the EU directives implemented by the Department since 8 June 2001. [126591]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury plays a leading role in the UK's EU policy on financial services and tax. Since 8 June 2001, the Treasury has led on the implementation of 13 directives:

Directive 98/4/EC, amending Directive 98/38/EEC co-ordinating the procurement procedures of entities operating in the water, energy, transport and telecommunications sectors. Implemented by the Utilities Contracts (Amendment) Regulations 2001 (S.I. 2001/2418) effective 26 July 2001;

Directive 2000/46/EC on the taking-up, pursuit of and prudential supervision of the business of electronic money institutions (implementation date: 27 April 2002);

Directive 2000/28/EC, amending Directive 2000/12/EC relating to the taking up and pursuit of the business of credit institutions (implementation date: 27 April 2002);

Directive 2001/44/EC, amending Directive 76/308/EEC on mutual assistance for the recovery of claims resulting from operations forming part of the system of financing the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund, and of agricultural levies and customs duties and in respect of value added tax and certain excise duties (implementation date: 24 July 2002);

Directive 2000/31/EC on certain legal aspects of information society services, in particular electronic commerce, in the Internal Market ("Directive on electronic commerce") (implemented by the Treasury as regards matters within the scope of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000; implementation date: 21 August 2002);

Directive 2000/26/EC on the approximation of the laws of the member states relating to insurance against civil liability in respect of the use of motor vehicles and amending Council Directives 73/239/EEC and 88/357/EEC (Fourth Motor Insurance Directive) (implementation date: 19 January 2003);

Directive 2001/78/EC of 13 September 2001 amending Annex IV to Council Directive 93/36/EEC, Annexes IV, V and VI to Council Directive 93/37/EEC, Annexes III and IV to Council Directive 92/50/EEC, as amended by Directive 97/52/EC, and Annexes XII to XV, XVII and XVIII to Council Directive 93/38/EEC, as amended by Directive 98/4/EC (Directive on the use of standard forms in the publication of public contract notices) (implementation date: 4 February 2003);

Directive 2002/38/EC and regulation 792/2002 regarding value added tax arrangements applicable to electronically supplied services and broadcasting;

Directive 2002/10/EC concerning the structure and rates of excise duty applied on manufactured tobacco;

Directive 2001/115/EC with a view to simplifying, modernising and harmonising the conditions laid down for VAT invoicing;

Commission decision 2001/574, following directive 95/60/EC, establishing a common fiscal marker for gas oils and kerosene;

Directive 2000/64/EC, amending various other Directives, with regard to the exchange of information with third countries. Implemented by the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Disclosure of Confidential Information)(Amendment) Regulations 2003 (S.I. 2003/693) effective 3 April 2003;

Directive 2001/17/EC on the reorganisation and winding up of insurance undertakings. Implemented (except as regards Lloyd's) by the Insurers (Reorganisation and Winding Up) Regulations 2003 (S.I. 2003/1102) effective 20 April 2003.

I am not aware of any further directives being implemented since 8 June 2001, but the Department does not keep a single record of this information and it could be assembled only at disproportionate cost.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Food-related Activities

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) who will fund the initiative by the Food Standards Agency to set up inspection teams for food-related activities in schools; [127723]

(2) how many inspection teams are to be set up under the initiative by the Food Standards Agency for food-related activities in schools; [127724]

(3) what the terms of reference will be for the inspection teams that are set up under the initiative by the Food Standards Agency for food-related activities in schools; [127725]

(4) how many nutritionists will be on each inspection team set up under the initiative by the Food Standards Agency for food-related activities in schools; [127726]

(5) what food-related activities are to be inspected under the initiative by the Food Standards Agency to set up inspection teams for food-related activities in schools. [127727]

Mr. Miliband: The Department for Education and Skills and the Food Standards Agency will jointly and equally fund an exercise that will aim to look at best practice in the whole school approach to food and nutrition.

The exercise will involve five teams, each consisting of one OFSTED inspector and one nutritionist and will take place in a small illustrative sample of primary schools and early years' settings in England. The exercise will consider activities such as breakfast clubs, tuck shops, school lunches, vending machines, the taught curriculum, after-school cookery, or growing, clubs and water provision.

In total three or four nutritionists will be commissioned for the initiative and will work in one or more of the five inspection teams. Each one will accompany an OFSTED inspector on each school visit.

School Meals

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the progress of the school meals research project. [127728]

Mr. Miliband: The Department for Education and Skills, in partnership with the Food Standards Agency, have commissioned research by Kings College London to assess whether food provided for school lunches in a selection of maintained secondary schools in England complies with statutory nutritional standards and associated guidance. The research, due to commence during the autumn school term 2003, will also aim to assess whether the food consumed by the children meets nutritional guidelines and to gather other relevant background information.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proposals he has to encourage the provision of free school meals; and what the average cost to pupils was of school meals in the last 12 months. [128239]

Mr. Miliband: The Education Act 1996 places a duty on all local education authorities in England to provide, on request, free school meals to eligible pupils. A similar duty is transferred to the governing body of all maintained schools in England that have a budgetary element for school meals delegated to them. Children whose parents receive the following support payments are entitled to receive free school meals: income support; income based jobseekers allowance; support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999; child tax credit, provided they do not receive working tax credit and have an annual income, as assessed by the Inland Revenue, that does not exceed £13,230.

This Department does not collect information on the cost of meals provided by schools.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what quality controls are placed upon school meals; and what assessment has been made of the potential benefits to child health of healthy school meal provision. [128240]

Mr. Miliband: Regulations introduced in April 2001, set minimum nutritional standards for school lunches in maintained schools in England. The standards are based on the four main food groups pictorially represented in the Government's 'Balance of Good Health' diagram, which suggests the types and proportions of foods that make up a balanced diet. Food from the four groups: fruit and vegetables; meat, fish and non-dairy sources of proteins; starchy food; and milk and dairy, are required to be available in schools at lunchtime and allow pupils to choose healthy and enjoyable school lunches. It is the responsibility of local education authorities or, where a budgetary element for school meals is delegated to them, a school's governing body to ensure that the standards are met. School governing bodies and LEAs (as the employer) have a general responsibility for protecting the health and safety of staff and pupils. This responsibility would extend to the quality of school meals.

The Department for Education and Skills has not undertaken any specific assessment of the potential savings in child health in relation to healthy school meal provision.

Teenage Pregnancies

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teenage pregnancies there were in *(a)* West Sussex and *(b)* England in (i) 2001–01, (ii) 2001–02 and (iii) 2002–03. [127547]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Tim Loughton, dated 8 September 2003:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking how many teenage pregnancies there were in *(a)* West Sussex and *(b)* England in (i) 2000–01, (ii) 2001–02 and (iii) 2002–03.

The numbers of teenage pregnancies in England and Wales are compiled routinely by calendar years. The latest year for which figures are available is 2001. For this purpose, a teenage pregnancy is defined as a conception to a girl aged under 18. This includes pregnancies resulting in live births, still births and abortions, but not miscarriages prior to 24 weeks gestation.

The information available is shown in the table below.

Conceptions to girls aged under 18 in West Sussex and England, 2000–01

	2000	*2001*[1]
West Sussex	411	407
England	8,700	8,439

[1] Figures for 2001 are provisional

Youth Clubs

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what funding is afforded to increasing youth club facilities and other projects aimed at getting children off the streets; and if he will make a statement on his policy on providing places for younger teenagers to go to socialise in the evenings. [128097]

Alan Johnson: Local authority youth services receive funding through the Education Formula Spending (EFS). This fund has a value of £513 million in 2003–04 and is an increase of 5.9 per cent. over 2002–03 budgets. In addition to EFS funds, the Government has made £10 million available to local authority youth services in each of the three years 2003–06 through the Transforming Youth Work Development Fund (TYWDF). With this resource, we want to see Local Authorities making good quality youth work provision available to all young people in the 13–19 age range. Many schools and Local Education Authorities (LEAs) offer learning activities after school as part of their study support provision. Funding for study support of £75 million is available this year through Standards Fund grant 206. National Voluntary Youth Organisations (NVYOs) receive funding to promote personal and social education. The NVYO Grant Scheme is a three year cycle of funding. There are 88 NVYOs running 98 projects which receive grants in the current cycle (2002–05) within a total budget of £18 million (£6 million a year). The grants cover up to 50 per cent. of the cost of the projects.

Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP) aims to provide developmental and diversionary activities for 8–19 year olds from 2003 to 2006. It is supported by Departments and Agencies across Government providing funding allocations into a single pot. The total funding available for 2003–04 is £25 million. Funding for years two and three will be confirmed within the next two months.

"Teacher Employment"

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will publish the results of his Department's surveys of local education authorities entitled "Teacher Employment", conducted in May. [119909]

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on recent redundancies of teachers in north-east Lincolnshire; and how many of these redundancies were attributed to insufficient school funds. [120061]

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what his latest estimate is of the number of teacher redundancy notices that have been issued in 2003, broken down by local education authority; and if he will make a statement. [123042]s

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what his latest estimate is of the number of teacher redundancy notices that have been issued in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire in 2003. [123913]

Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what redundancies of *(a)* teaching and *(b)* non-teaching staff have resulted from the funding of schools in this financial year. [125151]

Mr. Miliband: Provisional statistics on teacher and support staff numbers and teacher vacancies at January 2003 were published in April in "Statistical First Release 10/2003". Statistics due to be released on 9 September will provide regional and LEA level breakdowns of these figures; provisional national figures for January 2004 are due to be published next April. In May this year, in response to concerns about the difficulties some schools are facing as a result of changes to the funding arrangements, my Department liaised with local education authorities (LEAs) to make a broad assessment of the extent to which schools were making changes in their teaching staff complements. This included whether teachers were being made compulsorily redundant, and the possible reasons for changes in staffing, including falling rolls. LEAs' assessments were based on the best information available to them at that time; many told us that definitive information was not available and that the situation was changing rapidly as schools finalised their budgets and their staffing. In addition they advised that a significant number of the redundancy notices were "protective" and were likely to be withdrawn as the situation within schools and the LEA became clearer. My Department will continue to work closely with our national partners, including representatives of teachers, and have regular contact with LEAs.

Administration and Buildings Funding

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how much funding has been allocated for *(a)* administration and *(b)* buildings for (i) University for Industry, (ii) the learning and skills councils and (iii) the Connexions service, broken down by (A) centrally and (B) locally allocated funds; [127880]

(2) how much has been spent on *(a)* marketing and *(b)* advertising for (i) University for Industry, (ii) the learning and skills councils and (iii) the Connexions service, broken down by (A) centrally and (B) locally spent funds; [127881]

(3) how much funding has been allocated for spending on consultants for *(a)* University for Industry, *(b)* the learning and skills councils and *(c)* the Connexions service, broken down by centrally and locally allocated funds. [127882]

Mr. Charles Clarke: My Department makes available an annual grant which funds UFI's infrastructure and operating costs such as product development. In 2003–04 UFI has set aside £23.636 million to cover administration costs and £1.818 million to cover buildings costs. UFI does not allocate separate local funds for either administration or buildings.

In 2002–03 UFI central expenditure on marketing and advertising was:

(a) £10.126 million for marketing

(b) £8.652 million for advertising.

Much of the marketing developed centrally is also used locally by learndirect centres and hubs. Marketing and advertising at local level does however remain the responsibility of learndirect hubs and centres, many of which are private organisations who set their budgets accordingly. No central information is held on this local expenditure.

In 2003–04 UFI have allocated £1.867 million for spend on consultants centrally. UFI uses consultants to support the development of the national learndirect network and does not allocate consultancy budgets at local level.

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC)'s administration budget for 2003–04 is £218 million. This includes provision for expenditure on buildings. No specific amount for such provision is, however, earmarked. How the LSC allocates the £218 million funding for use centrally and locally, the amounts spent on marketing and advertising, and funding allocated for spending on consultants are matters for the Learning and Skills Council. I have therefore asked John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, to write to the hon. Gentleman with this information and to place a copy of his reply in the Library.

For 2003–04 my Department has allocated £6.098 million for the salaries and associated administrative costs of staff comprising the Connexions Service National Unit. In addition, £2.625 million has been allocated to the Government Offices for the salary and associated administration costs of their staff managing Connexions.

It is not possible to disaggregate the building costs associated with Connexions Service National Unit staff from the costs of other departmental staff using the same head office building, nor those costs associated with Government Office staff working on Connexions from those associated with other Government Office staff.

When allocating funding locally to Connexions Partnerships no part is ring fenced specifically to meet administration and buildings costs. Partnerships have flexibility to use their funding in a way which best meets local needs.

In 2002–03 central expenditure on marketing and advertising was:

(a) £1.815 million for marketing

(b) £1.451 million for advertising

Locally, Connexions Partnerships are able to use their funding flexibility to address their own particular circumstances. Data is collected centrally on the broad areas of Partnerships' expenditure but not at a level detailed enough to enable identification of how much has been spent on marketing and advertising.

No funding is allocated specifically for spending on consultants either nationally or regionally. However budget holders may decide to engage consultants where it is judged to be the most cost-effective method of achieving objectives. When allocating funding locally to Connexions Partnerships no part is ring fenced for consultants. Partnerships have flexibility to use their funding in a way which best meets local needs.

Adult Learning Grants

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the operation of the adult learning grant pilots. [127964]

Alan Johnson: Announced as part of the Government's Skills Strategy (CM 5810), the new Adult Learning Grant will offer an allowance of up to £30 per week to adults on low incomes studying full-time for a first full level 2 qualification (equivalent to 5 GCSEs or a National Vocational Qualification at level 2) and young adults on low incomes studying full-time for a first full level 3 qualification (equivalent to two A levels or a National Vocational Qualification at level 3). Piloting of the grant starts this month in further education providers in the following local Learning and Skills Council areas:

Bedfordshire and Luton
County Durham
Devon and Cornwall
Humberside
Lancashire
Leicestershire
London West
Shropshire
South Yorkshire
The Black Country.

We will evaluate the impact of the pilot programme to establish, in the light of the conclusions of the next spending review, the best operational design with the intention of implementing a national roll out of adult learning grants.

Baccalaureate

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of

the average extra cost faced by a school intending to offer the International Baccalaureate examination system. [127884]

Alan Johnson: The International Baccalaureate is already approved under section 96 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 and schools are free to offer the qualification if they wish. We have made no estimate of the additional costs to a school offering this qualification. The funding arrangements for post-16 learning, including school sixth forms, are the operational responsibility of the Learning and Skills Council. I have asked John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, to write to the hon. Member about the funding they provide to institutions that offer the International Baccalaureate and a copy of his letter will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many schools in England offer the International Baccalaureate to the students; [127886]

(2) how many pupils took the International Baccalaureate in England in each year since 1997. [127887]

Alan Johnson: The information on International Baccalaureates in England is as follows:

	Number of institutions		
Academic year	*Schools*	*FE Colleges*	*Number of pupils*
1996/97	12	7	504
1997/98	16	7	521
1998/99	16	7	618
1999/2000	15	6	553
2000/01	15	6	655
2001/02	21	6	854

Broadband Access (Schools)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures will be taken to provide broadband access to schools in areas where there is no broadband provision. [127090]

Mr. Miliband: Broadband is currently being rolled out through 10 Regional Broadband Consortia (RBCs). Each RBC is developing appropriate connectivity solutions for their area to ensure the Prime Minister's target of having all schools connected to broadband by 2006 is achieved.

Where cabling infrastructure is not available, RBCs are successfully deploying a range of other technologies to ensure schools have access to reliable, high bandwidth connectivity. In a number of rural areas for example, wireless technologies such as Satellite and radio are being used effectively to connect schools.

The DfES is also supporting the Government's Broadband Aggregation Project announced in July. From next April, nine Regional Aggregation Bodies will aggregate demand and procure broadband across the public sector. This will ensure best value and stimulate supply in areas where very little broadband is currently available.

Capital Spending (Leicestershire)

Mr. Dorrell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list capital spending on Leicestershire schools in each year since 1997–98. [127267]

Mr. Miliband: We do not collect detailed information on capital spend on school buildings. The table as follows sets out the capital allocations made by this government to Leicestershire Local Education Authority (LEA) and its schools since 1997–98. The LEA determines investment of these funds by prioritising the capital requirements of its schools through the asset management planning process. The authority may have augmented the government's funding from other sources.

Leicestershire LEA capital allocations

	£000
1997–98	2,920
1998–99	5,505
1999–2000	8,332
2000–01	18,942
2001–02	12,843
2002–03	20,731
2003–04	27,582

Children at Risk

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the Green Paper on Children at Risk will be published. [127893]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Green Paper "Every Child Matters" is being published today.

Children's Day Care Facilities

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many places have been provided in school holiday schemes in each of the past five years; [127899]

(2) how many places in after-school clubs have been provided in each of the past five years; [127900]

(3) how many day nurseries have operated in each of the past five years; [127905]

(4) how many places there were in day nurseries in each of the past five years; [127906]

(5) how many registered childminders there were on 1 January in each of the past five years; [127907]

(6) how many playgroups were operating in each of the past five years; and how many places were provided in playgroups in each year. [127918]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is shown in the tables.

Numbers of day care providers[1] by type of provider, England, 1999–2003

Position at 31 March each year	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*
Day nurseries[2]	7,000	7,500	7,800	n/a	n/a
Full day care[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	9,600
Playgroups and pre-schools[2]	15,000	14,300	14,000	n/a	n/a
Sessional day care[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	11,600
Childminders	82,200	75,600	72,300	n/a	68,200

Numbers of day care providers[1] by type of provider, England, 1999–2003

Position at 31 March each year	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*
Out-of-school clubs[2]	3,800	4,400	4,900	n/a	n/a
Holiday schemes[2]	10,200	[4]11,700	12,900	n/a	n/a
Out-of-school day care[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	8,000
Creche day care[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,900

n/a = not available.

[1] Figures have been rounded.

[2] Data Source: Children's Day Care Facilities.

[3] Data Source: Ofsted.

[4] Includes those schemes exempt from registration.

Numbers of day care places[1] by type of provider, England, 1999–2003

Position at 31 March each year	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*
Day nurseries[2]	247,700	264,200	285,100	n/a	n/a
Full day care[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	383,200
Playgroups and pre-schools[2]	347,200	353,100	330,200	n/a	n/a
Sessional day care[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	285,600
Childminders	336,600	320,400	304,600	n/a	300,600
Out-of-school clubs[2]	113,800	141,100	152,800	n/a	n/a
Holiday schemes[2]	435,300	[4]490,400	550,400	n/a	n/a
Out-of-school day care[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	301,600
Creche day care[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	43,900

n/a = not available.

[1] Figures have been rounded.

[2] Data Source: Children's Day Care Facilities.

[3] Data Source: Ofsted.

[4] Includes those schemes exempt from registration.

Local authorities were responsible for the registration and inspection of children's day care facilities until these responsibilities were transferred to Ofsted in September 2001. The figures on children's day care facilities up to and including 2001 were derived from local authority estimates returned to DfES by local authority social service departments.

The period from September 2001 to March 2003 was designated as a transitional period where Ofsted, as a by-product of its inspections, validated the actual number of individuals and organisations that were providing child care. At the end of the transitional period, Ofsted conducted appropriate quality checks on its administrative database and released the number of provider and places in June, with further publications planned on a quarterly basis. The number of child care providers and places are not directly comparable with the previous data made available by the DfES because they were collected differently.

With the introduction of the National Day Care Standards the day care facilities classification has been updated. Day nurseries, playgroups and pre-schools and childminders have been equivalently reclassified to full day care, sessional day care and childminders respectively.

Day care figures for 2001 and earlier years for England and Government Office regions were published in DfES Statistical Bulletin 08/01, "Children's Day Care Facilities at 31 March 2001", which is available in the Library and on the DfES website: www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics Figures for 2001 for out-of-school clubs and holiday schemes have recently been revised. Latest child care statistics were published in a report by Ofsted, "Registered Childcare Providers and Places in England, 31 March 2003", which is available on the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications

City Academies

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many city academies had been set up by 1 July, and how many he anticipates being set up by September 2005. [127885]

Mr. Miliband: Three Academies opened in September 2002 and there are a further nine opening in September 2003. We anticipate that by September 2005 there will be 27 open Academies.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils he expects to have been enrolled at city academies by the end of the academic year 2003–04. [127888]

Mr. Miliband: By the end of the 2003–04 academic year there will be 12 Academies open. These will cater for an estimated total of 10,710 pupils. This figure breaks down to 9,773 pupils who are under 16 and 937 pupils over 16. These figures include The City of London Academy which, being a totally new school, will have an initial entry of only 180 pupils.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average cost of setting up a city academy is to *(a)* public sector and *(b)* private sector investors. [127883]

Mr. Miliband: Of the 12 Academies currently open or opening this September the mean average expenditure across the projects is £23.10 million: £21.31 million from the public sector and £1.79 million from private sector investors.

Recurrent costs cover establishing the initial feasibility of a project and, once a Funding Agreement has been signed, the implementation of proposals to open an Academy During the feasibility phase, grant of up to £250,000 is available; during the implementation phase, grant of up to £650,000 is available. These costs are met by the public sector.

Classroom Assistants

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the impact of the new Formula Spending Share system on classroom assistant numbers in the South East; and if he will make a statement. [127285]

Mr. Miliband: In January 2003 there were more than 225,000 full-time equivalent support staff in schools in England including 122,000 teaching assistants, compared to 217,000 (including 106,000 teaching assistants) in January 2002. Statistics due to be released on 9 September will provide regional and LEA level breakdowns of these figures. It is for individual schools to decide on staffing levels in the light of their needs and priorities and the overall resources available to them. It is estimated that funding being made available to schools should enable them to recruit at least 50,000 additional full-time equivalent support staff over the lifetime of the current Parliament.

Classroom Teachers

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of *(a)* how many and *(b)* what percentage of teachers on the General Teaching Council register are employed as classroom teachers. [127755]

Mr. Miliband: The Secretary of State has made no such estimate. The management of the register is a matter for the General Teaching Council and I have asked the council's registrar to write to the hon. Gentleman with information about teacher entries. A copy of his response will be placed in the Library.

Connexions

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the purpose of Connexions, with particular reference to the range of options for post 16. [127112]

Margaret Hodge: Connexions is the Government's front line support service in England for all 13–19 year olds and those up to 25 who have learning difficulties and disabilities. It is a universal service that is differentiated according to the needs of young people. Its key purpose is to encourage more young people to continue and succeed in learning.

Connexions provides a range of advice and support to help young people make the transition from compulsory education to post 16 learning, Higher Education and employment. Depending on the individual young person's needs this could include impartial careers guidance, information and advice on health, lifestyle, housing, financial support and other personal issues and access to personal development opportunities.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance he provides to the Connexions service on the provision of advice to young lesbians and gay men facing homophobic abuse. [127871]

Margaret Hodge: We intend to issue guidance to Connexions personal advisers (PAs) on how to engage effectively with young lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people in the autumn.

The guidance will aim to raise awareness among Connexions PAs of the issues facing young LGB people. It will cover issues such as confidentiality, child protection, supporting a young person 'coming out', referring a young person to specialist agencies, multiple disadvantage and individual and organisational strategies to combat homophobia.

Creative Education

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of creative education partnerships. [124253]

Estelle Morris: I have been asked to reply.

In its first year of operation, our Creative Partnerships programme has involved 412 schools, 70,835 pupils and over 2,600 teachers, through nearly 900 projects. Arts Council England is currently conducting a national review of the first year of Creative Partnerships and this will inform the expansion of the programme from 2004. In addition, the National Foundation for Education Research is conducting a major evaluation of the impact of the programme and will report in spring 2005.

Deficit Budgets

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools have set deficit budgets for the academic year 2003–04. [127879]

Mr. Miliband: This information is not collected centrally.

Departmental Costs

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost was to his Department for *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers, *(b)* taxis, *(c)* train travel, *(d)* the use of helicopters, *(e)* airline tickets and *(f)* chartered aeroplanes in each year since 1997. [123083]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The cost within my Department for each of the travel categories since 1997 is as follows:

(a) Ministerial cars—I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided by the Cabinet Office.

(b) Taxis—this information is not held centrally and can be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

(c) Train travel—the information provided can only be given from August 1998, as no central data was held prior to this date.

Year	*Cost on rail travel (£)*
1998–99	3,055,026
1999–2000	5,882,502
2000–01	6,140,805
2001–02	8,071,544
2002–03	6,749,194

The annual cost for each year includes NDPB spend as it has not been possible to identify DfES spend separately. The former Employment Service left the contract on 31 March 2002 and they accounted for approx 30 per cent. of the spend.

(d) Helicopters—no costs incurred.

(e) Airline—the information provided can be given only from August 1998, as no central data was held prior to this date:

Year	*Cost on air travel (£)*
1998–99	835,981
1999–2000	1,265,621
2000–01	2,013,043
2001–02	1,720,275
2002–03	1,056,124

The annual cost for each year includes NDPB spend as it has not been possible to identify DfES spend separately. The former Employment Service left the

contract on 31 March 2002 and they accounted for approx 30 per cent. of the spend.

(f) Chartered planes—I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided by the Cabinet Office.

Departmental staff have a responsibility to give due consideration to cost when planning any official travel and extensive guidance is provided on how to get the best out of official travel. All ministerial travel is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Departmental Flexibility

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of his Department's end year flexibility for *(a)* 2003–04, *(b)* 2004–05 and *(c)* 2005–06. [127929]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Planned spending for the next three years, including the planned use of previously uncommitted End Year Flexibility, is set out in my Departmental Annual Report published on 14 May (Command Number 5902). In addition I have recently agreed that some programmes can carry forward resources into 2003–04 where expenditure is occurring later than originally planned. This includes over £100 million of programmes funded through the Learning and Skills Council and, as I set out to the House on 17 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 456, I am drawing on additional funding available from end year flexibility and other redirection of existing resources to finance the reversal of the previously announced reduction of standards fund support to schools in 2004–05 and 2005–06.

The details of this commitment will be announced in due course.

Departmental Framework Contracts

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answers of 22 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 1001W, and 12 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 1023W, for each departmental framework contract, what the total expenditure is on paid publicity services, categorised according to media, including design and print, for each of the last five years for which he has figures available. [128158]

Mr. Miliband: The Department's Marketing and Publicity Specialist Buying Unit initiate and manage 140 framework agreements with a range of suppliers covering several media areas. The following figures show expenditure by framework media area placed by Marketing and Publicity Division. (It should be noted that from 2002–03, an increasing proportion of such work is handled outside of Marketing and Publicity Division through a system of devolving non priority work to individual policy teams.)

£ million

	Print	*Binders and Plastics*	*Design*	*Writers*	*Video/ Audio Visual*
2000–01	10.5	1.6	3.3	251,000	1.1
2001–02	12.6	2.7	2.7	389,000	955,000
2002–03	5.7	1	1.3	521,000	864,000

£ million

	Typesetting and Translation	*Photography*	*Conferences*	*Exhibitions*	*PR*
2000–01	225,000	124,000	5.8	1.4	328,000
2001–02	315,000	103,000	4.7	926,000	1.5
2002–03	63,000	109,000	1.6	536,000	2

Note:
The PR costs for 2000–2001 differ from previous PQ responses as the figures above do not include PR expenditure via CO1 but expenditure through framework agreements only.

Early Years Education

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of three-year-olds have access to early years education in *(a)* Somerset, *(b)* Devon, *(c)* Wiltshire, *(d)* Cornwall, *(e)* Dorset, *(f)* North Somerset, *(g)* Bath and North East Somerset and *(h)* Bristol. [127772]

Mr. Miliband: The information is not available in the form requested.

The available information is shown in the table.

Number of free early years education places[1] taken up by three-year-olds, January 2002

Local education authority area	*Number of free early years education places taken up by three-year-olds*
Somerset	2,400
Devon	2,800
Wiltshire	2,000
Cornwall	3,400
Dorset	1,300
North Somerset	1,100
Bath and North East Somerset	730
Bristol, City of	3,800

[1] A free early education place is defined as a part-time place at a maintained nursery school or primary school or a part-time equivalent place, i.e. five sessions (half days) a week, at a provider other than a maintained nursery or primary school.

We have made the commitment that by April 2004, six months ahead of our original target, all three-year-olds whose parents want one, will have access to a free, part-time early education place.

The latest figures on early years provision in England were published by the Department in the Statistical First Release 15/2003, "Provision For Children Under Five Years Of Age In England—January 2003 (Provisional)", copies of which are available from the Library and the Department's website: www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics

EU Committees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list *(a)* the names, titles and grades of the officials who sit on the EU Socrates committee, *(b)* the number of times, and the dates, on which it has met since January 2002, *(c)* the agenda items it has considered since January 2002, *(d)* the decisions it has made since January 2002 and *(e)* the means used to communicate the decisions to the House. [110282]

Alan Johnson: Meetings of the Socrates committee are attended by delegates drawn from the 30 participating states of the 15 European Union countries, the European Economic Area countries of Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein, the 10 acceding countries, Romania and Bulgaria. Usually two officials of the Department for Education and Skills attend the committee.

The Socrates committee met five times on 17–18 January 2002, 14 June 2002, 7–8 November 2002, 16–17 January 2003 and 12–13 June 2003. In addition, there was an informal meeting of the committee in May 2002 to discuss evaluation of the Socrates programme.

The role of the Socrates committee is to oversee the powers delegated to the European Commission by the Council of Ministers to implement the Socrates programme. The committee's business is largely concerned with the technical details of the programme operation, such as project selection for programme support, publicity, information and budget allocation. In common with other Comitology committees its decisions are not routinely deposited for scrutiny under established scrutiny procedures, unless they are politically significant.

Together with member states, the Commission has been conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of Comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". The working group on the Friends of Comitology is meeting later this month to discuss proposals for interim reform.

As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of the committee. The second report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 10 January 2003 ref 5060/03, COM(03)733.

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every Comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Examination Awards

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions his staff have had with the examination awarding bodies since December 2002; and if he will make a statement. [128099]

Mr. Miliband: Discussions between DfES officials and the examination awarding bodies are held in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the DfES and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.

DfES officials formally meet the chief executives from three unitary awarding bodies, AQA, Edexcel and OCR twice a year. Since December 2002, one meeting has taken place on 1 April and another is scheduled for November. The majority of DfES's contacts with the awarding bodies occur at meetings organised by the QCA.

Family Centre Places

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many family centre places have been provided by local authorities. [127889]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: This information is not available in the form requested. However, in 2001–02, (the latest date for which data are available), gross expenditure by councils in England on family centres was £139.4 million.

Formula Spending Share

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the transfers into and out of formula spending share for 2004–05, and grants which are due to cease at the end of 2003–04; and whether his Department plans consequently to adjust the baseline calculation for floors and ceilings. [127164]

Mr. Miliband: The Secretary of State's statement of 17 July on school funding indicated that the standards fund would be maintained at its 2003–04 levels.

Details of any transfers into or out of formula spending will be announced later in the year, as will details on the baseline for floors and ceilings. However, we will ensure that every school and LEA has a reasonable year-on-year increase in its overall per pupil funding.

Free School Milk

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures he is taking to encourage local authorities to introduce free school milk for children aged seven years. [128236]

Mr. Miliband: This Department supports the provision of free and paid for milk in maintained schools and encourages schools and local education authorities to offer it to pupils. Guidance produced to assist schools to implement regulations, which set nutritional standards for school lunches includes a strong recommendation from the Secretary of State that drinking milk is available to all pupils as an option every day. Following a 20 per cent. reduction in the EU subsidy on school milk from January 2001, this Department agreed jointly with the Department of Health and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to top up the annual £1.5 million shortfall. This assistance helps prevent possible increased costs of providing school milk.

Free School Transport

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the maximum age is at which local education authorities must provide free transport to pupils who attend their nearest school if the distance between home and school is beyond the statutory walking distance. [127094]

Mr. Miliband: Statutory home to school transport provisions apply to pupils of compulsory school age. A pupil usually ceases to be of compulsory school age on the last Friday in June in the school year in which he or she reaches 16.

Further Education Colleges (Finance)

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total cost was of bids submitted by further education colleges for growth in 2003–04 in respect of *(a)* 16–19 and *(b)* adult provision; what proportion of the bids in each category have been met by the Learning and Skills Council; and if he will make a statement. [127959]

Alan Johnson: There has been very considerable growth in allocations to further education colleges. In the 2003–04 academic year, a total of £2,072 million was allocated for 16–18 year olds, £1,828 million for adult learning (including adult basic skills) and £321 million for Additional Learning Support. This represents increases of £284 million (16 per cent.), £181 million (11 per cent.), and £37 million (13 per cent.) respectively above the comparable allocations for 2002–03.

Plans for growth are agreed between the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and individual colleges as part of discussions on forward plans. Individual college proposals are supported by local LSCs where they fit with the Local Strategic Plan, which outlines the learning and skills needs in the local area. In 2003–04, all such proposals for growth in respect of participation by 16–18 year olds and basic skills provision for adults were met in full. In addition to the extra funding provided for Adult Learning, proposals totalling a further £30 million were unable to be met within available resources.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment has been made by his Department of the impact of the performance related funding system set out in Success for All on equality of opportunity for learners; and if he will make a statement. [127960]

Alan Johnson: The measures set out in Success for All will reward those colleges which meet their targets for student success and provide clear incentives for colleges to improve their performance in this respect. Floor targets have set clear expectations about minimum acceptable performance levels and these will drive up performance in colleges and providers whose learners currently have the lowest chance of securing the qualifications for which they are aiming. Through their agreed three year development plans, colleges and providers will set out their plans for improving student services and teaching standards. These approaches will benefit all learners, helping ensure more learners receive a high quality learning experience. In particular, they will benefit learners enrolled with colleges and providers whose performance is least good and this will enhance equality of opportunity for learners.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much of the funding totals shown for further education in the Departmental Annual Report 2003 is assumed to be for *(a)* participation, *(b)* investment, *(c)* local intervention and development funding and *(d)* other funding for the years (i) 2003–04, (ii) 2004–05 and (iii) 2005–06; and if he will make a statement. [127993]

Alan Johnson: The information requested is set out in the table.

£ million

	2003–04	*2004–05*	*2005–06*
Participation	4,278	4,625	4,988
Investment	266	316	343
Local intervention and development funding	132	177	191
Other	56	56	56
Total	4,732	5,173	5,579

These figures are rounded to the nearest £ million and are consistent with those published in the Departmental Annual Report 2003. We plan a 19 per cent. real terms increase in total funding in 2005–06 compared to 2002–03 which demonstrates this Government's commitment to further education.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what level of funding has been allowed in his Department's expenditure plans to compensate further education colleges for the transfer of responsibility for increases in the employer contributions to the teachers pension scheme in *(a)* 2003–04, *(b)* 2004–05 and *(c)* 2005–06; and if he will make a statement. [127994]

Alan Johnson: The Department has made available funding of £80 million in 2003–04 to compensate publicly funded further education colleges for changes to the Teachers' Pension Scheme. In 2004–05 the funds available will rise to £84 million and in 2005–06 to £87 million.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the estimated cost is to further education colleges of the increases in employer national insurance contributions introduced in April 2003 for *(a)* 2003–04, *(b)* 2004–05 and *(c)* 2005–06; and if he will make a statement. [127995]

Alan Johnson: The additional cost in employers' national insurance contributions in 2003–04 for all further education institutions in England is estimated to be £25 million. Further education institutions receive funding for staff costs from a variety of sources, both public and private, so the element of the increase to be covered from public sources will be only a proportion of this. In 2003–04 assumed total funding for further education allocated to the Learning and Skills Council will increase by 6 per cent. in real terms compared with 2002–03. This places further education colleges in a good position to meet cost increases and invest in improving services for learners and employers.

The likely cost of the increase in national insurance contributions in future years depends on a number of variables including the number of staff employed and the level of their pay. These are matters for colleges to determine within the resources that are available to them. Given this, the Department does not provide estimates of such costs for future years.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the level is of projected enrolments in terms of full time equivalents based on the funding assumed for participation in further education in the Departmental Report 2003 for *(a)* 16 to 19-year-olds and *(b)* adults in (i) 2002–03, (ii) 2003–04, (iii) 2004–05 and (iv) 2005–06; and if he will make a statement. [127996]

Alan Johnson: Funding for participation in further education, as set out in the Departmental Report 2003, is based on the following assumptions of funded enrolments in terms of full-time equivalents (FTEs):

Assumed FTEs 2002–03 to 2005–06

Thousand

	2002–03	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06*
16–18 year olds	509	534	566	596
19+ year olds	571	582	594	604

These are assumptions, not targets, that are subject to revision. The key assumption is that a rising proportion of the cohort of 16–18 year olds, which is itself increasing in size because of demographic changes, will choose to enrol in FE sector colleges.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the planned total funding is per full-time equivalent student in further education for adults in *(a)* 2002–03, *(b)* 2003–04, *(c)* 2004–05 and *(d)* 2005–06 in (i) cash terms and (ii) real terms at April 2003 prices, on the basis of GDP deflator projections (A) with and (B) without the additional funding made available to compensate colleges for increases in employer contributions to the teachers pension scheme; and if he will make a statement. [128028]

Alan Johnson: Unit of funding figures are not available separately for adults.

The total unit of funding in further education in cash and real terms in 2002–03 prices are set out as follows:

£

	2002–03	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06*
Cash terms				
Including money for teachers' pension scheme	4,020	4,310	4,530	4,720
Excluding money for teachers' pension scheme	4,020	4,240	4,460	4,650
Real terms (2002–03 prices)				
Including money for teachers' pension scheme	4,020	4,200	4,300	4,370
Excluding money for teachers' pension scheme	4,020	4,130	4,230	4,310

Source:
DfES estimates and projections.

The figures shown above for 2003–04 to 2005–06 are consistent with the Spending Review 2002 settlement for Further Education announced in November 2002 which was the most substantial increase in FE funding since college incorporation in 1993. They will deliver higher standards and reform of the local pattern of provision and therefore better meet the needs of learners and employers.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was allocated for *(a)* the Teaching Pay Initiative for further education colleges and *(b)* the staff development component of the Standards Fund for colleges in 2002–03; how much colleges will receive in 2003–04 from the 2 per cent. enhancement of funding rates allocated for the transfer under Success for All; and if he will make a statement. [128029]

Alan Johnson: In 2002–03 Further Education colleges were allocated £142 million pounds for the Teaching Pay Initiative, and £53 million for the staff development component of the Standards Fund. These funds were consolidated into participation funding for the academic year 2003–04 and the funding rate was increased by 3.5 per cent. to reflect this. Colleges will receive £138 million from the 3.5% increase. A further £50 million will be allocated to some colleges to meet the costs of implementing increased funding for colleges with high area costs and disadvantage factors, and to fund additional participation through pilots such as those in adult skills and partnerships for progression in 2003–4.

As well as consolidation of these funds, further education colleges will also receive an increase of £63 million or 2 per cent. in their core unit of funding per full time equivalent learner in return for agreeing a three year development plan. The real terms increase in the participation unit of funding, together with the consolidation of previously targeted funds and three year funding agreement, are what colleges were calling for. They give colleges more control over the funds allocated to them and a longer term planning horizon.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what average increase expressed in real terms he estimates further education colleges will receive in 2003–04 for *(a)* growth in participation and *(b)* other funding increases (i) in total funding and (ii) after discounting actual Teacher Pay Initiative and staff development allocations for 2002–03, the additional costs of employers contributions to the Teachers Pension Scheme from April 2003 and the additional costs arising from the increase in employers national insurance contributions from April 2003; and if he will make a statement. [128030]

Alan Johnson: The real terms increase in assumed total funding for further education allocated to the Learning and Skills Council for 2003–04 is 6 per cent. compared with 2002–03. This increase excludes the additional funding of £80 million made available to compensate colleges for an increase in the employer contribution rate arising from technical changes to the Teachers' Pension Scheme. It includes funding for additional student numbers.

We estimate that funding available for participation will increase by around 7 per cent. in real terms. This includes funding for additional student numbers. We estimate that funding available for non-participation budgets for purposes such as investment to raise standards and improve the capital infrastructure will

increase by 3 per cent. in real terms. These figures exclude the impact of the transfer in 2003–04 of funding in respect of the Teaching Pay Initiative and staff development from the non-participation baseline into the participation baseline.

We estimate that the costs of the increase in employers' national insurance contributions and of the additional increase in employers' contributions to the Teachers Pension Scheme as a result of the latest actuarial revaluation, represents around 0.7 per cent. of the value of total funding, or around 0.8 per cent. of the value of funding for participation.

The real terms increases in funding for colleges in 2003–04 place them in a good position to meet cost increases and invest in improving services for learners and employers.

Gifted Children

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what provisions are made to cater for particularly gifted children from state schools; and if he will make a statement on his policy on gifted children being able to fulfil their potential. [127956]

Mr. Miliband: The Government are making support for gifted and talented pupils integral to its core strategies to improve teaching and learning. Its gifted and talented education programme in England includes: a dedicated strand of Excellence in Cities, supporting intensive provision in disadvantaged areas; a range of national activity, featuring the Academy for Gifted Youth; and a new dimension provided through the Gifted and Talented Arm of London Challenge. The Government believes that all children, including the most able, deserve an education that meets their needs and provides them with the challenge to fulfil their potential.

Jean Monnet Chairs

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many Jean Monnet chairs are based in UK universities; what the value of the grant funding of these posts is; what the salaries of *(a)* these chairs and *(b)* professorships nationally agreed rates are; and how many Jean Monnet chairs there are per capita in each EU member state. [127760]

Mr. Miliband: Between 1990 and 2002, 107 Jean Monnet Chairs in UK universities were approved. Chairs are co-financed, with the European Commission providing up to 80 per cent. of the eligible costs and remaining costs paid for by the host universities. Up to 1999, the maximum level of European Commission financing for a Jean Monnet Chair was euro 60,000 for a 3-year period. Between 2000–02 it was euro 30,000.

Salaries of Jean Monnet Chairs vary between universities. As of 1 August 2002, the Professorial minimum in pre-1992 higher education institutions is £40,841. For institutions which gained university status in 1992, there is no set minimum or maximum salary level.

The following table shows the number of Jean Monnet Chairs in each EU member state between 1990 and 2002 together with the chairs per capita, based on population figures for 2002.

Countries	*Jean Monnet chairs*	*Chairs per capita*
Austria	10	0.0000005
Belgium	11	0.000001
Denmark	15	0.0000027
Finland	7	0.0000013
France	68	0.0000011
Germany	60	0.0000007
Greece	28	0.0000026
Ireland	19	0.0000048
Italy	50	0.0000008
Netherlands	25	0.0000015
Portugal	16	0.0000015
Spain	70	0.0000017
Sweden	8	0.0000009
United Kingdom	107	0.0000017
Total	494	—

Mathematics Teaching

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to improve the teaching of mathematics. [127781]

Mr. Charles Clarke: We have achieved the best ever primary school test results in mathematics. In the 2003 Key Stage 2 tests 73 per cent. of 11 year olds achieved the expected level in mathematics, a 14 percentage point increase since 1998. The National Primary Strategy will continue to help teachers improve the learning and teaching of mathematics, focusing on aspects that pupils find most difficult.

The KS3 results are also at their best ever this year, with mathematics up from 2002 by three percentage points, with 70 per cent. achieving the expected level. Through the continuing success of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy, where improving the teaching of mathematics remains a key priority, we expect standards to continue to rise.

The independent Post-14 Maths Inquiry is due to publish its final report at the end of September and is expected to make recommendations on the pedagogy, curriculum and qualifications for those aged 14 and over and to propose options for a new National Centre of Excellence for Mathematics Teaching.

National Foundation for Educational Research

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much funding the Department provided to the National Foundation for Educational Research in each year since 1990; and if he will place in the Library a copy of the Foundation's document, Sounds before letters: final evaluation of POPAT. [127199]

Alan Johnson: Information on funding provided to the national Foundation for Educational Research is only available from 1995. The cost of providing information prior to this date would be disproportionate. The funding provided by the Department each year from April 1995 is as follows.

£

	Funding provided by the Department
1995	312,808
1996	307,100
1997	200,984
1998	311,924
1999	759,209
2000	304,547
2001	319,090
2002	104,943

The Department did not commission the National Foundation for Educational Research to evaluate POPAT.

National Literacy Strategy

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the effect of the National Literacy Strategy on literacy skills among primary school pupils in Taunton. [127773]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The National Literacy Strategy has transformed standards of literacy in our primary schools. Nationally, 75 per cent. of pupils achieved level 4 or above in the 2003 Key Stage 2 English tests, 10 percentage points more than in 1998. A recent international study showed that England's 10-year-olds are now the third most able readers in the world.

In Somerset schools, the percentage of pupils achieving level 4 in the Key Stage 2 English tests has improved by seven percentage points, from 67 per cent. to 74 per cent., between 1998 and 2003. We are unable to disaggregate the results for Taunton schools.

National Primary Strategy

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations he has received in relation to the National Primary Strategy. [127921]

Mr. Miliband: Following the publication of "Excellence and Enjoyment—A strategy for primary schools" in May 2003, we have received a number of responses from individuals and organisations. In addition, we have invited 6,000 primary headteachers to attend a series of conferences, where they will have the opportunity to comment on the strategy.

Ormond Road Workshops

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what applications have been made to the Learning and Skills Council for funding of the Ormond Road Workshops in Islington; on what dates applications were received; and what the decision was in each case. [127397]

Mr. Miliband: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, will write to my hon. Friend with the information requested and place a copy of his reply in the Library.

Public Relations Consultants

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 12 June, *Official Report*, column 1026W, what his Department's budget for public relations consultants in the financial years 2003–04 and 2004–05 is. [128237]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Department's anticipated expenditure on public relations consultants in 2003–04 is £1,573,000. Plans and budgets for the Department's communications activity, including use of public relation consultants, for 2004–05 have not yet been developed and so it is not possible to give the information requested.

Pupil Funding

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if the guaranteed minimum per pupil increase in 2004–05 and 2005–06 will *(a)* take account of standards fund payments to schools and *(b)* apply only to the age-weighted per pupil funding. [127972]

Alan Johnson: The Secretary of State's statement of 17 July on school funding said that the Standards Fund would be maintained and inflation-proofed at 2003–04 levels. The level of Standards Fund allocations will therefore be guaranteed separately. The guaranteed minimum per pupil increase will refer to school budget shares, excluding the part funded through the Learning and Skills Council, for which separate arrangements will be in place as outlined in the statement. The Department is working with local education authorities on the methodology for the guarantee, and aim to issue draft regulations and guidance during the autumn.

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) when he expects the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to meet its obligations under section 95 of the December 2002 Tomlinson Report to publish a Memorandum of Understanding between the QCA and the awarding bodies before the first anniversary of the publication of that report; [128098]

(2) what discussions took place between the Department and the awarding bodies as stipulated in section 95 of the December 2002 Tomlinson Report relating to the Memorandum of Understanding published on 19 June; [128100]

(3) what plans he has to call together the relevant staff of his Department, of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and of the awarding bodies to discuss jointly the Memorandum of Understanding *(a)* drawn up between his Department and the QCA, and *(b)* drawn up between the QCA and the awarding bodies; [128101]

(4) when he expects to meet his obligation under section 95 of the December 2002 Tomlinson Report to publish a Memorandum of Understanding between the DfES and the awarding bodies before the first anniversary of the publication of that report. [128102]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Department and the

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) was published on QCA's website on 19 June. I placed a copy in the Library on 18 June. The MoU refers at paragraph 11 to the basis on which the Department meets the awarding bodies.

The relationship between QCA and the awarding bodies is covered by QCA's regulatory arrangements which include the accreditation criteria and Codes of Practice published jointly by the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales, the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment and QCA. There is no need for a separate memorandum of understanding between DfES and the awarding bodies. QCA will continue to monitor and review its regulatory arrangements and to meet regularly with the Joint Council for General Qualifications.

Qualified Teachers

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers with qualified teacher status were working *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time in (i) secondary, (ii) primary and (iii) special schools in each year from 1992–93 to 2002–03. [126935]

Mr. Miliband: The number of regular teachers with qualified teacher status in England broken down by phase and split by full and part-time full time equivalents (FTE) is given in the following table. Other regular teachers, of which there were 15,200 in maintained schools in England in 2003[1], are teachers who hold recognised school-teaching qualifications from countries outside the European Economic Area; trainees on employment-based routes to QTS (the Graduate, Registered and Overseas-Trained Teacher Programmes); and instructors with special qualifications or experience of a particular subject.

Regular teachers with qualified teacher status in England

Thousand

	Nursery and primary[2]			*Secondary*[3]			*Special*[4]			
	Total (FTE)	*Full time*	*Part time (FTE)*	*Total (FTE)*	*Full time*	*Part time (FTE)*	*Total (FTE)*	*Full time*	*Part time (FTE)*	*Total (FTE)*
1992	187.2	173.9	13.3	192.1	180.2	11.9	15.6	14.7	0.9	394.9
1993	188.4	175.1	13.3	192.3	180.1	12.2	15.5	14.6	0.9	396.2
1994	189.0	175.4	13.6	186.4	174.2	12.2	15.3	14.3	1.0	390.7
1995	190.0	175.8	14.2	188.3	175.4	12.9	15.2	14.1	1.1	393.5
1996	190.8	176.3	14.5	187.9	174.5	13.4	14.9	13.8	1.1	393.6
1997	190.7	175.9	14.8	187.7	174.3	13.4	14.7	13.5	1.2	393.1
1998	189.0	174.0	15.0	187.7	173.9	13.8	14.3	13.1	1.2	391.0
1999	189.9	174.0	15.9	189.8	175.7	14.1	14.2	12.9	1.3	393.9
2000	191.6	174.9	16.7	191.1	176.6	14.5	14.1	12.8	1.3	396.8
2001	192.6	174.7	17.9	193.8	179.2	14.6	14.0	12.7	1.3	400.4
2002	193.0	173.9	19.1	196.6	181.3	15.3	13.9	12.4	1.5	403.5
2003[1]	191.9	171.6	20.3	198.0	182.3	15.7	13.7	12.2	1.5	403.6

[1] Data are provisional but are unlikely to change.
[2] Pupil numbers in nursery and primary schools decreased by 48,000 between 2002 and 2003.
[3] Includes sixth form colleges prior to 1994.
[4] There are fewer pupils in special schools as they have been moving into mainstream schools in the period covered in this table.
Note:
Teachers in service and teacher vacancies (618G) has a survey date of the third Thursday in January.
Source for note:
618g survey.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people working as teachers in employment based training routes *(a)* commenced training and *(b)* gained qualified teacher status in each year from 1996–97 to 2002–03. [126938]

Mr. Miliband: The table shows the available data for the Graduate and Registered Teacher Programmes and the Overseas-Trained Teacher Programme. No data relating to earlier employment-based training routes, such as the Licensed Teacher Scheme, are available in the form requested. No data on numbers of Qualified Teacher Status awards made to employment-based trainees is available for years before 2000/01.

	1997/98	*1998/99*	*1999/2000*	*2000/01*	*2001/02*	*2002/03*
RTP new entrants[1]	7	77	69	96	155	214
OTTP new entrants[1]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	755	910
GTP new entrants[1]	89	572	872	1,860	3,507	3,813
Total new entrants[1]	96	649	941	1,956	4,417	4,937
Total QTS awards[2,3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	691	2,437	3,842

[1] RTP and GTP trainees may begin their training at the start of the autumn, spring or summer terms. OTTP trainees may begin their training at any time.
[2] Total numbers of awards made to RTP, OTTP and GTP trainees during the academic year, irrespective of in which academic year the completers' training commenced. Planned length of training may alter during the programme if a candidate switches from full- to part-time employment or vice-versa, or if training progresses more quickly or slowly than originally planned.
[3] A further 14 employment-based trainees have been awarded QTS so far in the 2003/04 academic year.
Source:
Teacher Training Agency Employment-based Routes Data Management System

Regional Assemblies

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what responsibilities and functions would pass from his Department to an elected regional assembly on its establishment. [127753]

Mr. Miliband: The aim of elected assemblies is to ensure that regional functions are carried out effectively and better reflect the needs of the region. Assemblies will also play an important role in supporting delivery of the Department's skills agenda, including ensuring coherence between national, regional and local level. Central to this will be its role in appointing two members to each of the Boards of the local Learning and Skills Councils in its region. It will also be consulted on other appointments; and on the LSC's guidance and plans for learning and skills development.

Regular Teacher (Definition)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what his definition is of a regular teacher; and when that definition was made. [126937]

Mr. Miliband: Teachers employed on contracts of a month or more are defined as regular teachers. Teachers employed on contracts of less than a month are defined as occasional teachers. Information has been collected on this basis since the 1960s on the Annual Survey of Teachers in Service and Teacher Vacancies (Form 618G).

The Department has used regular teachers as its standard definition for the number of teachers in the maintained sector for most purposes since 2000. This provides a stable measure of teacher numbers that is not affected by the relatively large year-on-year fluctuations in the demand for occasional teachers. The number of occasional teachers rose markedly between January 1999 and January 2001 and then fell in both 2002 and 2003. Both regular and occasional teacher numbers continue to be provided in official publications.

Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list local authorities in which spending on *(a)* special educational needs and *(b)* excluded pupils increased by a higher percentage than the individual schools budget in 2003–04, giving in each case the percentage increase for each budget head. [127928]

Alan Johnson: The Secretary of State published tables showing this information on the 2 May. A copy was placed in the Library of the House. Detailed expenditure data will be made available in September to allow benchmarking by LEAs and their Schools Forums, and this will show year-on-year changes for a range of selected expenditure categories from 2002–03 to 2003–04, for both Schools and LEA Budgets. These will include changes in spending on special educational needs and spending on pupils educated other than at school.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the circular documents that were sent by his Department to *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* city technology colleges, *(c)* other secondary schools and *(d)* special schools between 1 September 2002 and 1 July 2003; and how many pages each document contained. [127903]

Mr. Miliband: We sent the following in the period 1 September 2002 to 1 July 2003:

To all primary schools: 27 documents—total number of pages: 480
To all city technology colleges: 30 documents—total number of pages: 850
To all special schools: see the following:
To all other secondary schools: 30 documents—total pages: 850

Primary schools
The 27 documents sent to all primary schools were as follows:
Letter from Secretary of State on the Criminal Records Bureau
Guidance on School Teachers Pay and Conditions 2002
School Performance Tables
September 2002 class size count
Further literacy support file
Building on improvements (literacy and numeracy)
Secretary of State letter on KS2 results
New school finance pack flyer
Early Years headcount[1]
New funding system for LEAs
Criminal Records Bureau: update on arrangements
National literacy and numeracy refresher pack
Languages for all: languages for life
Information on Sure Start
Raising Standards and tackling Workload (National Agreement)
Letter from officials about development of an 'e-batch' system
Building schools for the future
Write here, write now
Annual Schools census 2002
Threshold guidance details
Excellence and enjoyment: a strategy for primary education
Safeguarding children: practice guidance for practitioners (summary)
Extended schools: providing opportunities and services for all
Childcare in extended schools
ICT in the literacy hour

City Technology Colleges (CTCs)
CTCs automatically received the same documents as those sent to 'other secondary schools'.
They were not sent any separate documents.

Special Schools
We are unable to provide total figures for special schools. This is because each school will have received documents that were relevant to their KS equivalent intake. So those with young people aged 5–11 would have received some of the material aimed at KS1 and KS2 level. Those with young people aged 11–16 would have received some of the material aimed at KS3 and KS4 level. Those with pupils aged between 5 and 16 would have received some of the material aimed at stages KSI-KS4.

Special schools automatically received a further document that went neither to primary schools nor to secondary schools. This was the report of the special schools working group which ran to 180 pages.

No special school would have received documents in excess of the individual totals shown for other secondary schools or for primary schools.

Other Secondary schools

The 30 documents sent to other secondary schools were as follows:

Letter from Secretary of State on the Criminal Records Bureau
Key Stage 3 framework for ICT capability
Schools and Colleges performance tables
Secretary of State letter on KS3 results
Revised guidance on dis-application of the national curriculum at KS4
Target setting at Key stage 3
Guidance on School Teachers Pay and Conditions 2002
New school finance pack flyer
KS3 year 9 booster: Maths
KS3 year 9 booster: Science
KS3 year 9 booster: English
Annual Schools census 2002
New funding system for LEAs
Criminal Records Bureau: update on arrangements
Languages for all: languages for life
Letter from officials about development of an 'e-batch' system
Consultation on 14–19 arrangements: outcomes pack
Raising Standards and tackling Workload (National Agreement)
A new specialist system: transforming secondary education
Building schools for the future
Survey of absences in schools
National non statutory specification for careers education and guidance
Safeguarding children: practice guidance for practitioners (summary)
12th youth cohort study
Threshold guidance details
Extended schools: providing opportunities and services for all
Childcare in extended schools
Governing body procedures from 1 September 2003
Celebrating commonwealth day partners in development
Child protection: post-Climbie report

In addition we sent a copy of the monthly DfES bulletin ('Spectrum' which carries news and publications of interest) to all schools each month. These varied in length but in total 11 bulletins were sent with the total number of pages running to 120.

[1] The early years headcount material was sent once a term.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the potential financial liability of school governors where a school sets a deficit budget. [127752]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Section 50(7) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 provides that the governors of a school do not incur any personal liability in managing a delegated budget, provided they act in good faith. It does not appear to the Government that ordinarily the decision of a governing body to set a deficit budget is an act of bad faith such that individual governors would lose the protection of corporate status, and potentially be personally liable. However, such issues clearly turn on their own particular circumstances; and relevant matters would include whether members had conscientiously considered the relevant facts and circumstances, and had not knowingly misled the local education authority.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance he has given to local education authorities on the modernisation of school libraries. [127786]

Margaret Hodge: Guidance on the design of school libraries is contained in the Department's Building Bulletin 82, "Area Guidelines for Schools", and Building Bulletin 95, "Schools for the Future—Designs for Learning Communities". Both documents are published by the Stationery Office, but can also be viewed on www.teachernet.gov.uk/schoolbuildings.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will instruct Ofsted to include the provision of science and biology fieldwork as one of the criteria for assessing school performance. [127744]

Margaret Hodge: This is a matter for Ofsted. HM Chief Inspector, David Bell, will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to improve the quality of school science laboratories. [127835]

Mr. Miliband: This government aims to improve school laboratories in line with the recommendations of Sir Gareth Roberts report in 2002 on the supply of scientists, so that there are no unsatisfactory laboratories by the end of this spending review period in 2005–06, and all school laboratories are good or excellent by 2010. Capital funding available for investment in school buildings, including in laboratories, is 3.8 billion this year, and it will rise to over £5 billion by 2005–06. Most of this funding is allocated by formula to schools and to local education authorities so that they can invest in their school buildings in line with priorities determined locally through a rigorous, transparent and consultative asset management planning process, which reflects local needs and government aims. Guidance to schools and local education authorities on capital funding reflects its aim to improve school laboratories.

Further, earlier this year, we launched Building Schools for the Future, which aims to renew all secondary schools in England so that they are suitable for the teaching and learning needs of the 21st century,

in ten to fifteen years from 2005–06, subject to future public spending decisions. This programme includes developing a number of exemplar designs for secondary schools, including laboratory provision, which will reflect our ambitions for schools for the future.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which recent studies of literacy and numeracy standards among primary school children his Department has analysed; and what assessment he has made of these studies. [127920]

Alan Johnson: The Department seeks to keep abreast of all research and evaluation of standards and practice in literacy and numeracy. On standards in England, the most comprehensive studies have been the evaluations of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies by Ofsted and by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, which found that the Strategies have had a significant impact on the standards attained and on the quality of teaching in primary schools. On international comparisons, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study found that children in England are among the most able readers in the world at the age of 10. England was ranked third of the 35 countries involved.

The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies from their inception were based on the best available research, and as our support for literacy and numeracy standards develops further through our primary strategy, "Excellence and Enjoyment" we will continue to ensure a sound evidence base for our policies.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he is taking to prevent homophobic bullying in schools; and what guidance is issued to headteachers in this respect. [127872]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Our free pack "Bullying: don't Suffer in Silence" is designed to help schools deal effectively with all forms of bullying. It recommends explicit reference to homophobic bullying in school anti-bullying policies so that pupils know it is unacceptable. The pack and our anti-bullying website also refer to other organisations that can provide additional help to young people affected by homophobic bullying.

Every secondary and middle school in England will shortly receive expert advice and training on improving attendance and behaviour. This will include material on the importance of tackling bullying in any form.

Tackling homophobic bullying will also feature in planned new National Healthy School Standard guidance and guidance for Connexions Personal Advisers.

Mr. Dorrell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the schools in Leicestershire that are in the special measures category. [127265]

Mr. Miliband: The schools in Leicestershire which currently require special measures as of 18 July 2003 are as follows:

(a) Leicester City LEA:

Spinney Hill Primary and Community Centre (Primary)

Queensmead Junior School (Primary)

Forest Lodge Primary School (Primary)

(b) Leicestershire LEA:

Latimer Primary School (Primary)

John Cleveland College (Secondary)

Longslade Community College (Secondary)

Shelthorpe Primary School (Primary)

Thrussington CE Primary School (Primary)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in what exceptional circumstances local authorities will be free to passport less than the full increase in schools formula spending share to schools. [127927]

Alan Johnson: The Secretary of State's statement of 17 July on school funding made clear the Government's expectation that "barring wholly exceptional circumstances, each and every LEA should 'passport' the full increase in its Schools Formula Spending Share (SPSS) into a matching increase in the Schools Budget". In considering whether or not to use his reserve power to set a minimum schools budget for the following financial year for any LEA proposing not to passport, the Secretary of State will consider all relevant circumstances including the reasons put forward by the LEA. He has made no pre-judgment on what would be considered exceptional. The current expectation is that every authority will passport and the Government will ensure that every local authority receives sufficient central Government grant to "passport" in full the increase in SPSS into its Schools Budget.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether schools forums will be able to agree a funding baseline for the guaranteed per pupil increase which is higher than current per pupil funding. [127931]

Alan Johnson: The Secretary of State said in his statement on school funding of 17 July stated that local education authorities and schools will work together through their Schools Forums to agree the funding baseline to which the guaranteed per pupil increase will be applied. We aim to issue guidance and draft regulations on this during the autumn.

Science Curriculum

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what plans he has to reassess the provision for fieldwork within the curriculum for science *(a)* GCSE and *(b)* A-level; and if he will make a statement; [127750]

(2) what assessment he has made of the resource implications that would arise if all secondary schools were required to make provision for fieldwork for all pupils; [127751]

(3) what assessment he has made of the implications for environmental awareness of access to field work as part of the biology curriculum; [128064]

(4) what information his Department collects centrally about secondary schools providing science or biology field work opportunities for all pupils; and what strategies he has for encouraging such provisions. [128065]

Alan Johnson: There are no plans to reassess the provision for field work within science GCSE or A-level. The existing science National Curriculum at Key Stages 1–4, together with current GCSE and A-level syllabuses, encourages field work; there is also a pilot at A-level which places particular emphasis on it. Additionally, all primary and secondary schools are required to make provision for fieldwork for all pupils as part of the Geography curriculum. The Department does not collect information centrally about the provision of science or biology field work opportunities for pupils.

No assessment has been made of the implications for environmental awareness of access to field work as part of the biology curriculum. "Growing Schools" encourages schools to use the 'outdoor classroom' as a resource in all subjects including science. The National Association of Field Studies Officers and the Field Studies Council are members of the National Advisory Group.

Special Needs

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what types of specific handicap or special need are defined as constituting special needs; and how many children there were with each specific type of handicap, at 11 July. [127923]

Margaret Hodge: Section 312 of the Education Act 1996 sets out that children have special educational needs if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them. Children are defined as having a learning difficulty if they:

a. have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age;

b. have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of the same age in schools within the area of the local education authority; OR

c. are under compulsory school age and fall within the definition above or would so if special educational provision was not made for them.

Four main areas of difficulty or need are identified in the statutory SEN Code of Practice, published in November 2001. Some of these can be sub-divided to give 11 categories:

a. Cognition and learning needs

Specific learning difficulty

Moderate learning difficulty

Severe learning difficulty

Profound and multiple learning difficulty

b. Behaviour, emotional and social development needs

Behaviour, emotional and social difficulty

c. Communication and interaction needs

Speech, language and communication needs

Autistic spectrum disorder

d. Sensory and/or physical needs

Visual impairment

Hearing impairment

Multi-sensory impairment

Physical disability

The Department does not currently collect data about the numbers of children with specific types of special educational need. However, we will be collecting this data from January 2004 and have recently published guidance to support this process. I will ensure that the hon. Member receives a copy.

Standards Fund

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether it is his policy that increases in schools formula spending share made in 2003–04 to reflect the removal of standards funds will be reversed to reflect the restoration of standards funds in 2004–05 and 2005–06. [127925]

Alan Johnson: The restoration of the standards funds in 2004–05 and 2005–06 are a separate issue from the transfer of funding to schools formula spending share in 2003–04. Therefore the restoration of standards fund in 2004–05 and 2005–06 will have no effect on the level of the schools formula spending share for those years.

Teachers

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what criteria are to be applied in September 2004 for teachers to move from upper pay scale 2 to upper pay scale 3; and if he will make a statement. [126843]

Mr. Miliband: For Upper Pay Scale 3, we have proposed to the School Teachers Review Body STRB) that there should be a series of changes including a simple new application requirement for progression, as well as a clear role for the governing body in deciding well in advance how many teachers should progress. We also plan rigorous new excellence criteria for progression, and to cash-limit resources to a level that will find progression at about a third of those eligible in September 2004. We have asked the STRB to make recommendations in November so that schools can better plan their budgets for 2004–05.

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher redundancies have been made in *(a)* Dorset, *(b)* Poole and *(c)* Bournemouth local education authorities in each year since 1997. [125034]

Mr. Miliband: Definitive information on redundancies of teachers is not collected centrally. Provisional statistics on teacher and support staff numbers and teacher vacancies at January 2003 were published in April in Statistical First Release 10/2003.

Statistics due to be released on 9 September will provide regional and LEA level breakdowns of these figures; provisional national figures for January 2004 are due to be published next April. In May this year, in response to concerns about the difficulties some schools are facing as a result of changes to the funding arrangements, my Department liaised with local education authorities (LEAs) to make a broad assessment of the extent to which schools were making changes in their teaching staff complements. This included whether teachers were being made compulsorily redundant, and the possible reasons for changes in staffing, including falling rolls. LEAs' assessments were based on the best information available to them at that time; many told us that definitive information was not available and that the situation was changing rapidly as schools finalised their budgets and their staffing. In addition they advised that a significant number of the redundancy notices were 'protective' and were likely to be withdrawn as the situation within schools and the LEA became clearer. My Department will continue to work closely with our national partners, including representatives of teachers, and have regular contact with LEAs.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 7 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 633W, on teacher redundancies, what the reasons were for the delay in answering the question; at what level information on redundancies is collected centrally; if he will place that information in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [125772]

Mr. Miliband: The answer to the hon. Member's earlier question was being processed in the usual way and was answered at the earliest opportunity. Provisional statistics on teacher and support staff numbers and teacher vacancies at January 2003 were published in April in Statistical First Release 10/2003. Statistics due to be released on 9 September will provide regional and LEA level breakdowns of these figures; provisional national figures for January 2004 are due to be published next April. In May this year, in response to concerns about the difficulties some schools are facing as a result of changes to the funding arrangements, my Department liaised with local education authorities (LEA)s to make a broad assessment of the extent to which schools were making changes in their teaching staff complements. This included whether teaches were being made compulsorily redundant, and the possible reasons for changes in staffing, including falling rolls. LEAs' assessments were based on the best information available to them at that time; many told us that definitive information was not available and that the situation was changing rapidly as schools finalised their budges and their staffing. In addition they advised that a significant number of the redundancy notices were 'protective' and were likely to be withdrawn as the situation within schools and the LEA became clearer. My Department will continue to work closely with our national partners, including representatives of teachers, and have regular contact with LEAs.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much his Department has spent on the fast track teacher training programme in each year, broken down by category of expenditure since the scheme commenced; how many applications there were for each year; how many were allocated a place each year; how many obtained qualified teacher status; how many entered teaching, broken down by *(a)* primary, *(b)* special secondary, *(c)* community, *(d)* foundation, *(e)* voluntary aided, *(f)* voluntary controlled and *(g)* independent school; and how many have subsequently left teaching. [126936]

Mr. Miliband: The Fast Track teaching programme is a long-term investment in developing effective leadership in schools. This year has seen a record number of appointments to the programme, more than double the totals in previous years.

Investment in the Fast Track teaching programme

£ million

	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
Information and Publicity	1.83	1.99	1.75
Application materials, assessment and selection	2.38	3.78	2.38
ITT and CPD	0.00	0.65	1.87
Pay, mentoring, career guidance and miscellaneous costs	0.40	1.85	2.08
Total	4.60	8.27	8.07

Numbers of applicants and participants to date

By September	New applications to join Fast Track	New offers made to join Fast Track	New entrants to Fast Track ITT[1]	Newly Completed ITT and gained QTS[1]	In Fast Track teaching posts	On Fast Track teaching programme
2001	1,574	136	110	n/a	n/a	120 (incl. 10 deferring)
2002	1,010	161	117	100	110	249 (incl. 22 deferring)
2003	2185	378	[2]310	110	239	[2]549

[1] Not applicable to those already holding QTS when selected for Fast Track.
[2] Provisional.

Fast Track teachers in post in September 2003: detailed breakdown

Type of school	Total
Primary	69
Secondary	168
Special	2
Total	239

Fast Track teachers in post in September 2003: detailed breakdown

Type of school	Total
of which:	
Community	168
Foundation	31
Voluntary aided	27
Voluntary controlled	12
City Academies	1

Six individuals accepted onto the Fast Track programme since its inception have subsequently left the programme to enter teaching in the independent sector; four from the first year's intake and two from the second.

No-one who has taken up a Fast Track teaching post has subsequently left teaching. One individual has left her Fast Track teaching post to take up promotion as an Assistant Head.

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher vacancies there are within the Leeds education authority. [127297]

Mr. Miliband: Teacher vacancies at local authority level for January 2003 will be published in a Statistical First Release on 9 September 2003. Data for 1997 to 2002 were published in table 14 of the Teachers in Service and Teacher Vacancies Statistical First Release (SFR18/2002) in August 2002. A copy has been placed in the Library. The table is also available on the statistics section of the DfES website at: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics/DB/SFR/s0346/index.html.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher vacancies there were in special schools in each of the last five years, broken down by local education authority. [127919]

Mr. Miliband: The table shows the number of teacher vacancies in maintained special schools in England at January of each year. Data for 2002 are the most recent available at local authority level. Provisional figures for January 2003 show that the number of vacancies in maintained special in England schools fell to 240.

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Gateshead	3	0	0	1	1
Newcastle upon Tyne	4	2	1	0	2
North Tyneside	0	0	1	0	2
South Tyneside	0	0	0	0	0
Sunderland	1	0	0	0	0
Hartlepool	0	2	1	0	1
Middlesbrough	3	1	0	0	2
Redcar and Cleveland	2	1	0	0	0
Stockton on Tees	0	0	2	0	2
Darlington	0	0	0	0	0
Durham	2	0	0	0	1
Northumberland	0	0	0	0	0
North East	15	6	5	1	11
Cumbria	0	0	0	0	0
Former Cheshire	7	—	—	—	—
Cheshire (post 1.4.98)	—	1	2	2	2
Halton	—	0	0	0	0
Warrington	—	0	1	1	0
Bolton	0	0	0	0	0
Bury	0	0	0	0	0
Manchester	0	0	0	0	0
Oldham	2	0	3	1	6
Rochdale	1	0	0	0	1
Salford	0	0	0	0	0
Stockport	2	0	1	1	1
Tameside	1	0	1	0	1
Trafford	0	0	0	0	0
Wigan	3	2	0	1	0
Former Lancashire	6	—	—	—	—
Lancashire (post 1.4.98)	—	4	6	4	4
Blackburn with Darwen	—	0	2	0	3
Blackpool	—	1	0	0	0
Knowsley	1	3	5	1	0
Liverpool	0	7	0	0	0
St. Helens	0	0	1	0	2
Sefton	1	1	0	4	0
Wirral	0	0	0	4	1
North West	24	19	22	19	21
Kingston upon Hull, City of	0	0	0	0	3
East Riding of Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	1
North East Lincolnshire	0	0	0	0	0
North Lincolnshire	0	0	0	0	8
North Yorkshire	2	0	1	1	1
York	0	1	0	1	2
Barnsley	0	0	0	0	0
Doncaster	0	0	0	1	0
Rotherham	0	0	0	0	0
Sheffield	1	0	2	0	1
Bradford	4	2	0	0	0
Calderdale	0	0	0	0	0
Kirklees	0	0	0	0	1
Leeds	3	3	3	1	0
Wakefield	0	0	0	3	0
Yorkshire and the Humber	10	6	6	7	17
Derbyshire	3	0	3	2	3
Derby	1	0	1	0	5
Leicestershire	0	0	3	0	1
Leicester	1	3	1	6	3
Rutland	0	0	0	0	0
Lincolnshire	3	3	3	2	5
Northamptonshire	0	0	1	4	0
Former Nottinghamshire	0	—	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire (post 1.4.98)	—	0	0	0	0
Nottingham	—	0	1	5	2
East Midlands	8	6	13	19	19
Former Hereford & Worcester	0	—	—	—	—
Herefordshire	—	0	1	0	0
Worcestershire	—	0	1	0	0
Former Shropshire	0	—	—	—	—
Shropshire (post 1.4.98)	—	0	0	0	0
Telford and Wrekin	—	0	6	0	0
Staffordshire	0	4	7	3	1
Stoke on Trent	0	0	1	2	0
Warwickshire	1	2	1	3	3
Birmingham	0	2	3	2	11
Coventry	0	1	0	0	2
Dudley	3	2	2	2	1
Sandwell	0	1	0	6	6
Solihull	1	1	3	2	6
Walsall	1	1	0	0	1
Wolverhampton	1	3	5	3	0
West Midlands	7	18	29	25	33
Former Cambridgeshire	1	—	—	—	—
Cambridgeshire (post 1.4.98)	—	0	0	0	3
Peterborough	—	0	0	0	1
Norfolk	1	1	1	4	3
Suffolk	3	7	4	1	3
Bedfordshire	3	2	6	5	4
Luton	2	0	0	0	2
Former Essex	4	—	—	—	—
Essex (post 1.4.98)	—	7	10	5	7
Southend on Sea	—	2	0	0	1
Thurrock	—	0	0	1	1
Hertfordshire	6	7	0	5	2
East of England	20	26	21	21	27
City of London	0	0	0	0	0
Camden	5	8	1	2	4
Greenwich	5	1	5	2	2
Hackney	3	6	5	5	3
Hammersmith and Fulham	6	1	3	6	1
Islington	2	0	0	5	2
Kensington and Chelsea	0	0	0	1	0
Lambeth	0	2	8	6	11
Lewisham	3	2	4	3	0
Southwark	0	4	1	5	1
Tower Hamlets	1	5	3	6	6
Wandsworth	15	12	8	6	13
Westminster	4	4	5	2	4
Barking and Dagenham	2	4	0	1	0
Barnet	0	4	4	4	1
Bexley	2	0	4	3	1
Brent	7	1	2	0	4
Bromley	0	1	2	2	1
Croydon	7	1	4	2	0
Ealing	5	5	5	0	1
Enfield	3	2	2	3	7

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Haringey	0	3	3	2	0
Harrow	1	2	8	2	5
Havering	0	0	0	0	0
Hillingdon	1	1	1	6	4
Hounslow	1	3	2	0	1
Kingston upon Thames	0	0	0	2	0
Merton	1	1	2	5	0
Newham	1	0	3	2	3
Redbridge	6	6	2	0	2
Richmond upon Thames	1	1	0	3	1
Sutton	1	2	0	0	3
Waltham Forest	1	0	0	0	4
London	84	82	887	86	85
Former Berkshire	0				
Bracknell Forest		0	1	1	1
Windsor and Maidenhead		0	6	4	3
West Berkshire		0	1	1	0
Reading		0	5	4	4
Slough		1	1	3	0
Wokingham		3	1	3	1
Buckinghamshire	11	7	3	5	5
Milton Keynes	4	3	0	2	5
East Sussex	3	1	4	1	2
Brighton and Hove	0	0	0	2	3
Hampshire	8	3	7	8	9
Portsmouth	0	3	0	3	4
Southampton	1	0	1	1	1
Isle of Wight	0	1	0	0	1
Former Kent	18				
Kent (post 1.4.98)		9	13	23	9
Medway		1	3	5	3
Oxfordshire	0	0	0	0	4
Surrey	6	3	2	17	12
West Sussex	2	4	2	6	3
South East	53	39	50	89	70
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0	0
Bath and North East Somerset	0	1	0	1	2
City of Bristol	2	7	6	0	2
North Somerset	2	0	0	0	0
South Gloucestershire	2	1	0	0	0
Cornwall	0	3	0	0	0
Former Devon	2				
Devon (post 1.4.98)		0	1	2	0
Plymouth		0	0	0	2
Torbay		0	0	1	0
Dorset	0	0	2	2	0
Poole	2	0	0	2	1
Bournemouth	0	1	0	0	0
Gloucestershire	1	0	1	3	0
Somerset	0	0	0	0	2
Wiltshire	1	0	0	0	0
Swindon	0	1	1	2	0
South West	12	14	11	13	9
England	233	216	244	280	292

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 7 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 695W, whether he has set a date for the launch of the Teachernet emergency planning website; and what the cost has been of developing the website. [121562]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 24 June 2003]:* Following the trialling we hope to be able to launch the website by the end of October, assuming that all the further development work and testing are satisfactorily completed and clearances obtained. The cost of developing the site, approximately £60,000, remains unchanged from my previous reply of 7 May.

The website will bring together a range of information already publicly available to schools. It will cover: planning, including health and safety, evacuation procedures and emergency services; types of incidents, which includes fire, flooding, terrorism and threats by post; and resources, such as forms to help schools with risk assessments.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what statistics his Department collects on assaults on teachers; and how many teachers have been the subject of *(a)* physical assaults, *(b)* verbal assaults and *(c)* other threatening behaviour from (i) children and (ii) parents in each year since 1988. [127896]

Mr. Miliband: The Department does not collect information on assaults on teachers. However, serious injuries to primary and secondary school teachers in Great Britain caused by physical violence reported to the Health and Safety Executive under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 have been as follows:

Year	*Number*
1996/97	83
1997/98	119
1998/99	124
1999/2000	135
2000/01	135
2001/02	110

The figures include major injuries and also injuries resulting in more than three days' absence from work as a result of assault. Information is not available on whether the assaults were carried out by children, parents or others.

Mr. Dorrell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers were employed in Leicestershire schools expressed as full-time equivalents on 1st April in each year from 1997 to 2002. [127266]

Mr. Miliband: Teacher numbers as at January in each of these years were published in table 13 of the Teachers in Service and Teacher Vacancies Statistical First Release (SFR18/2002) in August 2002. A copy has been placed in the Library. The table is also available on the statistics section of the DfES website at: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics/DB/SFR/s0346/index.html

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on salaries of teachers in the Greater London area. [127833]

Mr. Miliband: Teachers' salaries are regularly monitored using the Department's Database of Teachers' Records. Regional salary data from this source are published each year in the Department's evidence to the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB), a copy of which is in the library. The evidence is also available on the DfES website at http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/payandperformance/pay/strb2003/. The STRB also carries out a sample

survey of about 3,000 schools in England and Wales each year to inform its annual teachers' pay review. The results of this survey can be found on the STRB website at: http://www.ome.uk.com/stp review.cfm.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* teachers and *(b)* classroom assistants there were in schools in (i) the Taunton constituency and (ii) Somerset in each year since 1997. [127776]

Mr. Miliband: The number of full time equivalent (FTE) teachers and teaching assistants in the maintained sector in Taunton constituency and Somerset LEA since 1997 are shown in the following table.

Teachers and teaching assistants in Taunton constituency and Somerset. 1997–2002

	Taunton constituency		*Somerset LEA*	
	FTE number of teachers[1]	*FTE number of teaching assistants*[1,2]	*FTE number of teachers*[1]	*FTE number of teaching assistants*[1,2]
1997	680	140	3,480	610
1998	650	150	3,480	660
1999	650	160	3,380	680
2000	670	170	3,530	710
2001	690	210	3,700	830
2002	720	230	3,770	920

[1] Source: Annual School Census.
[2] Includes nursery assistants, special needs support staff, minority ethnic pupil support staff and other teaching assistants.
[3] Source: 618G survey of teacher numbers and vacancies.
Annual school census and 618G have a survey date of the third Thursday in January.

Local education authority level data for 2003 will be published in a statistical first release on 9 September.

Tuition and Top-up Fees

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost of abolishing tuition and top-up fees in 2003–04 would be; and what the cost of administering the eligibility assessment for loans and fees is. [127296]

Alan Johnson: English HE institutions' income from the standard fee of £1,125 is estimated at £847 million for 2003/04, comprising £431 million in private contributions and £416 million in public contributions through the fee remission grant. English HE institutions will not start to receive income from variable fees until 2006/07. Data on the cost to local education authorities of administering the eligibility assessments for loans and fees is not separately identified in the information collected by the Department on LEA spending.

Under-achieving Students

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he is taking to raise the performance of under-achieving students. [127779]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Primary and Key Stage 3 National Strategies are designed to raise standards for all students but include a strong focus on under-achievement. At Primary stage we provide several programmes to help pupils reach the expected level for their age by the end of Key Stage 2, plus targeted local support to schools and LEAs on addressing under-performance. Further measures being introduced this September, such as the Primary Leadership Programme, are also designed to tackle lower attainment. Evidence of the impact of our programmes is reflected in the Key Stage 2 results. The 2003 results show that 75 per cent. of 11-year-olds achieved the expected level for their age in English and 73 per cent. in maths. This represents a 10 percentage point increase in English and a 14 percentage point increase in maths since 1998.

We are using a similar model to address under-performance for pupils aged 11–14 through the Key Stage 3 Strategy. There are tailored support programmes in each of the three years at Key Stage 3 to help lower-attaining pupils reach the expected level at age 14. We are also targeting schools and LEAs that we believe would benefit from additional support. After only the first full year of the Strategy, the Key Stage 3 tests results stand at their best ever, Maths is up by three percentage points to 70 per cent. achieving level 5 (the expected level) and science and English are both up by one percentage point to 68 per cent.. There have also been improvements in level 6 attainment of four and seven percentage points in maths and science respectively.

At Key Stage 4 we are also supporting schools where pupil performance is too low. We are directing substantial resources through Excellence in Cities to transform standards in urban areas facing the challenges associated with cities. We are also supporting schools in difficult circumstances to address under-performance through the Leadership Incentive Grant.

Union Learning Fund

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the Union Learning Fund. [127789]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Unions have a key role in promoting learning and skills in the workplace, and to help them achieve this, the Department has provided financial support through the Union Learning Fund since 1998. The Union Learning Fund is now in its sixth year and has supported over 400 projects from over 50 different unions, working in almost 3,000 workplaces. Many Union Learning Fund projects are specifically aimed at widening participation in learning: basic skills, social inclusion and equal opportunities and improving access to learning. Evaluation up to 2002, together with performance management data for July 2003, has shown that over 36,000 people have completed learning courses, over 6,500 Union Learning Representatives have been trained and around 180 new learning centres have been opened. Unions have been very successful in engaging non-traditional learners including older males and shift workers.

One of the Union Learning Fund's greatest strengths is the success of Union Learning Representatives, a new type of lay union representative whose main function is to advise union members about their training and development needs. Union Learning Representatives are ideally placed to help and encourage workers to improve their skills, particularly the lowest skilled and

those with literacy and numeracy problems. They share a level of trust with union members who would be embarrassed about admitting their learning needs to their employer.

Following a consultation exercise in 2001, we introduced legislation to give Union Learning Representatives the same rights to paid time off for training and for carrying out their duties as those enjoyed by shop stewards and other union representatives at workplaces where a union is recognised for collective bargaining purposes. The legislation on Union Learning Representatives came into effect on 27 April along with the revised ACAS Code of Practice.

Additional funding for Union Learning for the next two financial years, announced in the last budget, will help us continue to build on the positive contribution made by Union Learning Representatives.

Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on measures to ensure that qualifications offered at apprenticeship, skilled craft and technician level are sufficient to meet the needs of business. [128207]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government published its national Skills Strategy on 9 July in 21st Century Skills: Realising Our Potential. It is a cross-Government strategy that sets out our approach to meeting skill needs, including making sure that qualifications are appropriate to the needs of businesses. There were frequent discussions between the Secretary of State for Education and Skills and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry during its development, and was a co-signatory to the White Paper published in July. This close involvement will continue in the implementation stage.

At the heart of the strategy is a shared aim that learning programmes and the qualifications that accredit them will respond fully to the skill needs of employers. DTI are closely involved in the joint remit for improving vocational qualifications which is being taken forward by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, the Learning and Skills Council and Sector Skills Development Agency. The high profile, business-led Modern Apprenticeship Task Force is taking a key role in promoting Modern Apprenticeships to employers, improving their quality and increasing take-up. Sir Robin Young, DTI Permanent Secretary, is a member of the Task Force. A close working relationship is also being established with DTI in promoting the development of foundation degrees to meet the growing demand for skills at the higher technical and associate professional level. The White Paper also set out the intention for the DTI to be joint sponsors of the Sector Skills Development Agency. All of this action demonstrates the close working relationships between the two Departments to ensure that qualifications are appropriate to the needs of employers.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the level of qualifications at *(a)* apprenticeship, *(b)* skilled craft and *(c)* technician level held in (i) the UK and (ii) other European Union countries. [128208]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: While we compare well at higher education level, our percentage of the workforce qualified to intermediate skill levels (based upon qualifications gained at apprenticeship, skilled craft and technician level) is low: 28 per cent. in the UK compared to 51 per cent. in France and 65 per cent. in Germany. An EU wide comparison is not available.

However, using a different measure the OECD estimates the proportion of adults (aged 25–64) who are qualified to upper secondary level (intermediate level education and based upon the highest level of education completed) in the UK is 63 per cent.. This is similar to France (64 per cent.) and the Netherlands (61 per cent.) but much lower than Germany (83 per cent.), Denmark (80 per cent.) or Sweden (81 per cent.). The UK however performs much better than Italy (44 per cent.) and Spain (40 per cent.).

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action he is taking to encourage school leavers to seek qualifications at *(a)* apprenticeship, *(b)* skilled craft and *(c)* technician level. [128206]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government are committed to ensuring that the work based learning route, and the qualifications and programmes within it (notably Modern Apprenticeships) will continue to deliver high quality, innovative provision, derived from and appropriate to the needs of the UK's industry and economy. The Government have detailed their vision for achievement in the recently published White Papers covering the development of 14–19 year olds and the Skills Strategy for 21st Century. These reveal the importance the Government are giving to vocational development from school to the workplace and the need for cohesion between education and the world of work to achieve the challenging target outlined in the reports. The Government launched a Modern Apprenticeship (MA) Task Force, chaired by Sir Roy Gardner, in February 2003 to oversee and steer the promotion and integration of modern apprenticeships, including vocational qualifications, into the workplace. This Task Force will report regularly to Government on progress widening the choice for young people to take up modern apprenticeship opportunities.

Connexions, the Government's front line support service for young people in England aged 13–19, offers teenagers integrated impartial advice and guidance on career paths and access to personal development opportunities based on the needs and aspirations of young people. This service enables young people to consider a full range of career options and make informed choices which include work-based provision.

HEALTH

Bivalve Molluscs

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the level of state funding for laboratories researching contamination of bivalve molluscs by *(a)* Novavirus and *(b)* hepatitis A virus. [128265]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Since April 2000, the Food Standards Agency has spent £1.5 million on projects relating to the contamination of bivalve molluscs by Norovirus and Hepatitis A virus.

Medical Staff (Protection)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what protection is afforded to nurses and other medical staff in the workplace from members of the public; what assistance is given by the police to hospitals and other medical treatment centres; and what recent measures he has introduced to improve co-operation. [128112]

Mr. Hutton: Responsibility for tackling assaults against staff working in the National Health Service passed to the Counter Fraud and Security Management Service (CFSMS) on 1 April 2003. During 2003–04, the CFSMS will be taking forward a number of initiatives to reduce the number of both physical and non-physical assaults. The CFSMS is currently developing:

conflict resolution training for all frontline staff including nurses and general practitioners as a key preventative measure to reduce the number of incidents;

a national and consistent reporting system to record incidents of physical assaults on staff, using a common definition, with the ability to track cases from report to conclusion. This will allow for intervention where appropriate in order to ensure the best possible outcome for the victim concerned and help increase the rate of offenders prosecuted;

a consistent locally managed reporting system will be established to deal with non-physical assaults using the common law definition. Clear definitions of assault swill enable sanctions that are appropriate to the incident to be sought;

a legal protection unit to provide health bodies with advice on cost-effective methods of pursuing a wide range of sanctions against offenders including criminal and civil action where appropriate;

ways in which technology can be used to provide better protection for staff. This work is undertaken in co-operation with the Home Office;

a Memorandum of Understanding with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) to ensure that a consistent national approach to reducing physical and non-physical assaults on staff is taken by both the NHS and the police.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what targets were set in the Zero Tolerance campaign; what progress has been made; and how many targets have been met. [128111]

Mr. Hutton: In 1999, in its "working together" framework, the Government set the National Health Service trusts three targets to reduce the number of incidents of violence against NHS staff:

by April 2000, to have systems in place for recording incidents of violence to staff and publish strategies to achieve reductions in the levels of violence by: 20 per cent. by April 2001–02; and 30 per cent. by April 2003–04.

A recent National Audit Office (NAO) report, "A safer place to Work — Protecting NHS Hospital and Ambulance Trust Staff from Violence and Aggression", reported that:

around 90 per cent. of NHS trusts have violence policies and systems in place for recording incidents; and

the majority of NHS trusts did not meet the 2001–02 target for reducing incidents by 20 per cent.

The NAO acknowledged that the increase in reported violent and abusive incidents in the majority of NHS trusts was mainly due to improved reporting rates, generally among NHS staff and in particular increased reporting of verbal abuse. The NAO suggests in its report, and this appears to be reflected in the data held by the Health and Safety Executive, that levels of physical assaults are stabilising.

Responsibility for tackling assaults against staff working in the NHS passed to the Counter Fraud and Security Management Service (CFSMS) on 1 April 2003. During 2003–04, the CFSMS will be taking forward a number of initiatives to reduce the number of both physical and non-physical assaults. The CFSMS is currently developing:

conflict resolution training for all frontline staff as a key preventive measure to reduce the number of incidents;

a national and consistent reporting system to record incidents of physical assaults on staff, using a common definition, with the ability to track cases from report to conclusion. This will allow for intervention where appropriate in order to ensure the best possible outcome for the victim concerned and help increase the rate of offenders prosecuted;

a consistent locally managed reporting system will be established to deal with non-physical assaults using the common law definition. Clear definitions of assault will enable sanctions that are appropriate to the incident to be sought;

a legal protection unit to provide health bodies with advice on cost-effective methods of pursuing a wide range of sanctions against offenders, including criminal and civil action where appropriate;

ways in which technology can be used to provide better protection for staff, working with the Home Office. One of the chosen test sites for the "Safer Hospitals" project as an ambulance trust;

a Memorandum of Understanding with the Association of Chief Police Officers to ensure that a consistent national approach to reducing physical and non-physical assaults on staff is taken by both the NHS and the police.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many incidents of violence and abusive behaviour by NHS patients in England against NHS staff there were in 2001–02. [127533]

Mr. Hutton: There were an estimated 112,000[1] reported violent or abusive incidents involving staff in national health service trusts and health authorities in England in 2001–2002.

[1] The 2001–02 total has been estimated to include organisations which did not provide figures and the results are based on surveys by the Department of Health and the National Audit Office.

Product Labelling

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to enable labelling of imported agricultural products produced to *(a)* animal welfare and *(b)* environmental care standards below those of the United Kingdom. [128122]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Food labelling rules are set at European Union level; the Department is not aware of any plans to introduce new rules to cover animal welfare and environmental care standards. Information on these matters can be given voluntarily on labels so long as it is not false or misleading. The Food Standards Agency is encouraging industry to provide consumers with more information on food production standards, including animal welfare and environmental care standards.

Accident and Emergency Services

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to pilot the 'See & Treat' scheme at Royal Bournemouth Hospital at other hospital sites. [127647]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Most accident and emergency (A&E) departments now have 'See & Treat' schemes in place, specifically to target patients with minor injuries and illnesses. The British Association for A&E Medicine and the Royal College of Nursing have endorsed it as an appropriate model of clinical care. The expectation is that 'See & Treat', or something similar, should be put in place in most trusts. However, it is the trusts' responsibility to decide if, when and how to implement.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has undertaken of the cost of implementing a 'See & Treat' scheme in A&E departments. [127648]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There may be costs associated with the implementation of initiatives such as 'See & Treat', but any costs will depend on how an individual trust implements the scheme locally compared to its existing accident and emergency department procedures.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were admitted to NHS hospital wards from Accident and Emergency after being examined by a doctor in *(a)* one hour or less, *(b)* over two hours but less than three hours, *(c)* over three hours but less than four hours, *(d)* over four hours but less than five hours and *(e)* over five hours in (i) the last 12 months for which figures are available and (ii) 1997–98. [127494]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department collects information on total time in accident and emergency (A&E) from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge. Information is also collected and on waits for admission as an emergency via A&E from the point of decision to admit to admission. This information is published quarterly.

Information is not collected on the time from a patient being first examined by a doctor to admission.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what targets he is planning to set for accident and emergency departments in the next year. [127318]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In 2000, the NHS Plan set the challenging improvement target that no patient should spend more than four hours in an accident and emergency department from arrival to admission, transfer or departure by the end of 2004.

Trusts will continue to be monitored on their progress towards this target, but there are no plans to set further targets for accident and emergency departments in the next year.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the method used for measuring accident and emergency targets in March. [127319]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department set an internal milestone that 90 per cent. of patients in England should wait less than four hours in accident and emergency (A and E) departments by the end of March 2003.

This was not a target but an interim milestone set to assess progress towards achieving the NHS Plan target to reduce the maximum time a patient should wait in A and E from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge to four hours from December 2004.

Performance against the milestone was measured using routine data trusts provide to the Department.

Adult/Adolescent Wards

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* adult and *(b)* adolescent wards were in operation in April in each year since 1997. [127507]

Mr. Hutton: Central information is not collected specifically in relation to adult and adolescent wards. The average number of wards in England reported by national health service organisations is shown in the table.

	Average number of wards
2000–01	9,676
2001–02	9,074
2002–03	10,353

Before 1 April 2000, this data was not collected. These figures exclude units such as intensive treatment units, accident and emergency/admissions units, coronary care units, special care baby units, paediatric intensive care and day case wards.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mixed sex *(a)* adolescent and *(b)* adult wards there are in England. [127508]

Mr. Hutton: The information is not available in the format requested.

Agency Staff

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent by the NHS on locum and other agency doctors in each of the past three years. [109087]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested on locum doctors is not held centrally. Information on agency doctors is shown in the table.

Expenditure on non-NHS medical staff by NHS trusts, health authorities and primary care trusts—England

	England total (£)
1999–2000	106,125,019
2000–01	138,342,148
2001–02	197,775,563

Sources:
1. Annual financial returns of NHS trusts
2. Annual financial returns of health authorities
3. Annual financial returns of primary care trusts

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost to the NHS of agency nurses was in 2002 in each NHS region. [127528]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) on 28 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 443W.

AIDS

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on AIDS research in each of the last six years. [127345]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Funding for research on AIDS is provided from a number of different sources, including the Government, charities and industry. The Department of Health does not routinely collect information on all research expenditure. The figures shown in the table for estimated Government spend on research relating to AIDS are approximate.

Year	*£ million*
1997–98	15.4
1998–99	16.2
1999–2000	20.2
2000–01	22.9
2001–02	20.4

A figure for 2002–03 is not yet available. The figure for 2000–01 is higher than the figure (£21.5 million) given the former Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears) on 16 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 212W, as the estimate of spend that the Medical Research Council included in this earlier figure was provisional. The figures for all years include estimated spend by Department of Health national research programmes and arm's length bodies. Management of much of the research supported by National Health Service research and development funding is devolved and expenditure at project level is not held centrally by the Department. In addition to specific projects, the Department also provides support for research commissioned by charities and the research councils that takes place in the NHS. The total investment is therefore greater.

Allergies

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many specialist allergy clinics there are in the NHS. [127627]

Dr. Ladyman: The Royal College of Physicians published their report 'Allergy the unmet need, A Blueprint for better patient care' on 25 June 2003. Their report refers to the British Society for Allergy and Clinical Immunology (BSACI) and British Allergy Foundation (BAF) respectively, who compiled a list of national health service allergy clinics which were NHS consultant-led and based at NHS hospitals in the United Kingdom.

The subsequent BSACI handbook "National NHS Allergy Clinics" (2001) lists 86 NHS consultant led clinics in the UK. There were an additional 15 clinics run by NHS consultants identified by the British Allergy Foundation (BAF) in the handbook. Six of these 101 clinics offered services led by a whole-time specialist allergist.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS trusts have reported vacancies for allergy specialists. [127628]

Mr. Hutton: The National Health Service vacancy survey collects information on the number of posts which trusts are actively trying to fill which have been vacant for three months or more. As at 31 March 2003, there was one three month consultant vacancy in allergy in England.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many allergy sufferers are on waiting lists for NHS treatments. [127626]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is not centrally collected. Waiting list data are collected according to the type of specialist the patient is due to see and therefore the number of allergy sufferers waiting for treatment are not separately identifiable as they may be included in a range of specialist waiting lists. However, all patients for consultant led hospital treatment, including those with allergies, are benefiting from shorter maximum waiting times.

Allograft Implants

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of people in England receiving allograft implants were subsequently infected with *(a)* Hepatitis and *(b)* HIV in the last 12 months. [127542]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The percentage of people in England receiving allograft implants subsequently infected with hepatitis or HIV is not recorded nationally as part of the routing follow-up post transplant.

Donor screening procedures as advised by the Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Blood and Tissues for Transplant (MSBT) are very effective and all transplant co-ordinators are required to ensure all the relevant data are collected and screening tests performed. This information is double-checked by the

UK Transplant duty office. As a result there have been very few recorded cases of transmission of any of the serious blood borne viruses.

Alternative Medicine

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Complementary and Alternative Medicine Research Awards run by his Department. [127730]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The awards made in the first round of the scheme were announced on 17 April 2003. The total value of these awards exceeds £1.3 million. Details of the operation and timing of the next round have not yet been determined.

Alzheimer's Disease

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has undertaken into a possible connection between Alzheimer's disease and obesity. [127696]

Dr. Ladyman: The Department has not undertaken any research into a possible connection between Alzheimer's disease and obesity.

The main agency through which the Government support medical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council (MRC). The MRC is an independent body, which receives its grant in aid from the Office of Science and Technology.

The MRC is not currently undertaking any research into a possible connection between Alzheimer's disease and obesity. However, it is funding research into dementia (including Alzheimer's Disease) and also funding research into nutrition.

Ambulance Services

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many 999 calls were made to the Greater London Ambulance Service in the last 12 months for which figures are available for which a police presence was also provided; and what criteria are used to decide whether a police presence is required to an ambulance call-out. [127470]

Mr. Hutton: This information is not held centrally. The London Ambulance Service National Health Service Trust (LAS) does not routinely collect this information. The LAS informs me that the decision whether to call police for assistance is made either by control room staff or by ambulance crews using information on the nature of the call.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many 999 calls were made to the Greater London Ambulance Service over the last 12 months for which figures are available for which it was decided an ambulance was not necessary; and what proportion of calls over this period such calls represented. [127486]

Mr. Hutton: This information is not centrally held.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many ambulance call-outs were made in the last 12 months for which figures are available in *(a)* Essex and *(b)* England; and what average length of time it took for ambulances to reach *(a)* the patient and *(b)* the hospital to which the patient needed to be taken. [127466]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The latest information about the proportion of emergency calls resulting in an ambulance arriving at the scene of the reported incident, within the Government's target response times for Essex and all other ambulance trusts, is contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin, "Ambulance Services, England 2002–03".

Copies of the bulletin have been placed in the Library and are also available at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0313.htm.

Information on the average length of time taken for ambulances to reach the hospital to which the patient needed to be taken is not collected centrally.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of ambulance response times meet the eight minute target; and how many met the target in 2001–02, broken down by trust. [127534]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The latest information about the proportion of emergency calls resulting in an ambulance arriving at the scene of the reported incident within the Government's target response times for all other ambulance trusts, is contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin "Ambulance Services, England 2002–03".

Copies of the bulletin are available in the Library and also at: *www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0313h*

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the performance targets set by his Department for ambulance services. [127324]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Ambulance national health service trusts should respond to 75 per cent. of category A (life threatening) calls within eight minutes. All other emergency calls should be responded to 95 per cent. of the time within 14 minutes in urban areas and 19 minutes in rural areas.

Information about ambulance services response times are collected each year by the Department and published annually. The latest information shows that nationally 74.6 per cent. of category A calls resulted in an emergency response arriving at the scene of the incident within 8 minutes compared to 70.7 per cent. in 2001–02. Further information is contained in the Department of Health statistical bulletin Ambulance Services, England 2002–03.

A copy is available in the Library and also on the Department's website at *www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0313.htm.*

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effect of speed restrictions on ambulance response times. [127325]

Ms Rosie Winterton: No national studies have taken place on the effect of speed restrictions on ambulance response times.

Drivers of ambulance vehicles can claim exemptions from some of the provisions of various Road Traffic Acts and Regulations—including speed restrictions—where it hinders them from responding to a life threatening emergency call.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* emergency vehicles and *(b)* vehicles for non-emergency services were in service with each NHS ambulance trust in each of the last three years. [127336]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to protect ambulance staff from aggressive behaviour by patients. [127736]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government are determined to tackle the assaults and intimidation that too many national health service staff face. As part of the work previously carried out under the NHS zero tolerance zone campaign, specific guidance to support managers and staff working in ambulance trusts, "Managing Violence in Ambulance Trusts", was issued by the Department of Health.

Responsibility for tackling assaults against staff working in the NHS passed to the Counter Fraud and Security Management Service (CFSMS) on 1 April 2003. During 2003–04 the CFSMS will be taking forward a number of initiatives to reduce the number of both physical and non-physical assaults. The CFSMS is currently developing;

conflict resolution training for all frontline staff including ambulance staff as a key preventative measure to reduce the number of incidents;

a national and consistent reporting system to record incidents of physical assaults on staff, using a common definition, with the ability to track cases from report to conclusion. This will allow for intervention where appropriate in order to ensure the best possible outcome for the victim concerned and help increase the rate of offenders prosecuted;

a consistent locally managed reporting system will be established to deal with non-physical assaults using the common law definition. Clear definitions of assault will enable sanctions that are appropriate to the incident to be sought;

a legal protection unit to provide health bodies with advice on cost-effective methods of pursuing a wide range of sanctions against offenders including criminal and civil action where appropriate;

ways in which technology can be used to provide better protection for staff. This work is undertaken in co-operation with the Home Office. One of the chosen test sites for the "Safer Hospitals" project is an ambulance trust;

a Memorandum of Understanding with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) to ensure that a consistent national approach to reducing physical and non-physical assaults on staff is taken by both the NHS and the police.

Anaemia

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of people in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland are anaemic. [127538]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Information on the percentage of people in England who are anaemic was last collected for the Health Survey for England in 1994[1]. The data indicated that 4.1 per cent. of men and 10.8 per cent. of women aged 16 and over were classified as anaemic using the World Health Organisation definition of anaemia, that is that haemoglobin levels of less than 13g/dl (grams per decilitre) for men and 12g/dl for women.

Information on the percentage of people who are anaemic in Scotland and Wales can be obtained from the devolved administrations. While the institutions in Northern Ireland are dissolved responsibility rests with Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office.

[1] Ref: Health Survey for England 1994 eds. Colhoun, H. and Prescott-Clarke, P. ISBN 011 321 895

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the UK are needlephobic; and what assessment he has made of the need for a needle-free anaemia testing device. [127537]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department of Health has not made an assessment of the numbers of people in the United Kingdom with a needle phobia or the need for a needle-free anaemia testing device.

Angina

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the total cost to the NHS of treating patients with chest-pain caused by angina in each of the last five years. [127442]

Miss Melanie Johnson: No information is held centrally concerning the total cost to the national health service of treating patients with chest-pain caused by angina.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the English population suffers from angina. [127443]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Nationally representative figures on the prevalence of heart disease and its risk factors are available from the Health Survey for England. The most recent estimates of the prevalence of angina were published in *The Health Survey for England—Cardiovascular Disease 1998* table 2.1, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department is taking to reduce the need for hospital treatment for patients suffering from angina. [127445]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Patients are usually treated with medical therapy or in more serious cases, surgical revascularisation to relieve symptoms of angina. The national service framework (NSF) for coronary heart disease (CHD) recommends patients receive the following medical therapy:

sublingual nitrates for immediate treatment control

beta-blockers, nitrates or calcium antagonists

aspirin

statins to reduce cholesterol levels.

Spending on statins has risen from £170 million in 1998 to £552 million in 2002.

The Priorities and Planning Framework requires that primary care, update practice-based registers so that patients with CHD continue to receive appropriate advice and treatment in line with NSF standards and

by March 2006, ensure practice based registers and systematic treatment regimes, including appropriate advice on diet, physical activity and smoking.

At the same time the Government have been engaged in a wide ranging programme to prevent heart disease, including action on smoking, free fruit in schools and physical activity.

Arthritis

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which primary care trusts have not yet implemented in full the NICE guidance on anti-TNF therapies for rheumatoid arthritis. [128228]

Dr. Ladyman: Information on the number of primary care trusts (PCTs) making anti-TNF therapy available to patients is not collected centrally. Funding to meet the recommendations of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence has been included in the allocations made to PCTs over the period 2003–04 to 2005–06.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients within the Adur, Arun and Worthing PCT area have been prescribed anti-TNF treatment for severe arthritis in the last 12 months. [127561]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information is not held centrally on the number of patients who have been prescribed anti-TNF drugs (Etanercept and Infliximab). Information is available on the number of prescription items of drugs that are dispensed in the community in England. The use of anti-TNF drugs in the community is negligible, but they are used extensively in hospitals. Although negligible, details of these anti-TNF drugs (contained in the British National Formulary paragraph 10.1.3) are included in the Prescription Cost Analysis publication, which can be accessed at http// www.doh.gov.uk/prescriptionstatistics/index.htm.

Information is not held centrally about drugs prescribed and dispensed in hospitals.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many severe arthritis sufferers there are within the Adur, Arun and Worthing primary care trust area. [127562]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information on the incidence of individual conditions is not collected centrally.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many primary care trusts have made TNFa available to arthritis sufferers in 2002–03; and if he will list them. [127697]

Dr. Ladyman: Information on the number of primary care trusts making anti-TNF therapy available to patients in 2002–03 is not collected centrally.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding has been made available to primary care trusts to implement the National Institute for Clinical Excellence guidelines on TNFa therapy. [127698]

Dr. Ladyman: Funding to meet recommendations of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence has been included in the allocations made to primary care trusts for the period 2003–04 to 2005–06.

Asthma

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people suffer from asthma and how many suffered from asthma in each of the last five years. [128124]

Dr. Ladyman: Information on the incidence of individual conditions is not held centrally. It is estimated, however, that asthma affects around 4 per cent. of adults and 4 to 6 per cent. of children sufficiently severely to require medical supervision. This amounts to around 2 million people in England.

Hospital Episode Statistics data, based on finished consultant episodes (FCEs), show a decline in the number of people who were admitted to hospital between 1997–2002. This information is shown in the table.

Year	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Admissions	71,434	69,824	66,054	60,376	60,134

Note:
An FCE is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one healthcare provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may several episodes within the year.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has commissioned into the relationship between lifestyle and *(a)* asthma and *(b)* diabetes. [127346]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The main agency through which the Government support medical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council (MRC). The MRC is an independent body, which receives its grant in aid from the Office of Science and Technology. The Department of Health funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in the national health service.

The lifestyle factors that interact with asthma will be very different for different people and will also change through an individual's life. In 2001–02 the MRC spent £0.3 million on research relating to lifestyle and asthma. The Department is funding research on air pollution and asthma, and a project on the effect of a low allergen indoor environment on exacerbations of asthma.

The importance of healthy lifestyle choices for avoiding or delaying the onset of diabetes and its complications is well established. In 2001–02 the MRC spent £2.7 million on a wide range of research relating to lifestyle and diabetes. The Department and the MRC worked together with Diabetes UK and the Wellcome Trust on the "Review of Current and Future Research on Diabetes", published in October 2002. The review identified a need for genetics and molecular biology to be brought into large-scale epidemiological studies, with definition of lifestyle and environmental factors. A Department led task group with participation from the MRC, Diabetes UK and others has been established to determine how best to take forward the proposals in the review.

The Department, MRC and the Wellcome Trust are to provide an initial £61 million to support the development of the UK Biobank project. This project aims to obtain comprehensive data on the combined

effects of genotype, lifestyle and environmental exposure to assess the risk of developing the common multi-factorial diseases of later life, including diabetes.

Autism

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what day care facilities are available to those suffering from autism; and if he will make a statement on the importance of interaction to autism sufferers. [127954]

Dr. Ladyman: Many people with autism also have a learning disability and may make use of learning disability day care services. Where people on the autistic spectrum have mental health problems, they may find mental health day care services helpful. Adults with Asperger's Syndrome or higher functioning autism are not precluded from using learning disability services, where appropriate, and may ask statutory services for an assessment of their social functioning and communications skills in order to establish their level of need.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what training is given to carers of autistic children; what other support services are available; and on what wage levels carers are placed. [127955]

Dr. Ladyman: The Learning Disability White Paper, "Valuing People" (Cm 5086), published in March 2001, details training and qualification requirements for staff working with adults and children who have both autism and learning disability. It states that, from April 2002, all new entrants to learning disability care services should be registered for qualification on the learning disability awards framework (LDAF) and that by 2005, 50 per cent. of front-line staff should have achieved at least National Vocational Qualification Level 2.

The LDAF contains two vocational qualifications—a level 2 certificate and a level 3 certificate in working with people with learning disabilities. Both these certificates include a module about autism. The LDAF modules can be used as part of the induction and foundation training that new care staff should undertake.

Parent carers of autistic children receive help from local authorities (under section 17 of The Children Act) and the National Health Service on how best they can support their child. This could include skills training, both on an individual basis and in groups. Much of this support is provided in partnership with parents in their own homes and takes into account the family's individual circumstances. Other support available includes the National Autistic Society's "Help" programme, which offers training to parents in caring for their newly diagnosed autistic children. The Government helped to fund the development of this programme.

Carers of people with autism may be employed by local authorities, local or national voluntary sector organisations such as the National Autistic Society and the Disabilities Trust or private sector care providers. The wage levels of paid carers are a matter for individual employers and would take account of the grade and experience of the individual staff.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission an economic analysis of the *(a)* cost in public funds of treatment of autism and the *(b)* benefits of funding preventative support services for people with autism spectrum disorders and their families. [127855]

Dr. Ladyman: We have no plans to commission an economic analysis of the costs associated with autism. A paper on this subject in 2001 by Jarbrink and Knapp ("Autism" Vol 5(1) pp 7–22) gives estimates of the costs of autism and points up the long-term cost-effectiveness of early interventions. Early diagnosis and early intervention are key issues being addressed as part of the development of the children's national service framework (NSF), which will set national standards for health and social services departments. We have already announced that autism will be used as an exemplar in the NSF. This is being informed by the National Autism Plan for Children which was published in March.

Babies

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the possible health risks associated with parents falling asleep in bed with their babies or young infants. [127435]

Dr. Ladyman: There is an association between parents falling asleep in bed with their babies and the tragic occurrence of cot death. The Department has issued guidance which addresses this hazard, details of which are available at http://www.doh.gov.uk/cotdeath/. There is also the possibility that an adult may roll over while asleep and smother their baby, or that the baby might fall from the bed and so be injured. The Child Accident Prevention Trust—a voluntary organisation which receives grant aid from the Department of Health—has issued guidance entitled "Keep your Baby Safe". This addresses health risks associated with parents falling asleep with their babies.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 8 May, *Official Report*, column 866W, on baby vaccines, if he will publish the responses to the letters of 1 April from the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency to UK vaccine marketing authorisation holders asking for an update on progress in reducing or removing thiomersal from vaccines. [123459]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer on 3 July]:* The information provided by pharmaceutical manufacturers to the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) is commercially sensitive and its confidentiality is guaranteed by The Medicines Act 1968. The Medicines Act 1968. The MHRA cannot publish the manufacturers' responses (which are still being received). The MHRA is continuing to work with the vaccine manufacturers to make every effort to remove or reduce the thiomersal component present in vaccines, including those used in the childhood immunisation programme. The only vaccine routinely administered to babies in the UK which contains thiomersal is diphtheria-tetanus-whole cell pertussis (DTwP). MMR HiB, oral polio and meningitis C vaccines used in the UK childhood vaccination programme are all thiomersal free.

Bilateral Health Arrangements

Mr. John Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the non-EEA countries and territories with which the UK has bilateral health arrangements. [128090]

Mr. Hutton: A full list of the non-EEA countries and territories with which the United Kingdom has bilateral health arrangements is given in pages 28–31 of the Department of Health leaflet "Health Advice for Travellers", which is available in the Library together with information on the services available free or at reduced cost in each of the countries or territories concerned.

Blood Pressure

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government has to publicise information on blood pressure. [127721]

Miss Melanie Johnson: High blood pressure—hypertension—is a major risk factor for stroke, coronary heart disease and other illnesses such as kidney disease and aortic aneurysm.

Blood pressure is part of the core data collected each year by the Health Survey for England. Tables on trends in blood pressure are updated each year and released on the Department of Health website. At the same time a main report is published together with a summary of Key Findings. For 2002 the report will focus on the health of children and young people and will include a section on blood pressure. Publication of the report for the 2002 survey is expected at the end of this year.

In order to increase public awareness of hypertension and its attendant risks, as well as the importance of prevention and early detection, the Department of Health provided funding in 2002 for the Blood Pressure Association's "National Blood Pressure Testing Week". With 100,000 people tested at 1,350 blood pressure testing stations nation-wide, the purpose of the campaign is to raise public awareness of high blood pressure and encourage everyone to know their own blood pressure numbers. The Department of Health is also supporting the 3rd National Blood Pressure Testing Week (15–21 September 2003).

In his Annual Report for 2002 on the state of the public health the Chief Medical Officer reviewed progress in the area of high blood pressure, which was one of the five areas covered in his 2001 report.

Prevention of hypertension through a healthy lifestyle, including diet and physical activity is key. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has published a consumer leaflet designed to raise awareness of salt intake, how to cut down on salt and the health benefits of reducing salt in the diet. The FSA regularly publishes a range of surveys and a survey showing the salt levels in certain food products will be published later this year.

Bone Injuries

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent in England on the prevention of *(a)* all injuries as a result of a fall, *(b)* hip fractures and *(c)* osteoporosis among older people in the last 12 months. [127591]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is not available centrally.

Bovine Derivative Bone Grafts

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of people in England receiving bovine derivative bone grafts subsequently contracted BSE or CJD. [127544]

Miss Melanie Johnson: In England only one patient with CJD is known to have had a bone graft. The graft was derived from the patient's own bone and was not bovine derived.

Broomfield Hospital, Chelmsford

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were cancelled at Broomfield hospital, Chelmsford in the last available quarter; and what percentage of the cancelled operations were consequently carried out within four weeks. [127461]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is not collected for individual hospital sites. Broomfield hospital is part of Mid-Essex Hospital Services National Health Service Trust. The number of last minute cancellations for non-medical reasons at Mid-Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust in the period January to March 2003 was 174. Information is not collected on the proportion of these cancellations that were consequently carried out within four weeks.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mixed sex wards and wards have been artificially divided into single-sex bays at Broomfield hospital, Chelmsford. [127464]

Dr. Ladyman: The information is not available in the format requested. Ward level data are not collected.

The Department of Health has set three objectives to support the elimination of mixed sex accommodation with a deadline of December 2002, designed to deliver separate sleeping areas, separate toilet and washing facilities and safe facilities for the mentally ill. That deadline has now been reached and today over 98 per cent. of wards across the national health service meet these standards. Given that there are some 10,000 wards in use, this is a significant achievement. A number of new hospitals and health care facilities are currently in construction, which will ultimately bring all wards to the required standards.

Cancer

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are employed directly in the management of cancer within the NHS. [127653]

Mr. Hutton: Of the staff directly involved in the management of cancer, the workforce census only separately identifies the medical specialties in the cancer group.

The specialties included in the cancer group are clinical oncology, clinical radiology, haematology, histopathology, palliative medicine and medical oncology. As at 31 March 2003, there were 4,059

hospital medical consultants within the cancer group in England. This represents an increase of 29 per cent. since September 1997.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the quality of care cancer patients receive from the NHS. [127784]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Some of the cancer research funded by Government (an estimated total of £190 million in 2001–01) is on quality of cancer care. The National Health Service Research and Development Programme on Service Delivery and Organisation (SDO) is currently commissioning projects on the evaluation of cancer services quality with an expected total value of around £6 million. The SDO Programme is also funding a £1.4 million project studying patient experience of cancer services. The NHS R&D Health Technology Assessment Programme commissions research on the comparative clinical effectiveness of interventions in cancer care.

The NHS Plan set out the intention to make available authoritative, evidence-based guidance on all aspects of NHS cancer care. The National Institute of Clinical Excellence was therefore asked to build on the existing cancer service guidance programme by commissioning a comprehensive package of guidance for cancer services covering all cancers. The Department's policy research programme has funded the evidence-based reviews underpinning the development of this guidance.

The findings of the National Cancer Patients Survey were published in July 2002, with 65,500 responses covering all 172 NHS trusts in England with eligible patients agreed to participate in the survey. In this, patients were commenting on treatment they received between July 1999 and June 2000—before publication of the NHS Cancer Plan in September 2000. The survey provides a benchmark against which implementation of the National Cancer Plan can be monitored.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many full-time cancer specialists were working in the NHS, broken down by speciality, in each of the last six years. [127315]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows the number of hospital medical staff within the cancer group specialties, with full-time contracts for the last six years. Only consultant data are available for March 2003.

Hospital medical staff within the six main cancer specialties by nature of contract

	All staff		Of which: Consultant	
England	All contracts	Full-time	All contracts	Full-time
1997				
All main cancer specialties	5,180	3,978	3,155	2,530
Of which:				
Clinical oncology	647	501	287	231
Clinical radiology	2,014	1,718	1,442	1,238
Haematology	1,026	733	488	393
Histopathology	1,027	770	769	581
Medical oncology	271	160	89	42
Palliative medicine	195	96	80	45
1998				
All main cancer specialties	5,350	4,208	3,273	2,617
Of which:				
Clinical oncology	676	540	299	246
Clinical radiology	2,075	1,752	1,481	1,252
Haematology	1,060	778	500	410
Histopathology	1,064	799	797	602
Medical oncology	284	169	93	44
Palliative medicine	201	99	83	46
1999				
All main cancer specialties	5,688	4,488	3,362	2,698
Of which:				
Clinical oncology	698	560	305	248
Clinical radiology	2,164	1,842	1,507	1,269
Haematology	1,102	800	510	404
Histopathology	1,129	896	836	654
Medical oncology	375	278	110	69
Palliative medicine	220	112	94	54
2000				
All main cancer specialties	5,955	4,669	3,528	2,770
Of which:				
Clinical oncology	711	572	307	248
Clinical radiology	2,303	1,923	1,585	1,297
Haematology	1,080	778	527	413
Histopathology	1,199	957	865	671
Medical oncology	404	292	133	77
Palliative medicine	258	147	111	64
2001				
All main cancer specialties	6,375	4,983	3,721	2,848
Of which:				
Clinical oncology	776	631	333	260
Clinical radiology	2,454	2,026	1,645	1,305
Haematology	1,134	825	556	420
Histopathology	1,291	1,044	915	705
Medical oncology	435	301	147	90
Palliative medicine	285	156	125	68
2002				
All main cancer specialties	6,706	5,227	3,913	2,929
Of which:				
Clinical oncology	785	638	315	237
Clinical radiology	2,538	2,063	1,702	1,326
Haematology	1,150	847	588	429
Histopathology	1,374	1,117	968	745
Medical oncology	504	355	185	103
Palliative medicine	355	207	155	89
March 2003				
All main cancer specialties	[1]...	[1]...	4,659	3,059
Of which:				
Clinical oncology	[1]...	[1]...	366	265
Clinical radiology	[1]...	[1]...	1,781	1,401
Haematology	[1]...	[1]...	598	437
Histopathology	[1]...	[1]...	994	783
Medical oncology	[1]...	[1]...	172	94
Palliative medicine	[1]...	[1]...	148	79

[1] Not available. 2003 data are taken from the medical and dental work force mini census, which only counted consultants.

Note:

1997 to 2002 data as at 30 September and 2003 data as at 31 March.

Source:

Department of Health medical and dental work force census.

Care Homes

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing care and residential care beds were provided by local authorities in each year since 1997. [127355]

Dr. Ladyman: The latest available information on the number of nursing and residential care home places provided by local authorities in each year since 1997 is shown in the table.

Residential and nursing care home places by type of home, England 1997–2001—England, as at 31 March

Rounded numbers

	Number of places				
	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Residential care					
LA staffed	65,820	63,980	59,030	55,460	50,860
Independent[1]	246,550	252,810	252,290	253,360	252,380
Nursing care					
Independent[2]	196,270	205,590	202,150	193,330	186,830
Dual registered	25,770	31,120	32,720	37,090	37,940
Total all homes	534,410	553,490	546,190	539,240	528,000

[1] Includes places in voluntary, private and small residential homes.
[2] Places include beds in general and mental nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics.
Source:
RA form A and KO36, RH(N) forms, Department of Health.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of care home beds in Essex. [127493]

Dr. Ladyman: The latest available information on the number of care home beds in Essex is shown in the table.

Care home beds in Essex 1999–2001

Essex Area[1]	*[2]Total number of care home places*
As at 31 March	
1999	14,730
2000	14,200
2001	14,230

[1] Care home places in nursing homes in North and South Essex health authorities and residential homes in Essex shire county and Southend and Thurrock unitary authorities.
[2] Total includes places in residential LA staffed, independent and dual registered homes, and beds in general and mental nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics.
Source:
RA Form A and RH(N) forms, Department of Health

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many care home beds there are in *(a)* Greater London and *(b)* England. [127502]

Dr. Ladyman: The latest available information on the number of care home places in Greater London and England as at 31 March 2001 is shown in the table.

Number of care home places in London[1] and England (rounded numbers)

As at 31 March 2001	*Total number of care home places*[2]
England	528,000
London	47,430

[1] All residential homes in councils with social services responsibilities in inner and Outer London and all nursing homes in Health Authorities within London.
[2] Includes places in residential LA staffed, independent and dual registered homes and beds in general and mental nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics.

Chelmsford Primary Care Trust

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the prescribing budget is for the Chelmsford Primary Care Trust for the financial year 2002–03. [127462]

Dr. Ladyman: Audited information in respect of the annual financial position of all national health service organisations must be published in their individual annual accounts and should be available centrally in autumn of each year.

I understand that Chelmsford Primary Care Trust has already made public that it has allocated £13.664 million from its 2002–03 unified budget towards the anticipated cost of prescribing for its general practitioners.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what accumulated deficit has been identified by the Chelmsford Primary Care Trust for *(a)* the financial year 2002–03 and *(b)* the current financial year. [127487]

Dr. Ladyman: Audited information in respect of the annual financial position of all national health service organisations must be published in their individual annual accounts and should be available centrally in autumn of each year.

I understand that Chelmsford Primary Care Trust has already made public that it has identified a deficit of £805,000 for the financial year 2002–03 and the deficit for the first quarter of 2003–04 is £228,000.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps will be taken to comply with Lord Laming's recommendations on child protection when formulating future star ratings for *(a)* hospital trusts, *(b)* primary care trusts and *(c)* mental health trusts. [127916]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government's response to the Victoria Climbié Inquiry report, to be published later this year, will set out the situation on performance assessment in the national health service.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether all NHS trusts offer to their nurses and key workers access to expert child protection advice and support 24 hours a day, seven days a week; and what mechanisms his Department has put in place to ensure that this requirement is being met. [127010]

Dr. Ladyman: This information is not collected centrally. However, I have asked the Commission for Health Improvement to assess child protection arrangements in the national health service and to report on the strengths and weaknesses of existing NHS arrangements.

Chlamydia/HIV

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department is undertaking into the links between HIV and AIDS awareness campaigns and education and the incidence of chlamydia in young people. [127545]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department of Health contributes £1 million annually to support a national programme of Sexual Health and HIV research which informs our work to prevent the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The current programme does not include specific research into links between HIV and AIDS awareness and the incidence of chlamydia, although we do know that the widespread HIV prevention campaigns of the 1980s did lead to a reduction in the prevalence of many other STIs. Our

regular surveys which measure the impact of the Teenage Pregnancy campaign, also provide data on the awareness of STIs among young people. This shows that awareness of HIV is high among this group and that awareness of chlamydia is increasing, possibly as a result of increased publicity on the subject, such as the Government's 'Sex lottery' campaign.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women were tested for *(a)* chlamydia and *(b)* HIV in each of the last five years. [127543]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department of Health does not hold central data on the total number of men and women who have undergone testing for chlamydia. We do, however, hold data on those who have tested and received a positive result.

Year	*Male*	*Female*
1998	18,937	24,975
1999	21,808	29,196
2000	26,632	34,815
2001	29,602	38,644
2002	34,341	43,796

Source:
Health Protection Agency

Estimates for the number of men and women tested for chlamydia through GUM Clinics, General Practitioners or Antenatal Care Providers in England between 1997 and 2002 are shown in the table. Note that data on antenatal testing of women are available only from 2000.

Year	*Male*	*Female*
1997[1]	75,113	60,020
1998[1]	79,665	63,998
1999[1]	81,842	65,614
2000[2]	93,262	345,083
2001[2]	122,178	473,321
2002	161,911	544,466

In addition, all blood donations are screened for HIV and in the table below are the estimates of the numbers of the donations screened for both men and women.

Year	*Total*
1997	3,040,022
1998	2,864,483
1999	2,922,045
2000	2,903,565
2001	2,849,740
2002	2,844,465

Notes:
[1] Data from Genitourinary clinics and general practitioners only.
[2] Includes preliminary unpublished data from the "National Survey of HIV in Pregnancy and Childhood", source: Institute of Child Health.

Source:
In calculating these estimates, data from the following surveys were used: denominator survey (CDSC) to provide GP testing estimates, KC60 (CDSC) to provide GUM testing estimates, National survey of HIV in Pregnancy and Childhood (ICH) to provide Antenatal testing estimates.

Cholesterol

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to improve the measurement of cholesterol in the over-50s. [127735]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The planning and priorities framework, "Improving, Expansion and Reform", which sets out priorities for the next three years for the national health service, includes a target for practice based registers to ensure that patients with, or at high risk of, coronary heart disease and diabetes receive appropriate care and treatment in line with national service framework standards, including advice on diet, physical activity and smoking. Patients at risk of coronary heart disease include those with hypertension, diabetes and who are obese.

The quality and outcomes framework within the new general medical services contract, being introduced from 1 April 2004, will reward general practitioners who monitor, and can demonstrate control of, the cholesterol level of patients suffering from chronic heart disease.

Clinical Data

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS hospital files holding clinical data on patients *(a)* went missing temporarily and *(b)* were lost in each year since 1995. [127186]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested is not available. The Department of Health does not monitor or gather statistics on the management of clinical records in National Health Service hospitals and trusts and consequently has no record of numbers of files temporarily missing or lost.

Each NHS trust and strategic health authority is legally responsible for managing its own records and complying with legislation and guidance relating to the clinical data they collect on patients.

In the NHS, guidance and governance arrangements have been designed to assure compliance with law and good practice, while minimising the overheads of managing and auditing detailed procedures. Independent authorities, such as the Audit Commission, Health Service Commissioner and Information Commissioner, oversee the governance arrangements and may impose sanctions where there is a significant failure to comply.

Commission for Health Improvement

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in which languages the patient surveys issued by the Commission for Health Improvement were published. [127322]

Ms Rosie Winterton: It is not possible to identify from patient records what language a patient speaks. Therefore the initial contact has to be in English. Survey guidance for trusts points to a range of options for helping patients whose first language is not English.

Community Health Councils

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with staff working at Community Health Councils on the closure of such health councils. [127167]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The closure of Community Health Councils (CHCs) was first announced in the NHS Plan in July 2000. Since then, this subject has formed part of the discussions Ministers have had with CHC staff and members as part of various visits around the country and there have been meetings with Stakeholder groups, including the Association of Community Health Council in England and Wales and trades unions. Officials in the Department of Health have had similar meetings and local employers and CHC leads have held open meetings to discuss the closure with staff and members.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when Community Health Councils will be closed in England. [127168]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the Written Ministerial Statement made by my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State on 4 June 2003, *Official Report*, columns 22–23WS. It is still our intention to abolish Community Health Councils on 1 December 2003.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions have taken place on the redundancy payments staff will receive when community health councils are closed. [127169]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I met with trade unions representing Community Health Council (CHC) staff on 16 July to discuss staffing issues and also received feedback from a meeting held recently with key stakeholders, including CHC staff, members of the Association of Community Health Councils of England and Wales, the Council for Patient and Public Involvement in Health and the trades unions.

Officials have worked with the trade unions and a revised human resources framework for CHC staff was issued on 25 July. This document, which was jointly with Unison and Amicus-MSF, covers not only the issue of redundancy but also the support and advice that is available to CHC staff to help them secure alternative posts within the National Health Service. It is hoped that this will address some of the concerns and anxieties raised.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he plans to keep Community Health Councils operational after 1 December 2003. [127429]

Ms Rosie Winterton: It is still our intention to abolish Community Health Councils on 1 December 2003.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many Community Health Councils have had to leave their previous premises because of the decision to keep CHCs operational until December. [127430]

Ms Rosie Winterton: To date, no Community Health Councils (CHCs) have had to leave their premises specifically because of the decision to keep CHCs operational until 1 December. However, it is estimated that about 56 CHCs will need to leave their current premises before the abolition date for reasons including the cost of extending the lease arrangements where previous notice had been given. Decisions will be based on local circumstances and suitable alternative arrangements will be discussed with local CHC staff and members.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many letters his Department has received opposing the abolition of community health councils; and if he will make a statement. [127460]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Since the abolition of community health councils was first announced in the NHS plan in July 2000 the Department has received many letters commenting on this issue. However, owing to the volume of correspondence which the Department receives and the way in which that correspondence is filed, the information cold be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Congestion Charge

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many letters he has received from health service personnel concerning the Central London congestion charge since the charge began. [127499]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has received three letters from national health service professionals about the impact of the congestion charge since the charge began.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of congestion charging in Central London on *(a)* doctors, *(b)* nurses, *(c)* consultants, *(d)* paramedics and *(e)* ancillary staff. [127500]

Mr. Hutton: The congestion charging scheme includes a number of measures to minimise the impact of congestion charging on National Health Service staff. This includes:

Exemption of NHS vehicles currently exempt from vehicle excise duty, including ambulances and paramedic vehicles.

A provision to reimburse journeys by NHS staff required to carry specified items, such as controlled drugs or confidential information, as part of their operational duties, that should not be transported on public transport.

A provision to reimburse journeys by NHS staff for the purpose of providing emergency on-call services.

The NHS steering group on this issue will shortly by writing to all NHS organisations to ask for data relating to the impact of the scheme for the period 17 February to 17 August. This data will be collated through the steering group and it will report on the outcome of this review in September.

Consultants

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in consultant recruitment in the last 12 months. [127479]

Mr. Hutton: As at 31 March 2003 there were 28,024 consultants working in the national health service. This represents an increase of 1,580 or 6.0 per cent. since March 2002. Between September 1997 and March 2003 there has been a 31 per cent. increase in the number of consultants.

From March 2002 to date, 179 consultants have been recruited through the Department of Health's international recruitment campaign.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in *(a)* Mid-Essex Hospital NHS Trust and *(b)* Greater London have been waiting more than 13 weeks to see a consultant. [127484]

Mr. Hutton: The information is shown in the table.

Patients who are waiting over 13 weeks for a first consultant outpatient appointment following G(D)P written referral: Position at 31 March 2003

Organisation	*Number*
Mid-Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust	450
North West London HA	3,818
North Central London HA	5,040
North East London HA	7,860
South East London HA	4,556
South West London HA	3,056

Source:
Department of Health form QM08

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies there were for consultants in the last year for which figures are available. [127374]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health does not collect information on individual vacancies. The national health service vacancy survey collects information on the number of posts which trusts are actively trying to fill which have been vacant for three months or more.

As at 31 March 2003, the three month vacancy rate for consultants was 4.7 per cent.

Paddington Health Campus

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the estimated completion date is of the proposed Paddington Health Campus. [128091]

Mr. Hutton: The Paddington Health Campus is expected to be a project that will take a decade to fully complete, though patients will be using the facilities from 2009–10.

Coronary Heart Disease

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in England suffer from coronary heart disease; and what proportion of the overall population these represent. [127446]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Nationally representative figures on the prevalence of heart disease and its risk factors are available from the Health Survey for England. Although the definition of coronary heart disease as such is not used in the Health Survey for England, the survey reports the prevalence of ischaemic heart disease which is defined as ever having angina or a heart attack, confirmed by a doctor. The most recent estimates of the prevalence of ischaemic heart disease were published in "The Health Survey for England—Cardiovascular Disease 1998", table 2.2, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Deep Vein Thrombosis

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures have been taken by his Department in the last 12 months *(a)* to increase awareness about and *(b)* to reduce the number of people who suffer from deep vein thrombosis. [127477]

Miss Melanie Johnson: In 2001 the Department of Health issued information and advice to the airlines and the public about minimising the risk of deep vein thrombosis (DVT) during long journeys. This included practical advice for air passengers on long haul flights. It also identified certain groups who may be at a higher risk of DVT and advised them to seek medical advice before travelling and described simple in-seat exercises that should be recommended to all air passengers.

To maximise access for the public to this information and advice it is available through health services, the internet at http://www.doh.gov.uk/dvt/, the airlines and NHS Direct and will be kept under review in the light of new research information. No further advice has been issued.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in England have been diagnosed with deep vein thrombosis in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [127489]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Deep vein thrombosis is linked to older age, cancer, trauma, surgery and long periods of immobilisation, oral contraception, pregnancy and a number of conditions related to hyperactive blood clotting.

The number of admissions where primary diagnosis was phlebitis and thrombophlebitis of other deep vessels of lower extremities, in national health service hospitals in England in 2001–02 was 23,801.

Notes:
Admissions are defined as a first period of patient care under a consultant in one health care provider.
The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several admissions within the year. This is the latest year for which data are available.
The primary diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the HES data set and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.
Figures have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data (i.e. the data are ungrossed).

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to reduce the number of cases of deep vein thrombosis affecting women during pregnancy. [127595]

Dr. Ladyman: In 2001, the Department of Health issued information and advice to the airlines and the public about minimising the risk of deep vein thrombosis (DVT) during long journeys. This included practical advice for air passengers on long haul flights. It also identified certain groups, including pregnant women, who may be at a higher risk of DVT and advised them to seek medical advice before travelling and described simple in-seat exercises that should be recommended to all air passengers.

In order to maximise access for the public to this information and advice, it is available through health services, on the internet at http:///www.doh.gov.uk/dvt/, from the airlines and NHS Direct and will be kept under review in the light of new research information.

The Department also produces "The Pregnancy Book" and "Birth to Five", which are given to all first time mothers by their midwife. Both books contain practical advice for pregnant women about DVT and advise them to consult their general practitioner or midwife before travelling by air.

Dementia

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the most significant known risk factor for dementia is; how many people are living with dementia in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Sefton; and how many of those people are under the age of 65. [127661]

Dr. Ladyman: There is no routine collection of information at national or local level about the number of people living with dementia. The research, quoted by the older people's national service framework in 2001, estimated that approximately 600,000 people in the United Kingdom have dementia, of whom there are about 17,000 people under the age of 65.

The most significant known risk factor for dementia is age. It is estimated that about 5 per cent. of people over 65 have dementia, rising to about 20 per cent. in the population over 80.

Departmental Press Office

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total cost was of running the Department's press office in the latest year for which figures are available. [127473]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The total costs for the Department's press office for 2002–03 are likely to be £1,154,000, including all staff and non-staff related administration costs.

This figure may still be subject to change, as the accounts are not yet closed for that period.

Departmental Priorities

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his Department's priorities; and how many there are. [127459]

Mr. Hutton: The national priorities for the National Health Service are set out in "Improvement, Expansion and Reform: The next three years: Priorities and planning Framework" (PPF) 2003–06, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Diagnostic and Treatment Centres

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors will be needed to staff the new diagnostic and treatment centres. [127328]

Mr. Hutton: The number of doctors needed to staff National Health Service-run diagnosis and treatment centres (DTCs) is a matter for the NHS trust managing the unit, working with their local workforce development confederations to ensure the best use of staff in the local health economy.

The number of doctors working in new independent sector run DTCs will be determined during the contract agreement process with preferred bidders. The procurement documentation sent to short-listed bidders asked them demonstrate that their workforce strategy would not be disruptive to the local health economy, and to indicate the numbers of additional clinical staff and NHS staff, working in an agreed and structured way, that will work in these new units.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which procedures are expected to be carried out in diagnostic and treatment centres. [127329]

Mr. Hutton: Diagnosis and treatment centres are expected to provide booked diagnosis and treatment, on a day case or short inpatient stay basis, in high volume "routine" specialities such as orthopaedics, ophthalmology and general surgery.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Government will use a standard tariff for treatments carried out at diagnostic and treatment centres. [127365]

Mr. Hutton: From this year, the Government has introduced a new financial system to provide a transparent, rules-based system for paying providers of services to National Health Service patients. Primary care trusts will commission the volume of activity required to deliver service priorities, adjusted for case-mix, from a plurality of providers on the basis of a standard national price tariff. These arrangements apply equally to NHS trusts and NHS—diagnosis and treatment centres.

Diet

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how he will measure the success of the Five-A-Day scheme. [127373]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Consumption of fruit and vegetables is monitored in national surveys, including the annual Health Survey for England, the annual Expenditure on Food Survey, and the periodic National Diet and Nutrition Survey.

The New Opportunities Fund has commissioned evaluations of the two elements of the Five-a-Day programme that it is funding at present—the 66 primary care trust-based community initiatives and the regional scaling up of the National School Fruit Scheme. Each evaluation will use a dedicated dietary assessment tool, the development of which was commissioned by the Department of Health at the time of its original pilots.

Awareness and usage of the Five-d-Day logo launched in March will also be monitored nationally.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the Government plans to increase the funding for Five-a-Day Local Community Initiatives available through the National Lottery New Opportunities Fund; and if he will make a statement. [128231]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The lottery-funded New Opportunities Fund is providing £10 million over two years to 2005 to support Five-a-Day community initiatives based in 66 primary care trusts (PCTs). These PCTs, like all PCTs in England, have a duty to improve the health of their communities which requires them to lead on public health issues such as healthy eating. By 2004 PCTs will be managing up to 75 per cent. of the total national health service budget for England to

commission services to meet the needs of their population, which may include Five-a-Day projects to increase fruit and vegetable consumption. The Department of Health continues to fund the production of Five-a-Day resources which are available, free, to all PCTs but it does not ring fence funds for Five-a-Day within PCTs' allocations.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department is taking to improve people's diets, with special reference to people living in socially deprived areas. [127453]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department of Health, working with the Food Standards Agency and other partners, is taking a range of measures to improve people's diets. The following measures specifically relate to deprivation.

The lottery-funded New Opportunities Fund is providing £10 million over two years to support "Five-a Day" community initiatives led in 66 of the most deprived primary care trusts. These aim to increase access to fruit and vegetables and awareness of the health benefits of eating at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables each day.

The "NHS Priorities and Planning Framework 2003–06" sets a target to increase breastfeeding initiation rates by two percentage points a year, focussing especially on women from disadvantaged groups.

The Welfare Food Scheme provides free milk and vitamins to over 700,000 pregnant women, mothers and young children. It is primarily targeted at low income families. The Department plans to reform the scheme by 2004 by broadening its nutritional basis, strengthening links with the national health service and providing increased support for breastfeeding mothers.

District Nurses

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the role of district nurses in the NHS; and what plans he has to increase their role. [127283]

Mr. Hutton: District nurses have an important contribution to make in improving health and health care. The implementation of policies to improve access, promote earlier discharge from hospital and the national service framework for older people require district nurses and others to develop their roles. To support their development I launched a strategy for nursing in primary care, in November 2002. 'Liberating the Talents: helping nurses and PCTs deliver the NHS plan' provides a framework for district nurses and other primary care nurses, for developing their roles based on the needs of patients. Workshops on implementing 'Liberating the Talents' have been held for all primary care trusts in England. It is for PCTs to determine locally how to maximise the role of nurses in delivering Government priorities.

Doctor-Nurse Ratios

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the ratio of *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses to people is in England. [127524]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows the ratio of hospital, public health medicine and community health services staff, general practitioners and nurses to the population in England.

Population per Doctor/Nurse

Number

England, as at 30 September 2002	*England total*
Population	49,342,229
Doctors[1]	104,460
Population per Doctor	472
of which:	
HCHS staff[1]	72,168
Population per Doctor	684
General Medical Practitioners[2]	32,292
Population per Doctor	1,528
All Qualified Nursing Staff	367,520
Population per Nurse	134

[1] HCHS stands for Hospital, Public Health Medicine and Community Health Services.

[2] Excludes Hospital Medical Hospital Practitioners and Hospital Medical Clinical Assistants, most of whom are GPs working part-time in hospitals.

Notes:

1. All Practitioners include GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs, PMS Salaried GPs, Restricted Principals, Assistants, GP Registrars, Salaried Doctors (para. 52 SFA), PMS Other and GP Retainers.

2. Practice Nurses employed by Unrestricted Principals and Equivalents (UPEs).

3. 2001 based resident population projections for England for mid year 2002.

Sources:

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.

Department of Health medical and dental workforce census.

Government Actuary's Department (GAD).

Doctors

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average number of hours worked per week by doctors in training were in England in the last year for which figures are available. [127375]

Mr. Hutton: The actual hours worked by junior doctors are not monitored centrally. We do however measure average maximum hours in order to assess compliance with the New Deal. The last occasion these figures were collated was in March 2003. This data revealed that out of nearly 32,000 junior doctors, about 90 per cent. were working less than 56 hours a week.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors were employed *(a)* at the Princess Royal Hospital and *(b)* in general practice in the Wrekin in each year since 1997. [127590]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is shown in the table.

Doctors employed at the Princess Royal Hospital Trust and GPs employed within Telford and Wrekin Primary Care Trust (actual numbers): 1997 to 2003

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*March 2002*	*2002*	*March 2003*
Princess Royal Hospital NHS Trust								
HCHS doctors[1]	98	100	103	107	122	—	122	—
of which:								
Consultants	34	32	36	38	40	40	40	44
Telford and Wrekin PCT								
General Medical Practitioners[2]	n/a	n/a	n/a	88	86	85	89	90
of which:								
Unrestricted Principals and Equivalents (UPEs)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	82	81	80	82	82

n/a = Not available

[1] Excludes Hospital Medical Hospital Practitioners and Hospital Medical Clinical Assistants, most of whom are GPs working part-time in hospitals.

[2] All Practitioners include UPEs, Restricted Principals, Assistants, GP Registrars, Salaried Doctors (Para. 52 SFA), PMS Other and GP Retainers.

[3] UPEs include GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs and PMS Salaried GPs.

Note:

Data for 1997–99 as at 1 October, 2000–02 as at 30 September, March 2002 and March 2003 as at 31 March.

Sources:

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.
Department of Health Medical and Dental Workforce Census.

Ealing Hospital Trust

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the resignations of the non-executive team of the Ealing Hospital Trust. [127640]

Ms Rosie Winterton: A joint press release was issued by the National Health Service Appointments Commission and the North West London Strategic Health Authority on 26 June 2003 announcing resignations from the board of the Ealing Hospital Trust. This stated that the chair and three non-executive directors were standing down because of a break down in relationships, and to make it easier for an independent review of corporate governance systems at the trust to be carried out by the trust's auditors. A caretaker chair is now in post and the three non-executive positions have been advertised.

East and North Hertfordshire Trust

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the findings of the external investigation into presentation of waiting figures by East and North Hertfordshire Trust are to be published. [127695]

Dr. Ladyman: Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Strategic Health Authority published the report of the independent external inquiry into the management of waiting lists at East and North Hertfordshire National Health Service Trust on 8 July 2003.

Copies of the report are available on the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Strategic Health Authority website, at www.bhha.nhs.uk.

Electronic Foetal Monitoring

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each hospital trust *(a)* the measures used to collect information and *(b)* the information collated on electronic foetal monitoring. [127097]

Dr. Ladyman: Trusts are required to collect information on maternity care through the Department of Health's Hospital Episodes Statistics system. This information is published in the National Health Service Maternity Statistics Bulletin, England 2001–02. The most recent bulletin, number 2003/09, was published on 16 May 2003. A copy is available in the Library and is also available on the Department of Health's website at www.doh.uk/public/sb0309.htm

Information on other measures used by each hospital trust to collect information, including information on electronic foetal monitoring is not collected centrally.

Emergency Services

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* emergency journeys and *(b)* emergency calls there were in each year from 1995–96 to 2001–02. [127715]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information on the number of emergency journeys and emergency calls for ambulance trusts in England are contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletins, "Ambulance Services, England".

Copies of the bulletins are available in the Library and on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0313.htm (covering the period 1997–98 to 2002–03) and www.doh.gov.uk/pub/docs/doh/amb9899.pdf (covering the period 1994–95 to 1998–99).

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average response times for emergency calls were in each health authority in each year from 1995–96 to 2001–02. [127717]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information on average response times in each health authority is not collected centrally.

The Department collects information on the proportion of emergency calls resulting in an ambulance arriving at the scene of the reported incident within the Government's

target response times for all ambulance trusts in England. These are contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletins, "Ambulance Services, England".

Copies of the bulletins are available in the Library and also on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0313.htm (covering the period 1997–98 to 2002–03) and www.doh.gov.uk/pub/docs/doh/amb9899.pdf (covering the period 1994–95 to 1998–99).

The information relating to Wales and Scotland is a matter for the devolved Administrations.

While the institutions in Northern Ireland are dissolved, responsibility rests with Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* front line ambulances, *(b)* patient transport vehicles, *(c)* fast response cars, *(d)* medical motorbikes and *(e)* special care baby units (i) serve and (ii) served Essex in May 1997. [127467]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many 999 calls were made to the Essex Ambulance Service in the last 12 months for which figures are available for which it was decided an ambulance was not necessary; and what proportion of calls over this period such calls represented. [127469]

Dr. Ladyman: I am advised by Essex Ambulance Service National Health Service Trust that it answered 141,775 999 calls in the period 1April 2002 to 31 March 2003.

I understand that these calls resulted in the trust responding to 124,063 incidents. Of these incidents, 1,364 were cancelled before the ambulance arrived due to hoax calls. The remaining 122,699 incidents resulted in 107,343 patients being taken to hospital. This results in 16,720 incidents where an ambulance was not required, which equates to 13.47 per cent.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* front line ambulances, *(b)* patient transport vehicles, *(c)* fast response cars, *(d)* medical motorbikes and *(e)* special care baby units serve Greater London. [127478]

Mr. Hutton: This information is not held centrally. Information from the London Ambulance Service National Health Service Trust is shown in the table.

Vehicles and units serving Greater London

Front line ambulances	395
Patient transport vehicles[1]	252
Fast response cars (RRUs)	59
Medical motorbikes (MRUs)	11
Special care baby units (SCBUs)	8

[1] Made up of six generic types of vehicles

Endometriosis

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to produce a public information campaign to raise awareness of endometriosis. [124189]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We recognise the very important role that voluntary organisations such as the National Endometriosis Society (NES) and Simply Holistic Endometriosis (SHE) Trust have in promoting awareness of this debilitating condition.

We are currently making funds available to NES to produce an information leaflet for women encouraging those with symptoms to discuss them with their general practitioner. They will also produce a leaflet for GPs, which will be the first point of contact for women with this condition, highlighting the symptoms and encouraging early referral.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been carried out by or on behalf of his Department on the use of complementary medicine in treating endometriosis. [127873]

Miss Melanie Johnson: No such research has been undertaken.

Epothilones

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement regarding Government funding and support of research and development of epothilones. [127555]

Miss Melanie Johnson: No research on epothilones is currently being funded by the Medical Research Council or the Department. Commercial trials are in progress.

Eye Surgery

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the recovery time and success rates of those patients undergoing *(a)* LASIK, *(b)* LASEK, *(c)* PRK and *(d)* ALK; and what the side effects of each are; [127535]

(2) what recommendations have been made to the NHS with regard to the range of *(a)* myopia and *(b)* hyperopia that would benefit the most from refractive surgery. [127536]

Mr. Hutton: The majority of laser eye surgery to correct refractive errors takes place in private hospitals, which are regulated by the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC), which is currently monitoring developments in this area. Providers of laser eye surgery are required to be registered with the NCSC and to keep records for inspection by the NCSC of each surgical procedure undertaken, including accidents or adverse events. Service providers are subject to annual inspection by the NCSC.

The National Health Service does not routinely provide laser eye surgery to correct refractive errors. However, it is considered when a specific clinical need could justify its use. Examples could include adjustment of the refractive error of one eye to make it similar to the other *(a)* condition known as anisometropia) or patients shown to be severely depressed by the need to wear glasses (and where contact lenses are contra-indicated). These are rare occurrences and are evaluated on an individual patient basis.

Health Care (EU)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the recent European Court ruling about the eligibility of all EU citizens to non-hospital care in any EU country. [127635]

Mr. Hutton: The judgment in a similar case before the English courts (Watts v. Bedford Primary Care Trust) is awaited for guidance on the extent to which the recent European Court of Justice ruling in case C (Muller-Faure/van Riet) applies in the United Kingdom. When that is available, careful consideration will be given to any implications for policy and practice in the UK.

Falls

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of ambulance call outs to people over the age of *(a)* 50 years and *(b)* 65 years in each of the last five years for which figures are available were as a result of a fall. [127350]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

The national service framework (NSF) for older people, published in 2001, requires the NHS, working in partnership with councils, to take action to prevent falls and reduce resultant fractures or other injuries in their populations of older people. Older people who have fallen should receive effective treatment and prevention and, with their carers, receive advice on prevention through a specialised falls service. All local health and social care systems should have established this service by April 2005 and achievement of this NSF milestone will be monitored centrally.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much was spent on the funding of falls co-ordinator posts in England in 2002–03; [127347]

(2) what he estimates to be the cost of *(a)* all injuries as a result of a fall, *(b)* hip fractures and *(c)* osteoporosis to the national health service in the last 12 months; [127348]

(3) how many designated falls co-ordinators are in post in the United Kingdom. [127364]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I refer the hon. Member to the responses given by my hon. Friends the then Minister of State and the then Under-Secretary of State for Health on 5 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 1121W.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the progress of local health authorities against the national service framework for older people's 2003 milestone on falls prevention. [127351]

Dr. Ladyman: The Department of Health will be monitoring formally the overall falls milestone of integrated health and social care falls services by April 2005 as this is included as one of the key targets in "Improvement, Expansion and Reform", the priorities and planning framework for 2003–06. It is now for strategic health authorities to plan, deliver and monitor progress locally on the other falls milestones in the national service framework for older people.

Food Additives

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what resources the NHS is allocating for research into the link between food additives and behavioural deficits in children. [127720]

Miss Melanie Johnson: There are currently no national health service studies on this subject. However, last year the Food Standards Agency (FSA) set up an ad hoc, multi-stakeholder working group to advise on the feasibility of conducting research on a possible relationship between exposure to certain food additives and behavioural effects in children; and to advise on the most suitable experimental strategies. In the light of this advice the FSA advertised for suitable research proposals. Following appraisal, successful proposals are likely to be commissioned early next year.

Food Poisoning

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of food poisoning were notified to his Department in each year since 1997. [127338]

Miss Melanie Johnson: A summary of the food poisoning notifications received in England and Wales for the years 1997–2002, is shown in the table.

Food poisoning notifications—annual totals: England and Wales, 1997–2001

	Total	*Formally notified*	*Otherwise ascertained*
1997	93,901	54,233	39,668
1998	93,932	53,764	40,168
1999	86,316	48,454	37,862
2000	86,528	46,481	40,047
2001	85,468	46,768	38,700
2002	72,649	38,541	34,108

Source:
HPA Statutory Notifications of Infectious Diseases—Last updated: July 2003

Food Standards Agency

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultations have been issued by the Food Standards Agency in each year since its inception. [127340]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Since its inception the Food Standards Agency (FSA) has operated under the three guiding principles of putting the consumer first, being open and accessible and being an independent voice. To do this effectively the FSA consults widely before making recommendations, unless urgent action is required, and engages with a plethora of stakeholders as part of its general policy-making process. It uses a wide range of consultative methods such as open/public meetings, specific stakeholder meetings, focus groups, standing consultative groups and questionnaire-based surveys. For formal written consultations, the FSA has published 331 on its website since its establishment in April 2000: 46 between April to December 2000, 80 in 2001, 128 in 2002 and 77 between January to July 2003.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how often he plans to meet officials from the Food Standards Agency. [127343]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I meet the Chair of the Food Standards Agency every four to six weeks and meet its officials on a regular basis for briefings.

Foundation Trusts

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what process will be used to recruit members of NHS Foundation Trusts. [127625]

Mr. Hutton: It will be for each national health service foundation trust to determine what approach to take.

A source book has now been developed to help applicants for NHS foundation trust status develop their governance and membership arrangements. NHS foundation trusts will be under a statutory duty to take steps to have a representative membership.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether foundation hospitals established in England will be required to treat patients referred by general practitioners based in Wales. [127376]

Mr. Hutton: Arrangements for cross border referrals to national health service foundation trusts are expected to continue to work in the same way as referrals from NHS Commissioners in Wales to NHS trusts currently operate.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of how many members a foundation trust will have. [127644]

Mr. Hutton: National health service foundation trusts will be required to set their own minimum membership as part of their constitution. The Independent Regulator must be satisfied that the membership is sufficient to ensure that a Board of Governors can be elected according to its constitution and that the actual membership will be representative of those eligible.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for piloting the scheme for foundation hospitals. [127645]

Mr. Hutton: We have no plans to pilot national health service foundation trusts.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to send out the source book for foundation hospital applicants. [127646]

Mr. Hutton: A first version of the governance source book has been made available to applicants. This will be supplemented, over time, to include learning from the experience of first wave applicants.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the role of the Foundation Trusts Regulator. [127662]

Mr. Hutton: Subject to Parliament, the Independent Regulator for National Health Service foundation trusts will be responsible for authorising, monitoring and regulating NHS foundation trusts. Details of the role of the Independent Regulator can be found in the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the Regulator of Foundation Trusts will be required to maintain universal access to healthcare services. [127663]

Mr. Hutton: Subject to legislation, the Independent Regulator will be required to exercise his functions in a manner that is consistent with the performance by the Secretary of State of the duties under sections 1, 3 and 51 of the National Health Service Act 1977.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what role he will play in the work of foundation trusts. [127664]

Mr. Hutton: The Secretary of State has overall responsibility for the National Health Service. The Secretary of State sets the strategic vision for the health service, distributes resources to the NHS, sets the national tariff and will set national standards. The Secretary of State's main role, with regard to NHS foundations trusts, will be to decide whether to support proposals for NHS foundation trust status.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps will be taken to ensure that foundation trusts do not turn away patients with chronic conditions. [127665]

Mr. Hutton: The services National Health Service foundation trusts provide for NHS Commissioners will be set out in legally binding contracts.

NHS foundation trusts will be required, under their terms of authorisation, to continue to provide essential NHS services to NHS commissioners.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether each foundation trust will have unique clinical targets and health care priorities. [127666]

Mr. Hutton: National Health Service foundation trusts will be established with the principal purpose of providing NHS services to NHS patients. They will be held to account for delivering the outputs agreed with primary care trusts and other partners in the health economy, as part of the commissioning process.

NHS foundation trusts will be independently inspected by the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection against the same national standards as other NHS trusts.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the extent to which foundation trusts will have access to non-public finance. [127681]

Mr. Hutton: National health service foundation trusts will have freedom to decide where to go for capital borrowing.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with City institutions about interest rates available for bond-based finance for foundation trusts. [127682]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health has undertaken a wide range of consultations with a variety of City institutions over future financing options for national health service foundation trusts.

Free Nursing Care

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many whole-time equivalent nurses are responsible for assessing patients for free nursing care; [127488]

(2) how many people are awaiting an assessment for free nursing care; and what proportion that represents of people who require an assessment for free nursing care; [127509]

(3) how many people have been waiting *(a)* less than one month, *(b)* over one month and less than two months, *(c)* over two months and less than three months, *(d)* over three months and less than four months and *(e)* over four months for an assessment for free nursing care. [127510]

Dr. Ladyman: Information on a survey of primary care trusts (PCTs) carried out in December 2002, which requested information on PCTs' progress on determining the nursing needs of nursing home residents supported by local authorities, was placed on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/jointunit/nhsfundednursingcare/dec2002resultspub.xls on 6 May 2003. In mid-December 2002 approximately 20 per cent. of the assessments of residents supported by local authorities, which were required by April 2003, had been completed. No further updated or detailed information is held centrally.

Arrangements for carrying out assessments are organised locally and no information on the number of nurses involved is held at central level.

Free Prescriptions

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who is eligible for free prescriptions. [127699]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The following categories of people are eligible for free national health service prescriptions:

Men and women aged 60 and over;

Children under 16;

Young people in full-time education aged 16, 17 and 18;

Pregnant women and women who have had a child in the previous 12 months who hold a valid exemption certificate;

People who hold a valid exemption certificate for a war or Ministry of Defence disablement pension but only in respect of medication for the disablement;

People suffering from the following conditions who hold a valid exemption certificate:

- permanent fistula (including caecostomy, colostomy, laryngostomy, or ileostomy) which requires continuous surgical dressing or requires an appliance
- diabetes insipidus or other forms of hypopituitarism
- diabetes mellitus (except where treatment is by diet alone)
- hypoparathyroidism
- myasthenia gravis
- myxoedema
- epilepsy requiring continuous anti-convulsive therapy;
- continuing physical disability which prevents the patient from leaving his residence without the help of another person.

People (and their partner) receiving income support

People (and their partner) receiving jobseekers' allowance income-based

People who are entitled to, or named on, a valid NHS tax credit exemption certificate

People named on a valid HC2 charges certificate for full help (under NHS low income scheme).

Fuzeon

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the drug Fuzeon. [127433]

Miss Melanie Johnson: On 27 May 2003, the European Commission issued a Marketing Authorisation valid throughout the European Union for the medicinal product Fuzeon, which contains enfuvirtide. The approved indication is:

"in combination with other antiretroviral medicinal products for the treatment of HIV-1 infected patients who have received treatment with and failed on regimens containing at least one medicinal product from each of the following antiretroviral classes: protease inhibitors, non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors and nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors, or who have intolerance to previous antiretroviral regimens. In deciding on a new regimen for patients who have failed an antiretroviral regimen, careful consideration should be given to the treatment history of the individual and the patterns of mutations associated with different medicinal products. Where available, resistance testing may be appropriate."

General Practitioners

Mr. Dorrell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioner posts in Leicestershire are vacant. [127269]

Dr. Ladyman: The information is not held centrally in the format requested.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners have entered general practice in each of the last six years; and how many have retired. [127384]

Mr. Hutton: It is not possible to provide comparable figures for general practitioners joining the work force and those retiring from the work force. This is because the time sequences and groups covered differ. The available information is set out in the tables.

Numbers of Unrestricted Principals and Equivalent (UPE) general practitioners joining the workforce 1996–97 to 2001–02

Year[1]	*Number of UPEs*[2] *joining General Practice*
1996–97	1,302
1997–98	1,333
1998–99	1,229
1999–2000	1,203
2000–01	1,452
2001–02	1,633

Notes:

[1] 12-month periods October to September

[2] UPEs include General Medical Services (GMS) Unrestricted Principals, Personal Medical Services (PMS) Contracted GPs and PMS Salaried GPs.

Source:

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Numbers of general practitioners[1] retiring in the financial years ending 1996–97 to 2002–03

Year[2]	*Number of GPs retiring*[3]
1996–97	537
1997–98	509
1998–99	457
1999–2000	339
2000–01	584
2001–02	604
2002–03	532

Notes:

[1] These figures include UPEs and all other GPs

[2] 12 month periods April to March

[3] These figures include retirements on the grounds of age and voluntary early retirements before the NHS Pension Scheme's normal retirement age of 60

Source:

NHS Pensions Agency

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the average length of time GPs in England spent with their patients in individual consultations in the last 12 months. [127454]

Mr. Hutton: The data are not collected either routinely or by health authority.

Under the new general medical services contract, which will be introduced from 1 April 2004, length of consultation is one of the indicators within the quality and outcomes framework. Practices will be able to increase earnings if they provide appointments and consultations which equal or exceed the times specified in the framework.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the population in *(a)* Greater London and *(b)* England are registered with a GP. [127503]

Mr. Hutton: The vast majority of the population is registered with a general practitioner. At 30 September 2002 (the latest published data), 8,122,456 people were recorded as registered with a GP or with a provider of personal medical services (PMS) in the areas covered by the five London strategic health authorities. In England, 51,552,391 people were recorded as registered with a GP or a provider of PMS.

However, these figures are greater than their respective population figures. Therefore, it is not possible to express accurately the percentages of the population that are covered. This is due to "list inflation". This arises where a patient moves his or her registration and for a transitional period may be registered on two lists. Similarly, an individual who dies or moves outside London and/or England may remain on a list for a time.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what contingency plans he has made in the event of doctors rejecting GP contracts. [109922]

Mr. Hutton: General practitioners voted overwhelmingly to support the new general medical services contract on 20 June.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on GP recruitment. [127491]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan set a target of recruiting an additional 2,000 general practitioners (GPs) between 1999 and 2004. A range of measures have been put in place to increase GP recruitment:

The number of GP registrars has increased from 1,340 in 1997 to 2,070 in March 2003 providing a substantial increase in the number of qualified GPs.

The GP Returner Scheme launched in November 2002 provides a clear, supported route back into general practice. Under the scheme returning GPs receive paid, individually tailored refresher training (full- or part-time) a dedicated return co-ordinator with whom they meet regularly, and a contribution towards their professional expenses.

The Golden Hello Scheme offers up to £5,000 to new GPs or those returning to practice from the Retainer Scheme, with up to a further £7,000 if they take up post in an area designated as under-doctored. On 29 November 2002 the scheme was extended to qualified doctors who are not currently working in national health service general practice who return to take up an NHS post.

In November 2002 the Flexible Careers Scheme, which only applied to hospital doctors, was extended to offer GPs new options to work more flexibly, to work part-time and to give them a route back to practice when they want to return to the NHS.

The NHS Delayed Retirement Scheme (formerly Golden Goodbye Scheme) which pays £2,000 per year to GPs between the ages of 60 and 64 inclusive who continue to work in a substantive primary care post.

Increased funding for locum cover for family doctors for maternity, paternity and adoptive leave.

A £22 million training package to increase the number of GP trainers and training practices.

A £55 million package to improve primary care premises in deprived parts of the country including new premises to train and employ more GPs.

Alongside these initiatives there is the new general medical services contract, which will provide GPs with the opportunities and funding to improve their working lives by allowing them to opt out of providing out-of-hours arrangements and additional services. This will make it easier for them to work flexibly and move in and out of salaried and independent contractor status and enable a new portfolio approach to career development which will make it easier for GPs to adapt their career to suit their aspirations.

We are now starting to see significant increases in the number of GPs. In the six months to 31 March 2003, GP numbers grew by 500. 1,240 of the NHS Plan target has now been delivered and we expect to see further increases as these measures take effect.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioner vacancies there were in each primary care trust in 2002 and how many there are now. [127525]

Mr. Hutton: In the 2002 General Practitioner Recruitment Retention and Vacancy Survey, health authorities reported that 2,615 GP vacancies were recorded at some stage during the period March 2001 to February 2002.

Figures for individual primary care trusts are not available because the data for the 2002 survey were returned in aggregate form by the former health authorities that existed at the time.

The 2003 GP Recruitment, Retention and Vacancy Survey will be published later this year.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average GP waiting times were in the Wrekin in each year since 1997. [127580]

Dr. Ladyman: The information is not available in the form requested.

At March 2003, results from a primary care access survey indicated that 94 per cent. of patients in Telford and Wrekin Primary Care Trust were able to be seen by a general practitioner within two days.

Prior to that, on the basis of similar data collected at health authority level, within Shropshire Health Authority, at March 2002, 80 per cent. of patients were able to be seen within two days.

At September 2001, 80 per cent. of patients were able to be seen within two days. This is the earliest date for which these data are available.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the criteria are for GPs to be eligible for a cash payment of up to £125,000 for IT. [127692]

Mr. Hutton: The previous arrangements for the computer reimbursement scheme were detailed in paragraph 58 of the Statement of Fees and Allowances. The scheme allowed for the direct reimbursement of a proportion of the costs incurred by a practitioner, restricted principal, partnership or group practice in purchasing, leasing or upgrading a computer system, and for maintaining the associated hardware and software. Practices were only eligible to claim reimbursement of expenditure on systems which are accredited to national standards defined in Requirements for Accreditation 99 (v1.1 and v1.2).

The new general medical services contract will facilitate the modernisation of information and technology in general practice and support the local health community. Under the contract, new money will be spent providing new systems and upgrading existing systems. In addition, primary care organisations will be responsible for funding the purchase, maintenance, future upgrades and running costs of integrated information technology systems, which includes those used in general practice.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the practices that have received payments for IT; and how much they received. [127693]

Mr. Hutton: There are over 8,700 practices in England. The Department of Health does not collect information on the amounts reimbursed to the individual general practitioner practices for information technology.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the operating systems which are approved by the Department of Health for GPs to receive payments for IT systems. [127694]

Mr. Hutton: Under current arrangements the Department of Health does not accredit operating systems for use by general practitioner practices. However, the national programme for information technology will be defining clear interoperability standards as new integrated care record services are rolled out across the national health service.

The clinical GP systems listed have been accredited against current Requirements for Accreditation (RFA) requirements.

RFA99v1.2:

Blue Bay/SAIC—GPS version 5.4

EMIS—PCS

Protechnic Exeter—Version 19

Healthy Software—Version 5

In Health Solutions—Ganymede version 5.1

Microtest—Practice Manager 2 version 1.7.1

The Phoenix Partnership—System One version 1

RFA99v1.1:

Chime—GP Care Version 4

EMIS—LV5.2 and GV2 version 2

In Practice Systems—Vision Version 3

Seetec—GP Enterprise Version 1.5

Torex Health—Premiere Version 2.2, Premiere Synergy Version 1.0, System 6000 version 3.3 and System 5 version 5.8

Torex Pennine—Visual Phoenix version 2.1

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female GPs have switched to working part-time since 1st July 2002. [127529]

Mr. Hutton: The number of female and male general practitioners who have switched to working part-time since 31 March 2002 is shown in the table.

All practitioners1 working full-time as at 31 March 2002 and part-time as at 30 September 2002 by sex

Numbers (headcount)

	Practitioners	*Female*	*Male*
England Total	320	174	146

[1] All practitioners include GMS unrestricted principals, PMS contracted GPs, PMS salaried GPs, restricted principals, assistants, GP Registrars, Salaried Doctors (paragraph 52 SFA), PMS other and GP Retainers.

Information can only be provided as at 31 March 2002 and 30 September 2002 because these are the dates when the workforce mini census and workforce annual census were carried out respectively.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new *(a)* male and *(b)* female GPs opted to work part-time between 1 January and 30 June in (i) 2002 and (ii) 2003. [127530]

Mr. Hutton: Information can only be provided between 30 September 2001 and 31 March 2002 and 30 September 2002 and 31 March 2003, because there are the dates when the workforce annual census and workforce mini census were carried out.

The number and proportion of new male and female general practitioners (GPs) who opted to work part time between 30 September 2001 and 31 March 2002 are shown in table 1.

The number and proportion of new male and female GPs who opted to work part time between 30 September 2002 and 31 March 2003 are shown in table 2.

Table 1: Unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs)[1] joiners by commitment and sex,between 30 September 2001 and 31 March 2002

	Total	Full-time	Of which	Male	Female	Part-time	Percentages all joiners working part-time	Of which	Male	Percentages male joiners working part-time	Female	Percentages female joiners working part-time
Joiners	800	436		274	164	364	45.5		99	26.5	265	62.1
Of which												
New Joiners	519	305		189	116	214	41.2		50	21	164	58.5
Re-joiners	281	131		85	46	150	53.4		49	36.6	101	68.7

Note:
UPEs include GMS Unrestricted principals, PMS Contracted GPs and PMS salaried GPs.
Source:
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Table 2: Unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs)[1] joiners by commitment and sex, between 30 September 2002 and 31 March 2003 (numbers-headcount)

	Total	Full-time	Of which	Male	Female	Part-time	Percentages all joiners working part-time	Of which	Male	Percentages male joiners working part-time	Female	Percentages Female joiners working part-time
Joiners	977	568		339	229	409	42.0		120	26.0	289	55.7
Of which												
New joiners	596	372		218	154	224	37.6		47	17.7	177	53.5
Re-joiners	381	196		121	75	185	48.5		73	37.6	112	59.8

Note:
UPEs include GMS Unrestricted principals, PMS contracted GPs and PMS salaried GPs.
Source:
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.

Genetially Modified Foods

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has undertaken into the health impact of genetically modified foods. [127738]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Food Standards Agency (FSA) funds two extensive research programmes that underpin the safety assessment of genetically modified foods.

This research is undertaken by independent research scientists and is peer reviewed before final reports are made publicly available through the FSA's library. Details of the research programme are published in the FSA's Research and Surveys Programmes annual report and are available on the FSA website.

Green Burial Sites

Mr. Fabian Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has undertaken into the effect of green burial sites on the welfare of bereaved families. [127183]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department has not undertaken any research into the effects of green burial sites on the welfare of bereaved families.

Health Action Zones

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a report on the progress of Health Action Zones. [127367]

Mr. Hutton: The University of Glasgow was contracted to undertake the evaluation of health action zones. The research team is currently working on the final report for the Department of Health. The intellectual property reights for the findings rest with the contractor and the Department will encourage them to publish.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that health action zones include withdrawal and rehabilitation clinics for people who have been over-medicated and may have severe dependency problems. [127851]

Mr. Hutton: Health action zones (HAZs) were set up to address health inequalities in the most deprived areas of England. It is for the primary care trusts (PCTs) within HAZ areas to decide, with local stakeholders, which services should be provided and how to allocate resources to deliver them. PCTs have a responsibility to ensure that adequate controls are in place to minimise dependency and to treat dependency problems where they occur.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to instruct health action zones to undertake an audit of the *(a)* financial and *(b)* quality of life costs of the adverse effects of psychotropic drugs. [127858]

Ms Rosie Winterton: All medicines are assessed for quality, safety and efficacy prior to the grant of a licence by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), with independent expert advice from the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM). A licence will not be granted unless the MHRA/CSM considers the benefits of treatment outweigh the risks of adverse effects. Once licensed, the MHRA/CSM continue to monitor the safety of medicines in clinical practice and take necessary action to optimise their safe use.

Health action zones were set up to develop local, bottom-up approaches to tackling health inequalities in the 26 most deprived areas of England. It is for the primary care trusts within those health action zones areas to decide with local stakeholders what those approaches will be and how best to allocate resources to deliver them.

Heart By-pass Operations

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many heart by-pass operations have been carried out by the NHS in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and how many were carried out in the same period in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1994, *(d)* 1990 and *(e)* 1986. [127444]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The national service framework for coronary heart disease and NHS Plan targets for an extra 6,000 heart operations by April were met a year early.

The table shows the number of coronary artery by-pass graft (CABG) procedures carried out in 2001 (latest available figures), 2000, 1998, 1994 and 1990. Figures are not available for the period before 1989–90.

	Coronary Artery Bypass Grafts
1989–90	9,404
1993–94	17,351
1997–98	19,816
1999–2000	21,081
2000–01	22,325

Heartburn

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients in England suffered from heartburn in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and what proportion of the population these represent; [127449]

(2) what measures his Department is taking to reduce the number of people who suffer from heartburn. [127452]

Dr. Ladyman: Information on the incidence of individual conditions, such as heartburn, is not collected centrally. It is estimated, however, that around 40 per cent. of the adult population may suffer from dyspepsia. Dyspepsia refers to a spectrum of usually intermittent upper gastrointestinal symptoms.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is currently preparing a guideline on "Dyspepsia: managing adult patients in primary care". The guideline is currently out as a draft for first consultation. This national guideline will provide recommendations and supporting evidence on caring for patients with dyspepsia.

Hepatitis

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hepatitis B carriers there are in the United Kingdom. [127359]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Studies suggest that the prevalence of chronic hepatitis B infection in the population of England is around 0.3 per cent., equivalent to 150,000 hepatitis B carriers.

Information on hepatitis B in Scotland and Wales is available from the Devolved Administrations. While the institutions in Northern Ireland are dissolved, responsibility rests with Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office.

Hip Replacements

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the use of *(a)* bovine derivative substitutes, *(b)* hydroxyapatites and *(c)* coraline derivative substitutes in hip revisions, with special reference to efficacy, duration of use and cost; [127540]

(2) if he will make a statement on his recommendations to the NHS on the use of porous hydroxyapatites for use in hip revisions. [127541]

Mr. Hutton: All these materials are used as artificial bone substitute implants. They have a variety of uses, but in hip replacements they can be used in granular form and moulded in a paste with the patient's blood which is then used to fill the space left if a patient has lost their natural bone (a process which can occur in a failing hip replacement).

These products are regulated in line with the Medical Devices Regulations 2002 (SE2002 No. 618). Under these regulations, the manufacturer is required to place the CE marking on the medical device—unless it is part of a clinical investigation approved by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) or a custom made device—indicating that the medical device meets the essential requirements for safety and design in Annex 1 of Council Directive 93/42/EEC. For the medical devices specified, the manufacturer's declaration will be audited by an independent Notified Body. Any product bearing the CE marking may be placed on the United Kingdom market.

The Department of Health and the MHRA do not collect information on efficacy and costs of these products. Duration of use is a matter for the individual manufacturer of the product.

HIV/AIDS

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what tests are carried out on HIV-infected patients to establish whether they have a drug-resistant strain of the virus. [127441]

Miss Melanie Johnson: There are two kinds of test that can be performed to determine whether an HIV-infected patient has a drug-resistant strain of the virus. Genotypic testing, which involves identifying mutation in the viral genetic material, has been adopted for widespread clinical use and is undertaken by specialist clinical virology laboratories. Mutations are associated with resistance to antiretroviral drugs and this information can be used to predict which drugs are likely to work for a particular individual. Phenotypic testing is more complex, requires high-containment laboratory facilities, and is not routinely available in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people in England were infected with HIV in each of the last five years; [127439]

(2) how many people in England were infected with AIDS in each of the last five years. [127440]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The number of new cases of HIV infection and AIDS diagnosed in England in each of the last five years is shown in the table.

Year of diagnosis	HIV	AIDS
1998	2,615	732
1999	2,872	672
2000	3,608	750
2001	4,725	633
2002[1]	5,234	679

[1] Numbers will rise, particularly for the most recent year, as further reports are received.

Source:

Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre, Health Protection Agency (data to end June 2003)

Home Carers

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has given to local authorities on providing assistance to home carers. [127793]

Dr. Ladyman: Carers are entitled to an assessment to determine their needs as carers and eligibility for support. The Carers Grant, worth £100 million this year, provides money for local councils to provide short breaks for carers to enable them to continue in their caring role. The Grant will continue until at least 2006, during which time it will increase to £185 million to provide extended care and 130,000 further breaks to carers.

Carers are also entitled to cash payments for carers' services to enable them to purchase the type of support they require and promote a better quality of life.

Hospice Movement

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the cost to the hospice movement in financial year 2003–04 of the increase in the level of charges for checks by the Criminal Records Bureau in respect of paid staff; [127400]

(2) if he will provide a grant to hospices to compensate for the recent increase in the level of charges for checks by the Criminal Records Bureau in respect of paid staff. [127401]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Responsibility for paying the fee for a criminal record disclosure rests with the individual applicant, although it is open to the employer to reimburse the cost. The Home Department has placed in the Library a regulatory impact assessment, which assesses the impact of the fee increase across all sectors.

The level of funding agreed is a matter for local discussion and decision. We have made available an additional £50 million per annum for specialist palliative care, including hospices, for the three years beginning 2003–04. This extra £50 million is to help tackle inequalities in access to specialist palliative care to enable the National Health Service to increase their contribution to the cost hospices incur in providing agreed levels of service.

Hospitals

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has had regarding the star rating system. [127377]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Commission for Health Improvement (CHI), which is now responsible for publishing the NHS Star Ratings, has received a small number of queries from trusts seeking clarification over the calculation of their Star Rating. Representations to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health have included a small number of right hon. and hon. Members, members of the public and national health service staff proffering views on the NHS Star Ratings system. These views are being passed to CHI so that they may inform future developments of the star ratings system.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what qualitative basis star ratings for hospital-acquired infections are calculated. [127567]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Two new performance indicators related to hospital acquired infections contributed to the star ratings this July. The first, a methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) improvement score was based on quantitative data from the national mandatory MRSA surveillance system. The second, an infection control procedures indicator was based on a qualitative assessment against the infection control standard. Full details of these indicators are on http://www.ratings.chi.nhs.uk/Trust/Indicator/indicators.asp?trustType=1

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department has in place to reduce incidences of MRSA in NHS hospitals. [127334]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We already have standards to ensure there is a managed environment which minimises the risk of infection to patients, staff and visitors. In addition, infection control procedures and a methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus score are now performance indicators and contributed to the star ratings in July. We are continuing work to improve infection control in hospitals by developing a longer term strategy to reduce health care associated infections, spearheaded by the Chief Medical Officer.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new hospitals have opened in the last three years; and at what cost. [127357]

Mr. Hutton: 35 new hospital building schemes have become operational since July 2000. The schemes and their capital values are shown in the following table:

Scheme	Capital value (£ million)
Dartford and Gravesham	94
Buckinghamshire Hospitals	45
Queen Elizabeth Hospital—Greenwich	96
County Durham and Darlington Acute Hospitals	61
Calderdale and Huddersfield	65
South Manchester University	67
Norfolk and Norwich Health	158
Hereford Hospitals	64
Barnet and Chase Farm	54
Worcestershire Acute	87
County Durham and Darlington Acute Hospitals	48
King's Healthcare	76
Swindon and Marlborough	100
Leeds Community and Mental	47
Bromley Hospitals	118
Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals	22
West Middlesex University Hospital	60
Berkshire Healthcare	30
Rochdale	24

Scheme	Capital value (£ million)
Central Sheffield University Hospitals	24
Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospital	84
Queens Medical Centre—Nottingham University Hospital	17
West Sussex Health and Social Care	22
North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare	28
Oxleas	11
North East London Mental Health	11
Northern Birmingham Mental Health	18
Cornwall Healthcare—Bodmin	10
East London and The City Mental Health—Newham	15
Luton and Dunstable	15
Northumbria Healthcare—Wansbeck	18
Royston Buntingford and Bishop Stortford PCT	15
Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals	13
Northumbria Healthcare—Hexham	29
Swale PCT	14

IT Projects

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the IT projects his Department *(a)* plans to undertake in the next year and *(b)* has undertaken, broken down by (i) expected date of commencement and completion and (ii) cost. [127353]

Mr. Hutton: Information on information technology projects with the Department of Health, costing £100,000 or more, that are planned, under way or are due to be completed in the financial year 2003–04 have been placed in the Library.

Learning Disability Services

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the identification and dissemination of examples of good practice in learning disability services. [127852]

Dr. Ladyman: We have received no such representations but recognise the importance of sharing examples of good practice to help ensure the improvement of services across the country.

Our proposals for improving services for people with learning disabilities, their families and carers are set out in the White Paper "Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century" (Cm 5086), published in March 2001. The White Paper sets out a challenging programme of action which will make a real difference to people's lives.

Our annual report on learning disability, "Making Change Happen" (HC514), published in April 2003, reports progress made in implementing "Valuing People" and contains examples of good practice. The valuing people support team, set up as part of the White Paper implementation programme, has been operating since February 2002. A core component of the support team's work, through publications, conferences, and other events, is the sharing and promoting of good practice among learning disability partnership boards throughout England.

Locums

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many locum doctors there are. [127480]

Mr. Hutton: A locum can be defined as a doctor with a temporary as opposed to substantive contract who temporarily fills vacant positions or covers the work of absent colleagues.

The table shows the number of medical and dental staff with locum contracts working in the national health service as at 30 September 2002.

Hospital, Public Heath Medicine and Community Health Services (HCHS): Medical and dental locum staff

(Headcount)

England as at 30 September 2002	Number
All locums[1]	3,700

[1] HCHS doctors with locum contracts—excludes doctors who also hold a substantive contract.

Note:
Locum data was not collected in the HCHS March 2003 mini census.

Source:
Department of Health 2002 medical and dental locum work force census.

The following table shows the number of general practitioner locums working in the NHS as at 31 March 2003.

General Medical Practitioners[1] who work exclusively as locums, in England, as at 31 March 2003

	Number
Loums[2]	4,644

[1] All practitioners include GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs, PMS Salaried GPs, Restricted Principals, Assistants, GP Registrars, Salaried Doctors (Para 52 SFA), PMS Other, GP Retainers and Flexible Career Scheme GPs.
[2] General Medical Practitioners with locum contracts—excludes doctors who also hold a substantive contract in GP practice.

Source:
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.

Mary Rose Birthing Centre

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what consultations took place with *(a)* local women and their families, *(b)* other service users, *(c)* community representatives and *(d)* NHS organisations before the proposal to close the Mary Rose Birthing Centre was taken; and if he will make a statement; [128307]

(2) if he will make it his policy to reconsider the proposal to close the Mary Rose Birthing Centre at St. Mary's hospital in Portsmouth; and if he will make statement; [128308]

(3) what assessment his Department has made of the proposal to close the community midwife-led maternity service unit at St. Mary's Hospital Portsmouth, and transfer the maternity service to Queen Alexandra hospital; what research has been conducted on the risks to expectant mothers; and if he will make a statement; [128323]

(4) what guidance he has given the Portsmouth Hospital NHS Trust following the report to the Department of Health Children's Taskforce from the Maternity and Neonatal Workforce Group on the proposal by the Trust to close the Mary Rose Birthing Centre; and if he will make a statement; [128324]

(5) what representations he has received on the proposal to close the Mary Rose Birthing Centre in Portsmouth. [128325]

Dr. Ladyman: The future configuration of local maternity services in Portsmouth and South East Hampshire is currently under careful consideration as part of the wider restructuring of local acute services. There are no plans to close the Mary Rose Birthing Centre, but the local national health service is considering the possible relocation of the unit along with the main Consultant-led maternity service at St. Mary's hospital to the new Private Finance Initiative hospital on the Queen Alexandra site. During September and October 2003, the local NHS has a programme of engagement to discuss the proposals with local residents and community representatives.

The Department has received two representations about the future of the unit. I am aware that the hon. Member wrote to my right hon. Friend on 13 August about this issue. The Department has not issued any guidance to NHS trusts following the report from the Maternity and Neonatal Workforce Group to the Children's Taskforce.

Maternity Services

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many births in the NHS were delivered by caesarean section in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will give this figure as a proportion of the total number of births delivered in the NHS. [126999]

Dr. Ladyman: The table shows estimated numbers and percentages of deliveries by caesarean section for years 1997–98 to 2001–02. The information is taken from the data published in National Health Service Maternity Statistics, England: 2001–02. The bulletin, number 2003/09, was published on 16 May 2003. A copy has been placed in the Library and is also available on the Department's website at http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0309.htm.

Caesarean deliveries, NHS hospitals, England

	Estimated numbers of Caesarean deliveries	*Percentage of deliveries that were by Caesarean*
2001–02	119,100	22.0
2000–01	118,200	21.5
1999–2000	116,500	20.6
1998–99	110,300	19.1
1997–98	106,500	18.2

Source:
Department of Health, Statistics Division 3G—Maternity Hospital Episode Statistics

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to respond to the Health Committee's report on the provision of maternity services in England. [127001]

Dr. Ladyman: A response to the Health Committee's report into the provision of maternity services will be made shortly.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many maternity units there are in the United Kingdom; and whether they all include specialist facilities for premature babies. [128113]

Dr. Ladyman: Information on the number of maternity units in the United Kingdom is not held centrally. Information about maternity units in England is collected by trusts and put on the hospital episode statistics system. Each trust may be responsible for one or more large hospitals and possibly several maternity units. Some of these units will have specialist facilities for premature babies.

Information on maternity units in Scotland and Wales is available from the devolved administrations. While the institutions in Northern Ireland are dissolved, responsibility rests with Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding has been made available since 1997 for maternity units; and what measures have been taken to reduce deaths of newborn babies. [128114]

Dr. Ladyman: Expenditure data on maternity services are collected within National Health Service trusts and primary care trusts in England. Information on funding maternity units is not held centrally. However, the table shows national total expenditure on maternity (including in-patients, out-patient and community services), 1997, 1998 to 2001–02.

Hospital & community Health Services Expenditure on Maternity Services—England 1997–98 to 2001–02

Year	*Expenditure on Maternity Services (£)*
2001–02	1,270,961,420
2000–01	1,192,362,905
1999–2000	1,153,864,597
1998–99	1,089,179,652
1997–98	1,053,832,887

Source:
1. Annual Financial returns of NHS Trusts, 1997–98 to 2001–02
2. Annual financial returns of Primary Care Trusts, 2000–01 and 2001–02

The Government have provided additional funding to improve facilities for the care of newborn babies. In 2001–02 and 2002–03 we invested £100 million capital in more than 200 maternity units in England. The money is being used to modernise and refurbish the units and to improve the environment in which care is provided and better to meet the needs of women and their families. All projects are due to be completed this year.

The Government have also provided additional funding in support of those babies who are in need of specialist and intensive care facilities. In 2000 the Government introduced recurrent funding of an additional £5 million to address local difficulties in neonatal intensive care services. An additional £6.5 million was also invested in new and upgraded neonatal intensive care equipment, and an additional £10.5 million for critical care nurse training. A comprehensive review of neonatal intensive care services has been conducted with a view to developing further the strategy for neonatal intensive care across the country, and increased funding has been announced to implement the results. There will be £12 million

revenue funding available this year, increasing to £20 million from next year, and there will also be £20 million available for capital expenditure this year.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the availability of emergency midwives; and what proposals he has to ensure that enough staff are present to provide emergency midwifery services. [128115]

Mr. Hutton: The Government is committed to increasing the number of midwives working in the National Health Service. Our target is clear: we want to see 2,000 more midwives working in the NHS by the end of 2006 than there were in 2000.

In September 2002 there were 680 more midwives working in the NHS than there were in September 2000. We expect there to be further increases, as a result of an increase in the number of people in training and return to practice initiatives.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of the proportion of babies born at home and in hospital for the latest year for which figures available; what midwives pay has been on average in each of the past five years; and whether midwives receive extra payment for providing late night and emergency services. [128116]

Mr. Hutton: Information relating to home and hospital births is collected by the Office of National Statistics. The latest figures available are shown in the table.

Births occurring in hospital, at home and elsewhere 2001 and 2002 in England

Year	*2001*		*2002*	
Births:	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
In hospital	546,070	97.8	547,482	97.7
At home	11,543	2.1	12,055	2.2
Elsewhere[1]	658	0.1	795	0.1
Totals	558,271	100.0	560,332	100.0

Source:
Office for National Statistics
Note:
[1] Elsewhere is usually either a private dwelling which is not the mother's usual residence, or on the way to hospital

From 1 April 2003, midwifery staff directly employed in the National Health Service on national terms and conditions received an above inflation pay increase of 3.225 per cent. Pay has increased across the board for all midwives employed on national terms and conditions by at least 30 per cent in cash terms since 1997.

All midwives and nurses directly employed in the NHS on national terms and conditions are currently paid and graded in accordance with a nationally agreed clinical grading structure which is shared with nurses. Newly qualified midwives enter the clinical grading structure at grade E.

The estimated average earnings of nurses and midwives at grades E to I since 1998 is shown in the table. Average earnings for midwives cannot be identified separately.

Year	*Estimated average earnings £*
1998	21,100
1999	22,600
2000	23,900
2001	24,900
2002	26,000

Source:
Department of Health's staff earnings surveys 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2002.
Notes:
1. The estimate for 2001 is based on the 2000 earnings survey projected forward in line with the April 2001 pay settlement.
2. Figures include allowances and overtime.
3. Figures are rounded to the nearest £100.

Currently, all midwives directly employed in the NHS on national terms and conditions receive pay enhancements where their working patterns fall outside of normal hours. This includes overtime, special duty payments for work performed late at night and allowances for any emergency duty they are called to do. Full details of the rates of pay and relevant allowances for midwives employed on national terms and conditions are contained in the "Nursing and Midwifery Staffs Negotiating Council Conditions of Service and Rates of Pay." A copy has been placed in the Library.

The information in this answer relates only to England. Information relating to home and hospital births and the pay and terms and conditions for midwives in Scotland and Wales is a matter for the devolved administrations. Whilst the institutions in Northern Ireland are dissolved, responsibility rests with Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office.

Medical Records

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Government's policy concerning the addition to medical records of material received from third parties without medical qualifications. [128136]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department of Health does not publish guidelines on what should be recorded in a patient's medical record; the judgment of what is relevant is left to the responsible health care professionals. However, the General Medical Council (GMC) in its 'Good Practice' guidance provides general advice on the use and content of medical records.

At present the patient's total national health service medical record consists of a series of paper sub-records divided according to the organisations where the patient has received health care. This means that a patient could have a record for each hospital and other health organisation he/she has attended as well as a general practitioner record. The health care professionals of each organisation are responsible for compiling and maintaining the medical records.

Should the patient's health care professional judge that some information, from whatever source, could make a contribution to the patient's health care, then it would be appropriate for it to be included in the patient's medical record. The fact the information is contained in the medical record is accepted as having been vetted by health care professionals and relevant to

the patient's health and care. The patient cannot at present ask for information from an external source to be added to the medical record.

Work currently being taken forward by the national programme for information technology will provide an electronic summary record for each patient in England. This record will either hold or provide access to the key information provided by all NHS organisations involved in the patient's care.

A section of this record will be under the patient's control. They will be able to add comments, including information from third parties (with or without medical qualification), to their records to ensure those records will contain the views and information that they wish to have, in addition to the normal information provided by the NHS.

Mental Health

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the hospital budget has been spent on mental health services in each year since 1997. [127333]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Mental health services are provided across a spectrum of hospital and community services, including staff, teams and beds in hospital as well as other settings. Separate data relating to the proportion of hospital budgets alone spent on mental health are not kept. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) on 15 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 227W, concerning spending on mental health care as a percentage of total hospital and community health service expenditure.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will establish an independent inquiry into the treatment of mental health patients from ethnic minority groups. [127361]

Ms Rosie Winterton: We do not consider it necessary to hold an independent inquiry into the treatment of mental health patients from ethnic minority groups.

However, the Department of Health acknowledges that mental health services are not currently fully meeting the needs of people from black and minority ethnic groups and has an extensive programme of work under way and plans that aim to address this issue.

Further information is available from: www.nimhe.org.uk about our programme of current work.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the accessibility of mental health services to ethnic minority groups. [127362]

Ms Rosie Winterton: As part of issuing the report, "Inside Outside", the Department funded a series of consultation events with the black, south Asian, Chinese and Irish communities, to help inform further work on black and minority ethnic mental health. Feedback from groups and from a questionnaire includes their view on accessibility of mental health services. The feedback will be made available and will help to inform the final guidance document to services on black and minority ethnic mental health. The guidance document will be issued for consultation later this year.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have received electro-convulsive therapy in each of the last five years, broken down by *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* ethnic minority group. [127363]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The latest information available on electro-convulsive therapy (ECT) is that contained in the Department of Health's publication, "Statistical Bulletin Electro Convulsive Therapy: Survey Covering the Period from January 2002 to March 2002, England". This was a follow-up to an earlier survey of the period January to March 1999. Both surveys were undertaken to provide data on ECT that are not currently available elsewhere.

The 2002 survey confirmed the continuing downward trend in the number of administrations of ECT. It collected information from national health service and independent sector care settings, including nursing homes, on the total number of administrations of ECT in NHS and independent sector care settings including data on sex, age ethnicity, legal status and method of consent. It found that in the period January to March 2002:

2,300 patients received ECT treatment compared to 2,800 in 1999;

there were 700 male patients receiving treatment, compared with 1,600 female patients;

there were 12,800 administrations of ECT compared to 16,500 in January to March 1999;

the ethnic group with the highest number of patients receiving ECT treatment was 'white', that is white British, Irish or from other white background, with 1,800 of the 2,300 who received ECT treatment;

the ethnic group with the lowest number of patients receiving ECT treatment was the 'multi-ethnic origin' group with six of the 2,300 who received ECT treatment. However, the rates for this and some other ethnic groups were based on very small numbers of patients; and

the spread of the ECT patients among the various ethnic groups was broadly similar to the spread seen in the general population. However, it should be noted the ethnicity category 'not stated' accounted for 18 per cent. of all ECT patients in this survey, more than twice the rate in the 1999 survey. Comparing only those patients receiving ECT whose ethnic origin was reported, 96 per cent. were white, similar to the results from the 1999 survey. However, the proportion of the general population who are white is slightly down to 91 per cent. compared with 92.7 per cent. in 1999. Further information on the ethnicity of ECT patients can be found in Table 8 of the 2002 Survey.

Copies of the 2002 Survey and the earlier 1999 Survey are available in the Library or can be downloaded from the Department of Health's website at: http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/work_health_care.htm#menthealth

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he plans to take over the next 12 months to improve the services for *(a)* ethnic minorities, *(b)* homeless people and *(c)* asylum seekers with mental health difficulties. [127576]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department is continuously seeking to improve mental health services for all, including vulnerable groups such as black and minority ethnic groups, the homeless and asylum seekers with mental health problems.

For black and minority ethnic groups, following the issue of "Inside Outside" earlier this year, the Department will be issuing draft guidance to services

on black and minority ethnic mental health for consultation. This will be in conjunction with a major work programme initiated by the National Institute for Mental Health in England for black and minority ethnic mental health service users.

Information from the adult mental health services mapping database shows that there were 66 homeless mental health teams, including homeless mentally ill initiative teams, in England in March 2003. Further details of these teams are available at http://www.dur.ac.uk/service.mapping/amh2002/queries/.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on mental health provision in Somerset in each year since 1997. [127822]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Figures are not held by English county. The table shows expenditure on mental illness by Somerset health authority and primary care trusts within Somerset.

Somerset health authority area mental illness expenditure

	£000
1997–98	23,273
1998–99	25,431
1999–2000	28,473
2000–01	31,969
2001–02	51,581

Notes:

1. Expenditure relates to the commissioning of secondary care mental illness only.
2. Mental illness expenditure includes expenditure by the health authority and primary care trusts on behalf of other NHS bodies. This is a particular factor in the increase between 2000–01 to 2001–02 for Somerset.

Sources:

Health authority audited accounts 1997–98 to 1998–99.
Health authority audited summarisation forms 1999–2000 to 2001–02.
Primary care trust audited summarisation schedules 2000–01 and 2001–02.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what mental health facilities exist for asylum seekers in *(a)* Bedfordshire and Luton Community NHS Trust, *(b)* Black County Mental Health NHS Trust, *(c)* Buckinghamshire NHS Trust, *(d)* Camden and Islington Mental Health and Social Care Trust, *(e)* Central and North West London Mental Health NHS Trust, *(f)* Community Health Sheffield NHS Trust, *(g)* Cornwall Partnership NHS Trust, *(h)* Derbyshire Mental Health Services NHS Trust, *(i)* East London and the City Mental Health NHS Trust, *(j)* East Sussex County Healthcare NHS Trust, *(k)* Lancashire Care NHS Trust, *(l)* Leeds Mental Health Teaching NHS Trust, *(m)* Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland Mental Health, *(n)* Norfolk Mental Health Care Trust, *(o)* Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Trust, *(p)* Pennine Care NHS Trust, *(q)* Somerset Partnership NHS and Social Care Trust, *(r)* South Birmingham Mental Health NHS Trust, *(s)* South West London and St George's Mental Health NHS Trust, *(t)* South West Yorkshire Mental Health NHS Trust, *(u)* Surrey Hampshire Borders NHS Trust, *(v)* Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust and *(w)* Tees and North East Yorkshire NHS Trust; and what plans are in place to improve facilities in these trusts in 2004–05; [127968]

(2) what facilities exist for ethnic minorities with mental health difficulties in *(a)* Bedfordshire and Luton Community NHS Trust, *(b)* Black County Mental Health NHS Trust, *(c)* Buckinghamshire NHS Trust, *(d)* Camden and Islington Mental Health and Social Care Trust, *(e)* Central and North West London Mental Health NHS Trust, *(f)* Community Health Sheffield NHS Trust, *(g)* Cornwall Partnership NHS Trust, *(h)* Derbyshire Mental Health Services NHS Trust, *(i)* East London and the City Mental Health NHS Trust, *(j)* East Sussex County Healthcare NHS Trust, *(k)* Lancashire Care NHS Trust, *(l)* Leeds Mental Health Teaching NHS Trust, *(m)* Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland Mental Health, *(n)* Norfolk Mental Health NHS Trust, *(o)* Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Trust, *(p)* Pennine Care NHS Trust, *(q)* Somerset Partnership NHS and Social Care Trust, *(r)* South Birmingham Mental Health NHS Trust, *(s)* South West London and St George's Mental Health NHS Trust, *(t)* South West Yorkshire Mental Health NHS Trust, *(u)* Surrey Hampshire Borders NHS Trust, *(v)* Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust and *(w)* Tees and North East Yorkshire NHS Trust and what plans are in place for 2004–05 to improve facilities for ethnic minorities. [127979]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Data are not available in the requested format.

The Department is continuously seeking to improve mental health services for all, including vulnerable groups such as black and minority ethnic groups, the homeless and asylum seekers with mental health problems.

For black and minority ethnic groups, following the issue of "Inside Outside" earlier this year, the Department will be issuing draft guidance to services on black and minority ethnic mental health for consultation. This will be in conjunction with a major work programme initiated by the National Institute for Mental Health in England for black and minority ethnic mental health service users.

Results of the adult mental health services mapping exercise, which provides detailed information on the numbers, functioning and composition of services by local implementation team and strategic health authority boundaries, are available at hhtp://www.dur.ac.uk/service.mapping/amh/index.php.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, (1) how many early intervention teams have been established in *(a)* Bedfordshire and Luton Community NHS Trust, *(b)* Black County Mental Health NHS Trust, *(c)* Buckinghamshire NHS Trust, *(d)* Camden and Islington Mental Health and Social Care Trust, *(e)* Central and North West London Mental Health Trust, *(f)* Community Health Sheffield NHS Trust, *(g)* Cornwall Partnership NHS Trust, *(h)* Derbyshire Mental Health Services NHS Trust, *(i)* East London and the City Mental Health NHS Trust, *(j)* East Sussex County Healthcare NHS Trust, *(k)* Lancashire Care NHS Trust, *(l)* Leeds Mental Health Teaching NHS Trust, *(m)* Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland Mental Health, *(n)* Norfolk Mental Health Care Trust, *(o)* Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Trust,

(p) Pennine Care NHS Trust, *(q)* Somerset Partnership NHS and Social Care Trust, *(r)* South Birmingham Mental Health NHS Trust, *(s)* South West London and St. Georges Mental Health NHS Trust, *(t)* South West Yorkshire Mental Health NHS Trust, *(u)* Surrey Hampshire Borders NHS Trust, *(v)* Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust and *(w)* Tees and North East Yorkshire NHS Trust. [127973]

(2) how many mental health crisis resolution teams have been established in *(a)* Bedfordshire and Luton Community NHS Trust, *(b)* Black County Mental Health NHS Trust, *(c)* Buckinghamshire NHS Trust, *(d)* Camden and Islington Mental Health and Social Care Trust, *(e)* Central and North West London Mental Health NHS Trust, *(f)* Community Health Sheffield NHS Trust, *(g)* Cornwall Partnership NHS Trust, *(h)* Derbyshire Mental Health Services NHS Trust, *(i)* East London and the City Mental Health NHS Trust, *(j)* East Sussex County Healthcare NHS Trust, *(k)* Lancashire Care NHS Trust, *(l)* Leeds Mental Health Teaching NHS Trust, *(m)* Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland Mental Health, *(n)* Norfolk Mental Health NHS Trust, *(o)* Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Trust, *(p)* Pennine Care NHS Trust, *(q)* Somerset Partnership NHS and Social Care Trust, *(r)* South Birmingham Mental Health NHS Trust, *(s)* South West London and St. George's Mental Health NHS Trust, *(t)* South West Yorkshire Mental Health NHS Trust, *(u)* Surrey Hampshire Borders NHS Trust, *(v)* Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust and *(w)* Tees and North East Yorkshire NHS Trust. [127977]

(3) how many mental health crisis resolution teams offer 24 hours cover in *(a)* Bedfordshire and Luton Community NHS Trust, *(b)* Black County Mental Health NHS Trust, *(c)* Buckinghamshire NHS Trust, *(d)* Camden and Islington Mental Health and Social Care Trust, *(e)* Central and North West London Mental Health NHS Trust, *(f)* Community Health Sheffield NHS Trust, *(g)* Cornwall Partnership NHS Trust, *(h)* Derbyshire Mental Health Services NHS Trust, *(i)* East London and the City Mental Health NHS Trust, *(j)* East Sussex County Healthcare NHS Trust, *(k)* Lancashire Care NHS Trust, *(l)* Leeds Mental Health Teaching NHS Trust, *(m)* Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland Mental Health, *(n)* Norfolk Mental Health NHS Trust, *(o)* Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Trust, *(p)* Pennine Care NHS Trust, *(q)* Somerset Partnership NHS and Social Care Trust, *(r)* South Birmingham Mental Health NHS Trust, *(s)* South West London and St. George's Mental Health NHS Trust, *(t)* South West Yorkshire Mental Health NHS Trust, *(u)* Surrey Hampshire Borders NHS Trust, *(v)* Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust and *(w)* Tees and North East Yorkshire NHS Trust. [127978]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Data are not available in the requested format.

Results of the adult mental health services mapping exercise, which provides detailed indormation on the numbers, functioning and composition of crisis resolution and early intervention teams by local implementation team and strategic health authority boundaries, are available at www.dur.ac.uk/service.mapping/amh/index.php.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what facilities exist for homeless people with mental health needs in *(a)* Bedfordshire and Luton Community NHS Trust, *(b)* Black County Mental Health NHS Trust, *(c)* Buckinghamshire NHS Trust, *(d)* Camden and Islington Mental Health and Social Care Trust, *(e)* Central and North West London Mental Health NHS Trust, *(f)* Community Health Sheffield NHS Trust, *(g)* Cornwall Partnership NHS Trust, *(h)* Derbyshire Mental Health Services NHS Trust, *(i)* East London and the City Mental Health NHS Trust, *(j)* East Sussex County Healthcare NHS Trust, *(k)* Lancashire Care NHS Trust, *(l)* Leeds Mental Health Teaching NHS Trust, *(m)* Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland Mental Health, *(n)* Norfolk Mental Health NHS Trust, *(o)* Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Trust, *(p)* Pennine Care NHS Trust, *(q)* Somerset Partnership NHS and Social Care Trust, *(r)* South Birmingham Mental Health NHS Trust, *(s)* South West London and St. George's Mental Health NHS Trust, *(t)* South West Yorkshire Mental Health NHS Trust, *(u)* Surrey Hampshire Borders NHS Trust, *(v)* Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust and *(w)* Tees and North East Yorkshire NHS Trust; and what plans are in place to improve facilities for the homeless in 2004–05. [127974]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Data are not available in the requested format.

The Department of Health provides services for rough sleepers with mental illness through the homeless mentally ill initiative. 32 local authorities will continue to receive support.

It may also be helpful to know that the adult mental health services mapping database shows that there were 66 homeless mental health teams, including homeless mentally ill initiative teams, in England in March 2003. Further details of these teams are available at http://www.dur.ac.uk/service.mapping/amh2002/queries/

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether there are women-only mental health services in *(a)* Bedfordshire and Luton Community NHS Trust, *(b)* Black County Mental Health NHS Trust, *(c)* Buckinghamshire NHS Trust, *(d)* Camden and Islington Mental Health and Social Care Trust, *(e)* Central and North West London Mental Health NHS Trust, *(f)* Community Health Sheffield NHS Trust, *(g)* Cornwall Partnership NHS Trust, *(h)* Derbyshire Mental Health Services NHS Trust, *(i)* East London and the City Mental Health NHS Trust, *(j)* East Sussex County Healthcare NHS Trust, *(k)* Lancashire Care NHS Trust, *(l)* Leeds Mental Health Teaching NHS Trust, *(m)* Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland Mental Health, *(n)* Norfolk Mental Health Care NHS Trust, *(o)* Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Trust, *(p)* Pennine Care NHS Trust, *(q)* Somerset Partnership NHS and Social Care Trust, *(r)* South Birmingham Mental Health NHS Trust, *(s)* South West London and St George's Mental Health NHS Trust, *(t)* South West Yorkshire Mental Health NHS Trust, *(u)* Surrey Hampshire Borders NHS Trust, *(v)* Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust and *(w)* Tees and North East Yorkshire NHS Trust. [127975]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Data are not available in the requested format.

Results of the adult mental health services mapping exercise contains information on women-only services and is available at http://www.dur.ac.uk/service.mapping/amh/index.php.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the level of provision of child and adolescent mental health services in *(a)* Bedfordshire and Luton Community NHS Trust, *(b)* Black County Mental Health NHS Trust, *(c)* Buckinghamshire NHS Trust, *(d)* Camden and Islington Mental Health and Social Care Trust, *(e)* Central and North West London Mental Health NHS Trust, *(f)* Community Health Sheffield NHS Trust, *(g)* Cornwall Partnership NHS Trust, *(h)* Derbyshire Mental Health Services NHS Trust, *(i)* East London and the City Mental Health NHS Trust, *(j)* East Sussex County Healthcare NHS Trust, *(k)* Lancashire Care NHS Trust, *(l)* Leeds Mental Health Teaching NHS Trust, *(m)* Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland Mental Health, *(n)* Norfolk Mental Health NHS Trust, *(o)* Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Trust, *(p)* Pennine Care NHS Trust, *(q)* Somerset Partnership NHS and Social Care Trust, *(r)* South Birmingham Mental Health NHS Trust, *(s)* South West London and St. George's Mental Health NHS Trust, *(t)* South West Yorkshire Mental Health NHS Trust, *(u)* Surrey Hampshire Borders NHS Trust, *(v)* Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust and *(w)* Tees and North East Yorkshire NHS Trust. [127976]

Dr. Ladyman: Systematic mapping of local child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) provision across England was launched last year and it is intended to repeat this annually. This will provide detailed information on service provision, service activity levels and expenditure on CAMHS by provider trust and by local authority and primary care trust commissioners. Data currently available can be found on the dedicated website at www.dur.ac.uk/service.mapping/CAMH/.

The Government's strategy for the development of CAMHS, initiated in 1999, has made significant progress in improving the overall quality and accessibility of local services for children and young people with mental health problems. Our current central investment programme of £250 million over the coming three years aims to help secure comprehensive CAMHS in all areas by 2006 in line with the objectives contained in "Improvement, Expansion, Reform—the Priorities and Planning Framework 2003/2006" published by the Department in October 2002.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide a breakdown of expenditure on mental health provision in each health authority/PCT area in England in each year since 1990. [127985]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Breakdown of expenditure on commissioning of secondary care mental illness services from 1992–93 to 2001–02, which is the latest year for which figures are available, has been placed in the Library. Data are not available for 1990–91 and 1991–92 data have not been included because of concerns over its quality.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many primary care mental health workers have been employed by *(a)* West Sussex Health and Social Care NHS Trust and *(b)* all mental health trusts; [127549]

(2) how many primary care mental health workers are employed by *(a)* Bedfordshire and Luton Community NHS Trust, *(b)* Black County Mental Health NHS Trust, *(c)* Buckinghamshire NHS Trust, *(d)* Camden and Islington Mental Health and Social Care Trust, *(e)* Central and North West London Mental Health NHS Trust, *(f)* Community Health Sheffield NHS Trust, *(g)* Cornwall Partnership NHS Trust, *(h)* Derbyshire Mental Health Services NHS Trust, *(i)* East London and the City Mental Health NHS Trust, *(j)* East Sussex County Healthcare NHS Trust, *(k)* Lancashire Care NHS Trust, *(l)* Leeds Mental Health Teaching NHS Trust, *(m)* Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland Mental Health, *(n)* Norfolk Mental Health Care Trust, *(o)* Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Trust, *(p)* Pennine Care NHS Trust, *(q)* Somerset Partnership NHS and Social Care Trust, *(r)* South Birmingham Mental Health NHS Trust, *(s)* South West London and St George's Mental Health NHS Trust, *(t)* South West Yorkshire Mental Health NHS Trust, *(u)* Surrey Hampshire Borders NHS Trust, *(v)* Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust and *(w)* Tees and North East Yorkshire NHS Trust. [127969]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The NHS Plan set out that one thousand new graduate primary care workers trained in brief therapy techniques of proven effectiveness will be recruited to help general practitioners manage and treat common mental health problems. The target date set for local services through priorities and planning guidance is December 2004; training courses have just been established and arrangements to monitor recruitment are currently in hand. This means that the information requested about the employment by specialist trusts of new graduate workers is not yet available.

However, it may be helpful to point out that our guidance for local services on recruitment suggests primary care trusts, rather than specialised trusts, are likely to be the lead employers. A copy of this guidance may be found on the Department's web site at www.doh.gov.uk/mentalhealth.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what improvements the Government is planning for mental health services in England. [127550]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government's agenda for modernising mental health services in England includes a modern service framework, which sets national standards for the delivery of modern services; a thorough review of the legislative basis for mental health care to reflect modern patterns of treatment and care; and significant additional investment of over £300 million to support the delivery of these targets and services.

More detailed information about the mental health modernisation programme can be found on our website at www.doh.gov.uk/mentalhealth. However, to summarise briefly, the programme includes action to reduce suicide rate and deaths by undetermined causes by 20 per cent. by 2010; reduce the duration of untreated

psychosis to a service median of less than three months, (individual maximum less than six months) and providing support for the first three years for all young people who develop a first episode of psychosis by 2004; offer 24-hour crisis resolution to all eligible patients by 2005; deliver assertive outreach to the 20,000 adult patients with severe mental illness and complex problems who regularly disengage from services by December 2003; increase breaks available for carers and strengthening carer support and networks to the benefit nationally of approximately 165,000 carers of people on the care programme approach by 2004; improve mental health care in prisons so that all prisoners with severe mental illness have a care plan by April 2004 (approximately 5,000 prisoners nationally) and ensure appropriate use of secure and forensic facilities by 2004, contributing to the national target of moving 400 patients from high secure hospitals by 2004.

The Department aims to expand the mental health workforce by employing 1,000 new graduate workers in primary care, 500 community mental health "Gateway" workers, 700 more staff to support carers, 300 prison in-reach staff, 400 staff to support secure step-down by 2004; and 300 extra prison in-reach staff, 500 community development workers for black and minority ethnic communities, 200 staff and six outreach teams for personality disorder and training of 3,000 support, time, recovery, "STR" workers by 2006.

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The Department is also committed to ensuring that, by April 2004, protocols are in place across all health and social care systems for the care and management of older people with mental health problems; and that all child and adolescent mental health services provide comprehensive service including mental health promotion and early intervention by 2006.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what level of funding per capita is being spent by *(a)* Adur, Arun and Worthing primary care trust and *(b)* West Sussex Health and Social Care NHS Trust on services for people with mental health difficulties in the current financial year. [127551]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The latest information for 2002–03 on the level of spend per capita in Adur, Arun and Worthing Primary Care Trust will be available in the autumn. Information for the current financial year is not available. The Department of Health does not collect the information requested at National Health Service trust level.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans for improvement his Department has for provision of respite breaks for carers of those with mental health difficulties. [127552]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The NHS Plan set a target for 2004 that 700 more staff will be recruited to increase the breaks available for carers and to strengthen carer support networks. In pursuance of this target, all regular carers of people with mental health problems will have been identified, received an assessment and have their own care support plans by 2004 and local support networks for these carers will have been developed. The statutory and voluntary sectors currently provide support to carers, and the Department of Health has developed a service specification for carers; support services, including respite breaks, against which we will measure progress.

Carers' Grant, introduced in 1999, has provided an extra £225 million over the past four years to increase the number of short breaks for carers to enable them to continue in their caring role. In recognition of its importance to carers, it has been extended for a further three years to 2005–06, by which time it will be worth £185 million to provide extended care and 130,000 further breaks to carers.

Carers' grant funds can appropriately be used to provide breaks for carers of adults with mental health problems to help meet objectives set out in the mental health national service framework.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to end the use of adult mental health units for mentally ill children. [128616]

Dr. Ladyman: Children and young people who require in-patient mental health care should receive it in a unit suitable for their age and development. This would normally be in a ward or unit designated for their age group, but in certain cases an adult ward may be a necessary short term alternative for some young people, depending upon the nature and urgency of their mental health need.

The children's national service framework (NSF) will be setting out standards for child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). A sub-group has been established to look at the specific needs of children and young people who may require in-patient services. The recommendations of this group will help to inform the mental health component of the children's NSF.

We are also making a substantial additional investment, some £250 million over three years, to improve CAMHS. This will assist the service to meet the new capacity assumptions set out in the Department's Priorities and Planning Framework, particularly the expectation that all areas will provide a comprehensive CAMHS by 2006.

Methylphenidate

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of children prescribed methylphenidate for severe attention deficit hyperactivity disorder have been regularly monitored to assess improvement in the last year. [127096]

Dr. Ladyman: This information is not collected centrally. In 2000 the National Institute for Clinical Excellence looked at the use of methylphenidate in treating attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Among other recommendations it concluded that:

Methylphenidate should be used as part of a comprehensive treatment programme for children with a diagnosis of severe ADHD;

Children on drug therapy should receive regular monitoring;

Methylphenidate should be discontinued if improvement of symptoms is not observed after appropriate dose adjustment over one month; and

Treatment should be initiated by specialists but general practitioners may be involved in continued prescribing and monitoring under shared care arrangements.

Microbiology Services

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* Health Protection Agency and *(b)* NHS laboratories which are providing microbiology services for food, water and environmental testing. [127684]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The following Health Protection Agency (HPA) laboratories provide food, water and environmental testing services to local authorities in England:

London Food and Water and Environmental Microbiology Laboratory;

Wessex Environmental Microbiology Services, Southampton;

West Midlands Health Protection Agency Regional Microbiology Laboratory, Birmingham;

North East Health Protection Agency Regional Microbiology Laboratory, Newcastle;

Yorkshire and the Humber Health Protection Agency Regional Microbiology Laboratory, Leeds;

South West Health Protection Agency Regional Microbiology Laboratory, Bristol.

The HPA also directly manage the following units in National Health Service trust laboratories which provide food, water and environmental testing services to local authorities:

Kent Environmental Microbiology Services, Ashford;

The Sussex and Surrey Environmental Microbiology Service, Brighton;

Food, Water and Environmental Laboratory, Chelmsford;

Reading Environmental Microbiology Services.

The following NHS trusts provide food, water and environmental testing services to local authorities, as commissioned by the HPA in accordance with service level agreements:

Carlisle Hospitals NHS Trust;

Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Trust;

Gloucestershire Royal NHS Trust;

Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust;

James Cook University Hospital NHS Trust;

Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust;

Norfolk and Norwich University Hospitals NHS Trust;

Northern Lincolnshire and Good Hospitals NHS Trust;

Preston Acute Hospitals NHS Trust;

Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust;

[1]Queens Medical Centre, University Hospital NHS Trust, Nottingham;

Royal Cornwall Hospital NHS Trust;

Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare NHS Trust;

Royal Shrewsbury Hospital NHS Trust;

Royal Hull Hospitals NHS Trust;

Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust;

University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust;

University Hospitals Leicester NHS Trust;

University Hospital of North Staffordshire NHS Trust.

[1] This laboratory provides water and environmental services. Food testing services in this area are provided by the Northern Lincolnshire and Goole Hospitals NHS Trust.

This list relates to services to local authorities. In addition, many other NHS trusts undertake limited testing on their own environmental and water samples for hospital infection control purposes.

Mid-Essex Hospital NHS Trust

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* hospital nurse and *(b)* consultant vacancies there are in the Mid-Essex Hospital NHS Trust. [127471]

Dr. Ladyman: The information is shown in the table.

Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 2003, vacancies in Mid-Essex Hospital Services Trust three month vacancy rates, numbers and staff in post

Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	*England*	*of which: RQ8 Mid-Essex Hospital Service NHS Trust*
March 2003		
Three month vacancy rate (percentage)	2.9	0.8
Three month vacancy number	7,967	7
September 2002		
Staff in post (whole-time equivalent)	279,287	872
Staff in post (headcount)	346,537	1,237

Notes:
1. Three month vacancy information is as at 31 March 2003.
2. Three month vacancies are vacancies which Trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole-time equivalents).
3. Three month Vacancy Rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post.
4. Three month Vacancy Rates are calculated using staff in post from the Vacancy Survey, March 2003.
5. Nursing staff in post data are from the Non-Medical Workforce Census, September 2002.
6. Consultant staff in post data are from the Medical and Dental March 2003 Mini-census.
7. Vacancy and staff in post numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Sources:
Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 2003.
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census, September 2002.
Department of Health Medical and Dental March 2003 Mini-census.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* general practitioner and *(b)* practice nurse vacancies there are in the Mid-Essex Hospital Trust area. [127437]

Dr. Ladyman: The Department of Health first carried out a survey into GP recruitment, retention and vacancies in 2000. The information was collected from health authorities. The latest published data are for 2001–02.

The information available for Essex covers all vacancies outstanding at any time in the 12-month period between 1 March 2001 and 28 February 2002. Essex health authority and South Essex health authority each had 46 general practitioner vacancies which were outstanding at some time in this 12-month period.

Information on practice nurse vacancies is not collected centrally.

Midwives

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole-time equivalent midwives worked in the NHS in 2001–02; and how many registered midwives worked in the NHS in 2001–02. [127520]

Mr. Hutton: The non-medical work force census as at 30 September 2001, the mid-point of 2001–02, shows that 18,048 whole-time equivalent midwives and 23,075 midwives (headcount) were working in the national health service.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the ratio of midwives in post to the total number of births was in *(a)* England and *(b)* each NHS maternity unit in each year since 1996–97. [128154]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the ratio of midwives to number of deliveries in England and by health authority area for each year between 1996–97 and 2001–02 has been placed in the Library. Reliable information by maternity unit or organisation is not available.

Ministerial Responsibilities

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which Minister is responsible for *(a)* complementary medicines, *(b)* nutrition, *(c)* the Health Protection Agency, *(d)* arthritis and *(e)* obesity. [127739]

Ms Rosie Winterton: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Public Health is responsible for complementary medicines, nutrition, the Health Protection Agency and obesity.

My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State is responsible for arthritis.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times Ministers in his Department have travelled abroad at public expense since March 2002; what countries they have visited; and what the total cost of each visit was. [127476]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Since March 2002, Ministers have travelled abroad to the United States of America, Belgium on three occasions, Italy, Luxembourg, Mexico, Norway and Switzerland.

The total costs of these visits are shown in the table:

Destination		*Costs £*
United States of America		5,892
Belgium	1.	416
	2.	1,170
	3.	306
Italy		944
Luxembourg		545
Mexico		10,520
Norway		1,075
Switzerland		668

MMR Vaccine

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the take up has been of the MMR vaccine in *(a)* Somerset and *(b)* Dorset in each of the last five years. [127771]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information about immunisation rates for measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) for children in the Somerset Health Authority and Dorset health authority by their second birthday and by their fifth birthday for the last five years is shown in the table.

Percentage of children immunised against MMR

	Somerset Health Authority			*Dorset Health Authority*		
		by their 5th birthday[1]			*by their 5th birthday*[1]	
	by their 2nd birthday	*first dose*	*first and second dose*	*by their 2nd birthday*	*first dose*	*second dose*
1997–98	90	-	-	93	-	-
1998–99	91	-	-	90	-	-
1999–2000	90	96	87	86	95	83
2000–01	90	96	86	78	95	78
2001–02	88	95	85	82	93	73

Note:
[1] Information about uptake at age five was collected for the first time in 1999–2000.
Source:
Department of Health, Statistics Division SD3G, COVER data.

MRI Scanners

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many MRI scanners are available to patients in Somerset; where they are located; and how old each scanner is. [127823]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There are two magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scanners located within the Somerset area, as shown in the table. In addition, patients in Somerset have access to MRI scanners located within neighbouring trusts as listed.

MRI scanners available to patients in Somerset

National health service trust	*Hospital*	*Year installed*
Somerset area trusts		
East Somerset	Yeovil district hospital	1995
Taunton and Somerset	Taunton and Somerset hospital	2001
Neighbouring trusts		
The Royal United hospital	Royal United hospital, Bath	1996
The North Bristol	Frenchay hospital, Bristol (two scanners)	1994 and 2002
	Southmead hospital, Bristol	2000
United Bristol Healthcare	Bristol Royal Infirmary (two scanners)	1992 and 2002
	Bristol Haematology and Oncology Centre	1996
The Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare	Royal Devon and Exeter hospital, Wonford	1995

National Fruit Scheme

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evaluation of the National Fruit Scheme has been completed; and when he will publish the results. [128232]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Evaluation of the National School Fruit Scheme pilots was carried out by the Department of Health in 2000 and 2001 to examine the practicalities of operating the scheme within schools and the logistics of the supply and distribution arrangements. The results of this were published in March 2002 in a summary document, "National School Fruit Scheme Evaluation Summary".

Further ongoing evaluation has been conducted by the Department on the practicalities of implementing the Food Dudes programme in large numbers of schools and on the practicalities of introducing different produce types including carrots and tomatoes. The Department is considering the most appropriate format for publication of these further evaluations. In addition, the New Opportunities Fund has recently commissioned an evaluation of the dietary impact of the scheme.

New Hospitals

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which foreign companies have submitted bids to *(a)* build, *(b)* staff and *(c)* run new hospital establishments; and which health trusts (i) have invited bids and (ii) plan to invite bids in the next year. [127917]

Mr. Hutton: No information is held centrally regarding the country in which bidders on new hospital establishments are either registered or owned.

Procurement for standard hospital buildings/facilities can be broken up into two categories: Private Finance Initiative (PFI), including PFI build and PFI Diagnosis and Treatment Centres (DTCs) and publicly funded, comprising the DTC programme and ProCure21 Initiative (ProCure21). Under ProCure21, the capital spend of £1.2 billion per year will be divided between a group of pre-tendered Principal Supply Chain Partners.

Under the PFI, procurement timetables are held centrally only for major prioritised schemes (capital value over £20 million).

Listed below are all schemes that have invited bids and are currently in procurement with a capital value of £20 million or over.

Barts & the London NHS Trust
University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust
North West London Hospitals NHS Trust
Mid Yorkshire Hospital NHS Trust
North Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust
Salford Royal Hospitals NHS Trust
Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust
Lewisham Hospital NHS Trust
St Helens and Knowsley Hospitals NHS Trust
Oxford Radcliffe Hospital NHS Trust
Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust
Tameside and Glossop Acute Services NHS Trust
Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Trust
University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust
University Hospital of North Staffordshire NHS Trust
United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust
Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust
Central Manchester Healthcare/Manchester Childrens Hospital NHS Trust
Newcastle Upon Tyne NHS Trust
University of Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust
Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust
Southern Derbyshire NHS Trusts

Listed below are trusts that are currently timetabled to invite bids by advertising in the *Official Journal of the European Communities* (OJEC) within the next calendar year.

Walsall Hospitals NHS Trust
Whipps Cross University Hospital NHS Trust
St Mary's Hospital NHS Trust
Peterborough Hospitals NHS Trust
Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust
Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust
South Devon Healthcare NHS Trust
Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust
Essex Rivers Healthcare NHS Trust
Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust
The Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals NHS Trust

DTCs

Dudley Hospitals Group
Swindon NHS Trust
Hinchingbrooke, Huntingdon

The following is a list of publicly funded schemes over £20 million that are currently in the procurement stages.

DTCs

Princess Alexandra NHS Trust, Harlow

Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen NHS Trust

Independent Sector DTCs

Eleven trusts that published OJEC advertisements in December 2002 with a capital value of £20 million and above are:

Basildon and Thurrock University Hospitals NHS Trust

North Bradford Primary Care Trust

Burton Hospitals NHS Trust

Nottingham City Primary Care Trust

Daventry and South Northants Primary Care Trust

Greater Manchester Strategic Health Authority (on its own behalf and on behalf of other NHS bodies)

Mendip Primary Care Trust

Plymouth Primary Care Trust

Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital Trust

Bristol South and West Primary Care Trust

South Gloucestershire Primary Care Trust

ProCure21

The trusts in ProCure21 with schemes with a capital value of £20 million and above are:

Royal Orthopaedic Hospital

Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre NHS Trust

Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals

Shropshire County PCT

National Blood Service

The Newcastle Upon Tyne NHS Trust

Stockport NHS Trust

Diabetes

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are employed directly in management of diabetes within the NHS. [127650]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Of the staff directly involved in the management of diabetes, the workforce census only separately identifies the medical speciality of endocrinology and diabetes mellitus.

As at 31 March 2003, there were 473 hospital medical consultants within the speciality. This represents an increase of 62 per cent. since September 1997.

NHS (Ethnic Minorities)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are in place to ensure equal access to the delivery of services within the NHS for ethnic minority groups. [127385]

Mr. Hutton: The Department is committed to transforming the national health service so that it produces faster, fairer services with equity of access for all. The creation of more equal access for black and minority ethnic people is an integral and vital aspect of the Department's programme of investment and reform.

The Department is taking action at a number of levels to ensure equal access to NHS services.

A primary care trust (PCT) transformational change programme has been jointly sponsored by the Department, the national primary and care trust development programme and Manchester Central PCT aimed at promoting excellence on race equality among PCTs including improving access to services for minority ethnic people.

A core group of strategic health authority (SHA) chief executives have convened to undertake work to provide practical steps to help SHAs deliver the race equality agenda and improve access for minority ethnic communities.

The Department is committed to the collection of ethnic origin information using the 2001 Census categories as part of the process of monitoring access to services within the NHS.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide a breakdown by ethnic minority working within the NHS. [127719]

Mr. Hutton: The following table shows the percentage of medical, dental and non-medical staff by ethnic category working in the national health service as at September 2002.

Hospital, public health medicine and community health services (HCHS): Medical, dental and non-medical[1] staff by ethnic category

England, as at 30 September 2002		*Numbers (percentages)*
All staff		100.0
2001 Population Census Ethnic Group Categories	All ethnic groups	73.1
	White	58.8
	Black or Black British	2.3
	Asian or Asian British	3.1
	Chinese	0.3
	Mixed	0.6
	Any other ethnic group	1.0
	Not Stated	7.0
Earlier Ethnic Group Categories	All Ethnic Groups	26.9
	White	23.7
	Black	0.7
	Asian	1.4
	Any other ethnic group	0.5
	Not Stated	0.6

Notes:

1. The ethnic breakdown of non medical staff is estimated from the 66 per cent. of HCHS organisation that reported 90 per cent. or more valid ethnic codes on the September 2002 census.

2. From 1 April 2001, newly appointed staff have been asked to classify themselves using the ethnic categories listed in the 2001 population census. Existing staff will be reclassified over time but data returns currently include a mixture of 2001 categories and older information based on 1991 population census categories.

Source:

Department of Health medical and dental workforce census. Department of Health non-medical workforce census.

NHS (Health and Safety)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are employed in management of health and safety within the NHS. [127655]

Mr. Hutton: This information is not held centrally by the Department of Health. The National Audit Office report, "A Safer Place to Work—Improving the Management of Health and Safety Risks to Staff in NHS Trusts", reported that 95 per cent. of national health service trusts have a competent person(s) to lead on health and safety matters and that the remaining 5 per cent. of trusts had a vacancy to fill.

NHS Staff

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people are employed in information technology within the NHS, broken down by trust; [127649]

(2) how many people are employed in risk management within the NHS; [127651]

(3) how many people are employed within equipment purchasing within the NHS; [127652]

(4) how many people are employed in patient complaints within the NHS. [127654]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not separately available, staff employed in information technology, risk management, and equipment purchasing are included in the broader category of "administrative staff employed in central functions" and patient complaints staff are included in "support to doctors and nurses".

As at September 2002, there were 85,706 administrative staff employed in central functions and 26,302 support workers to doctors and nurses.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many administrators were employed in the NHS in each of the last six years; [127317]

(2) how many managerial and administrative jobs were created in the National Health Service in the last 12 months. [127371]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of managers and administrators employed in the national health service in each of the last six years is shown in the following table.

NHS Hospital and community health service (HCHS): Administrative and managerial staff by grade as at 30 September each specified year (headcount)

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Total	182,652	185,214	191,738	199,603	211,653	227,303
Clerical and administrative[1]	160,479	162,521	167,451	174,347	184,229	195,009
Manager[2]	14,645	14,706	15,408	16,369	17,684	20,435
Senior manager[2]	7,528	7,987	8,879	8,887	9,740	11,859

[1] Clerical and administrative staff working in central functions. The group includes areas such as personnel, finance, IT, legal services, library services, health eduction and general management support services.
[2] Managers have overall responsibility for budgets, manpower or assets, or are accountable for a significant area of work. Senior managers include staff at executive level and those who report directly to the board. These staff are essential to the smooth running of hospitals, trusts and Strategic Health Authorities. This excludes nursing, ST and T and ambulance managers in post requiring specific clinical qualifications.
Source:
Department of Health Non-medical Workforce Census.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* electricians, *(b)* gardeners, *(c)* maintenance engineers and assistants, *(d)* kitchen staff and *(e)* cleaners were employed by the NHS in each year since 1997. [127505]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Within the non-medical work force census, electricians, gardeners and maintenance engineers and assistants are included in "estates staff" in "hotel, property and estates". Kitchen staff and cleaners are included with "support workers supporting doctors and nurses."

As at 30 September 2002, there were 12,206 estates staff and 88,285 support workers employed in the National Health Service.

Whole-time equivalent

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Estates (maintenance and works)[1]	13,295	12,715	12,333	12,016	11,758	11,831
Support workers[2]	66,706	65,301	64,140	62,858	63,568	64,018

Headcount

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Estates (maintenance and works)[1]	13,614	13,096	12,712	12,413	12,109	12,206
Support workers[2]	93,323	91,157	89,483	87,340	87,843	88,285

[1] Estates staff includes electricians, gardeners and engineers. These are unable to be separately identified.
[2] Support workers includes kitchen staff and cleaners. These are unable to be separately identified.
Notes:
Figures are rounded to the nearest whole number
Source:
Department of Health Non-medical Workforce Census

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many days off work have been taken by NHS employees each year since 1997 owing to stress; and how much this time off has cost the NHS. [127330]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health does not collect data centrally on how many days off work have been taken by National Health Service staff owing to work-related stress, or the associated costs.

The National Office Audit report "A Safer Place to Work—Improving the Management of Health and Safety Risks to Staff in NHS Trusts" reported that stress accounts for 30 per cent. of sickness absence in the NHS.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of stress levels among staff in the NHS; and what proposals he has to reduce this level. [127331]

Mr. Hutton: The National Audit Office report "A Safer Place to Work—Improving the Management of Health and Safety Risks to Staff in NHS Trusts" reported that stress accounts for 30 per cent. of sickness absence in the National Health Service.

Integral to the Department's plans for reducing levels of work-related stress in the NHS is the Improving Working Lives (IWL) initiative. IWL sets NHS-wide standards to cover a range of workforce issues, including the provision of childcare, flexible working, improvements to work/life balance, as well as ensuring the provision of counselling services for all staff.

Sexual Health

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are employed in sexual health within the NHS. [127656]

Mr. Hutton: Within a hospital medical setting, sexual health is generally covered by the genito-urinary medicine specialty.

The number of hospital and community health services medical staff specialising in genito-urinary medicine is shown in the table.

Hospital, Public Health Medicine and Community Health Services (HCHS): hospital and CHS medical staff with a specialty in genito-urinary medicine

England, as at 30 September 2002	*Number (headcount)*
All staff	866
of which:	
Consultants	274

Source:
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census.

General practitioners and nurses are also involved in sexual health issues, as are other health professionals in, for example, family planning clinics. The Department does not collect specific data on the numbers of such staff working in the national health service.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department *(a)* has taken over the last 12 months and *(b)* plans to take over the next 12 months to stress the importance of sexual health; and what impact such measures have had thus far. [127458]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department of Health is continuing to implement the Government's National Strategy for Sexual Health and HIV, and details of the actions being taken are contained in the National Strategy for Sexual Health and HIV Implementation Action Plan. Progress on the Strategy's implementation will be monitored by the recently established independent Advisory Group on Sexual Health. The Health Select Committee has recently published its report on Sexual Health and the Government's response to its recommendations will be published shortly.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the percentage increase in *(a)* HIV, *(b)* chlamydia, *(c)* syphilis and *(d)* genital warts was in the last year for which figures are available for (i) Fenland and East Cambridgeshire Primary Care Trust and (ii) East Anglia, broken down by (A) sex and (B) those aged (1) 15 and under, (2) 16–19, (3) 20–25, (4) 25–35 and (5) over 35. [127958]

Dr. Ladyman: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were diagnosed as suffering from a sexually transmitted infection in *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 2000, *(c)* 1995, *(d)* 1990, *(e)* 1985 and *(f)* 1980. [127455]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Data on diagnoses of sexually transmitted infections (STI) made within genito-urinary medicine clinics in England for the years 1990 to 2002, plus 1985 and 1980, are listed. These do not include STI diagnoses or treatments made within a primary care setting, for which we do not hold data centrally.

	Number
2002	644,399
2001	608,726
2000	570,072
1999	533,790
1998	506,908
1997	481,892
1996	451,903
1995	428,938
1994	390,876
1993	363,806
1992	372,282
1991	379,098
1990	367,256
1985	[1]362,700
1980	[2]288,000

[1] Approximation, based on total UK data of 398,547.
[2] Approximation, based on total UK data of 316,548

The Government's 10 year National Strategy for Sexual Health and HIV, launched in 2001, the first ever national strategy for sexual health, is to tackle these rising rates of infections and modernise and improve access to sexual health services.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women suffered from *(a)* syphilis and *(b)* gonorrhoea (i) in 1997 and (ii) on the latest date for which figures are available. [127456]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The number of people diagnosed with syphilis and gonorrhoea are shown in the table.

	Year	Male	Female
Syphilis (primary and secondary)	1997	98	49
	2002	1,062	137
Uncomplicated gonorrhoea	1997	8,418	3,981
	2002	16,980	7,417

Note:
Diagnoses in genitourinary medicine clinics only. Data not held centrally on diagnoses in primary care settings.

The Government's ten year National Strategy for Sexual Health and HIV, launched in 2001, is designed to tackle these rising rates of infections and modernise and improve access to sexual health services.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding is being dedicated to campaigns raising awareness in England of *(a)* sexually transmitted diseases and *(b)* HIV and Aids in 2003–04 and is planned for 2004–05. [127546]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department of Health has allocated £3.25 million in 2003–04 for work to prevent, and raise awareness of, sexually transmitted infections, which includes the national 'Sex Lottery' campaign (which also includes information on HIV). In addition, £1.85 million has been allocated specifically for HIV and AIDS prevention and awareness raising activities. In addition, primary care trusts are responsible for meeting the sexual health promotion needs of their local populations and this work is funded from mainstream National Health Service allocations and therefore details of expenditure are not held centrally.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the incidence is of sexually transmitted diseases in England in *(a)* school-aged children and *(b)* adults over the age of 50 years. [127548]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Centrally held data are available for the following five sexually transmitted infections, broken down according to these age groups.

Condition	15 and under	16–19	45 plus
Primary and secondary infectious syphilis	4	67	234
Uncomplicated gonorrhoea	1,216	17,654	4,487
Anogenital herpes simplex—first attack	643	11,628	6,259
Anogenital warts—first attack	2,802	59,189	14,739
Uncomplicated chlamydial infection	3,914	67,714	4,793

Source:
Health Protection Agency

Overseas Health Services

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients have been sent abroad for treatment; and at what cost in the last five years. [127380]

Mr. Hutton: A total of 477 patients have been referred for treatment abroad as part of the overseas treatment programme in the last five years.

A centrally funded pilot project took place between January and April 2002 at a cost of £1.1 million. This was extended for orthopaedic treatment overseas, with patients drawn from five different health authority areas at a cost of a further £2.1 million.

The option of receiving treatment abroad has also been offered as part of two patient choice pilot schemes.

The London Patients Choice Project (LPCP) has spent a total of £148,766 on funding overseas treatment. This includes all programme costs, for treatment, travel, comprehensive rehabilitation, and out-patient clinics run in the United Kingdom by European clinicians.

The final costs for the cardiac programme are not available as yet. To date, 19 patients have been treated abroad.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how long the patients who have been sent abroad by the NHS for treatment had been waiting in their own locality. [127381]

Mr. Hutton: The details of the length of time that individual patients have been waiting before receiving treatment abroad is not held centrally. However, the option of going overseas is usually offered to patients who are clinically fit for travel and who have been waiting relatively long periods.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to change the practice of sending patients abroad for treatment. [127382]

Mr. Hutton: The Government have made a commitment to developing greater diversity and plurality in healthcare provision in the future. This means that the national health service will be able to explore a range of options to help it deliver shorter waiting times and increase patient choice. These options include more effective use of the independent sector in the United Kingdom, innovative use of capacity in the NHS, and using NHS and independent sector diagnosis and treatment centres. The policy is that wherever possible the NHS should seek to attract overseas providers to the UK. However, where it makes sense in terms of value for money and convenience for patients, overseas treatment does offer a further means to add to the capacity of the NHS, to reduce waiting times and extend the choice available to patients.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health where the financial liability lies for follow-up operations which take place in English NHS hospitals following a patient's NHS treatment abroad. [127497]

Mr. Hutton: Financial liability for any subsequent treatment needed by national health service patients following treatment abroad rests with the NHS.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations have been carried out abroad but paid for by the NHS since January 2001, broken down by operation; and what the total cost to the NHS of each patient's treatment was while abroad including travel expenses. [127516]

Mr. Hutton: A total of 477 patients have been referred for treatment abroad as part of the overseas treatment programme since January 2001. Of these, 19 patients have been treated for cardiac procedures, 37 have been treated for ophthalmological procedures and 421 have been treated for orthopaedic procedures.

A procurement process identifying spare capacity abroad is currently active, so the costs of specific procedures abroad are commercially sensitive. However, prices are comparable to spot purchasing in the United Kingdom private sector.

NHS Beds

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many national health service beds were available in England in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002. [127352]

Mr. Hutton: The average daily number of available beds in wards open overnight in national health service trusts in England is shown in the table.

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Average daily number of general and acute	135,080	135,794	136,583
Average daily number of beds in all specialties	186,290	186,091	184,871

Source:
Department of Health form KH03

This information is published annually on the Department of Health website at http://www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity.

NHS Counter Fraud Team

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list recoveries worth more than £500,000 secured by the NHS Counter Fraud team since 1997. [127732]

Mr. Hutton: Figures dating from 1997 are not available. The National Health Service Counter Fraud Service, now the Counter Fraud and Security Management Service (CFSMS), was formed in 1998, with the overall remit to tackle fraud and corruption within the NHS.

The CFSMS has, to date, demonstrated a £70 million a year reduction in losses to fraud through preventative action and recovered over £14 million of fraudulently obtained money through our investigative work.

Individual cases, where in excess of £500,000 has been secured by CFSMS, are shown in the table. There are many other cases, where recoveries have been secured and the individual amounts concerned are less than £500,000.

Subject	*Amount of recovery (£)*
Pharmaceutical Products Supplier	650,000
Pharmaceutical Products Supplier	1,128,000
Pharmaceutical Products Supplier	1,337,680
Pharmaceutical Products Supplier	1,750,000
Dispensing Doctor (GP)	799,087
Dentist	1,150,000
Total	6,814,767

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what data support the 5 rating given to Burley, Pendle and Rossendale primary care trust for access to NHS dentistry. [127188]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The indicator in the 2002–03 National Health Service performance ratings relating to access to NHS dentistry asked primary care trusts (PCTs) whether or not they had 'plans in place to enable people to obtain NHS dentistry within local standards, following requests for help through NHS Direct and local inquiry points' at the end of March 2003.

Therefore, if a PCT met this criteria then, as per the performance ratings scoring system, they were assigned a score of five. Conversely, if a PCT did not meet this criteria at the said date, they would be assigned a score of one. Burley, Pendle and Rossendale PCT reported that it had met the above criteria and thus was assigned a score of five for this particular performance indicator within the 2002–03 NHS performance ratings. This score was then used in conjunction with performance on a wide range of other measures to determine that NHS organisation's performance (star) rating.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria determine whether a primary care trust qualifies as providing access to an NHS dentist. [127388]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Primary care trusts (PCTs) should be able to respond to requests for dentistry whether it is emergency, urgent or routine as defined by the clinical algorithms developed with the dental profession by NHS Direct. For each of these categories of need, the PCT needs to have a distance standard related to local geography, which has been agreed with local stakeholders and published. For emergency care, distance standards would be similar to those for other National Health Service emergency services. A PCT providing full access to NHS dentistry will be achieving compliance with both clinical and distance standards. Not all PCTs fulfil both these sets of criteria.

The 2002–03 performance indicator for dentistry asked if

"plans are in place to enable people to obtain NHS dentistry within local standards, following requests for help through NHS Direct and local enquiry points".

This was to recognise the endeavours of PCTs to address dentistry issues even where they remain unresolved.

A new NHS dentistry support team has been set up to work with local officials in PCTs with particular issues regarding access to NHS dentistry to help them tackle these problems. The support team will be up and running in September this year, and will have support funding to address particularly acute of long-standing difficulties.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS dentists are available in the Adur, Arun and Worthing PCT area. [127560]

Ms Rosie Winterton: National health service dentists cover dentists in the general dental service (GDS), hospital dental service (HDS), community dental service (CDS) and personal dental service (PDS). Information at primary care trust (PCT) level is not available for the CDS and HDS because these services are provided by NHS trusts, which do not have clearly defined geographical boundaries.

The latest information for March 2003 is shown in the following table and gives the number of GDS and PDS dentists who carry out the majority of the work in Adur, Arun and Worthing PCT.

These figures are on a headcount rather than whole-time equivalent basis and take no account of part-time working. Dentists working in both PDS and GDS are counted in the GDS only.

NHS Dental Services: Number of dentists in Adur, Arun and Worthing PCT, as at 31 March 2003

	Adur, Arun and Worthing PCT[1]
GDS dentists	98
PDS dentists[2, 3]	12

[1] Dentists who carry out the majority of their work in the PCT.
[2] Dentists working in the PDS who are not also working in the GDS.
[3] West Sussex Community PDS scheme covers Adur, Arun and Worthing PCT.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS dentists there are in the Chorley constituency; and what steps he is taking to increase the number of NHS dentists in the Chorley constituency. [127292]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information on the number of dentists in the Chorley constituency is shown in the table.

General and Personal Dental Service: number of dentists in the Chorley and South Ribble constituency area

Health authority/primary care trust[1]	*GDS dentists*	*Salaried dentists*	*PDS dentists*[2]
At 30 September 2002			
South Lancashire HA	100	1	3
At 31 March 2003			
Chorley and South Ribble PCT	56	1	3

[1] Only dentists with the majority of patients in the South Lancashire HA and the Chorley and Ribble PCT are included.
[2] Dentists working in the South Lancashire PDS pilot who are not also working in the GDS.
Notes:
1. Dentists are free to work in more than one health authority or primary care trust, therefore, dentists who do some work in this area HA/PCT but more in another HA/PCT have not been included.
2. NHS dentists cover dentists working in the General Dental Service (GDS), Hospital Dental Service (HDS), Community Dental Service (CDS), Personal Dental Service (PDS) and Salaried Service of the GDS.
3. The number of GDS dentists includes Principals, Assistants, Vocational Dental Practitioners.
4. These figures are on a headcount basis rather than a whole time equivalent (wte) basis and therefore take no account of part-time working. In the GDS, the amount of time spent working in the NHS varies greatly with a large proportion of dentists doing some private work. Dentists working solely in private dentistry are not covered in these figures.

I understand that Cumbria and Lancashire strategic health authority is working with the local Chorley and South Ribble Primary Care Trust (PCT) on access to national health service dentistry. Chorley and South Ribble PCT has plans in place to enable people within Chorley to obtain NHS dentistry service.

NHS Direct

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost has been of NHS Direct. [127379]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Since March 1998, NHS Direct sites have been funded from a top-sliced central budget. The total costs of the service since 1998–99 are given in the table.

	Total cost (£ million)
1998–99	14
1999–2000	55
2000–01	90.1
2001–02	109.7
2002–03	124

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost is per call to NHS Direct. [127556]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The average cost of a call to NHS Direct is currently about £18.00, although this is expected to fall further in the future as call volumes rise. The National Audit Office has found that half of callers are directed to forms of care they would not have chosen and that this tends to be care of a lower level and cost of intervention. More than half of NHS Direct costs are saved in this way.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many qualified nurses work for NHS Direct, broken down by grade. [127557]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There are approximately 1,100 whole-time equivalent nurses working for NHS Direct. Specific information about NHS Direct nurses broken down by grade is not collected centrally.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many calls were made to NHS Direct in each year since it was set up. [127568]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The table shows how many calls have been made to NHS Direct since its launch in March 1998.

Financial year	*Total calls handled*	*Cumulative total calls*
1998–99	110,000	110,000
1999–2000	1,650,000	1,760,000
2000–01	3,420,000	5,180,000
2001–02	5,213,062	10,393,062
2002–03	6,318,844	16,711,906
2003-July 2004	1,653,344	18,365,250

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many different callers have used NHS Direct in each year since it was set up. [127569]

Ms Rosie Winterton: NHS Direct has handled over 18 million calls since the service was launched in March 1998, and NHS Direct Online has had over 8 million visitors. Specific information is not available on how many different callers have used NHS Direct each year since the service was set up.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* nurses and *(b)* managers are employed by NHS Direct. [127637]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Currently all NHS Direct members of staff are employed by their host organisation trust. NHS Direct employs approximately 1,100 whole-time equivalent nurses across the 22 NHS

Direct sites. Specific information about the number of managers employed by NHS Direct is not collected centrally.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the budgeted cost of NHS Direct in financial year 2003–04 is. [127638]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The total budgeted cost for the NHS Direct telephone service, NHS Direct Online, and other related services for the financial year 2003–04 is £124 million.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health from how many sites NHS Direct operates; and how many staff are employed at each site. [127639]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Specific information on how many staff are employed at each of the 22 NHS Direct sites is not collected centrally. The following table outlines the number of nurses and call handlers based at each site.

	Staff in post FTE		
Sites	*Nurses*	*Call handlers*	*Total FTE*
1. Anglia	38.63	15.22	53.85
2. Avon	47.53	29.43	76.96
3. Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire	47.80	23.17	70.97
4. East Midlands	70.80	36.21	107.01
5. Essex	50.03	24.95	74.98
6. Hampshire	56.31	15.60	71.91
7. Kent, Surrey and Sussex	64.83	28.70	93.53
8. Manchester	87.35	41.40	128.75
9. Midlandshires	55.26	33.72	88.98
10. North and Central London	22.68	12.94	35.62
11. North East	56.76	28.00	84.76
12. North East London	23.20	16.70	39.90
13. North West Coast	76.51	18.48	94.99
14. South East London	36.58	23.39	59.97
15. South West London	25.60	12.60	38.20
16. South Yorkshire	39.63	26.80	66.43
17. TENYAS	34.70	13.10	47.80
18. Thames Valley	46.50	15.20	61.70
19. West County	59.27	29.80	89.07
20. West London	38.70	22.60	61.30
21. West Midlands	50.47	24.96	75.43
22. West Yorkshire	52.93	24.45	77.38
Total	1,082.07	517.42	1,599.49

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of calls to NHS Direct result in *(a)* no further action being taken by the caller, *(b)* the caller being advised to contact their GP, *(c)* the caller being advised to attend an accident and emergency department and *(d)* an ambulance being summoned to the caller's location. [127642]

Ms Rosie Winterton: 45 per cent. of calls to NHS Direct result in no onward referral to another service, 35 per cent. of callers are advised to contact their general practitioner, 7 per cent. of callers are advised to attend an accident and emergency department, and 3 per cent. of callers required an ambulance dispatching to the caller's location.

Source:
NHS direct data April 2003-June 2003.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are employed by NHS Direct, broken down by *(a)* grade and *(b)* salary. [127636]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Currently, all NHS Direct members of staff are employed by their host organisation trust. Specific information about the number of people employed by NHS Direct, broken down by grade and salary is not collected centrally. Approximately 3,000 members of staff are employed by NHS Direct.

NHS Fraud/Inefficiency

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department is taking to reduce the levels of *(a)* financial waste, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* inefficiency in the NHS; and what progress has been made over the last 12 months. [127492]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health monitors and manages the performance of the national health service in the delivery of the key targets set out in the NHS Plan. In addition, the NHS is subject to external independent audit by the Audit Commission and the National Audit Office. They publish a number of studies each year on the value for money of aspects of the NHS. The Department of Health considers each of these reports and implements their recommendations where appropriate.

The Counter Fraud Service, now Counter Fraud and Security Management Service (CFSMS), was formed in September 1998, with a remit to tackle fraud and corruption within the NHS. It established a risk measurement programme to carry out an exhaustive examination of valid samples of cases in each area of NHS spending and to produce statistically robust estimates of fraud accurate to plus or minus 1 per cent. of losses. These exercises are among the first of such exercises to be undertaken anywhere in the public or private sectors.

The first measurement exercise concentrated on patient fraud. To deter and prevent patient evasion of NHS charges and to increase the anti-fraud culture, point of dispensing and point of treatment checks were introduced. These checks require patients to provide proof of exemption to charges. The measurement exercises have already demonstrated a reduction in fraudulently claimed exemption to these charges from approximately £170 million to £109.17 million per year, a reduction of 36 per cent. since 1998.

Over 1,400 cases of potential fraud have been detected and investigated. This has resulted in 160 successful criminal prosecutions with 98 per cent. success rate, 215 civil and disciplinary sanctions have been applied and over £14 million recovered. Additionally, over £31 million of fraud has been identified and stopped.

As action takes place to counter fraud in the NHS the measurement process will be repeated to demonstrate what progress has been made to reduce fraud to an absolute minimum.

In addition, governance arrangements have been improved to ensure the necessary standards of accountability, probity and openness through the introduction in 1999 of the Controls Assurance Standards.

NHS Finance

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the balance of income and expenditure of health authorities and the NHS trusts in England for the financial year ending 31 March. [127354]

Mr. Hutton: The audited information in respect of the 2002–03 financial position of all national health service organisations will be published in their individual annual accounts and will be available locally in September and centrally in the autumn.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he is planning to meet the chairmen of NHS trusts to discuss administrative costs. [127360]

Mr. Hutton: My right hon. Friend will meet chairs of national health service trusts on 9 September; a wide range of issues will be discussed.

NHS Finance

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the NHS funding budget was for Shropshire in each year since 1997; [127585]

(2) what the budget of Shropshire Primary Care Trust was in each year since 1997 and will be in each year up to 2005–06; [127588]

(3) what the budget of Telford and Wrekin Primary Care Trust was in each year since 1997 and will be in each year up to 2005–06. [127589]

Dr. Ladyman: Revenue allocations for Shropshire Health Authority, Shropshire County Primary Care Trust and Telford and Wrekin Primary Care Trust are shown in the tables.

Total allocation for Shropshire HA 1997–98 to 2002–03

Period	*£000*
1997–98	169,555
1999–99	178,325
1999–2000	247,650
2000–01	270,975
2001–02	295,252
2002–03	326,945

Total allocation to PCTs comprising the former Shropshire HA 2003–04 to 2005–06

£000

Period	*Shropshire County PCT*	*Telford and Wrekin PCT*
2003–04	230,545	124,364
2004–05	252,424	136,914
2005–06	275,548	152,918

Allocations for 1999–2000 onwards are not comparable with those for 1997–98 and 1998–99 which cover hospital and community health services only. 1999–2000 was the first year of unified allocations, which cover hospital and community health services, prescribing and discretionary general medical services.

From 2003–04 allocations are made to PCTs.

NHS Hospital Trusts

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS hospital trusts have general hospitals in different towns. [117771]

Mr. Hutton: Of the trusts in England with more than one general hospital, 75 per cent. have hospitals in more than one town. The remaining 25 per cent. have all their hospitals in the same town.

NHS Recruitment

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many advertisements for non-clinical jobs within the NHS have been advertised in the national press each year since 1997; and at what cost. [127368]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health does not hold this information centrally.

The Department is currently commissioning a national electronic recruitment service for the National Health Service. It will link with NHS Careers to provide a web-based service advertising posts, providing information about careers, jobs and NHS employers, and an electronic application process, supported by a call centre service to provide flexible, interactive access to information and job and training opportunities. The new service will enable the NHS to reduce its recruitment and advertising costs.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what budget his Department has in the current year for job advertisements. [127369]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department does not have a budget specifically for job advertisements, but does have a recruitment budget, which for the current year is £300,000. The costs for job advertisements are met from this budget.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much each primary care trust spent on advertising job positions in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2002 and *(c)* 2003. [127370]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health does not hold this information centrally.

The Department of Health is currently commissioning a national electronic recruitment service for the National Health Service. It will link with NHS Careers to provide a web-based service advertising posts, providing information about careers, jobs and NHS employers, and an electronic application process, supported by a call centre service to provide flexible, interactive access to information and job and training opportunities. The new service will enable the NHS to reduce its recruitment and advertising costs.

NHS Professionals

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS trusts are using NHS Professionals. [128155]

Mr. Hutton: There are currently 75 national health service trusts using NHS Professionals. These are listed.

NHS trusts using NHS Professionals

Aintree Hospitals NHS Trust
Barking Havering and Redbridge NHS Trust
Basildon PCT
Basildon and Thurrock University Hospitals Trust
Bath and North East Somerset PCT, Bath
Billericay PCT
Central Liverpool PCT
Chelmsford PCT
Cherwell Vale PCT, Oxfordshire
Christie Hospital NHS Trust, Manchester
Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Trust, Stourbridge
East and North Herts NHS Trust, Stevenage
East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust
Epping Forest PCT
George Eliot NHS Trust, Nuneaton
Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children Trust
Harlow PCT
Lancashire Care NHS Trust, Preston
Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust
Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust, Leicester
Maldon and South Chelmsford PCT
Mid Essex Hospitals Trust
Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust, Wakefield
Milton Keynes PCT
North Bristol NHS Trust, Bristol
North Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust
North East Oxfordshire PCT
North Essex Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust
North Mersey Community NHS Trust
North Middlesex University Hospital
Nottingham City Hospital NHS Trust
Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre NHS Trust, Oxford
Oxford City PCT
Oxford Learning Disability NHS Trust
Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust
Oxfordshire Mental Healthcare NHS Trust
Pennine Care NHS Trust
Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, Oldham
Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust, Harlow
Queens Medical Centre, Nottingham
Redditch and Bromsgrove PCT
Royal Liverpool Children's NHS Trust
Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases
Royal United Hospital Bath NHS Trust
Royston, Buntingford and Bishops Stortford PCT
Salford Royal Hospitals NHS Trust
Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust
South East Oxfordshire PCT
Southend Hospital Trust
South Leeds PCT
South Manchester University Hospitals Trust
South Tees Hospitals NHS Trust, Middlesbrough
South West Oxfordshire PCT
South West Yorkshire Mental Health NHS Trust
South Worcestershire PCT
St. Helens and Knowsley Hospitals NHS Trust
St. Mary's NHS Trust, London
Stockport NHS Trust
Stoke Mandeville Hospitals NHS Trust
Suffolk West PCT
Thurrock PCT
United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust
University College London Hospitals NHS Trust
University Hospital, Nottingham NHS Trust
Uttlesford PCT, Essex
Walsall PCT
Walton Neurology and Neurosurgery NHS Trust, Liverpool
West Suffolk Hospitals NHS Trust
West Middlesex University Hospitals NHS Trust
Whipps Cross University Hospital NHS Trust
Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
Worcestershire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust
Worcestershire SSA
Wyre Forest PCT

NHS Salaries

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department issues to NHS trusts about limits on staff salaries. [127341]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not issue guidance to national health service trusts on limits to individual staff salaries. In each of the five years from 1998–99 to 2002–03, the Department issued guidance recommending a financial envelope for increases in each organisation's pay bill for senior managers.

NHS Costs

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the rate of increase of NHS specific costs on an annualised basis. [127621]

Mr. Hutton: In order to estimate the rate of increase of national health service costs annually, the Department of Health uses the Hospital and Community Health Services pay and prices inflation. For 2001–02 (the latest year for which data are available), the pay and prices percentage growth over the previous year was 5.1 per cent.

NHS Trust Chief Executives

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS trust chief executives have resigned in each of the past five years. [127731]

Mr. Hutton: We do not collect any information on national health service trust chief executive resignations. This information is not monitored by the Department of Health and therefore not held centrally.

NHS Walk-in Centres

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many NHS walk-in centres have been been established in the UK; [127383]

(2) how many NHS walk-in centres there are in England. [127712]

Mr. Hutton: There are 42 National Health Service walk-in centres in the United Kingdom.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people are employed in NHS walk-in centres, broken down by *(a)* grade and *(b)* salary; [127710]

(2) how many *(a)* nurses and *(b)* managers are employed by NHS walk-in centres; [127711]

(3) how many staff are employed at each NHS walk-in centre. [127714]

Mr. Hutton: This information is not held centrally.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the locations of NHS walk-in centres in England. [127713]

Mr. Hutton: A full list of National Health Service walk-in centres and their location had been placed in the Library. This information can also be found at www.doh.gov.uk/nhswalkincentres

NHS Whistleblowers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many whistleblowers have been suspended from work within the NHS as a result of allegations and complaints in the last 12 months; [127482]

(2) how many staff within the NHS have been suspended from work as a result of allegations by whistleblowers in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [127483]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of suspensions of staff working in the national health service, specifically relating to whistleblowing is not colleted centrally, but may be held at a local level by NHS employers.

The Government expect a climate of openness and dialogue in the NHS that encourages staff to feel able to raise concerns about health care matters sensibly and responsibly without fear of victimisation.

The Department of Health will shortly be issuing new guidance to all NHS employing organisations to support them in developing and/or reviewing their whistleblowing policies and procedures. A copy of the policy pack, which has been produced in partnership with Public Concern at Work, will be placed in the Library.

NICE Guidance

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to issue guidance on wounds and injuries. [127095]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has already published guidance on the prevention of pressure ulcers, infection control and the treatment of difficult-to-heal wounds. It is now preparing a suite of guidelines on this topic which will be published over the period August 2003 to April 2006. Full details of this work programme and the anticipated publication dates are available on the NICE website at: www.nice.org.uk

Nicotine Replacement Therapy

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to make nicotine replacement therapy available through the NHS. [127680]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Nicotine replacement therapy products were made available on national health service prescription in April 2001.

Non-Executive Appointments

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list non-executive appointments to NHS bodies in the last two years, broken down by political affiliations. [127563]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The National Health Service Appointments Commission will be publishing its annual report in the autumn of 2003, listing the names of all chairs and non-executives serving on NHS boards and giving details of any political activity undertaken. The current overall figures for political activity undertaken by candidates appointed in the last two years are shown in the table.

	Chair		*Non-executive*		*Total*	
Party	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
2001–02						
Conservative	11	6.96	40	4.42	51	4.79
Independent	—	—	7	0.81	7	0.66
Labour	31	19.62	212	23.40	243	22.84
Liberal Democrat	7	4.43	38	4.19	45	4.23
None	109	68.99	603	66.56	712	66.92
Other	—	—	6	0.69	6	0.59
2002–03						
Conservative	9	4.92	63	5.87	72	5.73
Independent	—	—	16	1.58	16	1.35
Labour	43	23.50	125	11.64	168	13.37
Liberal Democrat	3	1.64	25	2.33	28	2.23
None	127	69.40	842	78.40	969	77.09
Other	1	0.57	3	0.30	4	0.34

Nurses

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses were recruited by the NHS in 2002. [127526]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of recruits to the national health service is not collected centrally. Information on the number of nurses employed in the NHS is collected in the non-medical workforce census, but does not distinguish between leavers and joiners. Between September 2001 and September 2002, there was a net increase of 17,140 nurses employed in the NHS.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) publishes an annual statistical report which includes information about the number of nurses and midwives entering the register. This data can be found on the NMC website at www.nmc-uk.org.uk.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the nurses who are employed by the NHS are *(a)* set to retire in the next five years and *(b)* under the age of 30. [127527]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table. Information about the age profile of practice nurses is not collected centrally. The information provided therefore excludes practice nurses.

As at 30 September 2003, the non-medical workforce census shows that there were 346,537 qualified nurses (excluding practice nurses) working in the national health service. Of these 20,309, or 5.8 per cent., were aged 55 to 59, 5,509, or 1.6 per cent., were aged over 60 and 48,774, or 14 per cent., were aged under 30.

NHS hospital and community health services: qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff by specified age bands— England as at September 2002

headcount

	All staff	*Up to 30*	*55 to 59*	*Over 60*
Of which				
All qualified staff	346,537	48,774	20,309	5,509
Nurse consultant	330	8	7	[1]—
Manager	5,784	118	480	97
Registered sick children's nurse	12,288	3,157	410	94
Registered midwife	23,249	2,038	1,495	361
Health visitor	12,774	262	1,606	448
District nurse (1st level)	12,141	497	1,227	279
District nurse (2nd level)	1,252	43	136	43
Other 1st level	255,712	41,383	13,015	3,482
Other 2nd level	18,450	1,268	1,933	704
Unspecified	4,557	[1]—	[1]—	1

[1] Equals zero

Notes:

Other 1st level and 2nd level include staff coded as community psychiatric nurses (CPN) and community learning disability nurses (CLDN) with a specific recordable community qualification.

Source:

Department of Health 2002 non-medical workforce census.

Mr. Dorrell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many agency nurses were employed in Leicestershire hospitals on average in 2002–03; and what proportion this represented of total nursing staff. [127270]

Dr. Ladyman: This information is not collected centrally.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to increase the number of nurses in training. [127316]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan sets out the Government's commitment to increase the number of nurses and midwives in training by 5,500 each year by 2004 over 1999 levels. Since 1999 the number of nurses and midwives entering training each year has increased by 4,474 to 23,181.

We have increased funding for nurse training by over 100 per cent. since 1997-from £752 million in 1997–98 to £1,517 million in 2003–04. We are working closely with the higher education sector to increase capacity and look at innovative ways to boost the number of practice placements.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what checks his Department conducts on the qualifications of agency nursing personnel; and what assistance his Department gives to *(a)* hospital trusts and *(b)* health authorities in checking the qualifications of agency nursing staff. [127326]

Mr. Hutton: Providers of temporary staffing should conform to the principles and standards in the Department's Code of Practice for the Supply of Temporary Staffing when supplying temporary staff to the National Health Service. NHS employers should ensure that they request a declaration of adherence to the code of practice when engaging with a provider of temporary staff. The code states that information relating to the staff member's qualifications, training and membership of professional bodies should be obtained by the provider. In addition, the Nurses Agencies Regulations 2002 require nurses agencies to ensure that full and satisfactory information is available in relation to a nurse's qualifications, training and current registration with the Nursing and Midwifery Council before supplying the nurse.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many nurses recruited into the NHS in each of the last three years have come from overseas; [127519]

(2) how many nurses were recruited from overseas in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and from which countries. [127915]

Mr. Hutton: The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) registers all nurses who work in the United Kingdom and it is the NMC that hold the statistics for the number of overseas nurses who are accepted on to their register.

This information can be obtained from the NMC at www.nmc-uk.org

The NMC statistics details nurses that are registered to work in the United Kingdom and not just in the National Health Service. A large proportion of these nurses will be working in the independent sector.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many practice nurses were in place in GP surgeries in each of the last five years. [127531]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Between 1998 and 2002, the number of practice nurses employed in the national health service has increased by 2,089 or 11 per cent.

Practice Nurses[1] in England 1997–2002

Numbers (headcount)

	1998	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Practice nurses	18,894	19,495	19,200	19,846	20,983

[1] Practice nurse headcount information was estimated in 1998 and 1999. Data as at 1 October 1998–99 and 30 September 2000–02.

Source:

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to increase the number of practice nurses working in GP surgeries. [127532]

Mr. Hutton: The Government is implementing a range of measures to increase the numbers of staff working in the national health service, including practice nurses. These include an increase in pay, encouraging the NHS to become a better employer through the "Improving Working Lives and Positively Diverse" programmes, increasing training commissions, reducing student attrition, running national and local recruitment and return to practice campaigns, and supporting international recruitment where appropriate. In addition, we have recently developed a dedicated NHS Careers factsheet on practice nursing, to promote further careers and opportunities in this field. A copy of the factsheet is available in the Library.

As a result of these measures, there are now over 2,500 more practices nurses working in the NHS since 1997 (NHS Workforce Census). This has contributed in helping to meet the NHS Plan target for 20,000 more nurses two years ahead of schedule.

Obesity

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action *(a)* has been taken and *(b)* is planned to address NHS provision for the management of overweight and obese patients that were identified as patchy in the National Audit Office report on Tackling Obesity in England. [127688]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The NHS Plan and the national service framework for coronary heart disease (CHD) (launched after the National Audit Office survey), sets standards for health authorities in partnership with local authorities, primary care trusts (PCTs) and NHS trusts, for the development and delivery of effective policies for reducing overweight and obesity, promoting healthy eating and increase physical activity.

The NHS Priorities and Planning Framework for 2003–06 includes targets on reducing CHD. One of these targets requires practice-based registers and systematic treatment regimes, including appropriate advice on diet, physical activity and smoking, to cover the majority of patients at high risk of coronary heart disease, particularly those with hypertension, diabetes and a body mass index greater than 30 (that is, people who are obese).

PCTs, as local providers and commissioners of services, determine the most appropriate methods to deliver health care to their populations, based on clinical need and effectiveness, as well as local circumstances, drawing on the available evidence. The Health Development Agency will publish their review of effective interventions for the prevention and treatment of obesity later this year. Work on how to put the evidence into practice is also being taken forward.

In line with recommendations of the National Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee reports, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and the Health Development Agency have been tasked by the Department of Health to work collaboratively to develop guidance on the identification, prevention and management of obesity and maintenance of weight reduction.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to produce national guidelines for the management of obesity in addition to those which are part of the National Framework for Coronary Heart Disease and Diabetes; and if he will make a statement. [127689]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Following publication of the Government's strategy for sustainable farming and food, the Department of Health is leading on developing a cross-Government food and health action plan. The plan will pull together all of the issues that influence what we eat and will address food production, manufacture and preparation, access to healthier food and providing information for consumers about healthy eating and nutrition, which is of direct relevance to the prevention and management of obesity.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has already issued national guidance on the anti-obesity drugs orlistat and subutramine, treatment with which should be accompanied by appropriate advice on diet, activity and behavioural strategies. NICE has also issued guidance on surgery to aid weight reduction for people with morbid obesity and have been tasked, in collaboration with the Health Development Agency, to develop guidance on the identification, prevention and management of obesity and maintenance of weight reduction.

To ensure there is a co-ordinated and strategic approach to the planning and delivery of sport and physical activity, an activity co-ordination team (ACT) has been established. The team, jointly led by the Department of Health and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, will set out a cross-government strategy to work towards the challenging target for 70 per cent. of the population to be active by 2020. The Department of Health has published a national quality assurance framework for exercise referral systems, offering guidance to primary care and fitness professionals, who work together to offer tailored exercise and physical activity programmes to patients.

The Department has also supported the development guidance for professionals in primary care on weight management in children and adolescents, produced by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, and

National Obesity Forum. We are also funding research on family-based treatment for obese children that will include resources for health professionals.

The Health Development Agency will publish their review of effective interventions for the prevention and treatment of obesity later this year. Work on how to put the evidence into practice is also being taken forward.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action the Government are taking to tackle obesity in children. [127314]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government are committed to tackling the rising trend in childhood obesity and we have put in place cross-Government programmes of work to improve diet and nutrition and increase physical activity levels. Commitments for action on obesity, diet and physical activity are outlined in the NHS plan and the national service frameworks, particularly those outlining action on coronary heart disease and diabetes.

The Department of Health is leading on developing a cross-Government food and health action plan. The plan will pull together all of the issues that influence what we eat and will address food production, manufacture and preparation, access to healthier food and providing information for consumers about healthy eating and nutrition. Action on physical activity will be guided across Government by an activity co-ordination team, jointly led by the Department of Health and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. These initiatives will be of direct relevance to the prevention and management of obesity in children and adults.

Current action on diet includes initiatives to increase breastfeeding (breastfed babies may be less likely to become obese later in life than formula fed babies); reform of the welfare foods programme to use the resources more effectively to ensure children in poverty have access to a healthy diet; a five-a-day programme which includes the National School Fruit Scheme; the Healthy School Programme; the Food in School programme and nutritional standards for school lunches. Work is also under way with the food industry to improve the overall balance of diet including salt, fat and sugar in food, working with the Food Standards Agency.

Current action on physical activity includes the transformation over the next three years of physical education, school sport and club links and the building and refurbishment of physical education and sports facilities in schools. In addition, the Department of Health, together with Sport England and the Countryside Agency is leading on a local exercise action pilots (LEAP) programme, which includes children and young people as one of its target groups.

Official Publications

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list his Department's spending on official publications since July 2001. [127323]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The accounting general ledger system is unable to differentiate between official publications and campaign materials. To separate the data in the manner requested would incur disproportionate cost.

Operations

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average cost to the NHS was of *(a)* a hip replacement, *(b)* a hysterectomy, *(c)* a cataract extraction, *(d)* a tonsillectomy, *(e)* a kidney transplant and *(f)* a hernia operation in the last 12 months. [127386]

Mr. Hutton: The most up to date costs published by the Department of Health are for the financial year 2001–02 and are shown in the table. The costs detailed represent the national average cost in the national health service for all NHS patients treated as an in-patient or day case. These costs are collected using healthcare resource groups (HRGs), which are groups of treatments that are clinically homogeneous and have similar costs. Therefore, the treatments the HRGs contain are less specific than those listed in the question.

HRG code	*HRG label*	*Average (£)*
H01	Bilateral Px Hip Replacement	4,831
H02	Primary Hip Replacement	4,360
M07	Upper Genital Tract Major Procedures (Hysterectomy)	2,077
B02	Phakoemulsification Cataract Extraction with Lens Implant	671
B03	Other Cataract Extraction with Lens Implant	740
C24	Mouth or Throat Procedures—Category 3 (Tonsillectomy)	793
C34	Mouth or Throat Procedures—Category 4 (Tonsillectomy)	1,114
L01	Kidney Transplant	14,208
F71	Abdominal Hernia Procedures >69 or w cc	1,902
F72	Abdominal Hernia Procedures <70 w/o cc	1,225
F73	Inguinal Umbilical or Femoral Hernia Repairs >69 or w cc	1,165
F74	Inguinal Umbilical or Femoral Hernia Repairs <70 w/o cc	831

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients are on planned waiting lists for *(a)* cataract operations and *(b)* other operations in each English health authority; and if he will make a statement. [127163]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of patients waiting on a planned list is not collected centrally.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many follow-up operations have taken place in English NHS hospitals following a patient's operation abroad which was paid for by the NHS. [127468]

Mr. Hutton: Of the 477 patients who have received treatment abroad under the overseas treatment programme, three have received follow-up operations upon their return to the United Kingdom.

Organ Donors

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many registered organ donors there were in each year since 1997, broken down by local authority area. [127775]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The chart lists the number (in thousands) of people who joined the National Health Service organ donor register between 1997 and 2002 by health region in England and Wales. The information is not available by local authority area.

(thousands)

Region	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Eastern	95	78	133	119	67	93
London	84	118	115	121	78	115
North West	94	80	175	120	71	99
Northern and Yorkshire	88	81	210	126	76	117
South East	151	132	251	217	128	186
South West	106	83	154	131	87	115
Trent	77	64	141	91	61	87
West Midlands	74	57	122	92	58	77
Wales	33	30	29	51	34	40
Total	802	723	1,330	1,068	660	929

Pain Relief

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to assist people living with persistent pain; what pain relief drugs are available; and if he will make a statement on the *(a)* effectiveness of such drugs and *(b)* problems with their side effects. [128078]

Mr. Hutton: Pain management is an important component of most patients' care. The Clinical Standards Advisory Group (CSAG) report on pain services, published in 2000, highlighted variations in access to pain services throughout the country. The report made recommendations to National Health Service acute trusts and commissioners on how pain services should be delivered in order to reduce the variations to access. It recommended that primary care trust commissioners should review local provision of pain services, looking particularly at the provision of more specialised treatments on a networked basis. In this review, account should be taken of the needs of both adults and children, and include patients with acute pain resulting from sudden illness or accident, as well as post-operative pain and chronic pain. Trusts should agree with commissioners the services that are appropriate to meet local needs.

All medicines are assessed before licensing by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), with independent expert advice from the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM). A licence will not be granted unless the MHRA and the CSM are satisfied that the medicine meets appropriate standards of safety, quality and efficacy at the time of licensing.

Details of the different classes of medicines used in the treatment of persistent pain and their side effects are contained within the British National Formulary (section 4.7, page 208, BNF 45, March 2003), a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding has been made available for research into pain relieving drugs; if he will make a statement on the current status of cannabis for pain relief uses; and what progress has been made in discussions on the use of cannabis for medical purposes. [128079]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The main agency through which the Government support medical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council (MRC). The MRC is an independent body that receives its grant-in-aid from the Office of Science and Technology. The MRC is currently funding a number of projects investigating the mechanisms of pain that could eventually lead to the development of pain relieving drugs. Information on these projects can be found on the MRC website.

The Department of Health funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in the National Health Service. Current projects include a £0.6 million study of the comparative effectiveness of topical and oral Ibuprofen for the treatment of chronic knee pain in older people and a £0.6 million study of interventions for pain relief in patients with abdominal malignancy. The Department also provides NHS support funding for research commissioned by the research councils and charities that takes place in the NHS.

A marketing authorisation has not been issued for cannabis for pain relief uses. Like any other medicinal product, cannabis can be granted a marketing authorisation for medical purposes only when supporting data have been submitted to demonstrate that the quality, safety and efficacy of the product are satisfactory for the intended use.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason the figures for waiting lists for in-patient treatment in individual trust areas described in his Department's Press Release 2003/0253, published on 4 July, were not used in his answer to question ref 124998, tabled by the hon. Member for West Chelmsford. [126327]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer on 17 July]:* The figures for waiting lists for inpatient treatment given in my response to the hon. Member of Monday 14 July, *Official Report*, column 128W, are those used in the Department of Health's Press Release 2003/0253, which was published on 4 July 2003.

Patient Deaths

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of relative levels of patient deaths among patients treated by nurses with university qualifications. [127575]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not collect patient specific information about the precise qualifications held by staff involved with patient care.

Patient Residence Criteria

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria his Department uses to decide whether a patient is ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom; and what guidance his Department has issued on this matter. [127332]

Mr. Hutton: "Ordinarily resident" is a common law concept considered by the House of Lords in 1982 in the case of R *v.* Barnet LBC ex parte Shah. Although the case being considered was in the context of the Education Acts, the Lords' interpretation is generally recognised as having a wider application. To be considered ordinarily resident a patient needs to be living lawfully in the United Kingdom voluntarily and for settled purposes as part of the regular order of their

life for the time being, with an identifiable purpose for their residence here which purpose has a sufficient degree of continuity to be properly described as settled.

It is for individual national health service trusts to decide whether a particular patient is ordinarily resident and therefore entitled to the full range of NHS treatment free of charge, or is liable to pay for hospital treatment under the provisions of the National Health Service (Charges for Overseas Visitors) Regulations 1989. The Department of Health issued guidance to the NHS on this in 1988. Updated guidance was issued on 29 July 2003.

PET Scanners

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many positive emission topography scanners are in use in the NHS; [127572]

(2) how many private PET scanners are in use in the UK; [127573]

(3) how many PET scanners used by the NHS have been purchased through *(a)* mainstream hospital trust expenditure, *(b)* new opportunities fund lottery funding and *(c)* voluntary fund raising. [127574]

Miss Melanie Johnson: There are five positron emission tomography (PET) scanners in national health service hospitals in England used for routine clinical assessments. They are situated at Guys, St. Thomas', Middlesex, Mount Vernon and Hammersmith hospitals. In addition three private facilities including a new mobile PET scanner in London are available for NHS patients.

The two scanners situated at Guys and St. Thomas' were purchased through a combination of funding from the hospital trust, the United Medical and Dental Schools and charitable funding from the unit's special trustees. The scanner at the Middlesex hospital was funded by the unit's special trustees. The scanner at Mount Vernon hospital was funded from charitable funds and the scanner at Hammersmith hospital was provided through a charitable donation.

Pre-eclampsia

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women suffered from pre-eclampsia in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [127448]

Dr. Ladyman: The number of women who suffer from pre-eclampsia is not available. The estimated number of non-delivery episodes in hospital with a mention of pre-eclampsia (ICD Code O14) in 2001–02 is 4,500. The estimated number of deliver episodes with a mention of pre-eclampsia in 2001–02 is 9,300.

This is not the same as the number of women with pre-eclampsia as the number of delivery episodes and non-delivery episodes may overlap. For example, a woman with pre-eclampsia may have one or more episodes in hospital before her delivery and she may also have a mention of the diagnosis of pre-eclampsia during her delivery episode.

The information provided is taken from the Maternity Hospital Episode Statistics and can be found in Tables 27 and 28 of the bulletin, NHS Maternity Statistics, England, 2001–02. A copy is available in the Library or at Department of Health website: http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0309.htm

Pregnancy-related Deaths

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women have died in each of the last 10 years from pregnancy-related causes. [128400]

Dr. Ladyman: The Department does not collect the information in the format requested. However, the table, taken from the latest report on the Confidential Enquiries into Maternal Deaths in the United Kingdom (CEMD), shows the direct and indirect maternal deaths and mortality rates per 100,000 maternities reported to Registrars and the CEMD; United Kingdom, for each triennium since 1988.

Direct and indirect maternal deaths and mortality rates per 100,000 maternities reported to Registrars General and to the CEMD; United Kingdom 1998–99

	Triennium			
	1988–90	*1991–93*	*1994–96*	*1997–99*
Maternal deaths known to Registrars General				
Number	172	150	175	142
Rate	7.3	[1]6.5	[2]8.0	[3]6.7
Direct deaths known to inquiry				
Number	145	128	134	106
Rate	6.2	5.5	6.1	5.0
Indirect deaths known to inquiry				
Number	93	100	134	136
Rate	4.0	4.3	6.1	6.4
Total known to inquiry				
Number	238	228	268	242
Rate	10.1	9.8	12.2	11.4
Total maternities				
Number	2,347,529	2,317,328	2,197,640	2,123,614

[1] Final ONS revised figures for 1991–93: the rate available at the time for the publication of the 1991–93 report was 6.0.
[2] England and Wales figures for 1994 now include underlying cause and mentions (ICD9 630–676).
[3] The rate for 1994–96 in the previous report was 7.4.

Private Health Services

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of private beds available in national health service trust hospitals. [127356]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on 30 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 164W.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether *(a)* Department of Health and *(b)* NHS employees are entitled to private medical care as an employment benefit. [127687]

Mr. Hutton: Both the locally negotiated terms and conditions of service for employees of the Department of Health, and the nationally negotiated terms and conditions for staff working in the National Health Service make no provision for any entitlement to private medical care.

Professional Negligence

Mr. Dorrell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was paid to cover professional negligence claims on Leicestershire hospitals in each year since 1997–98; and what proportion each sum represented of those hospital budgets. [127268]

Dr. Ladyman: This information is not collected.

Psychotropic Medication

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has given to local specialist services for people with severe challenging behaviours on the use of *(a)* educational, *(b)* behavioural, *(c)* environmental and *(d)* dietary stategies in preference to psychotropic medication. [127859]

Dr. Ladyman: The report of the Mansell Committee (HMSO) 1993) provided guidance aon services for people with learning disabilities and challenging behaviour. Our White Paper "Valuing People" (Cm 5086), published in March 2001, notes that psychotropic medication may be very effective if someone has an underlying psychiatric disorder but points out that there is concern that too often this medication is used as an alternative to adequate staffing. The interventions to be used will depend on the individual situation and the factors that are contributing to the nature and severity of the behaviours that occur.

Public Bodies

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many agencies his Department has created since May 1997; what their purpose is; and how many staff each employs. [127504]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has created two executive agencies since 1997. The NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency was set up on 1 April 2000, with staff transferred from the Department of Health. The agency's purpose is to modernise and improve the performance of the national health service purchasing and supply system, and become and centre of expertise, knowledge and excellence on matters of purchasing and supply for the NHS. The agency negotiates national contracts for the benefit of the NHS in England. The agency has 314.5 whole-time equivalent members of staff.

The Department created the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) on 1 April 2003 following the decision to merge the Medicines Control Agency and the Medical Devices Agency. The MHRA is responsible for the regulation of medicinal products and medical devices in the United Kingdom. It also represents national interests in the regulation of these sectors at European level. The number of staff employed by the MHRA as at 1 April 2003 was estimated to be 644.

Racial Harassment

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what action his Department is taking to tackle racial harassment in NHS workplaces; [127358]

(2) what steps he is taking to eradicate racism in the NHS. [127734]

Mr. Hutton: Linked to improving working lives we have the national positively diverse programme to support employers in working towards eradicating racism in the national health service.

One hundred and seventy NHS organisations are taking part in the national programme, with 10 lead sites exploring, developing and disseminating practical ways of managing diversity in the NHS for the benefit of both staff and users of the service in the health care work force.

The development of black and minority ethnic networks at local (trust) and regional levels has also been actively encouraged with seed funding being provided by the Department of Health.

Redundancies

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff have been made redundant in the NHS as a consequence of the reorganisation of area health authorities into strategic health authorities. [117191]

Mr. Hutton: Over 20,000 staff from health authorities and regional offices of the Department of Health transferred employment into primary care trusts and new strategic health authorities on 1 April 2002. In order to minimise redundancies and to ensure that valuable skills are not lost to the national health service all staff were guaranteed employment for a 12-month period ending 31 March 2003. At the end of this period 234 staff had been unable to find a suitable post and were made redundant and/or took early retirement.

Research

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that all public funded research is recorded and made freely available to *(a)* patients, *(b)* health professionals, *(c)* the public and *(d)* members of the scientific community. [127870]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department funds the National Research Register (NRR) and the Research Findings electronic Register (ReFeR). The NRR is a database of ongoing and recently completed research projects funded by, or of interest to, the National Health Service. The ReFeR is a database of findings from the NHS research and development programme and the Department's policy research programme. Both registers can be accessed through the Department's R and D website at www.doh.gov.uk/research.

The national electronic Library for health provides health professionals and the public (through NHS Direct Online) with knowledge and know-how to support health care related decisions. The electronic Library for social care makes knowledge available to social care practitioners, managers, service users and carers.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of Department of Health research funding was spent on research into *(a)* heart disease, *(b)* obesity, *(c)* strokes and *(d)* arthritis in the last 12 months. [127706]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The main agency through which the Government support medical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council (MRC). The MRC is an independent body which receives its grant-in-aid from the Office of Science and Technology. Available figures for 2001–02 are shown in the following table. Disease specific spend data for 2002–03 is still being collated and figures will be available in the autumn.

MRC spend in 2001–02	*£ million*
Circulatory disease	26.3
Obesity	2.1
Stroke	3.9
Arthritis and rheumatism	4.2

The Department funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in the NHS. Spend by the Department's national research programmes in the four subject areas is shown in the following table.

DH spend in 2002–03 (main national programmes)

	£ million
Heart disease	1.4
Obesity	0.1
Stroke	0.6
Arthritis	0.3

Management of much of the research supported by national health service research and development funding is devolved and expenditure at project level is not held centrally by the Department. The Department also provides support for research commissioned by charities and the research councils that take place in the NHS.

Annual figures for net spend on research and development by the MRC and the Department are published in "The Forward Look 2003" which is available on the Office of Science and Technology website at www.ost.gov.uk/research/forwardlook03.

Retired Surgeons/Anaesthetists

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the Department of Health's policy is on the use of retired surgeons and anaesthetists. [127708]

Mr. Hutton: All practitioners aged over 65 may continue to practice if it is regarded by their employer as being in the interest of the service. Employment contracts may be extended for one year at a time, until the age of 70. National health service trusts may employ practitioners over the age of 70 but it is the trust's responsibility to ensure that the practitioner is suitably qualified and fit, both mentally and physically to undertake the duties of the post.

The Department of Health has published guidance "Reviewing your retirement options: Consultants and senior hospital doctors", to support consultants who wish to continue working beyond the retirement age.

Rough Sleepers

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department has issued to *(a)* primary care trusts and *(b)* health care professionals to improve access to health services by homeless people. [125851]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 July 2003]:* The Department has not issued guidance to primary care trusts on this issue, but reminded general practitioners, in the February 2003 issue of its monthly newsletter, "GP Bulletin", that National Health Service primary medical care is available to homeless people who do not need to have a permanent address to register for services.

Salt

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the recommendations of the Chief Medical Officer in relation to salt in nutrition. [127632]

Miss Melanie Johnson: This Government are committed to reducing population average intakes of salt, and as 75 per cent. of the salt comes from processed foods, has called on industry to take a meaningful lead in reducing the salt content of processed foods. The Chief Medical Officer's (CMO's) 2002 Annual Report urged:

> "the food industry—including manufacturers, retailers and caterers to drive down the salt content of food—a potentially life saving measure".

The Department along with the Food Standards Agency is holding meetings with food sectors representing the main contributors to salt intake and other key stakeholders to achieve this goal.

CMO endorses and supports the recommendation to reduce the population average intake of salt, which is the principle source of sodium, from 9g to 6g/day and the recent recommendations for children's salt intake by the Scientific Advisory Committee of Nutrition. Even a small reduction in sodium intake can help to reduce the burden of high blood pressure, a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease in our population.

Sex Equality and Discrimination Directive

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact on the NHS of the proposed Directive on sex equality and discrimination. [127624]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health is committed to providing equality of opportunity in all aspects of its work. All policy development must support the core principles of the NHS Plan, one of which states that the national health service of the 21st century must be responsive to the needs of different groups and individuals within society and challenge discrimination on the grounds of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability and sexuality.

While as yet there is no official published Directive text, once a draft Directive is put forward by the European Commission (EC) the United Kingdom Government will aim to work positively and constructively with the EC and other member states on extending the existing sex discrimination legislation to cover goods and services and to ensure that the final agreement fully reflects UK priorities and concerns.

Shrewsbury Hospitals

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* consultants and *(b)* nurses were employed in (i) the Princess Royal Hospital and (ii) the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital in each year since 1997. [127579]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is shown in the table.

Hospital, public health medicine and community health services (HCHS) consultants and nursing staff (actual numbers)

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	March 2003[1]
Princess Royal Hospital National Health Service Trust							
(a) HCHS medical and dental consultants	34	32	36	38	40	40	44
(b) nursing staff[2]	348	377	390	405	418	425	[3]—
Royal Shrewsbury Hospitals National Health Service Trust							
(a) HCHS medical and dental consultants	74	83	83	89	95	98	107
(b) nursing staff[2]	783	796	815	832	928	988	[3]—

[1] Figures for 1997 to 2002 are as at 30 September. 2003 data are as at 31 March.
[2] Nursing staff shows qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff.
[3] Denotes figure not available.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* out and *(b)* in-patient treatments there were at (i) the Princess Royal Hospital and (ii) the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital in each year since 1997. [127581]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is shown in the tables.

Out-patient treatments at Princess Royal Hospital and Royal Shrewsbury Hospital—consultant out-patient attendances for all specialties, 1997–98 to 2002–03

	First attendances seen	Subsequent attendances seen	Total attendances seen
Princess Royal Hospital NHS Trust			
2002–03	44,178	76,001	120,179
2001–02	42,868	75,632	118,500
2000–01	42,068	84,311	126,379
1999–2000	41,039	80,051	121,090
1998–99	38,547	76,678	115,225
1997–98	39,218	75,977	115,195
Royal Shrewsbury Hospitals NHS Trust			
2002–03	64,141	86,512	150,653
2001–02	57,937	88,570	146,507
2000–01	55,537	86,594	142,131
1999–2000	49,734	89,783	139,517
1998–99	41,260	86,545	127,805
1997–98	40,627	86,797	127,424

Note:
Total out-patient attendance figures are for the whole course of treatment that covers the initial consultation through to follow ups after any in-patient admission. Treatment is taken in its widest sense and not just that a procedure or operations has taken place.
Source:
Department of Health form KH09.

In-patient treatments at Princess Royal Hospital and Royal Shrewsbury Hospital—finished consultant episodes and finished in-year admissions

	Finished episodes	In-year admissions FCEs
Princess Royal Hospital NHS Trust		
2001–02	32,486	27,710
2000–01	29,108	26,418
1999–2000	28,450	25,660
1998–99	26,252	24,311
1997–98	25,397	23,288

In-patient treatments at Princess Royal Hospital and Royal Shrewsbury Hospital—finished consultant episodes and finished in-year admissions

	Finished episodes	In-year admissions FCEs
Royal Shrewsbury Hospitals NHS Trust		
2001–02	63,720	56,976
2000–01	61,042	54,489
1999–2000	60,525	53,845
1998–99	59,686	53,611
1997–98	56,973	50,947

Notes:
1. Grossing: figures have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data (i.e. the data are ungrossed).
2. A finished consultant episode (FCE): defined as a period of admitted patient care under one consultant within one healthcare provider. Figures do not represent the number of patients, as a person may have more than one episode of care within the year.
3. Admissions are defined as the first period of in-patient care under one consultant within one healthcare provider. Admissions do not represent the number of in-patients, as a person may have more than one admission within the year.
Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds there were at *(a)* the Princess Royal Hospital and *(b)* the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital in each year since 1997. [127582]

Dr. Ladyman: The average daily number of available beds in wards in wards opening overnight in the Princess Royal National Health Service Trust and the Royal Shrewsbury NHS Trust is shown in the table.

	Princess Royal Hospital NHS Trust (RKF)		Royal Shrewsbury Hospitals NHS Trust (RLZ)	
Year	All beds	General and Acute	All beds	General and Acute
2001–02	346	346	541	479
2000–01	342	342	516	454
1999–2000	345	345	499	431
1998–99	336	336	486	417
1997–98	308	308	462	393

This information is published annually on the Department of Health website at http://www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* capital and *(b)* other grants and allocations were made to the Princess Royal hospital in each year since 1997. [127583]

Dr. Ladyman: Capital Allocations to the princess Royal Hospital National Health Service Trust since 1996–97 are shown in the table.

(£) thousands

Financial Year	*Capital Allocation*
1996–97	2,260
1997–98	1,069
1998–99	1,180
1999–2000	3,735
2000–01	2,634
2001–02	4,540
2002–03	2,575

Information on other grants made from, the Department of Health to the princess Royal Hospital NHS Trust since 2000–2001 are shown in the table.

(£s)

	2000–2001	*2001–2002*	*2002–2003*
Hospital cleanliness	50,000	40,000	0
Ward budgets	45,000	0	0
Improving staff working environment	25,000	0	0
Ward housekeepers	55,000	0	0
NHS menu	7,000	0	0
Reforming emergency care (A and E nurses)	0	18,321	73,561
Reforming emergency care (A and E networks)	0	4,100	17,000
Theatre projects	0	0	25,000
Sexual health and HIV strategy	0	0	10,000

It is not possible to provide information on other grant prior to 2000–01, as this would incur disproportionate costs.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* waiting list numbers and *(b)* waiting times were for (i) in-patients and (ii) out-patients at the Princess Royal hospital in each year since 1997. [127587]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Sibutramine

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions have been *(a)* issued and *(b)* issued to children for sibutramine. [127089]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In 2002, 197,000 prescription items of sibutramine were dispensed in the community in England. Of these, it is estimated that 1,000 items were dispensed to children. There is no information available on the number of children who received sibutramine. Information is not held centrally about drugs prescribed and dispensed in hospitals.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have been prescribed sibutramine for *(a)* up to four weeks, *(b)* one to three months, *(c)* three to 12 months and *(d)* longer than 12 months. [127099]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested is not held centrally. However guidance issued by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence recommends that people should continue with treatment for more than four weeks only if they have lost 2 kg in weight, and beyond three months if they have lost at least 5 per cent. (5 kg for each 100 kg) of their body weight from the start of the drug treatment. Treatment is not recommended for more than 12 months.

Smoking

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the future use of the terms light and mild on cigarette packets. [127737]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government recognise that certain terms can be used to suggest that one tobacco product is less harmful than another. We are therefore committed to banning the use of "misleading descriptors."

The Tobacco Products (Manufacture, Presentation and Sale) (Safety) Regulations 2002 prohibit the supply of tobacco products, "the packaging of which carries any name, brand name, text, trademark or pictorial or any other representation or sign which suggests that that tobacco product is less harmful to health than other tobacco products." The supply of such cigarette packets must cease as of 30 September 2003.

The Government would expect the prohibition to include terms such as "light" and "mild".

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to pilot the scheme running at hospitals in Norwich to help patients following the ban on smoking in the hospitals. [127691]

Dr. Ladyman: The Department of Health has no plans to pilot national smoking prevention schemes. With the changes under "Shifting the Balance of Power", it is now for strategic health authorities and their primary care trusts to introduce smoke-free policies.

The Chief Medical Officer's annual report recommended to Government, that among other recommendations, employers should plan to introduce smoke free workplaces; the public sector and health service should take the lead and this year set dates by which their premises will become entirely smoke free.

The Department of Health are also running a pilot study, led by St. George's hospital, to look into developing a toolkit of introducing a smoking cessation service/policy within hospitals. The results of this study should be available in 2005. We have also asked the British Thoracic Society to undertake a survey of hospitals to see what smoking policies they have introduced.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the recommendations of the Chief Medical Officer in relation to smoking in public places. [127631]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Chief Medical Officer's report should leave no-one in any doubt that second-hand smoke is an important public health issue, and the Government are looking very closely at the Chief

Medical Officer's recommendations. We wish to ensure real progress is being made in the availability of smoke-free public places.

In our 1998 White paper, "Smoking Kills", we agreed that completely smoke-free places are the ideal. The World Health Organisation's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which the UK signed in June 2003, also called for action to protect people from tobacco smoke. Taking action on smoking in the workplace and in public places is an important element of international best practice in tobacco control.

We also want to increase the public's awareness of the real health risks from second-hand smoke: not merely the discomfort caused by being in a smoky atmosphere. That is why we have launched an education campaign, making everyone aware of the need to protect others, particularly children, from the harm caused by second-hand smoke. From 1 April 2003, the Department of Health has also taken a lead in making all our buildings smoke-free and we will be encouraging others to follow this lead.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what basis the Government used for establishing smoking cessation targets for primary care trusts. [127623]

Miss Melanie Johnson: There are national targets. Primary care trusts (PCTs) have not been set smoking cessation targets. PCTs were asked to plan together with their strategic health authorities how to support the national Priorities and Planning Framework (PPF) target:

> "to reduce the rate of smoking contributing to the national target of: reducing the rate in manual groups from 32 per cent. in 1998 to 26 per cent. by 2010; 800,000 smokers from all groups successfully quitting at the four week stage by 2006".

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the Government has spent centrally on smoking cessation advertising and awareness campaigns since 1995; and what central allocations have been made in the current year. [128233]

Miss Melanie Johnson: International evidence shows that key elements in any tobacco control strategy are advertising and public education. In the 1998 White Paper, "Smoking Kills", the Government committed itself to a programme of public education to persuade smokers to quit and non-smokers not to start.

Education and media campaign spending is shown in the table.

Year	*£ millions*
1995–96	5.5
1996–97	6.5
1997–98	16.5
1998–99	2.7
1999–2000	15.9
2000–01	13.73
2001–02	13.3
2002–03	13.0
2003–04	[1]14.2

Note:
[1] Expenditure to date

This funding includes expenditure on telephone helplines per annum for the NHS Smoking Helpline—£1.1 million; the NHS pregnancy smoking helpline—£152,000; and the NHS Asian Tobacco Helpline—£78,500. £15 million over the three years from 2003–04 to 2005–06 will be available to key health charities, beginning with the British Heart Foundation and Cancer Research UK to develop hard-hitting messages on the dangers of smoking.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the Government have spent centrally on smoking cessation programmes in each year since 1997; and how much has been allocated in the current year. [128234]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The national health service stop smoking services were launched in 1999. The services received a total of £76 million over a four year period 1999–2000 to 2002–03.

A further £138 million has been allocated over the three years 2003–06.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department tracks smokers who have given up for longer than four weeks through the smoking-cessation services. [127679]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department of Health does not require the national health service stop smoking services to track smokers who have given up for longer than four weeks, although some services do. Follow-up at four weeks was chosen as a viable, practical way to ascertain initial success, following advice from experts in smoking cessation.

Data from 52-week follow up were originally collected for clients who set a quit date in specialist services in health action zones in 1999–2000. A high proportion of clients were lost to the service and some services found that 52-week follow up took disproportionate resources.

Solvent Misuse

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department has taken to implement the recommendations arising from the seminar 'Young People and Solvent Misuse: Developing a Shared Approach', held on 19 November 2002. [127795]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The report on outcomes from the seminar 'Young People and Solvent Misuse: Developing a Shared Approach' was circulated to delegates in August. The Department is setting up a national stakeholder group to support the development and implementation of the Department's Action Plan on Volatile Substance Misuse. The stakeholder group will take account of recommendations arising from the seminar.

Speech and Language Therapists

Mr. Dorrell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies there are in Leicestershire for speech and language therapists; and what proportion this represents of the total number of such posts in Leicestershire. [127272]

Dr. Ladyman: Information on vacancies is collected via the National Health Service Workforce Vacancy Survey. The Survey defines a vacancy as one that has lasted for three months or more which employers are actively trying to fill.

From the latest information available there are no three-month vacancies for speech or language therapists in Leicestershire.

Standing Medical Advisory Committee

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the membership is of the Standing Medical Advisory Committee; and if he will make a statement. [127202]

Mr. Hutton: The current membership, at 18 July 2003, of the Standing Medical Advisory Committee (SMAC) is:

Dan Ash*— President, Royal College Radiologists
Nick Astbury*— President, Royal College of Ophthalmologists
Susan Benbow—Old Age Psychiatrist (Manchester)
Carol Black*—President, Royal College of Physicians
Ian Bogle*—Chairman, Council of the British Medical Association
Graeme Catto*—Chair, General Medical Council
John Chisholm GP and Chairman of GMSC (London)
Alan Craft*—President, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health
William Dunlop*—President Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and Chair of the Joint Consultants Committee
Sian Griffiths*—President, Faculty of Public Health Medicine
Bill Gunnyeon*—Dean, Faculty of Occupational Medicine
David Haslam*—Chairman, Council of the Royal College of GPs
Peter Hutton*—President Royal College of Anaesthetists
Brian Jarman—Professor of Primary Care (London)
Flora Jessop—Specialist registrar histopathology (Cambridge)
James Johnson*—Chairman, Council of the British Medical Association
Bruce Keogh—Cardiothoracic Surgeon (Birmingham)
Tamara Madej—Consultants Anaesthetist (York)
Peter Morris*—President, Royal College of Surgeons of England
John Newton—Epidemiology Research (Oxford/Southampton)
Ken Nischal—Consultant Ophthalmic Surgeon/Paediatrics (London)
Colin Roberts—Medical Microbiologist (Oxford)
Angela Robinson—Consultant/Honorary Senior Lecturer GU/HIV (London)
Martin Roland—General Practitioner (Manchester)
Mike Shooter*—President, Royal College of Psychiatrists
Sunil Sinha—Consultant Paediatrician (Middlesbrough)
Susan Tuck—Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist (London)
James Underwood*—President, Royal College of Pathologists

* Denotes ex-officio member.

Information about SMAC can be found on the Department of Health website at http://www.doh.gov.uk/smac/index.htm.

Stolen NHS Property

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the value is of NHS property stolen from NHS premises during each of the previous five accounting years and so far during this accounting year. [127160]

Mr. Hutton: Historically, there has been no routine collection of this kind of information. Individual health bodies are required to keep registers of losses, which are retained locally.

The Counter Fraud and Security Management Service, launched on 1 April 2003 is currently reviewing the management of security within the national health service.

Stroke Units

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many hospitals have a specialist stroke unit; and what percentage of hospitals this represents; [127704]

(2) what progress has been made towards the target of 100 per cent. of hospitals having a specialist stroke unit by April 2004. [127705]

Dr. Ladyman: The most comprehensive source of information is the National Sentinel Stroke Audit, carried out by the Royal College of Physicians. The audit was commissioned by the national health service in 1998 and was last updated in 2002. The results can be found at http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/pubs/strokeaudit01–02.pdf. The 2002 audit shows that 73 per cent. of trusts who participated had a stroke unit compared to 56 per cent. three years earlier. The audit shows that 80 per cent. of trusts that participated have a consultant physician with specialist knowledge of stroke who is formally recognised as having principal responsibility for stroke services. While it is recognised that some services need to increase their capacity, the audit notes that very significant improvements have already been made.

Our major vehicle for further improving standards for stroke services is through the older people's national service framework (NSF) which sets specific milestones for improvement by 2004 of stroke services in primary care trusts, specialist services and general hospitals that care for people suffering from a stroke. Our document, "Improvement, Expansion and Reform", which sets for the NHS a Priorities and Planning Framework for 2003–06, makes clear that implementation of the older people's NSF is a top priority, and that the 2004 milestone around specialist stroke services is a key target.

We monitor progress against the key milestones in the NSF. From the information gathered so far we know that 83 per cent. of the hospitals who have replied, now have plans to have a specialist stroke service in place by April 2004.

Implementation of the NSF for older people is leading to real improvements in stroke services and making a difference to people's lives. The development of better services and improved standards in stroke care requires the right balance between national standards, provided by the NSF, national clinical guidelines and local control. It will be important to ensure that stroke care services are co-ordinated and fully integrated within a full range of other relevant local services.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many stroke units there are in the NHS; and where they are. [127327]

Dr. Ladyman: We do not routinely collect the information requested. The most comprehensive source of information is the National Sentinel Stroke Audit, carried out by the Royal College of Physicians. The audit was commissioned by the National Health Service in 1998 and was last updated in 2002. The results can be found at http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/pubs/strokeaudit01–02.pdf. The 2002 audit shows that 73 per cent. of trusts who participated had a stroke unit compared to 56 per cent. three years earlier. The audit shows that 80 per cent. of trusts that participated have a consultant physician with specialist knowledge of stroke who is formally recognised as having principal responsibility for stroke services. While it is recognised that some services need to increase their capacity, the audit notes that very significant improvements have already been made.

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We monitor progress against the key milestones in the NSF. From the information gathered so far we know that 83 per cent. of the hospitals who have replied, now have plans to have a specialist stroke service in place by April 2004.

Sugar

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to restrict the amount of sugar in foods manufactured primarily for children. [127716]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The NHS Plan and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) nutrition action plan identify Government commitment to working with the food industry to improve the overall balance of the diet. This includes aspects of food content relating to salt, fat and sugar.

The FSA and the Department are in discussions with industry on reducing salt in foods. Work on sugars and fat will follow subsequently.

Suicide

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in meeting the "Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation" target on suicide reduction. [127366]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The "Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation" target is to reduce the death rate from suicide and undetermined injury by at least a fifth by the year 20010, from a baseline of 9.2 deaths per 100,000 population in 1995–97 to 7.4 deaths per 1,000,000 population in 2009–11.

The suicide rate for the single year 2001, the most recent available, was the lowest recorded. The European Age Standardised Rate in 2001 was 8.9 per 100,000 population, a decrease of 5 per cent. on 2000 which was 9.3. There was also a fall in mental health in-patient suicide in 2001.

As the only full-year figures we have since the publication of the "Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation" strategy are for 2000 and 2001, it is still too early to assess progress in meeting this target. Current trends do not as yet provide a robust indication of the effect of the strategy. If the trend of the last three years continues, then the target will be met, however this is much too short a period from which to extrapolate a robust trend.

Sun Creams

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures were taken in the last 12 months to promote the use of sun protection creams over the 2003 summer. [127474]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The United Kingdom Health Departments have funded the SunSmart sun awareness campaign run by Cancer Research UK. One of the key messages of the campaign's health promotion materials (leaflets, posters and factcards) is "to use a factor 15+ sunscreen". The campaign and its materials have been widely publicised in both national and local media.

Testicular Cancer

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department has taken over the last 12 months to raise awareness of testicular cancer and the importance of self-checking, with specific reference to men aged under 35 years; and what further measures he plans to take in the future. [127485]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Testicular cancer is almost always curable if found early. The disease responds well to treatment even if it has spread to other parts of the body. More than nine out of 10 patients are cured.

There is currently no method by which a man can reduce his risk of developing the disease, but awareness of its early signs and symptoms should be encouraged. Men should be aware of any unusual changes and consult doctors early in order to ensure the maximum chance of a cure. That is why, in April last year, we collaborated with Cancer Research UK in the production of a testicular self-awareness leaflet, "Testicular Cancer: Spot the Symptoms Early".

We are also currently working with the Department of Psychiatry of Disability at St. George's Hospital Medical School on the production of testicular awareness materials for men with learning difficulties.

Teeth

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children have had impacted third molars removed in each year since 1997; and how many showed signs of pathology in their teeth. [127093]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The number of children who have had impacted third molars removed in England in 1997–98 to 2002–03 is shown in the table. Children are

defined as being under 18 years of age. Records of the pathology of the teeth prior to extraction are recorded as part of the patient's clinical notes, but are not collected centrally. Nevertheless, the table provides encouraging evidence of progress on implementation of the recommendations that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) made in 2000 that the routine prophylactic removal of pathology-free wisdom teeth should be replaced by standard routine follow-up.

General, Personal and Hospital Dental Service: Number of children who have had impacted third molars removed in 1997–98 to 2002–03, England

	Total	*General Dental Service*[1]	*Personal Dental Service*[1]	*Hospital Dental Services*[2]
1997–98	[3]3,700	[3]2,100	0	1,544
1998–99	3,562	1,861	10	1,691
1999–2000	2,685	1,356	9	1,320
2000–01	1,842	891	6	945
2001–02	1,516	724	5	787
2002–03	n/a	684	5	n/a

n/a = data not available.

[1] Based on dental treatment claims for payment.

[2] Number of admissions for surgical removal of impacted third molar based on finished consultant episodes. Patients may have more than one admission within a year.

[3] Estimated using figures for number of teeth extracted in the general dental service.

Sources:

[1] Dental Practice Board.

[2] Hospital Episode Statistics.

Treatment Availability

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the *(a)* efficacy and *(b)* availability within the NHS of (i) gold, (ii) Enbrel and (iii) Remicade. [127553]

Dr. Ladyman: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) was asked to appraise the use of infliximab (Remicade) and etanecerpt (Enbrel) in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis. NICE issued its guidance on 22 March 2002, which recommended the use of etanecerpt for the treatment of juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA) and etanecerpt and infliximab for adult rheumatoid arthritis (RA). Clinicians will still be responsible for exercising judgment in individual cases in the light of NICE's guidance and the evidence on which it was based.

Gold therapy may be used to suppress the disease process in rheumatoid arthritis. It may be given by intramuscular injection as sodium aurothiomalate, or given by mouth as auranofin.

These drugs are available on the national health service for use in cases where the clinician and patient decide this is the best option.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were diagnosed as suffering from tuberculosis in *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 2000, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1996 and *(e)* 1994. [127431]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Statutory notifications to the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre of the Health Protection Agency show that the number of people diagnosed with pulmonary and non-pulmonary tuberculosis in England and Wales for the years mentioned are shown in the table.

	Notifications
1994	5,591
1996	5,654
1998	6,087
2000	6,797
2002	[1]6,891

[1] Provisional figure

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people suffering from AIDS are also infected with tuberculosis. [127432]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The numbers of HIV-infected individuals diagnosed with AIDS in the last five years in England, for whom pulmonary or non-pulmonary tuberculosis was the first AIDS-defining illness, are shown in the table.

	Number of cases
1998	117
1999	93
2000	142
2001	168
2002	[1]206

[1] Numbers may rise, particularly for the most recent year, as further reports are received.

Source:

Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre, Health Protection Agency (data to end June 2003).

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions between 31 March 2002 and 31 March 2003 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [126668]

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times special advisers have accompanied ministers on overseas visits in the last 12 months for which figures are available; which countries were visited; and what the total cost of each individual visit was. [127472]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Between 31 March 2002 and 31 March 2003 special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity on three occasions: to Washington DC, Brussels and Mexico.

Destination	*Cost (£)*
Washington	5,784
Brussels	1,170
Mexico	10,220

Waiting Times/Lists

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were waiting more than 21 weeks at the end of March for an outpatient appointment, broken down by NHS hospital trusts. [127320]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of patients at each National Health Service trust and primary care trust (as a provider) who have been waiting more than 21 weeks for a first consultant outpatient appointment following a general practitioner written referral at 31 March 2003, has been placed in the Library.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of patients in each health authority in England were waiting for treatment for more than 12 months in 2001–02. [127521]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the percentage of patients who were waiting over 12 months at the end of each quarter for elective inpatient admission by English health authorities in 2001–02, has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people suffering from *(a)* motor neurone disease, *(b)* migraines, *(c)* Parkinson's disease, *(d)* epilepsy and *(e)* Alzheimer's disease waited (i) up to four weeks, (ii) four to 13 weeks (iii) 13 to 17 weeks, (iv) 17 to 21 weeks, (v) 21 to 26 weeks and (vi) more than 26 weeks from the receipt of a GP written referral request to a first out-patient attendance in each quarter since Quarter 1 of 1996–97 in each NHS trust and primary care trust. [127024]

Dr. Ladyman: Information at the level of detail requested is not available centrally. We have set targets to reduce the waiting between referral and first out-patient appointment in all cases to 16 weeks by 1 April 2004. Each year maximum waiting times will fall so that, by the end of 2005, the first out-patient appointment will be cut to three months. Urgent cases will continue to be treated much faster. People with neurological conditions will benefit from these reductions in waiting times.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of people suffering from strokes waited for less than four hours for admission to accident and emergency in each quarter for which data is available since Quarter 1 of 1996–97 in each NHS trust and primary care trust; [127026]

(2) what percentage of stroke victims received brain imaging within 48 hours of the onset of the stroke in each quarter for which data is available since Quarter 1 of 1996–97 in each NHS trust and primary care trust. [127027]

Dr. Ladyman: Information about stroke services at the level of detail requested is not available centrally. The most comprehensive source of information on stroke services is the National Sentinel Stroke Audit, carried out by the Royal College of Physicians. The results can be found at http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/pubs/strokeaudit01-02.pdf.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the latest average waiting time is for in-patient treatment in *(a)* Greater London and *(b)* England. [127501]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows the latest estimated average waiting times for elective inpatient admission for England and each London strategic health authority.

Average (median) waiting times for elective inpatient admission; England and London SHAs (commissioner based): Position at 31 May 2003

	Median waiting times (months)
England	2.80
North West London HA	2.69
North Central London HA	2.73
North East London HA	2.99
South East London HA	2.92
South West London HA	2.74

Source:
Department of Health form QF01

The Medians in the table are based on aggregate data, categorised into waiting time bands, and do not reflect shifts in the waiting time profiles within these bands, only between bands. Progress on delivering maximum waiting times may not necessarily translate into a reduction in the median waiting time, because of shifts in low time bands.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting times are in each hospital trust; and what these were 12 months ago for *(a)* hip replacements, *(b)* cataract operations and *(c)* heart operations. [127558]

Mr. Hutton: Information on waiting times for elective in-patient admission is not collected by type of operation.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting times outside Accident and Emergency departments were in each health authority in each year from 1995–96 to 2001–02. [127718]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Work Force Development Confederations

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has given to Workforce Development Confederations on staff training on the *(a)* recognition and *(b)* response to autism spectrum disorders. [127853]

Dr. Ladyman: We have not issued specific advice on autism to national health service workforce confederations. However, the learning disability White Paper, "Valuing People", points out the need for local NHS workforce confederations to take account of workforce requirements in learning disability, which often occurs in association with autism.

"Valuing People" also requires learning disability partnership boards to develop local workforce and training plans. Local bodies with interests in staff training should be aware of the learning disability awards framework, which contains two vocational qualifications—a level 2 certificate and a level 3 certificate in working with people with learning

disabilities, both of which include a module about autism. These modules cover both recognising and responding to autistic spectrum disorders.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to ensure that casualty departments are adequately staffed after the implementation of the European Working Time Directive. [128214]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has issued guidance on implementing the Working Time Directive (WTD), HSC 2003/001, "Protecting Staff, Delivering Services, Implementing the European Working Time Directive for Doctors in Training", and also on configuration of services, "Keeping the NHS local". Together, these emphasise the importance of innovative solutions to maintain local access to services while achieving compliance with the WTD. This is a local national health service responsibility, supported by the 7.4 per cent. per annum real term increase in funding over the next five years.

To assist trusts in meeting the WTD and to support increases in consultant numbers the Department has increased significantly the number of specialist registrar (SpR) training opportunities, including 80 in accident and emergency. I announced on 17 July 2003 that postgraduate deans will be instructed to give priority to hospitals facing WTD challenges when considering the allocation of 1,500 additional locally funded SpR training opportunities available this year. This will ensure that training posts are focused on those hospitals under the greatest pressure in complying with the WTD. Further training posts will also be approved where this can help trusts with compliance.

Successful implementation of the WTD will mean staff working differently. A programme of 19 pilot projects has been set up to develop and test innovative solutions to implementing the WTD. The "Hospital at Night" pilot project utilises a central multi disciplinary emergency team to provide cover across the hospital at night.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with doctors' representatives regarding the implementation of the European Working Time Directive. [128215]

Mr. Hutton: The Department regularly discusses Working Time Directive (WTD) implementation with representatives of the medical profession both formally and informally. A WTD) implementation with representatives of the medical profession both formally and informally. A WTD expert group meets regularly with members from several medical Royal Colleges, the joint consultants committee, the British Medical Association junior doctors committee and the Department of Health.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Royal College of Physicians report on the Working Time Directive. [127709]

Mr. Hutton: The Department is committed to working with the Royal College of Physicians and other bodies to achieve compliance with the European Working Time Directive (EWTD). To assist trusts in meeting the EWTD and to support increases in consultant numbers, the Department has increased significantly the number of specialist registrar (SpR) training opportunities.

I announced on 17 July 2003 that postgraduate deans will be instructed to give priority to hospitals facing EWTD challenges when considering the allocation of 1,500 additional locally funded SpR training opportunities available this year. This will ensure that training posts are focused on those hospitals under the greatest pressure in complying with the EWTD. Further training posts will also be approved where this can help trusts with compliance.

TRANSPORT

Blue Badge Scheme

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the action he intends to take in respect of each of the recommendations from the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee on the future of the Blue Badge Scheme; and if he will make a statement; [127981]

(2) when he expects the changes to the Blue Badge Scheme which do not require primary legislation to be in place; and if he will make a statement; [127982]

(3) what plans he has to amend the publication, The Blue Badge Scheme parking concession for disabled and blind people; if he will make the section on the duties of blue badge holders clearer; and if he will make a statement. [127983]

Mr. McNulty: As my colleague the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) announced on 18 December 2002 a summary of our responses to each of DPTAC's recommendations has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

We will be taking forward the majority of the recommendations through changes to primary and secondary legislation, research and in new guidance to local authorities on the scheme. As we progress our work we will be consulting and involving major disability organisations, many of which act as umbrella organisations representing people with a range of disabilities. Copies of consultation material will additionally be made available to any individual or group who requests it.

We are pursuing a suitable legislative slot for those changes requiring primary legislation. In the meantime we have begun work on those recommendations which require changes to secondary legislation and will also be embarking on a number of research projects over the next few months. The new guidance, which will cover all aspects of the scheme will be issued when changes have been introduced.

The Department's publication, "The Blue Badge Scheme: Parking concessions for disabled and blind people" will be amended to reflect those changes and will be issued in tandem with the guidance.

Timing for introduction of the changes will be subject to the outcome of the research, consultations and the parliamentary process as appropriate. I am not able at this stage to give a firm timetable, but would reassure my hon. and learned Friend that we are firmly committed to introducing the changes at the earliest possible opportunity.

Bus Services (Merseyside)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the change in *(a)* the number of passenger journeys and *(b)* passenger mileage has been on supported bus services in Merseyside from 2000–01 to 2002–03. [128582]

Mr. McNulty: The Department does not collect information on the number of passenger journeys on supported services or passenger mileage on those services in Merseyside.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the average age of buses in Merseyside is; and whether there has been a change in the average age of buses in Merseyside over the last two years. [128583]

Mr. McNulty: DVLA records for Public Service Vehicles registered in Merseyside showed an average age of 8.4 years in 2000. The average age was 8.7 years in 2002.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many CCTVs are in use on supported buses in Merseyside. [128584]

Mr. McNulty: The Department does not collect information on the number of CCTV cameras or recording equipment fitted to buses.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many low floor wheelchair accessible vehicles are used on supported services in *(a)* Merseyside and *(b)* Sefton. [128585]

Mr. McNulty: Merseytravel advise that all the vehicles used on their supported services are low floor and wheelchair accessible. This equates to approximately 270 vehicles across the county of Merseyside, of which approximately 60 are used on routes which, at some point, pass through the district of Sefton.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the rate of *(a)* punctuality and *(b)* reliability of Merseyside supported bus services was in the last year for which figures are available. [128586]

Mr. McNulty: The Department does not collect information on bus punctuality. Bus reliability is measured in a quarterly survey through a panel of large bus operators, but was not designed to show reliability in each Passenger Transport Authority area or to distinguish the reliability of supported bus services from the reliability of commercial bus services.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps have been taken to reduce environmentally harmful emissions from supported bus services in Merseyside. [128587]

Mr. McNulty: The Government's measures to promote the shift to environmentally clean low-carbon vehicles and fuels include the 'TransportEnergy' programmes, which include financial support for bus and other transport operators to purchase or convert to cleaner fuels or vehicle technology.

TransportEnergy has supported the purchase of four CNG (compressed natural gas) buses and the retrofitting of 80 buses with pollution reduction devices by the Merseyside Passenger Transport Executive.

Coastal Lifeboats

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on Government funding for coastal lifeboats. [127866]

Mr. Jamieson: In the United Kingdom, 296 coastal lifeboats are provided for front line search and rescue purposes by the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) which, as a charity, receives no Government funding. In addition, there are 42 independent rescue boats which are made available for search and rescue purposes. These boats are usually part of local charitable organisations or privately funded and again receive no Government funding.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* press officers, *(c)* civil servants, *(d)* advisers to civil servants and *(e)* permanent staff were working for the Department in each year since 1996. [126476]

Mr. McNulty: I refer the hon. Member to Table C of the annual publication "Civil Service Statistics", which covers permanent staff numbers for the Department and its agencies from 1995 to 2002. Copies of these are available in the Libraries of the House. Alternatively this information is available from the Cabinet Office website.

There is one special adviser currently in post, a further post is vacant.

There are 16.8 permanent press officers (full-time equivalent) currently employed in the DfT press office.

The job title 'advisers to civil servants' described above does not correspond to any current job titles in this Department.

Network Rail

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has made and intends to make to Network Rail to ensure that disused land is sold at cost value to local authorities to enable flood remedial measures to be implemented. [128211]

Mr. McNulty: None. This is a commercial matter for Network Rail.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the Strategic Rail Authority and Network Rail's decision to opt for closure and diversions to allow engineering work. [128640]

Mr. McNulty: The Strategic Rail Authority and Network Rail's approach will enable the work to be done more quickly and efficiently and the inevitable disruption will be contained to a much shorter period. Disruption to passengers will be minimised by the use of diversionary routes and alternative services.

GB Railways Group

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he first received reports from the Strategic Rail Authority of the bid by FirstGroup plc for GB Railways Group plc; and if he will make a statement. [127228]

Mr. McNulty: The Department first received a report from the Strategic Rail Authority on this matter on 8 July 2003.

Rail Freight

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to encourage businesses to use rail services as a means of transporting goods; and what assessment his Department has made of methods businesses use to transport products. [128244]

Mr. McNulty: The Strategic Rail Authority set out its objectives for freight in its revised Strategic Plan, published in January. Copies of this document are available in the Libraries of the House.

Mersey Tunnels

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has received copies of accounts of income and expenditure for the Mersey Tunnels in accordance with section 100 of the County of Merseyside Act 1980. [127963]

Mr. Jamieson: The Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority (Merseytravel) submitted Outturn forms recording Mersey Tunnels income and expenditure to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in August 2003.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last received a set of accounts of income and expenditure for the Mersey Tunnels prior to 1 January. [127965]

Mr. Jamieson: The Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority (Merseytravel) submitted Outturn forms recording Mersey Tunnels income and expenditure to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in August 2002.

National Air Consultation

Alan Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what meetings he has had with *(a)* British Airways, *(b)* British Airport Authority, *(c)* other industry bodies, *(d)* local authorities and *(e)* environmental groups on the National Air Consultation; what the agenda of each meeting was; and if he will meet representatives of the London Borough of Hounslow to discuss their concerns. [127756]

Mr. McNulty: Ministers and officials attend many meetings with a wide range of organisations including those representing industry, local authorities, and environmental concerns. It is not possible to provide a definitive list of those meetings which have included discussions about "The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom" consultation.

National Walking Strategy

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish a National Walking Strategy; and if he will make a statement. [128613]

Mr. McNulty: The Department issued a discussion document on walking on 30 June. "On the move: by foot" seeks views from all interests on how we might improve conditions for pedestrians and increase levels of walking. Responses to the document have been requested by 26 September and will help to inform a strategic action plan of measures and initiatives to encourage more journeys on foot and identify any related guidance required.

Operation Bream

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many arrests were made in Merseyside owing to the joint initiative Operation Bream. [128593]

Mr. McNulty: Operation Bream was a high visibility intensive policing operation along a single bus corridor and resulted in 72 arrests.

Rail Transport

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the effect of reduced use of rail transport by business on road and air services; and what assessment has been made on what pollution problems could result. [128248]

Mr. McNulty: Our policies aim to provide safe, reliable and secure transport that supports sustainable economic growth. The use of rail is then a commercial matter for the businesses concerned. Any assessment of pollution problems resulting from any modal shift from rail to road or air would be difficult to undertake, because it would depend on the locations concerned and the time of travel.

Rail Services

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve the on-time performance of rail companies. [127842]

Mr. McNulty: Our top priority is to see significant improvement in rail punctuality and reliability. The rail industry, under the leadership of the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA), is working increasingly closely together to deliver this. The SRA has issued a template performance action plan to all train operators. The plan requires train operators to identify the main causes of delay, and to produce action plans to address them.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how much ridership has changed on average over the last two years for rail travel in Merseyside; [128588]

(2) what percentage of trains in Merseyside ran no more than five minutes late in the last year for which figures are available. [128590]

Mr. McNulty: The number of passenger kilometres travelled on Arriva Trains Merseyside services rose from 255 million in 2001–02 to 275 million in 2002–03 and the number of passenger journeys rose from 23.8 million to 24.9 million in the same period.

For the year to 31 March 2003, 91.5 per cent. of Arriva Trains Merseyside services arrived within five minutes of their scheduled arrival time.

The Strategic Rail Authority publishes statistics for each train operating company in its Annual Report, and in the quarterly National Rail Trends and six-monthly "On Track" publications, each of which is available through the Libraries of the House.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding Silverlink's advice to rail passengers to go on holiday during a period of maintenance. [128275]

Mr. McNulty: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received no representations regarding Silverlink's advice to rail passengers to go on holiday during a period of maintenance.

Reading Station

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the Strategic Rail Authority to provide him with the business case for a major scheme at Reading station; and when he expects to publish the business case. [127123]

Mr. McNulty: The Strategic Rail Authority, in conjunction with Reading Borough Council, is developing a business case for major capacity enhancements at Reading. The project would require a Transport and Works Act Order, an application for which would be made around 2005. The business case will form part of that application.

School Buses

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the results of the yellow school bus pilot schemes will be published; and if he will make a statement on proposals to encourage wider take up of such schemes. [128196]

Mr. McNulty: We expect to receive the final report of the independent evaluation of the yellow school bus pilot schemes by the end of September. We will give careful consideration to the findings of the study before deciding on next steps.

Speed Cameras (Romford)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the number of speed cameras in Romford. [128379]

Mr. Jamieson: In the London borough of Havering, of which Romford is a part, there are currently 13 fixed camera site housings available for speed camera enforcement and one site enforced periodically by a mobile camera unit.

Speeding

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he will take to reclaim from local partnerships money paid in fines as a result of convictions for speeding based on evidence from speed cameras which are not *(a)* properly identified and *(b)* positioned in accordance with Government guidelines; and if he will make a statement. [128089]

Mr. Jamieson: The rules and guidelines relating to the safety camera netting-off programme have no bearing on the prosecution process. Where camera partnerships fail to meet visibility and conspicuity rules they may be suspended from the scheme and payments withheld.

Local Transport Plans

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to encourage local authorities to show how they intend to improve urban design and regeneration in their next local transport plans. [128644]

Mr. McNulty: The Government recogniseb the importance of Local Transport Plans as a tool that local authorities may use to regenerate and improve the urban environment, in and around local transport infrastructure. We are currently considering how this might be reflected in our guidance for local authorities on their next Local Transport Plans.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Foodstuffs Trade

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the balance of payments in the UK in foodstuffs; and if she will make a statement. [128056]

Mr. Bradshaw: The following table shows the level of exports, imports and trade gap for the United Kingdom in food, feed and drink, for each of the last five years (1998–2002).

£ billion

	1998	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Total Exports	9.2	8.9	8.7	8.5	8.9
Total Imports	17.1	17.2	16.8	18.3	19.1
Trade Gap[1]	-7.9	-8.3	-8.1	-9.8	-10.2

[1] In the calculation of the trade gap the values of exports and imports are measured slightly differently. For exports, values include the costs allowed under "free on board" which refers to the total export values of goods leaving the country. For imports, values include the costs allowed under "cost insurance freight" which refers to the total value of the goods imported into the UK. Thus for imports into the UK the cost of transportation between the port or place of dispatch and the UK port or place of importation is included. As a result imports are overstated relative to exports by about 5 per cent. The figures are not seasonally adjusted.

Source:

HM Customs and Excise Data prepared by Statistics (Commodities & Food) Accounts and Trade, ESD, DEFRA

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Corporate Environmental Reports

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many FTSE

350 companies have responded to the Prime Minister's October 2000 challenge to produce corporate environmental reports. [127837]

Mr. Morley: This Department conducted a survey last year of the progress made by companies in the FTSE 350 in voluntary reporting of their environmental performance. An account of the results of this survey was placed in the Library of the House in July 2002.

Egg Industry

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will be raising the UK egg industry at the Fifth World Trade Organisation Ministerial Conference in Cancun. [127597]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will aim to secure a positive outcome for all UK interests at the Fifth WTO Ministerial. She is aware of the concerns of the British egg industry about market access and will take due account of those concerns in her discussion in Cancun.

Environmental Legislation

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to raise awareness among small businesses of environmental regulations and legislation. [127838]

Mr. Morley: The central thrust of the Department's efforts to raise awareness of environmental regulations and legislation is the NetRegs project. NetRegs aims to provide clear and coherent guidelines for businesses (principally small/medium-sized businesses) on environmental legislation, and how to comply with it. Sector-specific guidelines for 100 industry sectors will be available on its website (www.netregs.gov.uk) by the time the project finishes at the end of March 2004; currently there are guidelines for over 55 business sectors already published on the site. NetRegs is a partnership between the Environment Agency, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, the Environment and Heritage Service Northern Ireland, and the DTI. It is funded by the Treasury's Capital Modernisation Fund.

To publicise NetRegs to its target audience, the NetRegs team has successfully engaged the support of the relevant trade media, associations, and business support organisations in 'spreading the word' on a sector-by-sector basis, as each sector's guidelines are launched on the website. So far NetRegs has generated over 700 pieces of media coverage since October 2002 and over 180 organisations have to date actively supported and or promoted the site

Defra also undertakes initiatives in relation to specific areas of new legislation. For example, between September 2002 and February 2003 Defra, DTI and the Small Business Service ran over 30 seminars across the UK to raise awareness of the European Directives on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE), which must be transposed into UK legislation by the summer of next year.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) which countries have sent radioactive material to the United Kingdom for disposal since 2001; and what charges were levied; [128107]

(2) how many shipments of radioactive waste have been sent abroad to be disposed of since 2001; and what the destination countries were. [128108]

Mr. Morley: Imports and exports of radioactive waste into, out of, or through the European Union are controlled under European Commission Directive 92/3 Euratom. This Directive is implemented into UK law by the Transfrontier Shipment of Radioactive Waste Regulations 1993. Authorisations under the regulations are administered in England and Wales by the Environment Agency, in Scotland by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and in Northern Ireland by the Environment and Heritage Service.

Under the regulations three shipments of radioactive waste into the UK have been authorised since 2001. Small quantities of mixed solid and liquid laboratory wastes were received from the British Antarctic Survey in 2001 and 2002, and contaminated oilfield equipment was received from Norway in 2002. No charges have been levied by the regulatory bodies for issuing an authorisation. Any other costs involved are a commercial matter for the consigners and/or consignees, as relevant.

No shipments of radioactive waste for disposal have been sent abroad from the UK since 2001.

Antibiotics

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her policy towards the use of antibiotics in animal feed. [128260]

Mr. Bradshaw: Antibiotics cannot be used in animal feed unless they are authorised either as veterinary medicinal products or as zootechnical feed additives (which are used as growth promoters).

The Government recognises the important role that authorised antibiotics play in maintaining animal health and welfare. However it takes very seriously the possibility of their contributing to the development of antimicrobial resistance in bacteria affecting humans. The Government has therefore developed a comprehensive strategy for maintaining the effectiveness of antimicrobial products and reducing the overall pool of antibiotic use in animals. A key element in this strategy is promoting the prudent use of authorised antibiotic medicines and feed additives in animal husbandry.

The Government is satisfied that the four feed additives authorised as antibiotic growth promoters are not related to any therapeutic antibiotics currently used in human or animal medicine. However it supports the phasing out of these products on a precautionary basis from 1 January 2006 under new EU legislation on Feed Additives coming into effect next year. The Government believes that this provides sufficient time for the industry to introduce new husbandry methods before the authorisations for antibiotic growth promoters are withdrawn. Defra is working closely with the industry's

Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture (RUMA) alliance in drawing up plans to assist industry to adjust to the loss of these products from January 2006.

Avian Influenza

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the current outbreak of avian influenza in the European Union. [128252]

Mr. Bradshaw: European Community legislation lays down procedures for controlling avian influenza (AI) outbreaks in EU member states. The measures taken by the Dutch, Belgian and German authorities and endorsed by the European Commission follow the rules laid down in this legislation.

Following the confirmation of AI in the Netherlands and Belgium in March and April 2003 respectively, the Dutch and Belgian authorities imposed a standstill on the transport of live poultry and hatching eggs within those countries. The Dutch and Belgian authorities also stopped their exports of live poultry, hatching eggs and fresh unprocessed and non-heat treated poultry manure and litter. In May 2003, AI was also confirmed in the Land of North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany and the German authorities took similar action. In each instance the European Commission put in place Community legislation to reinforce the action taken by the countries concerned.

In each case following the confirmation of AI, Defra issued Declarations under domestic animal health legislation to ban imports of live poultry, hatching eggs, racing/show pigeons, fresh unprocessed and non-heat-treated poultry manure or litter and dead day-old chicks from the Netherlands, Belgium and the affected part of Germany. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland also introduced similar Declarations. EU legislation does not permit trade in fresh poultry meat if it was obtained from poultry originating in established surveillance zones in those countries. In light of Germany and Belgium's confirmation on 26 June and 16 July 2003 respectively, that there had been no further outbreaks and that the disease had been successfully eradicated, restrictions were lifted from Belgium and the affected part of Germany. Defra revoked the declarations and have informed the trade that they can import live poultry, hatching eggs, racing/show pigeons and fresh unprocessed and non-heat treated poultry manure and litter from the whole of Germany and Belgium.

On 22 July 2003, Defra issued a Declaration lifting all import restrictions on live poultry, their hatching eggs and racing/show pigeons from the Netherlands except from the area between the provinces of Utrecht and Gelderland and the area North of Limburg in the Netherlands.

The European Commission is keeping all member states informed of the AI situation in the Netherlands. The Government are satisfied that the German, Dutch and Belgian authorities have done all that was needed to control the disease. Defra will continue to monitor the situation in the Netherlands.

Officials have reviewed and updated the AI contingency arrangements. In the event of an outbreak of avian influenza in the UK, the structures, frameworks and systems that are set out in Defra's Foot and Mouth Disease Contingency Plan will be put in place as appropriate. In support of these plans are operational instructions detailing the actions to be taken to deliver the plan. As part of the review of our state of readiness, we have taken powers which would allow a pre-emptive or firebreak cull should that be necessary (The Avian Influenza and Newcastle Disease (England and Wales) Order 2003).

Defra has also kept the industry informed and up to date information on the AI situation may be obtained from the Defra website. Defra also reminded egg and poultry producers in the UK about the need for stringent biosecurity measures at all times. Officials asked poultry producers in the UK to be vigilant for any signs of respiratory disease in birds and contact their local veterinary office immediately if they have any concerns.

Bovine TB

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cattle were slaughtered because of bovine TB in each year since 1997 in *(a)* the Taunton Constituency, *(b)* Somerset, *(c)* North Devon Constituency and *(d)* Devon. [127777]

Mr. Bradshaw: The data requested is not available for the Parliamentary constituencies of Taunton or North Devon. However, the number of cattle slaughtered under bovine TB measures in Somerset and Devon, from 1997 to 2002, is given in the table below. As a result of county boundary changes in the past, the number of cattle slaughtered because of bovine TB in part of the county of Somerset is shown in TB statistics as being in "Avon". Therefore, the data for "Avon" is also included.

Number of cattle slaughtered under bovine TB control measures 1997–2002[1]

Year	*Somerset*	*Avon*	*Devon*
1997	191	75	493
1998	264	276	550
1999	339	145	870
2000	644	275	1,291
2001	125	125	621
2002	881	769	3,009

[1] In 2001, the TB testing and control programme was largely suspended due to the Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) outbreak. Since testing resumed in 2002, resources have been concentrated on herds with overdue TB tests which would have had a longer period in which to contract the disease. Also the proportion of high risk herds being tested post-FMD is greater than that prior to the outbreak. As a result, the number of TB reactors identified and slaughtered in 2002 is not comparable to those identified and slaughtered in previous years.

British Products

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has made to other departments in support of the use of British farm products by their departments. [128257]

Alun Michael: The EC Treaty and EC procurement directives do not permit discrimination on the basis of nationality. Defra is however working with others in the

public sector to integrate sustainable development considerations into their procurement of food and catering services. One of these considerations is that their specifications should not discriminate against or prevent local businesses from competing in the supply market.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has made to the Ministry of Defence on the use of British products in the supply chain. [128258]

Alun Michael: The EC Treaty, and EC procurement directives do not permit discrimination on the basis of nationality. Defra is however working with the Ministry of Defence and other departments to take forward the public sector food procurement initiative. This is designed to help the public sector "to promote public procurement of food that supports delivery of the Government's Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy for England". The objective is intended to encourage public sector to procure food in a manner that promotes sustainable development and does not discriminate against local and UK suppliers. Information can be found at: http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/sustain/procurement/index.htm

BSE

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what form the tests to ensure there is no BSE in over-thirty-month beef will take; how long an individual test will take; and where and when these tests will take place. [128334]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government are currently considering the FSA recommendation that the over-thirty-month rule could be amended. If the rule is amended, over-thirty-month cattle would be tested for BSE using the Bio-Rad test, which is one of the five rapid diagnostic tests approved by the European Union. The test is carried out using brain stem tissue taken from the cattle following slaughter. It takes about six hours and will be carried out at LGC laboratories at Teddington, Runcorn and Edinburgh. These laboratories will run an overnight testing service.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what facilities will be required at slaughterhouses for the BSE tests on over-thirty-month beef; and whether separate units will be required at slaughterhouses to enable animals to be tested. [128335]

Mr. Bradshaw: If the over-thirty-month rule is amended, slaughterhouses would require a dedicated area for sampling including access to washing facilities. They would also need to ensure that they have sufficient space to store carcases and edible offals until test results are known. Although there are no current plans to require slaughterhouses to operate separate units for processing over-thirty-month cattle for human consumption, some might choose to do so for operational reasons.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the estimated cost is of the new testing arrangements when the Over-Thirty-Month Scheme is lifted; and whether there will be a single national slaughterhouse for the scheme. [128336]

Mr. Bradshaw: If the over-thirty-month rule is amended, the costs of testing for BSE over-thirty-month cattle for sale for human consumption would be shared by Government and industry. The Government will pay for the rapid test kit and the testing process. The precise cost is commercially sensitive but it is within the EU's state aid limit of 40 euros. Abattoirs will pay for the sampling, packaging and transportation of samples to laboratories and other in-abattoir costs. A significant number of abattoirs have indicated that they may be interested in slaughtering cattle aged over-thirty-months if the rule is amended.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the Over-30-Month Scheme; what changes she plans to make to the scheme, and if she will make a statement; [128383]

(2) whether the Government will phase in the changes to the Over-30-Month Scheme; and when the changes will take effect. [128386]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Over-30-Month Scheme (OTMS) provides an outlet for cattle which are excluded from the food chain by the Over-30-Month (OTM) Rule. The Food Standards Agency has carried out a review of the OTM Rule, and has advised the Government that it would be acceptable on public health grounds to replace the OTM Rule by BSE testing of cattle older than 30 months in two stages. Cattle born after August 1996 could be allowed into the food supply, after being tested for BSE, at the earliest from January 2004, with the possibility of complete replacement of the Rule by testing from July 2005. The Government are considering this advice. Any change to the OTM Rule is likely to lead to parallel changes to the OTMS.

Cages (Hens)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to encourage a switch towards more advanced well-managed cages for egg-laying hens. [128684]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2002, lay down specific requirements in terms of space and design which cages for laying hens must meet. From 2012, cage systems must be enriched to meet additional requirements. Both the industry and Defra have research programmes which aim to evaluate the emergence and development of new systems of production.

Combined Heat and Power

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to ensure that electricity derived from CHP is financially more attractive to use than electricity from other carbon-based technologies. [127224]

Mr. Bradshaw: The measures to support CHP announced in the Energy White Paper, taken together with the measures we have previously introduced, and detailed in the draft CHP Strategy, will significantly help CHP. These include:

Exemption from the climate change levy for fuel inputs and electricty outputs from Good Quality CHP;

The £50 million Community Energy programme promoting community heating;

The introduction of a target for Government Departments to use CHP generated electricity by the end of the year.

Contagious Animal Diseases

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list those outbreaks of contagious animal diseases which have occurred since May 1997, for which the European Commission has issued Decisions or communications to limit their spread; what numbers of livestock were killed to limit spread; what support funds were released in compensation; what amount was taken up by government; and what proportion of the value of lost stock this equated to. [128263]

Mr. Bradshaw: Since May 1997 there have been two outbreaks of contagious notifiable disease which have occurred in the UK—classical swine fever in 2000 and foot and mouth disease in 2001. Control of these was governed by both domestic and EU legislation. On both occasions the European Commission also issued Decisions.

A proportion of the costs of eradicating these diseases can be reimbursed by the European Commission to the member state, and the UK Government have submitted official applications for such reimbursement. Relevant details are as follows:

	Classical swine fever 2000	*Foot and mouth disease 2001*
Number of confirmed cases	16	2030
Livestock killed for disease control	74,793	4,230,786
Compensation paid for livestock (£)	4,453,309	1,033,000,000
Total compensation for which EU reimbursement claimed (includes other costs) (£)	7,632,925	1,581,000,000
Maximum rate of EU re-imbursement (percentage)	50	60
Maximum amount of re-imbursement (£)	3,816,463	948,600,000
Amount received to date[1] (£)	1,809,460	217,000,000

[1] Further amounts will only be paid following completion of Commission audits of expenditure incurred during the disease outbreaks.

Convention on Europe (Animal Welfare)

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether her Department was consulted on the Swedish Government's recent approach to the British Government in the European Convention with respect to the issue of animal welfare; at what level such consultation took place; when; and if she will make a statement. [128262]

Mr. Bradshaw: There is no record of any such approach to this Department by the Swedish Government.

Correspondence

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what reasons underlay the delay in responding to the letter received by the Department on 16 December 2002 from Mr. Ian Marsden and P. Westby of Accrington regarding biodiesel. [127101]

Alun Michael: I have looked at the way in which the case was dealt with and it appears that this was an unusual case in which the details of a draft response were considered by officials and Ministers on a number of occasions before a reply was sent to the hon. Gentleman on 27 June. The delay is unacceptable and falls far short of the standards now achieved within Defra. Having massively improved the turnaround of replies to MPs we are now trying to eradicate occasional lapses of this sort which are unacceptable.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the letter from her Department dated 18 June to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Ms M. Bromley, if she will require the Food Standards Agency to send the promised reply to the right hon. Member without delay. [127747]

Alun Michael: I regret that my right hon. Friend's letter was not shown to me before it was transferred to the Food Standards Agency. However that transfer was correct as the Food Standard Agency is responsible for the Food Supplements Directive. I cannot speak for other Departments and my right hon. Friend may therefore wish to direct his inquiries to colleagues in the Department of Health.

Countryside Agency

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment she has made of the Countryside Agency's handling of its budgetary affairs in 2003–04; and if she will make a statement; [127765]

(2) if she will take steps to ensure that the finances of the Countryside Agency are managed in such a way that will ensure funding arrangements for partnerships can be made clear at an early stage for 2004–05 and left unchanged. [127766]

Alun Michael: I have discussed with the Countryside Agency the way in which it manages its finances in view of the "hold" placed on some budgets, including Vital Villages, at the start of this financial year. This was done by the Agency because of the very high level of applications received and the consequent need to target money at the areas of greatest need, but it is unfortunate that this caused uncertainty to a number of organisations who were dependent on the Countryside Agency grant for continuity of their work. I am drawing to the attention of the Agency and other organisations funded by Defra the requirements on finance contained in the Government's compact with the Voluntary Sector. It should be noted that the Agency's grant in aid has been significantly increased this year.

It is for the Countryside Agency to manage its finances within the budgets set for it and has been doing so against the background both of the major and novel task of access mapping, whose costs depend on public responses which are hard to predict, and of the demand-led nature of its major grant programmes. Despite these factors the budget for Vital Villages has been held to the level set at the start of the year. Budgets have also been agreed for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will meet Hampshire county council to discuss the effect on its rural transport partnership of late changes in funding by the Countryside Agency. [127767]

Alun Michael: The Countryside Agency manages the Rural Transport Partnership scheme on behalf of Defra and day to day decisions on the operation of the scheme are a matter for the Agency. However, the Agency has assured me that rather than cuts to the Rural Transport Partnership scheme, the budget for 2003–04 has been increased by £2 million since the original budget announcement. Demand for the scheme has been high and the funds available have had to be shared among as many projects as possible. In the South East region it is the Rural Transport Partnership officers themselves who have decided which projects should take priority.

Departmental Discussions

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions her Department has had with *(a)* the United States, *(b)* the European Union and *(c)* environmental organisations on international measures to assist developing nations in reducing climate change. [128216]

Mr. Morley: As climate change is a global problem, it is important that all countries engage constructively in international action to tackle it. With this in mind, Defra, along with other Government Departments, has regular discussions in both formal and informal fora with the United States, other European Union member states and environmental organisations on measures to assist developing countries to address climate change. These discussions include: the need to integrate climate change into national strategies for sustainable development; the importance of capacity building; the role of technology transfer and, the operationalisation of the Clean Development Mechanism.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions her Department has had with *(a)* the United States, *(b)* the European Union and *(c)* environmental organisations on the obligations of (i) the UK and (ii) others to reverse (A) climate change and (B) energy shortage. [128217]

Mr. Morley: As climate change is a global problem, it is important that all countries engage constructively in international action to tackle it. With this in mind, Defra, along with other government departments, has regular discussions in both formal and informal fora with the United States, other European Union Member States and environmental organisations on action to address climate change. Although these discussions are often linked to energy policy, the security of energy supply is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions her Department has had with the Department of Trade and Industry on investment in renewable energy. [128220]

Mr. Bradshaw: Achieving the commitments set out in the energy white paper will require close integration across departments and much more widely. To make this a reality the white paper announced the creation of a Sustainable Energy Policy Network of policy units from across Government departments, the devolved administrations, regulators and key delivery organisations that are jointly responsible for delivery. Working within this framework my Department has regular discussions with the Department of Trade and Industry on a wide range of energy policy issues, including the development of renewable energy.

Public Sector Procurement (UK Food)

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's policy on public sector procurement of United Kingdom sourced food products. [128242]

Alun Michael: Defra's policy on the UK's public sector procurement of food is given in the guidance we have published on integrating sustainable development issues into public procurement of food and catering. It explains that buyers should ensure that specifications do not discriminate against or prevent local businesses from competing in the supply market, while pointing out that the EC Treaty and EC procurement directives do not permit discrimination on the basis of nationality. The guidance is aimed at the public sector as a whole and should help to increase the opportunities for local and UK producers to compete for public sector contracts. Information can be found at: http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/sustain/procurement/index.htm.

Locally Grown Produce

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures have been taken to promote and encourage the consumption of locally grown produce in the last 12 months. [128245]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government recognises the benefits of local food and is keen to encourage a flourishing local food sector. Over the last 12 months, we have made provision under the England Rural Development Programme for grants for activities such as the establishment of farmers' markets and other direct sales outlets, the development of local branding initiatives and the formation of collaborative groups to market produce. Defra has also helped to finance workshops organised by the IGD designed to bring together supermarkets and small local producers to explore how barriers to local sourcing can be overcome. One practical area where the Government can have a direct effect on the local food sector is public procurement. Defra has published guidance on its website (http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/

sustain/procurement/index.htm) that, among other things, should help to increase the opportunities for local and UK producers to compete for public sector contracts. We have asked Government Departments to produce their own action plans on public procurement. We are also encouraging local authorities to do the same.

We have recently drawn up a local food policy paper examining the rationale for public support and setting out a framework within which support will be given. The paper is published on the following website address: http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodrin/specialfoods/localfood/index.htm.The framework focuses on added value at national level, the public procurement initiative and spreading best local food practice nationwide. We will also continue to deploy our various funding schemes to encourage a flourishing local food sector. This activity will complement measures at a regional level which the Regional Development Agencies will be implementing as part of their wider food and drink strategies.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures her Department has taken to promote local trade fairs and farmers' markets in the last 12 months. [128246]

Mr. Bradshaw: Local trade fairs and farmers' markets are an excellent way to raise awareness about local and regional food. In the last 12 months, we have made provision under the England Rural Development Programme for grants for projects promoting farmers' markets and other direct sales outlets. For example, within this period we have awarded 100,256 to the National Association of Farmers' Markets to raise the profile of farmers' markets across England and increase public awareness of them. In addition, in November last year Lord Whitty wrote to all Local Authorities outlining the benefits farmers' markets bring and the role they play in bringing urban and rural communities together. Finally, Defra provides funding to Food from Britain, which has responsibility for promoting the production and consumption of quality regional food and drink. One of the measures for doing this is by providing business support, through the network of Regional Food Groups, to those producers wishing to exhibit at trade fairs both at a local and national level.

Foreign Policy

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the application of the ethical dimension of foreign policy in her Department's activities overseas. [128253]

Mr. Bradshaw: The common theme of the Department's overseas activity is sustainable development—meeting the needs of today without compromising the needs of future generations.

Defra's overseas activities support the Government's wider international objectives, by contributing to preventive measures designed to address potential causes of future conflict; by supporting multilateral co-operation to address international problems; and by contributing to the spread of good governance.

Defra's key international activities support sustainable development by:

- tackling the causes and effects of environmental degradation, for example, by addressing climate change;
- promoting sustainable use of natural resources, including water, soil, forestry, fisheries, and biodiversity; and
- promoting fairer world trade in agriculture, notably through CAP reform and the WTO's Doha Development Agenda.

These overseas activities, on which Defra works closely with other Departments, particularly the FCO, DfID, and DTI, help address problems facing the world's poorest countries.

EU Legislation

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's application of *(a)* subsidiarity and *(b)* proportionality in applying EU legislation. [128254]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Department considers whether the implications and effects of subsidiarity are relevant in respect of each proposal that falls under the remit of the UK parliamentary scrutiny procedures. The Department provides Parliament with a concise assessment of whether the Government believe the proposal in question is justified in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity as set out in Article 5 of the EC Treaty.

The Department's policy is to consider proportionality as an integral part of the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA). All proposed legislation is examined to ensure that the approach—both in negotiation and final implementation, is appropriate to the risk posed, and that costs are identified and minimised wherever possible.

Departmental Spending

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been spent by her Department on encouraging *(a)* co-operation and *(b)* stronger marketing for British farmers and food produce in each of the last 10 years. [128054]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Department has over the last 10 years pursued various initiatives designed to encourage and support co-operation between farmers and the better marketing of food produced by them, or which have contributed to these objectives. These include the work that the Department has undertaken to promote agricultural exports, its support for Food from Britain and regional food groups, its promotion and administration of protected food names schemes, the support that it is giving to English Farming and Food Partnerships (which has been set up by industry to promote collaboration and co-operation) and grants made available under various grant schemes such as the Agriculture Development Scheme, the schemes operating under England Rural Development programme, and those under the EU Structural Funds. Identifying all of these initiatives, and isolating or estimating the expenditure that relates directly to encouraging co-operation and marketing, could be done only at disproportionate cost.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how much has been spent by her Department on progressive and appropriate science and technology in the area of food security, by type, in each of the last 10 years; [128055]

(2) how much has been spent in support of science and technology for agriculture in each of the last 10 years. [128061]

Mr. Bradshaw: Details of Defra funding of science and technology (S&T) activities are regularly published through the Government's Forward Look, the 2003 version of which has just been published (http://www.ost.gov.uk/atoz.html)

Although the Department is involved in much work relating to food security, none of this is classed as S&T and figures are not therefore available under this category.

Expenditure on S&T in support of agriculture for the last 10 years, taken from the Forward Look, is:

	£ million
1993–94	92.80
1994–95	93.10
1995–96	93.70
1996–97	92.00
1997–98	91.60
1998–99	91.70
1999–2000	89.30
2000–01	90.20
2001–02	92.60
2002–03	92.40

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been spent by her Department on the protection against the importation of *(a)* dangerous and *(b)* unacceptably produced food in each of the last 10 years. [128057]

Mr. Bradshaw: All products of animal origin imported from third countries into the UK must enter at designated UK Border Inspection Posts (BIP) where they are subject to veterinary inspections. The inspection services at the BIP are the responsibility of the local authority. UK and EC legislation requires that costs incurred by the local authority while carrying out checks are recovered from the importer. Details of costs are not held centrally.

As part of their normal duties, local and port health authorities were responsible for checks on passenger baggage and cargo at ports and airports until 11 April 2003, to prevent the illegal importation of products of animal origin. Between October 2002 and April 2003, Defra funded additional enforcement activity at the border. From 11 April 2003, HM Customs and Excise became responsible for anti-smuggling action in relation to these products. A total of £6 million additional resources is being provided this year on work to tackle illegal imports.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been spent by her Department on the development of crops which offer sustainable alternatives for *(a)* fuel, *(b)* medical and *(c)* plastic products in the UK in each of the last 10 years. [128058]

Mr. Bradshaw: This Department has research programmes supporting the sustainable development of arable and horticultural crops relevant to both food and non-food uses. The total research expenditure on these crops is about £16 million per year. This includes about £0.5 million on biomass energy crops, £1 million on oilseed rape and £2 million on wheat.

The research programme specific to the non-food uses of crops is market-led and aims to respond positively to all proposals for high quality pre-competitive research to support the development of non-food products. The research spending over the last 10 years specifically supporting the development and use of crops for fuel, medical and plastic products is as follows:

£

	Fuel	*Medical*	*Plastic products*
1993–94	0	0	30,000
1994–95	323,000	0	140,000
1995–96	293,000	0	141,000
1996–97	316,000	0	247,000
1997–98	328,000	7,000	246,000
1998–99	378,000	0	160,000
1999–2000	560,000	0	59,000
2000–01	780,000	127,000	74,000
2001–02	591,000	219,000	146,000
2002–03	654,000	240,000	83,000

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures are in place to maintain the United Kingdom market share of indigenous fruit and vegetables; and how much has been spent on these measures in each of the last five years. [128062]

Mr. Bradshaw: There are no specific measures in place to maintain the UK market share of indigenous fruit and vegetables. However, Defra funds strategic research and development, worth some £11 million pa, which helps our fruit and vegetables producers to increase their competitiveness. Growers can also take advantage of assistance available under the England Rural Development Programme and other grant schemes.

Energy Crops

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on Government strategy to increase the amount of energy crops grown in United Kingdom. [127614]

Mr. Bradshaw: This Department is committed to supporting the growing of energy crops in England. We have allocated £29 million under the Energy Crops Scheme to support the planting of short rotation coppice (SRC) and miscanthus, and the setting up of producer groups to supply SRC to energy end-users. £3.5 million has been allocated to develop supply chains for energy crops and woodfuel, from harvest to energy end-users. Energy crops can be planted on set-aside land and receive payments under the Arable Area Payments Scheme.

CHADWYCK-HEALEY

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£66 million is available to develop markets for biomass, including energy crops, in heat, combined heat and power, and power generation. Officials are working closely with project developers and others, including the Local Support Teams set up under the Countryside Agency's Community Renewables Initiative, to promote the potential of energy crops. Recently, over 200 farmers attended one such event near Swindon. The co-firing of energy crops with fossil fuels is permitted under the Renewables Obligation. To encourage the market for transport biofuels, which can be produced from energy crops, the Government introduced a cut in the duty rate for biodiesel in July 2002 and has announced the intention to cut the duty rate for bioethanol in January 2005.

Alternative Fuels

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the environmental attributes of *(a)* LPG, *(b)* biodiesel and *(c)* bioethanol. [127191]

Mr. Bradshaw: An assessment of the environmental performance of various alternative fuels, including LPG, was carried out by the Cleaner Vehicles Task Force in 2000. The research showed that LPG can have air quality benefits over conventional fuels in terms of reduced emissions of particulates and oxides of nitrogen, and reduced noise, although progress with conventional engine and fuel technologies is reducing this advantage. A copy of the report "The environmental impacts of road vehicles in use" is available on the Department for Transport's website, at: www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_roads/documents/page/dft_roads_506888.hcsp

The Government recently published a consultation document seeking views on the future structure of the Government's support for the road fuel gases LPG and natural gas in the short to medium term, to ensure that future support continues to reflect environmental and other policy objectives. A copy of the consultation, which closes on 17 September, is available at: www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_roads/documents/page/dft_roads_508355.pdf

An assessment of biodiesel was commissioned by Defra from Sheffield Hallam University in 2001. The report found that emissions of carbon dioxide are significantly reduced for biodiesel compared to conventional diesel. Consistent air quality benefits from biodiesel in terms of emissions of particulates and oxides of nitrogen have not been established. A copy of the report "Evaluation of the comparative energy, global warming and socio-economic costs and benefits of biodiesel" is available on the Defra website at: www.defra.gov.uk/science/project_data/DocumentLibrary/NF0422/nf0422.pdf

A number of reports show that life cycle emissions of carbon dioxide are significantly lower for a range of vehicle types run on bioethanol compared to petrol or diesel. Research includes "Energy and Greenhouse gas balance of biofuels for Europe—An update", CONCAWE, April 2002 and "Well-to-wheel analysis of energy use and the greenhouse gas emissions of advanced fuel/vehicle systems—A European Study", L-B-Systemtechnik Consultancy, September 2002. Research has also been carried out on local air quality benefits. An assessment of the emissions performance of bioethanol undertaken by AEA Technology plc (Ethanol Emissions Testing, March 2002) was published by the Department for Transport. The report found that tailpipe emissions of particulates are significantly reduced for bioethanol compared to petrol but as petrol engines are very low emitters of particulates, the large reduction in emissions from bioethanol results in only a marginal improvement in air quality. Emissions of oxides of nitrogen are not significantly changed compared to petrol.

EU Committees

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the *(a)* activities and *(b)* mandate of the (i) EU Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health, (ii) Community Committee for the Farm Accountancy Data Network, (iii) Management Committee for Live Plants, (iv) Standing Committee on Agricultural Plants, (v) Management Committee on Poultrymeat and Eggs, (vi) Standing Committee on Agricultural, Horticultural and Forestry Seeds and Plants, (vii) Standing Committee on Propagating Material and Plants of Fruit Genera and Species, (viii) Management Committee on Tobacco, (ix) Management Committee for Fisheries and Aquaculture, (x) Committee on the Conservation, Characterisation, Collection and Utilisation of Genetic Resources in Agriculture, (xi) Management Committee for Beef and Veal, (xii) Standing Committee for Propagating Materials of Ornamental Plants and (xiii) Management Committee on Wine. [128256]

Mr. Bradshaw: The activities and mandates of the above listed Committees are wide-ranging and varied. A synopsis of the Committees' activities and mandates are outlined as follows:

Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health

The activities of the EU Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFCAH) include animal health and welfare, controls and import conditions, biological safety of the food chain, general food law, toxicological safety of the food chain, animal nutrition and phytopharmaceuticals. SCoFCAH is a regulatory Committee which meets under Comitology rules. It has the power to discuss and agree proposals for Commission legislation designed to maintain the Safety of the EU food Chain. It can agree Commission rules relating to EU production and to third country imports.

Community Committee for the Farm Accountancy Data Network

The Committee meets three times a year to consider all aspects of the Farm AccountancyData Network, from developing the network itself (including reviewing legislation) to commissioning and presenting economic research into the impact of policy proposals on farm businesses. The Committee was established by Council Regulation 79/65/EEC to set up a harmonised farm accountancy system across the EU to support farm business analyses and determination of farm incomes to meet the needs of the Common Agricultural Policy.

Managment Committee for Live Plants

The mandate of the Management Committee for live plants and floriculture products is to assist the Commission in the management of the common organisation of the market in live trees and other plants, bulbs, roots and the like, cut flowers and ornamental foliage, as established by Article 1 of Council Regulation (EEC) No. 234/68. The Commission has not convened a meeting of the Committee since it last met in July 2001. Items discussed then included market statistics and EU enlargement.

Standing Committee on Agricultural Plants

There is no such Committee.

Management Committee on Poultrymeat and Eggs

The Management Committee for Eggs and Poultry meets once a month to examine the market situation and the regulations that implement the CAP regimes for these commodities. The Committee has the authority to fix export refund rates and import representative prices for poultrymeat, eggs and egg products, and to make changes to Commission Regulations on certain marketing standards for eggs and poultrymeat and production and marketing of eggs for hatching.

Standing Committee on Agricultural, Horticultural and Forestry Seeds and Plants

The Standing Committee on Seeds and Propagating Material for Agriculture, Horticulture and Forestry meets to consider a wide range of administrative, technical and regulatory arrangements for the implementation of the provisions of the Council Directives on the marketing of seeds and propagating material. The Committee's mandate is to carry out the duties devolved to it by these Council Directives. Reports of the Committee's activities can be found on the Commission's website at:

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/rc/scsp/index_en.html.

Standing Committee on Propagating Material and Plants of Fruit Genera and Species

The mandate of the Standing Committee on Propagating Material and Plants of Fruit Genera and Species is contained within Council Directive 92/34 on the marketing of fruit plant propagating material and fruit plants intended for fruit production. The Committee gives opinions on amendments and implementing measures associated with the Directive, and on the arrangements for carrying out and reviewing Community comparative trials on fruit planting and propagating material. Recent activities of the Committee include a review of the genera and species covered by the Directive, an evaluation of CAC (Conformitas Agraria Communitatis) and certification requirements and comparative trial matters. Agendas and meeting reports for this Committee are available on the European Commission's website at http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/rc/scpfgs/index_en.html.

Management Committee on Tobacco

The Management Committee on Tobacco exists to carry out the requirements of Council Regulation (EEC) No 2075/92 on the common organisation of the market in raw tobacco.

The Committee last met in June to consider matters relating to the management of the market for raw tobacco, including exemptions from the buy-back scheme and fixing for 2003 the definitive allocations of financing under Community Tobacco Fund.

Management Committee for Fisheries and Aquaculture

This Committee was established under Article 30 of the Common Fisheries Policy's (CFP) basic framework regulation (Council Regulation 2371/2002). It can deal with any issues relating to the detailed implementation of the CFP, but has recently concentrated on the successor arrangements to the Multi-Annual Guidance Programme for the management of EU fleet capacity.

Committee on the Conservation, Characterisation, Collection and Utilisation of Genetic Resources in Agriculture

The mandate of the Committee on the Conservation, Characterisation, Collection and Utilisation of Genetic Resources in Agriculture is to advise the Commission on draft measures made under Council Regulation 1467/94 on assisting the co-ordination, at Community level, of certain national measures for the conservation, characterisation, collection and utilisation of genetic resources in agriculture, aiming to achieve an approach in line with the aims of the Common Agricultural Policy. Regulation 1467/94 established a programme for the conservation, characterisation, collection and utilisation of genetic resources in agriculture for a period of five years. A revised proposal for a successor regulation in 2001 is expected later this year. The Committee recently met, during which meeting it reviewed the state of projects approved under Regulation 1467/94 and considered informal Commission ideas for the revised proposal for a successor regulation.

Management Committee for Beef and Veal

The Management Committee for Beef and Veal is mandated to provide close co-operation between Member States and the Commission in order to facilitate the implementation of measures provided for in the CAP regime for Beef and Veal (Council Regulation (EC) No. 1254/99 of 17 May 1999). The normal work of the Committee involves regular consideration of the market situation (including production, consumption, imports and exports). Its work also includes setting export refund rates, adjudicating intervention tenders (purchases and sales), opening import tariff quotas, consideration of technical aspects of beef carcase classification and price reporting and consideration of implementational aspects of the various producer support schemes and other technical measures.

Standing Committee for Propagating Materials of Ornamental Plants

The mandate of the Standing Committee for Propagating Materials of Ornamental Plants is contained within Council Directive 98/56 on the marketing of propagating material of ornamental plants. The Committee gives opinions on amendments and implementing measures associated with the Directive, and on the arrangements for carrying out and reviewing Community comparative trials on ornamental propagating material. Recent activities of the Committee include a review of control arrangements under the Directive and comparative trial matters. Agendas and meeting reports for this Committee are available on the European Commission's website at http://europa.eu.int/comm.food/fs/rc/scop.index_en.html.

Management Committee for Wine

The Management Committee for Wine assists the Commission in its responsibility for the management of the wine sector. It considers draft Commission legislation

and gives its formal opinion on Commission proposals. The Management Committee for Wine is mandated to provide close co-operation between Member States and the Commission in order to facilitate the implementation of measures provided for in the CAP wine regime (Council Regulation 1493/1999). The objective of these measures is to maintain and improve the balance between the supply and demand for wine on the Community market and to enable the sector to be more competitive in the longer term.

European Union

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what discussions her Department's Ministers held with other departments with respect to formulating policy on the Convention on the Future of Europe; and if she will list the policy areas discussed; [128160]

(2) what papers her Department drafted for submission to the Convention on the Future of Europe; [128161]

(3) if she will list the documents submitted to the Convention on the Future of Europe which related to the reform of *(a)* the Common Fisheries Policy and *(b)* the Common Agricultural Policy. [128163]

Mr. Bradshaw: As part of the normal Whitehall process, Defra Ministers have had regular discussions with other Departments to formulate policy on the Convention. Such discussions have informed the negotiating position of the UK Government representatives on the Convention but Departments have not been required or invited to submit documents to the Convention itself.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will take steps towards the restoration of fisheries policy to national control, in the context of the Laeken Mandate and the Convention on the Future of Europe. [128162]

Mr. Bradshaw: The principal aim of the Convention on the Future of Europe, as set out in the Laeken Declaration of December 2001, is to address the following issues:

a better division and definition of competence in the European Union;

simplification of the Union's instruments;

more democracy, transparency and efficiency in the European Union;

a Constitution for European Citizens—not changing but simplifying existing Treaties.

The draft EU Constitution does not extend Community Competence over fisheries, but clarifies the present situation. We support the current framework because effective management of fisheries requires close international co-operation, and the Common Fisheries Policy provides this. If the CFP has failings, the answer is to negotiate improvements, as we did at the Council last December.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of the effect of EU enlargement on the competitiveness of British agriculture. [128174]

Mr. Bradshaw: EU enlargement represents a considerable expansion of the single market. The increase in the size of the single market presents UK producers with additional markets for their output as well as potential competitors for current markets. However, the implications for UK producers are not expected to be significant in the short term, both because of the continued application of CAP market measures and because trade liberalisation between the EU 15 and CE 10 is already well under way.

In the longer term the effect of enlargement will depend, in large part, on rates of productivity growth, and we have commissioned a detailed study to examine this issue. The objective of this project is to analyse the potential for changes in relative productivity growth in the new member states and the existing EU and the impact that this will have on agricultural markets. The project is expected to be completed by the end of the year and will be published.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made on the effect of EU enlargement on the scale of the agricultural work force in the EU. [128173]

Mr. Bradshaw: Information on the agricultural workforce in both the EU15 and the candidate countries is published by Eurostat. The latest Eurostat estimates, for 2001, show the level of employment in the Agriculture, Forestry, Hunting and Fishing sector was 6,701 thousand in the EU 15 and 3,871 thousand in the CE 10. This 2001 data implies that enlargement would be expected to increase the scale of the workforce by nearly 60 per cent.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of EU legislation relating to agricultural production standards identified by her Department as having been implemented in the United Kingdom but not in other member states. [128063]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government have not made such an assessment. The European Commission is responsible for monitoring the transposition of Community law. Each year the Commission draws up a report on the monitoring of the application of Community law in all member states. This report is available on the Commission's website www.europa.eu.int.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to undertake departmental assessment of the competitive financial impact of EU regulations on UK agriculture. [128255]

Mr. Bradshaw: Departments are required to undertake Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIA) for all proposals that impose a burden or realise a benefit to business, charities and the voluntary sector, including those arising from the EU. In February 2002, a two stage 'competition assessment' was introduced as part of the RIA process. The first stage identifies whether the regulation will have an effect on competition; if the effect on competition is significant a second; more rigorous examination of the likely effects is carried out.

In addition to the UK RIA requirement, in June 2002 the European Commission adopted an Action Plan for Better Regulation, in which it committed itself to introducing systematic impact assessment for new policy proposals.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the decision not to apply for a derogation to Regulation (EC) 1774/2002. [128261]

Mr. Bradshaw: The EU Animal By-Products Regulation (EC 1774/2002) is directly applicable in all member states. However, the UK has applied for transitional measures where it was clear that sectors of industry needed further time to comply with the requirements of the regulation. It is not clear what aspect of this regulation the hon. Member thinks we should have obtained a derogation from.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the working groups in the European Communities which relate to climate change. [128164]

Mr. Morley: The European Community has set up two groups relating to climate change: the Working Party on International Environment/Climate Change and the Monitoring Mechanism Committee.

The Working Party on International Environment/ Climate Change considers key international climate change issues and develops the policy positions that the EU takes in the international climate change negotiations. It generally meets monthly and is attended by officials heading the climate change delegations of each of the member states, and the European Commission. The working party is supported by several expert groups of officials that provide advice and recommendations on a range of technical issues such as carbon sinks, the Kyoto mechanisms, reporting and accounting, and, further action beyond the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol (2008–12).

The Monitoring Mechanism Committee assists the European Commission with tasks related to the monitoring and reporting of greenhouse gas emissions by member states, and the evaluation of progress by member states towards meeting their commitments. It was established by Council Decision 93/389/EEC as amended by Decision 99/296/EC. The committee has set up three working groups, comprising the relevant experts from member states and the Commission, on annual emissions inventories, national programmes and projections, and emissions trading. The committee meets once a year, usually in September, and is attended by officials from climate change delegations of each member state and the European Commission.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with *(a)* colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and *(b)* counterparts in the European Union about the legislative competencies covered by the draft European constitution. [124775]

Mr. Bradshaw: As part of the normal Whitehall process, Defra Ministers and officials have had regular discussions with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on all aspects of the Convention, including legislative competences. We have also had contact with Member and Accession States to discuss issues of mutual interest arising in the Convention.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list proposed EU legislation identified by her Department as setting agricultural production standards below those in place in the UK. [128052]

Mr. Bradshaw: There are no EU proposals for legislation currently being negotiated which set agricultural production standards below those already in force within the UK.

Export Credits

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what recent discussions her Department has had with the Department of Trade and Industry on reforming the Export Credits Guarantee Scheme; [126361]

(2) what plans she has to reform the Export Credits Guarantee Scheme. [127184]

Mr. Morley: The Department is continually engaged in detailed discussions with the Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD)—the Department responsible for export credits—with a view to ensuring that the provision of export credits takes full account of sustainability considerations. Discussions take place at both official and ministerial levels.

Recent discussions between Defra and ECGD have focused on:

- revisions to ECGD's Case Impact Analysis Process, including agreement that in future, ECGD would normally expect to disclose details of High Potential Impact cases at least 60 days prior to making a decision on whether to provide support;
- the UK's approach to the forthcoming review of the OECD agreement on Common Approaches on the Environment and Officially Supported Export Credits;
- an initiative to seek improved terms of support for renewable energy projects through discussions in the OECD; and
- detailed analysis of applications for support which are currently being assessed under ECGD's Sensitive Case procedure—in particular the Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline project and the Sakhalin oil and natural gas project.

Defra will continue to work closely with ECGD on these and other issues to ensure that the principles of sustainable development are reflected fully in the policies and operations of that Department.

Farm Maps

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will issue new satellite measured farm maps to all farmers to enable them to comply with the new requirements of the IACS forms. [128686]

Alun Michael: All farmers should receive their Rural Land Register farm maps by the middle of November this year. These maps are digitised using Ordnance Survey MasterMap and aerial photographs where further clarification is required.

Fisheries

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many fishing vessels there are in each EU applicant state capable of fishing in the North Sea. [128178]

Mr. Bradshaw: Under the outcome of the CFP review, fishing rights will continue to be based on the principle of relative stability. This means that none of the applicant countries will gain access to regulated fish stocks in EU waters, including the North Sea. Access will be limited to unregulated stocks outside the 12 mile limit. It is not possible to estimate the number of vessels that might fish in this area.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many foreign nationals work on UK flagged fishing vessels. [128179]

Mr. Bradshaw: Information is not held on this subject by Defra or the other Fisheries Departments in the UK.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of United Kingdom flagged fishing vessels *(a)* by tonnage, *(b)* by horse power and *(c)* in absolute terms are owned by foreign nationals. [128180]

Mr. Bradshaw: The information sought is set out in the following table.

UK registered vessels at 1 January 2003

	Number of UK registered fishing vessels	*Number of UK registered foreign owned vessels*	*UK registered foreign owned vessels as a proportion of the UK total for*		
			Fleet Number	*Tonnage*	*Engine Power*
Over 10 metre vessels	1,805	121	6.7%	17.5%	16.8%
All vessels	7,578	121	1.6%	16.0%	11.5%

The Department does not maintain comprehensive records on the beneficial ownership of fishing vessels. The number of foreign owned vessels is based on advice from local port offices of the Fisheries Departments in the UK on the vessels that are considered to be partly or wholly owned by foreign interests. This information relates to vessels over 10 metres in overall length. Information is not held on vessels under 10 metres, in which we are not aware of any significant overseas interest.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what European Community compensation *(a)* is available to and *(b)* has been taken up by the Government for UK fishermen affected by the 2002 days at sea limits. [128264]

Mr. Bradshaw: Under the Fisheries Structural Fund, grants co-financed by the EU may be made to fishermen for the temporary cessation of their activities. Where a recovery plan is adopted by the Council, compensation may last for one year, and may be extended by one further year. Where the financial contribution from the Structural Fund exceeds €1million or 4 per cent. of the Community financial assistance for fisheries in the UK, the measure must include a decommissioning scheme, with the aim of removing vessels with fishing effort at least equal to the effort of the vessels for which compensation is given.

This provision is not being used in the UK, but the Scottish Executive is financing an equivalent scheme using national funding.

Community funding is also available for decommissioning vessels. Defra is awaiting clearance by the EU Commission of a scheme under the provision, and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for Northern Ireland has announced its intention to introduce a scheme. The Scottish Executive has implemented a parallel scheme with national funding.

Flood and Coastal Defences

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the adjustable flood control and defences that have been constructed since May 1997; what analyses have been made of upriver spillover since construction; and if she will make a statement. [128168]

Mr. Morley: Defra provides grant aid as a percentage of eligible costs to the flood and coastal defence operating authorities in England—the Environment Agency (EA), local authorities and internal drainage boards—to assist with capital works and studies to manage flood risk. Since May 1997 approximately 800 such capital construction projects have been approved by Defra for grant and/or completed by the operating authorities. However information is not held centrally as to whether these defences were adjustable or not. I regret this information could not be provided except at disproportionate cost.

The Environment Agency is by far the largest flood risk operating authority in England, being empowered to manage flood risk from all rivers designated as "main" and from the sea. The agency undertakes analyses both upstream and downstream of new defences, both adjustable and fixed, prior to construction in order to understand the river regime. These "river models" provide a tool for understanding how different types of flood defence structure can influence the river regime and assist in the final selection and detailed design processes. By undertaking this in advance of construction any potential adverse impacts should be avoided or minimised.

Unless particular circumstances arise it is not usual to revisit river models soon after the construction of new defences given the pre-construction activities. However, periodic modelling of many rivers/locations is undertaken through other agency activities such as periodic reviews of defence performance and improvement strategies, broad scale modelling for flood mapping, flood risk assessments and catchment flood management plans.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the long-term strategic maintenance plans for flood defences in Lincolnshire. [128169]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency has long-term flood management strategies in place for each of the major rivers in Lincolnshire: the Nene, Welland,

Glen and South Forty Foot. These strategies are implemented through maintenance regimes and capital improvement works, and are subject to regular review. Responsibility for maintenance of other flood defences in Lincolnshire rests with the agency, local authorities or internal drainage boards.

The agency will also be preparing more wide-ranging catchment flood management plans for the major rivers over the next three years, and a revision of the shoreline management plan for the Wash will be started next year.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on changes in *(a)* the level and *(b)* the mechanisms of flood and coastal defence funding. [127759]

Mr. Morley: The Government are committed to maintenance and improvement of flood and coastal defences, including those to reduce the risk of coastal erosion as well as flooding, and have planned to spend nearly £1.5 billion in this and the next two years:

£ million

	Defra[1]	*ODPM*[2]	*Total*
2002–03	131	280	411
2003–04	144	295	439
2004–05	137	332	469
2005–06	182	382	564

[1] For capital projects, Environment Agency national initiatives such as National Flood and Coastal Defence Database and Catchment Flood Management Plans, Storm Tide Forecasting Service etc.

[2] Funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to local authorities to support their levies to the Environment Agency and internal drainage boards and their own spend on flood and coastal defence.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced the Government's conclusions of the Flood and Coastal Defence Funding Review on 12 March 2003. We propose that Government funding of the Environment Agency's flood defence service should in future come from a single stream of Defra block grant which will replace the existing requirement to approve individual projects for capital grant and the levies currently paid by local authorities to the Agency. These changes will provide more assured flood defence funding for the Agency and allow better long-term planning. The introduction of block grant to replace individual project approvals relies on successful passage of provisions in the Water Bill and, subject to this, we aim to implement the changes as soon as possible.

Fluoridation

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the effects of water fluoridation on farm businesses. [128171]

Mr. Morley: Fluorine is a natural environmental contaminant and both feeding stuffs and water for livestock contain fluorides. Some fertilisers and ingredients of livestock and poultry diets contain relatively high concentrations of fluorides. Drinking water limits are designed to accommodate exposure to other sources of fluorides in the diet and in the environment. The best available evidence suggests that safe upper fluoride concentrations in livestock and poultry drinking water are up to 2 mg/l.

If the water fluoridation provisions in the Water Bill before Parliament were enacted, all local farmers or their representative organisations would be able to participate in public local consultations. There would be no new water fluoridation schemes unless the majority of the local population were in favour. Arrangements for the conduct of local consultations, and the assessment of public opinion will be set out in regulations under powers in the Water Bill. It will also be possible to alter the target fluoride concentration by statutory instrument.

Food Assurance Schemes

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to promote food assurance schemes in the UK. [128048]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Department has made clear its support for assurance schemes as part of the Government's Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food.

Assurance schemes are a priority for grant aid under the new Agriculture Development Scheme, launched last year to take forward important elements of the strategy. Assured Food Standards has received grant aid under the scheme for projects to create an independent, authoritative body for food assurance; review assurance standards and their delivery; and develop a marketing and communications strategy.

Some assurance schemes may also be eligible for help under the Rural Enterprise Scheme, which forms part of the England Rural Development Programme. We have, for instance, helped LEAF (Linking the Environment and Farming) develop their premium assurance scheme for horticultural produce.

Ultimately, promotion of the individual schemes is a matter for the private sector bodies that own and administer them.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of the comprehensibility of existing food assurance schemes for consumers in the UK. [128049]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Department has not itself undertaken any work to assess the comprehensibility of existing food assurance schemes for consumers in UK. However, various other organisations have considered consumers' understanding of assurance schemes. These include an independent review of assurance schemes (June 2002) carried out for the Food Standards Agency and the National Consumer Council's report on consumers' views on labelling (Bamboozled, baffled and bombarded, February 2003), commissioned by the Food Standards Agency.

Food Security

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what steps her Department is taking to assess the role of British

agriculture in providing national food security; and if she will adopt the concept as a central principle of her Department's work; [128050]

(2) what steps her Department is taking to examine the risks inherent in a reduction in British agriculture's capacity to produce food and non-food products. [128051]

Mr. Bradshaw: Defra has a role to play with others in providing all citizens with access to healthy food and in ensuring the continuity of essential supplies of food. The Government believes that national and international food security is best facilitated through improved trading relationships based on more open international markets and reductions in trade distorting subsidies. Our domestic agriculture industry has an important contribution to make by improving its ability to produce efficiently and sustainably what the market requires. The Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food sets out how Government and industry is working in partnership to deliver this objective.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* policy and *(b)* financial assessment she has made of food security in the UK; and if she will make a statement. [128046]

Mr. Bradshaw: Food security in the UK, including the threat to the food chain, is monitored very closely by the Government and we and the industry remain vigilant. Advice on any terrorist threat to the UK is the responsibility of the Security Service. The Director General of the Security Service is responsible to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary for this advice, which is provided on a continual basis. Strategic assessments about terrorist threats to the UK are provided to the Government by the Joint Intelligence Committee.

Freedom of Information act

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the electronic document and electronic record management systems which have been procured by the public authorities listed in Parts I to V of Schedule 1 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 for which she is responsible. [116389]

Alun Michael: Defra is currently in the process of procuring and implementing a corporate electronic document and record management system. A number of electronic document management systems have been procured for use on a smaller scale in specific areas of Defra; these are listed as follows:

Product	*Supplier*
Docs Open	Hummingbird
Filenet	Panagon
Keyfile	Sydoc (UK) Ltd.
Wisdom	Diagonal Solutions

Genomics Research

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the potential of genomics research for conventional plant breeding. [127836]

Mr. Bradshaw: Genomics is a set of technologies central to the public sector investment underpinning crop breeding. The Government fund genomics research through a range of research programmes in Defra, Research Councils, and other Departments. As a technology, the potential of genomics is addressed in relevant strategic plans. In addition, research funders have their own mechanisms to assess the potential of their research both at programme and project level.

Defra's current research underpinning crop breeding is informed by a specially commissioned research project that provided an assessment of the potential of publicly-funded genomics research. The project entitled 'The Role of Future Public Research Investment in the Genetic Improvement of UK Grown Crops' was completed in September 2002. The assessment provides a strong rationale for public investment and has informed the Defra Science and Innovation Strategy. It has been widely distributed within the research and crop breeding community, and is available on the Defra website.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the products undergoing genetically modified organism field testing in the United Kingdom. [128165]

Mr. Morley: Listed are the genetically modified organisms which are undergoing trials in the UK this year under consents issued in accordance with Part B of European Directive 2001/18/EC. All these trials are for research and development purposes, and none of the GM organisms in question have consents for placing on the market as commercial GM products.

GMO	*Purpose of modification*
Potato	Altered carbohydrate metabolism
Wheat	Altered bread-making quality
Sugar beet	Herbicide tolerance
Barley	Altered malting and nutritional quality
Pea	Reporter gene linked to a drought responsive promoter
Oilseed rape	Herbicide tolerance
Bacterium	Development of vaccine for use against typhoid
Bacterium	Development of vaccine for use against traveller's diarrhoea
Bacterium	Development of vaccine for use against hepatitis

Import Standards

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures are in place to prevent the importation of agricultural products produced to unacceptable standards in *(a)* animal welfare and *(b)* environmental care, from (i) the EU and (ii) elsewhere. [128053]

Mr. Bradshaw: Comprehensive legislation exists to protect both the environment and the welfare of farmed animals within the EU. On a wider front, the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement allows for prohibition of imports only in the case of a threat to human, animal or plant health in the importing country. Products may also be banned in accordance with the terms of Multilateral Environmental Agreements to which the UK is a party. More generally, we seek to engage in

multilateral dialogue on how environmental standards can be raised in line with our overall aims to promote global sustainable development and eradicate poverty in developing countries. In addition, the EU has made firm proposals on animal welfare in the context of the current WTO agricultural trade negotiations.

Animal Welfare

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on Government policy on animal welfare in the Intergovernmental Conference. [128182]

Mr. Bradshaw: At the Intergovernmental Conference, which starts in October, the Government will remain committed to maintaining a policy towards the EU that focuses on a Union that is more transparent, accountable and effective, and better able to deliver on issues which matter to its citizens. The aim of the IGC is to agree the European Convention's draft Constitutional Treaty before the June 2004 elections for the European Parliament.

With respect to animal welfare, we are pleased that the Protocol to the Treaty of Amsterdam has been retained in the new draft Treaty and will remain legally binding. The draft Treaty continues to recognise animals as sentient beings and requires full regard to be paid to their welfare when formulating and implementing policies.

Animal Movements

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the policy on livestock movement restrictions; whether she plans to make any changes; and if she will make a statement. [128339]

Mr. Bradshaw: A standing animal movements regime came into force on 1 August, maintaining the 6 day standstill but with additional exemptions for male sheep and cattle during the main breeding season. My noble Friend Lord Whitty set out the thinking behind this decision in a written answer on 2 July 2003, *Official Report* (*Lords*), volume 650, columns *WA 117–120*.

OSPAR

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the role of the European Union in OSPAR after the coming into force of the European Constitution. [128159]

Mr. Morley: The European Constitution is currently still in draft and subject to negotiation. No change in the working of OSPAR is envisaged once the European Constitution comes into force.

Seals

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to tackle the phocine distemper virus in seals in the UK. [127834]

Mr. Bradshaw: The first case of phocine distemper virus (PDV) was reported at Anholt, Denmark in May 2002. This was the same place that the previous PDV outbreak in 1988 originated. The epizootic reached the east coast of England in August 2002.

Drawing on the lessons learned during the last outbreak, Defra helped voluntary organisations prepare and cope with the PDV outbreak as it hit UK waters. Discussions were held about the disposal and vaccinations options for seal carcases and the resulting guidance notes were published along with other useful information on the dedicated Defra PDV website (http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/ewd/seals/index.htm).

Defra commissioned the Institute of Zoology (Zoological Society of London) to monitor, report and produce information about the progress of the virus. The helpline was funded by Defra and the Devolved Administrations. We worked closely with voluntary organisations and other Government Departments, including The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), The Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SSPCA), The Institute of Zoology (IOZ), Scottish Executive Environment Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD), National Assembly for Wales Agriculture Department (NAWAD), The Department of Environment (Northern Ireland) (DoE NI), and the Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU).

The outbreak was formally declared to be over in the UK at the end of February this year, and was responsible for the deaths of almost 4,000 seals. The Sea Mammal Research Unit continues to monitor seal mortality in UK waters to provide an early warning system for any future outbreaks.

Policy Development

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the use of global *(a)* population figures and *(b)* food production trends in policy development by her Department. [128047]

Mr. Bradshaw: Assessments of the impacts of EU policies under the CAP can be influenced by world market trends for agricultural commodities and my Department considers projections of these made by international organisations such as OECD. In projecting these trends, analysts will take account of likely levels of world food production, consumption and trade flows. Population changes may influence these trends.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the role of the Precautionary Principle in determining Government policy in areas of scientific contention within her Department's responsibilities. [128181]

Mr. Bradshaw: The purpose of the Precautionary Principle is to create an impetus to take a decision notwithstanding scientific uncertainty about the nature and extent of the risk. Defra is committed to using the Precautionary Principle in line with the comprehensive guidelines and advice set down in 2002 by the

Interdepartmental Liaison Group on Risk Assessment and is also mindful of the European Council Resolution on the Precautionary Principle agreed by Heads of Government at Nice in December 2000.

Recycling

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she takes to ensure that the incentives local authorities receive to collect paper by weight to meet Government targets are followed by action by those councils to ensure the method of collection is one which facilitates effective recycling. [127222]

Mr. Morley: Each local authority in England has been set statutory recycling and composting standards (targets) for 2003–04 and 2005–06. These targets relate to the percentage of household waste sent for recycling, not the amount collected. Individual local authorities are responsible for deciding how to meet these targets in the light of local circumstances which will include settlement patterns, waste characteristics and the market for recycling. Where authorities are contracted to supply paper (and other materials) to selected reprocessors, they will be required to supply materials in the form specified by the reprocessors, which will influence their collection practices.

Guidance on methods of collection which facilitate recycling should be based on sound data. The Waste Resources Action Programme (WRAP) has recently conducted an extensive survey with the aim of providing a baseline measure for the quality of paper reaching reprocessors from different collection methods. The results of this study are due to be published in Autumn 2003.

River Nene

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to investigate the response by the Environment Agency to the recent major pollution incident on the River Nene between Peterborough and Northampton. [127758]

Mr. Morley: Defra officials have checked the response by the Environment Agency to this pollution incident. They are satisfied with the extent and the manner in which the Environment Agency has carried out, and continues to carry out, its investigations into the cause and effect of the incident. I will be writing to my hon. Friend about this in more detail in reply to her letter of 15 July.

Rural Transport

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to ensure the sustainability of individual rural transport partnership schemes in the light of the 10-year transport plan; and if she will make a statement. [127764]

Alun Michael: The Rural Transport Partnership programme is run by the Countryside Agency, on behalf of Defra in order to demonstrate ways of providing flexible transport in rural communities. It provides start up funding for up to three years to community based rural transport initiatives to help them develop and implement their plans. It is additional to and outside the mainstream of the long-term investment framework for transport set out in the Government's 10-Year Plan. We are awaiting the Agency's evaluation of the Rural Transport Partnership scheme and will consider its future in the light of this evaluation and the review of rural delivery by my noble Friend Lord Haskins.

Sheep Tagging

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the estimated costs of sheep tagging *(a)* to the industry and *(b)* as an average per capita to farmers in 2002–03. [128170]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Department's Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) estimates the additional cost to the sheep industry of implementing the EU proposals on sheep identification to be in the order of £89 million per annum for a manual double tagging system, and for an electronic identification system in the order of £44 million per annum with a one off capital investment of around £45 million.

The RIA also estimates typical business costs to be:

£

	Medium upland holding (600 ewes)	*Medium lowland (600 ewes)*
Additional annual cost of moving from existing requirements to double tagging and manual recording	1,582	2,034
Additional annual cost of moving from existing requirements to electronic identification	[1]2,736	[1]3,376
Additional annual cost of moving from double tagging to electronic identification	[1]1,661	[1]1,950

[1] Includes £500 capital investment for hand held reader

Waste Management

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the percentage was of collection of municipal *(a)* non-recyclable and *(b)* recyclable waste in the UK in the last 12 months. [127389]

Mr. Morley: The Department does not collect the information required to answer this question fully. However, results from the Department's Municipal Waste Management Survey for England show that 13 per cent. of Municipal Waste collected by local authorities was either recycled or composted in 2001–02.

The Strategy Unit estimated in their report, "Waste Not, Want Not", that over 50 per cent. of household waste sent to landfill sites or incinerated in England could be diverted from incineration or landfill through home composting and recycling on the basis of current best practice.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* on-farm drum incinerators, *(b)* on-farm carcase incinerators and *(c)* waste oil burners are in operation in England; and what the total capacity is in each case. [122755]

Mr. Bradshaw: It is not possible to provide the complete detailed breakdown requested.

Neither the Department nor the Environment Agency holds definitive data with regard to on-farm drum incinerators. However it is estimated that approximately 27,000 drum incinerators are in use in England and Wales.

A central register of operators indicates that as at 1 July 2003 there were 306 approved Specified Risk Material (SRM) incinerators in Great Britain. In addition, it is believed there are around 2,500 low capacity (less than 50kg/hour) non-SRM animal carcase incinerators mainly on pig and poultry farms in the UK.

Burning waste oil as a fuel is permitted under an exemption under Part I of the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994. This exemption only applies when the total amount of waste oil burned does not exceed 2,500 litres an hour in any one engine. At the last count (Nov. 02) the Environment Agency had registered 36 such exemptions.

Applications to operate other types or capacities of waste oil burners are regulated by Local Authorities at a local level and no central database exists.However, according to the 2001–02 Local Air Pollution Control Survey it is believed there are over 1,100 small waste oil burners which operate with a maximum burning capacity of 0.4 megawatts to 3 megawatts net rated thermal input. However, the industry estimate is that the actual number of burners with this capacity may be as high as 10,000.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the waste incinerators undergoing planning review. [128166]

Mr. Morley: Details of planning applications for proposed facilities which have yet to be determined by the respective local planning authorities are not held centrally. The table gives the number and status, as at 16 June 2003, of proposed new municipal waste incineration plants in England and Wales of which we are aware. The table contains information shared with the Environment Agency by prospective applicants for pollution control permits. There may also be other planning applications or amendments which have been submitted to local authorities over which the agency has not been consulted. The planning status may have been changed since the data were supplied.

Operator	*Location*	*Planning Status*
NEWLINCS Developments	Grimsby	Granted
Onyx	Portsmouth	Granted after appeal
Onyx	Marchwood, Southampton	Granted
Surrey Waste Management	Capel, Surrey	Granted, but there has been a successful legal challenge
Grundons	Slough	Granted
Onyx	Chineham, Surrey	Granted
HLC Waste Management Services	Neath, Port Talbot	Granted
Waste Recycling Group	Hull	Planning appeal turned down
Kent Enviropower	Maidstone, Kent	Granted
Riverside Resource Recovery	Bexley, London	Application submitted; public inquiry under way
Shanks	Milton Keynes	Application submitted
Onyx	Sheffield	Application approved
Sita	Ridham Dock, Kent	Subject to a planning appeal
County Environment Services	Roche, Cornwall	Application submitted

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 9 September 2003

PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Prime Minister when he last visited Galloway and Upper Nithsdale constituency. [128013]

The Prime Minister: Regrettably, I have been unable to do so, but I hope to visit the hon. Member's constituency at some point in the future.

Joyce Quin: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 16 July 2003 to the question tabled by the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West whether it is policy to hold regular meetings with *(a)* the First Minister of the Scottish Parliament and *(b)* the First Minister of the National Assembly for Wales. [127961]

The Prime Minister: I have meetings with both First Ministers on a regular basis, both bilaterally and through the Joint Ministerial Committee.

Media Training

Mr. Flight: To ask the Prime Minister what the cost was to his Department of media and voice training for Ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [123129]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer the Minister for the Cabinet Office gave him on 1 September, *Official Report*, column 693W.

Tibet

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Prime Minister if he will raise the issue of Tibet with the Chinese Government during his forthcoming visit to China. [128183]

The Prime Minister: I raised human rights with the Chinese Premier, and underlined our interest in an ongoing dialogue with China over human rights issues. I also discussed Tibet with the Chinese leadership, and welcomed recent contact between the Chinese authorities and representatives of the Dalai Lama.

World Trade Organisation

John Barrett: To ask the Prime Minister what his priorities will be at the World Trade Organisation's fifth Ministerial Conference in September; and if he will make a statement. [127941]

The Prime Minister: We will work for a successful outcome to the current round of world trade negotiations that benefits industrialised and developing countries alike.

The recent agreement on the issue of affordable medicines for the world's poorest nations is a step in the right direction.

Our immediate objective now is to secure agreement on a framework for an agreement on agriculture—where the EU has shown its commitment to the Round in agreeing ambitious changes to the CAP.

We shall also be pressing for progress on reducing non-agricultural tariffs, increasing services liberalisation and agreeing special and differential treatment for developing countries.

TREASURY

Customs and Excise

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what Government spending was on HM Customs and Excise in real terms in each of the last five years. [127409]

John Healey: HM Customs and Excise reported their total public spending figures in Table 1 (Total spending for HM Customs & Excise) of Appendix 3 of their Spring Departmental report 2003 (Cm 5924). Actual outturn is reported for the four financial years from 1998–99 to 2001–02.

No figures are available in comparable resource accounting terms for the financial year 1997–98. The actual resource outturn figure for 2002–03 will be published in Schedule 1 of the Resource Accounts in their annual report this autumn.

Public spending figures can be adjusted to 2000–01 price levels by applying the Treasury's GDP deflator, as shown in the table.

£ million

Financial year	*Actual public spending*	*Real terms spending*
1998–99	897	963
1999–2000	921	965
2000–01	847	868
2001–02	1,106	1,106

Online Tax Assessment

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many tax filers submitted their self-assessment form electronically using the Inland Revenue's on-line programme in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01, *(c)* 2001–02 and *(d)* 2002–03. [127073]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue received the following number of returns electronically in the following years:

1999–2000—The number of returns received electronically by the Inland Revenue was 309,510. All of these were received via the Electronic Lodgement Service as the Internet service was not available until 3 July 2000.

2000–01—The number of returns received electronically by the Inland Revenue was 336,127. 296,837 of these were received via the Electronic Lodgement Service and 39,290 via the Internet Service.

2001–02—The number of returns received electronically by the Inland Revenue was 419,236. 343,009 of these were received via the Electronic Lodgement Service and 76,287 via the Internet Service.

2002–03—The number of tax returns received electronically by the Inland Revenue was 705,690. 370,051 of these were received via the Electronic Lodgement Service and 335,639 via the Internet service.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of UK tax-filers submitted their self-assessment form electronically using the Inland Revenue's on-line programme in the tax year 2002–03. [127074]

Dawn Primarolo: 7.8 per cent. of taxpayers submitted their Self Assessment forms electronically in the tax year 2002–03. 3.71 per cent. (335,639) used the Inland Revenue's Internet service and 4.09 per cent. (370,051) used the Inland Revenue's Electronic Lodgement Service.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the Government's target for take-up of the Inland Revenue's self-assessment on-line programme by UK tax-filers was in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03; what it is for the 2003–04 tax period; and how these targets were derived. [127075]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue does not have specific targets for each year.

The Inland Revenue Public Service Agreement 2003–2006 posted on the Inland Revenue Internet site on 14 February 2003 sets out the targets for electronic filing.

The Inland Revenue has set a target of 25 per cent. of SA returns filed electronically by 2005–06 (i.e. 2.2 million of 8.8 million returns), including but not differentiating those filed by agents. Electronically means Filing by Internet Service (FBI) or Electronic Lodgement Service (ELS).

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how HM Treasury is determining the value for money paid for the Inland Revenue's self-assessment on-line system. [127076]

Dawn Primarolo: Determining the value for money of an individual project is the responsibility of the department implementing it.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether an evaluation of the Inland Revenue's self-assessment on-line programme will be included in the review of the Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise announced on 2nd July. [127077]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Brian Cotter) on 2 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 270W.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much HM Treasury allocated to the marketing of the Government's e-agenda for the Inland Revenue's self assessment on-line programme in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01, *(c)* 2001–02 and *(d)* 2002–03; [127081]

(2) how much HM Treasury spent on the marketing of the Government's e-agenda for the Inland Revenue's self assessment on-line programme in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01, *(c)* 2001–02 and *(d)* 2002–03. [127082]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers given to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) in January 2003, *Official Report*, column 1061–63W and to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) in May 2002, *Official Report*, column 36W that detail all Treasury departments' marketing communications spend for the period, including for Self Assessment.

The annual Self-Assessment campaign includes the promotion of the online service as part of a wider package.

The three main messages of the campaign are: file by the due deadline, file early and file online. Most advertising will carry a combination of these messages accompanied by information about the support available but broadly speaking, around a third of the campaign effort is weighted toward e-filing messages, with online (internet) advertising concentrating on this issue.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what role he plans for the private sector in assisting the Government to meet its targets for take-up of the Inland Revenue self-assessment on-line programme. [127084]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue has worked closely with relevant parts of the Private Sector since the SA on-line programme was introduced. The filing product was created in close consultation with the software industry and equal prominence is given to third party software products on the Inland Revenue Website.

An advertisement was published in May in "Government Opportunities" encouraging potential SA filing partners to come forward, and various joint initiatives are currently being worked on with independent software vendors, payroll companies and financial organisations.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how his Department is evaluating the results being achieved with regard to the percentage of UK tax-filers submitting their self-assessment form electronically using the Inland Revenue's on-line programme against the Government's pre-set targets. [127085]

Dawn Primarolo: The Public Service Agreement 2003–06 sets out the targets for electronic filing. The Inland Revenue has set a target of 25 per cent. of SA returns filed electronically by 2005–06, including but not differentiating those filed by agents. Electronically means Filing by Internet (FBI) or Electronic Lodgement Service (ELS).

The Inland Revenue counts the total number of returns received and how many of these have been received electronically to monitor its progress against the target.

The achievement of the target will be assessed and reported annually and subject to validation by the Inland Revenue's Internal Audit Office.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the actual per-return cost to HM Treasury was of the Inland Revenue's self assessment on-line in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01, *(c)* 2001–02 and *(d)* 2002–03 with regard to electronic tax filing; and what the projected cost is for the 2003–04 tax year. [127086]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue's on-line service for Self-Assessment Tax Returns went live in 2000–01 (on 3rd July 2000).

The "per return" costs were:

	£ per return
2000–01	187.83
2001–02	105.93
2002–03	33.13

The projected "per return" cost for 2003–04 is £16.35 per return.

Tax Changes

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library an estimate of the impact on the level of income of a transfer of all changes in the total level of taxation since 1997 to income tax, broken down by households with annual incomes of up to *(a)* £30,000, *(b)* £50,000, *(c)* £75,000 and *(d)* above £75,000. [127059]

Dawn Primarolo: There are many ways in which income tax increments or decrements equivalent to changes in current receipts since 1997 could be represented. These include raising or lowering one or more of the income tax allowances, increasing or reducing one or more of the tax rates or the size of an income band to which that rate applies and introducing new lower or higher rate bands or allowances. The impact on households with very different annual incomes would very much depend on which approach was adopted.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Business Rating System

Brian White: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress has been made in the review of the business rating system as it applies to communications infrastructure. [126021]

Mr. Timms: I have been asked to reply.

Representatives from industry, DTI, ODPM, Oftel and the Valuation Office Agency have met. The Department will now set in motion procedures to appoint a person or persons to carry out further analysis.

Environmental Impact Appraisals

Mr. Horam: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many of the Department's policies have been screened for their environmental impact since June 2001; how many environmental appraisals have been conducted, and on what policy issues; and what information has been published about these screenings and appraisals. [124708]

Keith Hill: All Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's policies are screened for their impacts in a range of areas, including environmental impacts.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has to date published no free-standing environmental appraisals of its policies.

Sunderland Football Club

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which Minister will determine the appeal by Sunderland Football Club against the refusal by the local planning authority to permit development of its training centre. [127087]

Keith Hill: Sunderland Association Football Club have applied for planning permission for an indoor training barn, student hostel, groundsman's store and perimeter fencing at Whitburn Moor, Cleadon. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has recovered for his own determination four related appeals made by Sunderland AFC against refusal of planning permission and one further application for planning permission which was called-in by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to be considered at the same time as the appeals.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Afghanistan

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the ethnic make-up is of the new Afghan National Army. [127135]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We do not receive detailed breakdowns of personnel who have passed through the US-led Afghan National Army training programme. But indications from earlier this year were that about half of those trained were Tajiks, around a quarter Pashtuns and the remainder split fairly evenly between Uzbeks and Hazaras.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is being done to promote the rights of *(a)* women and *(b)* children in the new constitution of Afghanistan. [127136]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Afghan Constitutional Commission was convened on 25 April. Its 35 members (including 7 women) are tasked with providing a draft constitution, overseeing preparations for a Constitutional Loya Jirga later this year which will adopt it, and ensuring that the public are informed of—and involved in—the process. The UK has given £500,000 to support a UN-led process of popular consultation to ensure that as many Afghans as possible are able to engage in public debate. The Commission has also met with the Ministry for Women's Affairs, a number of women's NGOs, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission and other civil society groups to discuss how to incorporate women's and children's rights into the draft constitution.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action is being taken to reduce the level of violence in Afghanistan. [127137]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Coalition operations against extremist elements in Afghanistan are ongoing, especially in the south. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) continues to help maintain security in Kabul. Four Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) have deployed to regional centres to help extend the authority of central government, improve the security environment and facilitate reconstruction. These include the UK PRT in Mazar-e Sharif, which is helping to reduce tensions between rival regional commanders. Efforts to establish a new, multi-ethnic Afghan National Army and reform the police are continuing. The UK is helping train Afghan NCOs and developing a police crime scene investigation capability.

British Exports

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the occasions since 1997 when Ministers from his Department have accompanied British firms on visits overseas to promote export marketing and sales, indicating the name of the Minister and the country visited in each case. [128407]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Information on such visits is not recorded centrally in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Burma

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the *(a)* Governments of (i) Thailand, (ii) China, (iii) Japan and (iv) Vietnam and *(b)* the United Nations regarding the arrest and detention of Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. [126764]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We take advantage of regular bilateral and multilateral contacts with all Asian nations, including Thailand, China, Japan and Vietnam to press for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, national reconciliation and an improvement in Burma's human rights record. From my discussions at the Asia-Europe (ASEM) Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Bali in July it was clear that Burma's international isolation is growing. We are also in discussion with the appropriate bodies of the UN on how to take these matters forward.

Child Protection

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action is being taken by the Government to protect *(a)* child workers, *(b)* sexually exploited children and *(c)* child victims of trafficking in (i) Africa, (ii) Asia, (iii) the Pacific, (iv) Latin America, (v) the Caribbean and (vi) the Middle East. [128394]

Mr. Rammell: The Government are committed to the promotion and protection of child rights worldwide. We urge all countries to ratify and implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which sets the standard for guaranteeing children's rights and contains specific provisions on child labour, trafficking and protection from sexual abuse. The FCO's Human Rights Project Fund is currently funding over £450,000 worth of practical projects with local NGOs to tackle these and other child rights issues. Details are available at www.fco.gov.uk/humanrights.

In addition, the Department for International Development provides substantial financial and technical assistance to the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour. This campaign aims to achieve universal ratification and implementation of ILO Conventions 138 on Minimum Age for Employment and 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, which include trafficking and prostitution.

China

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had and intends to have with the Chinese Government regarding *(a)* the occupation of and *(b)* human rights abuses in Tibet. [128186]

Mr. Rammell: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised our concerns about Tibet with Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing on 25 June and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister discussed Tibet with the Chinese leadership during his recent visit to China.

We remain concerned about the human rights situation in Tibet and continue to urge China to enter into dialogue with the Dalai Lama's representatives. We have welcomed the recent visits to China by representatives of the Dalai Lama.

Defence Exports

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer of 14 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 47–48W, how many meetings were attended by his Department's Ministers to promote the export of British defence equipment with officials from *(a)* Chile, *(b)* India, *(c)* Singapore, *(d)* Czech Republic, *(e)* Slovakia and *(f)* Tanzania in (i) 2002 and (ii) 2003; what equipment was discussed; and if he will make a statement. [127657]

Mr. Straw: Many of the occasions during which Ministers discuss UK-origin defence equipment with representatives of foreign governments do not form part of formal meetings. It is not therefore possible to provide figures about the number of meetings concerned. Disclosure of the types of equipment concerned may infringe on commercial confidentiality or provide sensitive information on the defence procurement strategies of foreign countries. I am withholding this information under exemptions 1 and 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

European Constitution

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the envisaged primacy given to European legislation over UK legislation in the draft European Constitution will override the authority of the European Communities Act 1972. [127390]

Mr. MacShane: The principle of the primacy of Community law has been central to the operation of the EU since its earliest days. This principle prevents countries from going back on obligations they have made to one another. It is an integral part of the obligations of our EU membership—as it is for all Member States. It is already enshrined in UK law by Section 2 of the European Communities Act 1972.

George Atkinson

Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what instructions have been given to his officials in Dubai in connection with the forthcoming release of Mr. George Atkinson from prison; whether Mr. Atkinson will be met by Foreign Office officials on his release; who will be responsible for booking his return flight to the UK and ensuring that he has the necessary travel documents; and on what date he expects Mr.Atkinson to be released. [127877]

Mr. Mullin: Mr. Atkinson was released from prison on 1 September and was deported to the UK. Officials at our Embassy in Dubai were in touch with the prison authorities to ensure that the necessary arrangements for Mr. Atkinson's return to the UK were in place. Our Vice Consul met Mr. Atkinson at Dubai airport and accompanied him throughout the deportation process to his flight.

Guantanamo Bay

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has made a request to the US Administration for the repatriation of British detainees held in Camp Delta, to face, if the evidence justifies, trial in the UK. [127174]

Mr. Mullin: We are pressing the US authorities to move forward with the process of determining the future of the British detainees at Guantanamo Bay. We have discussed, and are discussing, a range of options with the US, including the possibility of repatriation.

Indonesia

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will urge the Indonesian Government to withdraw all non-West Papuan troops and Brimob special forces from West Papua. [127175]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Indonesian Government are within their territorial rights to deploy Indonesian troops and police throughout their country to counter any aggressive external and internal threats. However, we have stressed to the Indonesian Government that any action undertaken in respect to their territorial rights must respect human rights and be in accordance with international law.

There are a number of areas in Indonesia where the levels of violence raise issues, including Papua. The origins of such conflicts vary and are complex: some are inter-ethnic or inter-religious while others may have economic causes. Our message to the Indonesian Government is clear and consistent: long-term stability can only be achieved through political negotiation and consultation within Indonesia. Together with our European partners, we are in regular, top-level dialogue with the Indonesian Government, and urge them to maintain law and order and promote reconciliation in order to ensure the territorial integrity of Indonesia.

We are implementing a strategy to tackle the causes of conflict and are working with EU and other partners to help Indonesia build capacity to analyse and respond effectively to outbreaks of violence.

Iran

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the Government take to monitor the end-use of the dual-use equipment that was licensed for export to Iran during 2000, including toxic chemicals; and if he will make a statement. [127829]

Mr. MacShane: The Government issued 3 export licences in 2000 for the proposed export of toxic chemical precursors to Iran for use in the oil industry. All were assessed rigorously against the consolidated criteria, which take account of the risk of diversion to undesirable end-users.

Our overseas posts have standing instructions to report on any allegation of misuse of UK-origin equipment.

Iraq

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library copies of regulations and orders made by the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq. [127594]

Mr. Rammell: I refer my hon. Friend to the website www.cpa-iraq.org/regulations where all the Coalition Provisional Authority Orders and Regulations are available.

Moazzam Begg

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has received letters sent to him on *(a)* 6 and *(b)* 9 July by solicitors representing Mr. Moazzam Begg. [127139]

Mr. Mullin: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office received two letters dated 6 July and 9 July from Mr. Begg's solicitors. My hon. Friend the Minister for Europe replied to the letter dated 9 July on 21 August. A substantive response to the 6 July letter will be sent shortly.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with US officials concerning the possibility of Mr. Moazzam Begg and Mr. Feroz Abbasi standing trial in a US civil court; and if he will make a statement. [127171]

Mr. Straw: Mr. Begg and Mr. Abbasi have been designated as eligible to stand trial before a Military Commission, but have not yet been charged.

The Attorney-General has recently held a number of rounds of talks with the US Administration. His objective has been to ensure that the British nationals detained at Guantanamo Bay, if prosecuted, are assured

of fair trials that meet generally recognised principles, wherever those trials take place, and to make clear our opposition to the death penalty. We are discussing a number of options with the US Government. Further talks are planned for the near future.

Moldova

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals there are for an EU peacekeeping force to be deployed to Transdniestria in Moldova. [127875]

Mr. MacShane: There are currently no proposals for an EU peacekeeping force to be deployed to Transdniestria in Moldova. The EU is working to support the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe's efforts to reach a constitutional settlement.

In the event the political talks make sufficient progress towards a settlement, the international community, including the EU, will need to consider the options for any potential stabilisation force.

Western Sahara

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Morocco concerning recent court judgements affecting the peoples of the Western Sahara. [123463]

Mr. Rammell: I refer my hon. Friend to the answers I gave him on 9 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 820W, 11 July 2003 *Official Report*, column 1056W and 14 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 51W.

Officials in Rabat have raised concerns over court judgments affecting the peoples of the Western Sahara with the Moroccan Government. We continue to monitor the situation in Western Sahara and raise specific cases with the relevant authorities where appropriate.

HEALTH

Abortions

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women have died in each of the last 10 years as a direct result of unsafe abortions; and what steps the Government is taking to reduce the number of deaths caused by unsafe abortions. [128401]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Maternal deaths associated with termination of pregnancy that were reported to the Confidential Enquiries into Maternal Deaths for the period 1991 to 1999, are shown in the table. The data for 2000 to 2002 are not yet available.

The Abortion Act 1967 requires a pregnancy to be terminated by a registered medical practitioner. The General Medical Council's (GMC) Duties of a doctor include making the care of the patient the first concern, keeping professional knowledge and skills up to date and recognising the limits of professional competence. Where there is evidence that a doctor is not fit to practise, the GMC is able to suspend or erase a doctor from the register or place conditions on their registration. As part of each hospital's clinical governance framework, all adverse events, including deaths, are investigated and lessons learned, and any appropriate action taken. In addition, the Commission for Health Improvement and the National Care Standards Commission monitor patient care in the National Health Service and independent sector respectively.

Maternal deaths associated with termination of pregnancy: United Kingdom 1991–99

Triennium	*Number of deaths from termination of pregnancy*[1]	*Number of these associated with substandard care*[1]
1997–99	2	0
1994–96	1	1
1991–93	5	3

[1] Figures are from the reports of the Confidential Enquiries into Maternal Deaths in the United Kingdom for the relevant triennium.

Notes:

1. From 1991–93 these deaths were defined as occurring before 20 weeks of pregnancy. From 1994, 24 weeks was used as the upper gestational limit. Thus comparisons of the data between triennia may be inappropriate.

2. There were around 500,000 abortions in the United Kingdom in each three-year period and hence the number of deaths represents less than 0.0001 per cent. of all abortions carried out.

"Agenda for Change"

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the proposed new pay system for NHS employees, under "Agenda for Change". [124345]

Mr. Hutton: "Agenda for Change" has been negotiated over the past four years by staff and management representatives working in partnership. Following the conclusion of the union consultation exercise, agreement was reached through the Central Negotiating Group, which includes the four United Kingdom Health Departments, unions and employer representatives, to move to the next phase of testing "Agenda for Change" in early implemented sites. This commenced in June 2003 in 12 sites identified in England, which were selected in partnership with the unions. This phase will provide the opportunity to address any concerns that might arise, through the Central Negotiating Group and when formed, the new National Health Service staff council, with a view to national implementation in October 2004. These sites are being supported by the Modernisation Agency and will develop effective models of implementation for the breadth of organisations represented. All the nationally recognised staff organisations will be represented on the proposed NHS Staff Council.

We anticipate that NHS Foundation Trusts will begin the "Agenda for Change" implementation process in April 2004 and that all staff in NHS Foundation Trusts will be guaranteed the opportunity of moving to the new pay system.

Alcohol Advertising

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on alcohol advertising. [127722]

Miss Melanie Johnson: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, in close collaboration with other Government departments, including the Department of Health, is currently developing the national alcohol harm reduction strategy. The Strategy Unit is due to publish an interim analysis of the harms associated with alcohol misuse later this year. The final report, which will set out the cross-Governmental alcohol harm reduction strategy, is planned for publication later this year.

As part of this project, the Strategy Unit and the Sponsor Minister, the Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing and Community, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), have had ongoing discussions with all relevant stakeholders. The final report will consider a wide variety of issues concerning alcohol misuse, including alcohol advertising.

Community Pharmacies

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will make a statement on the Government's policy on community pharmacies. [127622]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the written ministerial statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on Thursday 17 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 76–79WS.

Compensation Claims

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of operation care complainants have brought compensation claims in each of the last five years. [128632]

Ms Rosie Winterton: This information is not collected centrally by the Department of Health. The information that is requested can only be supplied at disproportionate cost to the request.

The present situation is that National Health Service complaints and clinical negligence claims are handled separately. Once a patient who has made a complaint indicates that they are seeking legal action linked to the complaint, then the complaint is halted until the case is resolved through litigation, withdrawn or settlement reached with the trust or NHS Litigation Authority.

However, a review of the way clinical negligence claims and complaints are handled in the NHS is currently under way. The recently published Chief Medical Officer's report, "Making Amends", sets out a number of recommendations to reform the way clinical negligence cases are handled in the NHS, including the removal of the rule which requires a complaint to be halted pending resolution of a claim to encourage closer alignment between the claims and complaints.

Departmental Entertainment

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent by *(a)* ministers and *(b)* Departmental special advisers on food and alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for entertainment purposes since March 2002. [127475]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the response given to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on Monday 27 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 673W. The total amount spent by the Department of Health on hospitality in 2002 03 is £125,000.

Departmental information systems do not classify expenditure by Ministers, special advisers or other employment category, nor do information systems provide a detailed breakdown of food and drink.

Food Supplements

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 8 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 776W, on the Food Supplement Directive, if he will make it his policy to add nutrients to the list of permitted ingredients included in dossiers submitted to the European Food Safety Authority; and if he will make a statement. [128556]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The lists of permitted vitamins and minerals and their sources in annexes I and II to the directive remain open pending safety assessments for additional substances. Dossiers of information supporting safety may be submitted to the European Food Safety for assessment. In the case of amendments to the permitted lists in the directive, Schedules 1 or 2 to The Food Supplements Regulations (England) 2003 will be amended accordingly.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his Answer of 11 July, *Official Report*, column 1041W, on natural supplements, what plans he has to press for changes in the regulations to ensure that the maximum permitted levels of nutrients in supplements are set on the basis of safety and not nutritional need; what assessment he has made of the impact of this issue to the British specialist food industry; and if he will make a statement. [128516]

Miss Melanie Johnson: While the Food Supplements Directive sets out principles for setting maximum limits for vitamins and minerals in food supplements, no such limits have yet been set. The principles in Article 5 of the directive state that maximum levels should be set based on scientific risk assessment and intake from dietary sources other than food supplements as well as taking account of reference nutrient intakes. The Government continues to argue for maximum permitted limits for vitamins and minerals in food supplements to be set on the basis of thorough risk assessments and will continue to press this view strongly at every opportunity.

During negotiations on the Directive and when drafting the Food Supplements (England) Regulations 2003, the Food Standards Agency consulted with a wide range of stakeholders. The potential impacts of the Regulations on the specialist food industry are summarised in the Regulatory Impact Assessment accompanying the Regulations, which are available in the Library.

General Practitioners

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what compensation is paid to GPs who lose their right to dispense; [127629]

(2) what plans he has to reform regulations that permit the removal of the right to dispense from a GP. [127630]

Ms Rosie Winterton: General practitioners do not normally receive compensation if they are no longer required to dispense National Health Service prescriptions. Primary care trusts can make transitional arrangements to ensure an orderly winding-down of such dispensing services.

The Government has no plans to change the conditions under which certain GPs can dispense NHS prescriptions. However, in our response to the Health Select Committee Fifth Report, The Control of Entry Regulations and Retail Pharmacy Services in the UK (Cm 5896) on 17 July 2003, we said that we would invite medical and pharmacy representative bodies to look again at existing proposals to reform the rules governing rural NHS dispensing.

We are setting up an advisory group to advise on how best to implement a series of changes we are proposing to current NHS dispensing rules. We published further details on 29 August 2003 in Proposals to Reform and Modernise the NHS (Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 1992. A copy has been placed in the Library. We will also ask the group to consider the results of the representative bodies' consideration of their proposals for reforming the rules governing rural NHS dispensing.

Hip Fractures

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people suffered a hip fracture *(a)* recorded as a first episode and *(b)* recorded as a second episode in each of the last five years; and what the cost was in each case. [124309]

Mr. Hutton: Table one shows the number of hip fractures, which were recorded as a first and second episode in each of the last five years. Table two shows the average cost of the procedure, taken from the Published National Schedule of Reference Costs. Data are available from 2000. The cost excludes any elements of critical care services that might have been be used by a patient.

Table 1

Finished Consultant Episodes (FCEs) where a hip fracture was recorded as the main diagnosis

	Year				
Episode Order	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
1	40,083	41,956	43,030	41,691	42,367
2	5,004	5,304	5,732	5,919	7,177

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) Department of Health, England.

Table 2

	Mean Average £		
Condition	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Neck of femur Fracture >69 years old or with complications and comorbidities	3,669	3,818	4,200
Neck of Femur Fracture < 70 years old or without complications and comorbidities	2,946	2,956	3,137

Source:
Published National Schedule of Reference Costs.

Laser Eye Surgery

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations have been received by his Department from *(a)* the Medical Protection Society and *(b)* the Royal College of Ophthalmologists on (i) guidance for and (ii) regulation of individuals involved in the provision of laser eye surgery. [128676]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department of Health has not received any representations from either the Medical Protection Society or the Royal College of Ophthalmologists concerning guidance and regulation in the provision of laser eye surgery. We are, however, aware that there are concerns regarding laser surgery.

Laser eye surgery in England is regulated by the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC). Providers of laser eye surgery are required to be registered with the NCSC and to comply with national minimum standards set by them. Providers must keep records for the NCSC of each surgical procedure undertaken, including accidents or adverse events. They are also subject to annual inspections by the NCSC.

The NCSC is currently monitoring development in the area of laser eye surgery and should any evidence emerge that further regulation of this procedure is required, it would be considered in order to further protect service users.

Mental Health

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations he has received on the need for a Mental Incapacity Bill; and if he will make a statement; [128316]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effect of the proposals in the draft Mental Incapacity Bill on the lives of *(a)* people with dementia and *(b)* their carers; and if he will make a statement. [128317]

Ms Rosie Winterton: A draft Mental Incapacity Bill was published by the Department for Constitutional Affairs on 27 June. It is currently subject to pre-legislative scrutiny by a Joint Committee of both Houses of Parliament. Letters received in the Department of Health about the draft Bill are being fed into the scrutiny process.

The need for a Bill on Mental Incapacity was raised by many who responded to consultation on the draft Mental Health Bill, which was published in June 2002. The draft Mental Incapacity Bill aims to provide a better decision-making framework for people who are unable to make some decisions for themselves and those that care for them. The Department of Health is working closely with colleagues in the Department for Constitutional Affairs to make sure that the Bill addresses the needs of all vulnerable adults, including people with dementia and those who look after them, whether informal carers or professionals in health or social care services.

David Kelly

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when over the past two years Mr. David Kelly has met Mr. Andrew Gilligan of the BBC. [126330]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 17 July 2003]:* I have been asked to reply.

My hon. Friend will understand why it was not possible to answer this question on the day named. These matters are now being addressed by Lord Hutton's inquiry.

The information requested has been passed to the inquiry. Lord Hutton will publish his report in due course. I am therefore withholding the information under Exemption 4a of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Radiotherapy

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what average length of time patients in each health authority had to wait for radiotherapy cancer treatment in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [127522]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Information on waiting times for radiotherapy is not collected centrally. However, the NHS Cancer Plan sets out maximum waiting time

targets for first definitive cancer treatment, which includes radiotherapy when it is the first treatment. From December 2001, there is a one month maximum wait from diagnosis to first treatment for breast cancer and a one month wait from urgent general practitioner referral to first treatment for children's cancers, testicular cancer and acute leukaemia. From 2002 there is a maximum two-month wait from urgent referral to treatment for breast cancer. By 2005 there will be a maximum two months from urgent referral to treatment and a maximum one-month wait from diagnosis to first treatment for all cancers.

In order to tackle radiotherapy waiting times, we have increased the number of radiographers in post by 9.2 per cent. and numbers in training by 55 per cent. since 1977. We are making better use of existing staff by establishing new roles for radiographers, which can open up new career opportunities and improve retention. We are also making unprecedented investment in new radiotherapy facilities, with 61 new and replacement linear accelerators delivered to the national health service since April 2000. In addition, we are streamlining the patient's route to treatment through the Cancer Services Collaborative.

Waiting Lists/Times

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have waited more than *(a)* three months, *(b)* six months, *(c)* nine months and *(d)* 12 months for elective admissions in each year since 1997. [112978]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows the length of time a patient waited for an elective finished in-year admission from 1997–98 to 2001–02, which is the latest year for which figures are available.

Elective Finished In-Year Admissions, Waiting List and Booked Cases: Finished Consultant Episodes—NHS Hospitals England, 1997–98 to 2001–02

Length of time patient waited	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
More than 3 months	1,134,491	1,307,371	1,147,551	1,133,824	1,155,138
More than 6 months	601,994	723,520	592,752	587,714	604,109
More than 9 months	356,778	445,320	349,472	343,787	354,641
More than 12 months	183,506	245,884	189,565	186,096	188,023

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

There is a clear pattern of significant reduction demonstrated in the waiting time information at the end of March 2003. Across all the time bands there have been significant reductions in the number of patients waiting compared to March 1997. This reduction is most apparent in the number of over 12 month waiters, where a total of only 103 patients were waiting at the end of March 2003.

Source:
Department of Health form QF01
Notes:
A finished consultant episode is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within the year.
Figures in this table have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data.
Waiting time statistics from HES are not the same as the published waiting list statistics. HES provides counts and waiting times for all patients admitted to hospital within a given period whereas the published waiting list statistics count those waiting for treatment at a given point in time and how long they have been on the waiting list. Also, HES calculates the waiting time as the difference between the admission and decision to admit dates. Unlike published waiting list statistics, this is not adjusted for self-deferrals or periods of medical/social suspension.

Written Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he has taken to improve procedures for answering written parliamentary questions by his Department since 1st April 2002. [127490]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Significant changes have been made to these procedures within the Department since 1 April 2002. The parliamentary section responsible for overseeing them has been substantially reorganised and a new database has been introduced to help drive and monitor the process. This was immediately made available to all departmental staff; its predecessor having been solely for use by the parliamentary section. It records each stage of the answering procedure, provides a transparent means of checking precisely where a question is in the process and helps to identify and clear blockages in the system.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Olympic Games

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions her Department has had to ensure that sufficient hotel accommodation will be available for visitors to the capital, should the Olympic Games be held in London in 2012. [128653]

Tessa Jowell: The assessment of the cost and benefit implications of bidding for and staging the Olympics and Paralympic Games in London in 2012 undertaken by Arup in May 2003 estimated the average daily room requirement during an Olympic Games as between 80,000 and 145,000. Drawing on London Tourist Board figures, Arup also projected up to 200,000 rooms in hotels/guest houses as potentially available within International Olympic Committee (IOC) visitor travel time requirements of one hour.

Detailed information on accommodation is required by the IOC for the applicant city questionnaire, and London 2012 Ltd., the company set up to prepare the Olympic bid, will be undertaking further work to verify and refine these figures over the coming months.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her estimate is of the total cost of a London Olympic Games; and how it is proposed that it will be financed, broken down by source in each year. [128086]

Tessa Jowell: The consultants Arup estimated the costs of a London Olympics at £3.6 billion with expected revenues of £2.5 billion. This implied a net public subsidy of £1.1 billion. The Government and the Mayor have agreed a funding package of up to £2.375 billion, allowing a generous contingency, including up to £1.5 billion from the lottery and up to £625 million from a London Olympics Council Tax. As is explained in the Memorandum of Understanding, which was included in the Government response to the Select Committee Report, "A London Olympic Bid for 2012" (HC 268), ref. Cm 5867:

> "The flow of funds will depend on the organisations that are nominated to deliver various aspects of the Games. These details have not yet been fully worked up. Because rises or falls in one sector of Olympic cost may be offset in another sector it is not possible to completely earmark particular strands of funding to discrete objects. Within that, the broad intention is that Lottery funding should be primarily directed to sports investment, Olympic facilities and event staging and that money raised from the Olympic precept should address capital requirements of the Games including transport infrastructure."

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her estimate is of the total change in money available to existing good causes as a result of the establishment of special Olympic lottery games. [128087]

Tessa Jowell: Preliminary estimates provided by Camelot, and assessed by the National Lottery Commission, suggest that any reduction of income to the existing good causes from Olympic lottery games would be small—approximately 4 per cent. for the remainder of the Camelot licence period (until 2009). Each game will be subject to approval by the NLC, and in designing the games, Camelot will seek to minimise the effect on the core lottery games.

Parthenon Sculptures

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she next plans to meet representatives of the Greek Government to discuss the return of the Parthenon sculptures to Greece. [127841]

Estelle Morris: The Government has no such plans. We have advised the Greek Government that the Parthenon Sculptures are a matter for the Trustees of the British Museum. The museum is independent of government.

Schools (Physical Exercise)

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what percentage of schoolchildren in the UK participate in a minimum of two hours of physical exercise at school each week; [128580]

(2) what steps she is taking to promote participation in sports by schoolchildren *(a)* during games lessons and *(b)* after school. [128581]

Mr. Caborn: The Government is investing more than £1 billion in England to transform physical education and school sport. This funding will help deliver an ambitious Public Service Agreement target, shared by DCMS and DfES, to increase the percentage of school children who spend a minimum of two hours each week on high-quality PE and school sport within and beyond the curriculum to 75 per cent. by 2006. Currently, about a third of schools provide this entitlement at Key Stage 1, two fifths at Key Stage 2 and a third at each of Key Stages 3 and 4.

Tourism

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether tourism in the UK has grown as an industry in each of the last 10 years; how many people are employed in tourism in the UK; and what percentage of GDP is accounted for by the tourism industry. [128577]

Mr. Caborn: The available data on annual expenditure by domestic and foreign tourists in the UK over the last 10 years are shown in the table.

Annual expenditure by domestic and foreign tourists in the UK for each of the last 10 years

£ million

	Expenditure by foreign tourists in the UK	*Expenditure by UK tourists in the UK*	*Total expenditure by tourists in the UK*
1993	9,487	[1]	[1]
1994	9,786	[1]	[1]
1995	11,763	20,072	31,835
1996	12,290	22,041	34,331
1997	12,244	24,137	36,381
1998	12,671	22,814	35,485
1999	12,498	25,635	38,133
2000	12,805	26,133	38,938
2001	11,306	26,094	37,400
2002	11,859	26,699	38,558

[1] Not available

Sources:
International Passenger Survey
UK Tourism Survey

While there has been a generally increasing trend in the value of UK tourism expenditure over the past 10 years, it has not increased every year. In particular, tourism expenditure since 2000 has been affected by the foot and mouth epidemic, the SARS virus and the war with Iraq.

It is estimated that 2.1 million people are employed in the tourism-related industries.

It is also estimated that the tourism industry accounts for approximately 4.5 per cent. of UK GDP.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Written Constitution

30. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs if the Lord Chancellor will draft a written constitution for the United Kingdom. [128476]

Mr. Leslie: There are no plans to draft an overarching codified constitution for the United Kingdom.

Supreme Court

31. **Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs if the Secretary of State will make it his policy for the proposed Supreme Court to sit outside London when considering devolution issues. [128477]

Mr. Leslie: As my hon. Friend is aware, we are currently consulting on the role that the Supreme Court will have in considering devolution issues. In parallel, we are also looking at where the court should be accommodated and whether it should have the power to sit outside London when considering devolution issues.

Judicial Reform

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs if he will make a statement on the priorities within the Department's modernisation programme for ensuring better service delivery in the courts. [128470]

Mr. Leslie: The primary purpose of the departmental change agenda is to improve delivery to the public by the Court Service and the other agencies of the Department. This purpose underpins our plans for a unified court administration and the constitutional reforms announced in June.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what assessment he has made of the need to provide access to legal aid to victims of domestic violence. [127278]

Mr. Lammy: Domestic violence proceedings are a high priority for the Department for Constitutional Affairs and the Legal Services Commission (LSC). The LSC's funding code criteria allow such cases to be funded more widely than most other family and non-family areas. This gives the victim of domestic violence the means to secure various remedies against the other party. The latest available figure for expenditure on domestic violence (civil representation) for the financial year 2002 to 2003 is £53.4 million.

The LSC has Regional Legal Services Committees who are tasked with assessing legal need regionally on an on-going basis. The Yorkshire and Humberside Committee have undertaken a project with the aim of developing good practice in identifying and addressing the legal advice needs of victims of domestic violence in the context of the Community Legal Service (CLS). The Legal Service Regional Committee's Periodic Survey of Justiciable Problems are publishing a research report in the next issue of the Family Law Journal which addresses the issue of legal need in domestic violence cases and examines the strategy needed to encourage victims to seek remedies.

Gender Recognition Bill

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs if he will make a statement on the draft Gender Recognition Bill. [128466]

Mr. Lammy: As Lord Filkin announced on 11 July this year the Government have published the draft Gender Recognition Bill for pre-legislative scrutiny by the Joint Committee on Human Rights. On 17 July the Joint Committee issued a call for evidence to be submitted to it by 11 September. The Government looks forward to receiving the report of the Joint Committee and to introducing the Bill to Parliament as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

Media Training

Mr. Flight: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what the cost was to the Lord Chancellor's Department of media and voice training for Ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [123117]

Mr. Lammy: The cost to my Department (including the former Lord Chancellor's Department) of media and voice training for Ministers and officials in each year since 1997 was as follows:

Year	£
1997–98	[1]
1998–99	0
1999–2000	1,762.50
2000–01	2,625
2001–02	0
2002–03	0
2003–04	[2]0

[1] Figures not available
[2] To date

Figures for 1997–98 are not readily available because communications group accounts were not kept separately from the then LCD corporate services accounts.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

AS-levels

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total cost of setting and marking AS-level examinations in all subjects was in each year between 2000 and 2003. [128551]

Mr. Miliband: The answer can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ofsted

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the level of higher education funding in Wales was in present day prices in each year since 1979. [124672]

Mr. Touhig: I have been asked to reply.

The following table provides figures on Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) funding by financial year from 1993–94 to 1998–99.

HEFCW assumed responsibility for funding HE in Wales in April 1993, and figures prior to 1993 are not available on a comparable basis.

The National Assembly for Wales assumed overall responsibility for HE funding in Wales on 1 July 1999, and figures beyond this date are not held by the Wales Office.

HEFCW funding from National Assembly for Wales/Welsh Office (inc. running costs and grants to HEIs)

£000

	Current prices	*Constant (2002–03) prices*
1993–94	179,200	225,607
1994–95	232,497	288,877
1995–96	242,465	292,913
1996–97	243,522	285,148
1997–98	236,787	268,963
1998–99	231,222	255,618

Note:
Constant price figures based on current price figures rounded to nearest 1,000 (nearest 100,000 for 2002–03 and 2003–04).
Sources:
HEFCW annual reports.
HM Treasury GDP deflators used to produce constant price figures.

Lessons (Ofsted Inspections)

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of lessons recorded as set by ability in *(a)* Year 7, *(b)* Year 8, *(c)* Year 9, *(d)* Year 10 and *(e)* Year 11 in each state secondary school in West Sussex were inspected by Ofsted between 1995 and 2002. [128614]

Mr. Miliband: This is a matter for Ofsted. HM Chief Inspector, David Bell, will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Ministerial Visits

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the *(a)* foreign and *(b)* UK visits he has made since 1 April; what the cost was to public funds of each trip; whom he met; and what gifts were received. [126886]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Government publishes the overall costs of all ministerial overseas travel and a list of all visits overseas by Cabinet Ministers costing in excess of £500 on an annual basis. The list for the period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003 was published by the Prime Minister on 16 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 482W. The next list for the period 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004 will be published at the end of the financial year.

In respect of gifts received, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 14 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 482W.

Details of UK visits are not held in the format requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Pupil Funding

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will publish the per pupil funding for each maintained school for *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04. [127930]

Mr. Miliband: The available information has been placed in the Library of the House. The Information is as provided by local education authorities in their section 52 budget statements. The amount a school receives is dependant on a range of allocation factors including; the fair funding formula, Standards Fund, Standards Grant, and local formulae which operates within the individual local education authority.

WORK AND PENSIONS

War Pensions

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many war disability pensioners suffering from a wholly psychiatric disorder lost their incapacity benefit in each year from 1995 to 2002. [127952]

Maria Eagle: The available information is in the table.

Incapacity Benefit (IB) claims ceasing where a War Pension had been payable due to a psychiatric disorder

1 Sep 1998 to 31 Aug 1999	—
1 Sep 1999 to 31 Aug 2000	200
1 Sep 2000 to 31 Aug 2001	100
1 Sep 2001 to 31 Aug 2002	100

Source:
DWP Information Centre, 5 per cent samples of the Incapacity Benefit and War Pensions computer systems.
Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred, and exclude a small number of cases held clerically.
2. Figures exclude IB claims ceasing due to an award of Retirement Pension.
3. Numbers are based on very few sample cases and are therefore subject to a high degree of sampling error and should be used as a guide to the current situation only.
4. War Pensions figures exclude cases which have been archived 18 months after cessation of the War Pension.
5. Information prior to 1998 is only available at disproportionate cost.
6. '—' indicates nil or negligible.

British Sign Language

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what proposals he has to recognise British Sign Language as a language; and if he will make a statement on its use by those who are hard of hearing; [128249]

(2) what proposals he has to increase the amount of British Sign Language/English interpreters; and what funding is available to train language tutors. [128250]

Maria Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the written statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on 18 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 41WS, in which the Government recognise British Sign Language (BSL) as a language in its own right. We have made available an additional £1 million for a discrete programme of initiatives to support the statement and have said that among our priorities is increasing opportunities for people to learn BSL to a professional level. We have established a British Sign Language working group to consider priorities for allocating the additional funding and will receive their recommendations in due course.

Disability Bill

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the Government will publish the Draft Disability Bill. [127743]

Maria Eagle: I refer the right hon. Member to the Written Statement given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 22 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 12–13WS.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what use is made of medical reports when assessing an application for disability living allowance; and what other evidence is required to secure a grant of disability living allowance. [128105]

Maria Eagle: Entitlement to Disability Living Allowance is based on the care needs and assistance with mobility that a person requires as a result of an illness or disability rather than the diagnosis of that illness or disability. To support the information provided by the customer on the claim form, it is often necessary for the Department to obtain additional evidence from people involved in the care of the person with the illness or disability. It is for the decision maker to determine what additional evidence is necessary to enable them to decide the claim.

Where a decision maker considers that further medical evidence is necessary to establish whether someone meets the criteria for an award of benefit they can request a report from the customers General Practitioner, or other health care professional, or a report may be requested based on an examination by an Examining Medical Practitioner, who is trained specifically in the effects of disability.

It is of course open to the customer at any time to provide such additional evidence, both medical and non-medical, as they may choose to submit in support of their claim or appeal.

Incapacity Benefit

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of appeals against refusal of incapacity benefit were settled in favour of the claimant in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [127056]

Maria Eagle: Information on IB appeals is only available from 2000.

The available information is in the table.

There are a number of reasons for decisions being overturned at appeal; for example, additional evidence may be given to a tribunal that was not available to the decision maker. The Department is currently working on a number of initiatives to improve liaison with the Appeals Service and gain a better understanding of these issues.

Incapacity benefit (IB) claims ceasing following a personal capability assessment (PCA), number of appeals cleared by The Appeals Service and number found in favour of the appellant in each of the last five years

	1 March 2000 to 28 February 2001	*1 March 2001 to 28 February 2002*	*1 March 2002 to 28 February 2003*
IB claims ceasing following a PCA[1]	86,400	91,900	106,600
Appeals cleared	34,060	30,785	37,845
Appeals found in favour of appellant (percentage)	13,965 (41)	13,100 (42.6)	17,535 (46.3)
Percentage found in favour of appellant	41	42.6	46.3

[1] IB figures have been updated to include late notifications of IB ceasing and are subject to change. The most recent quarters include fewer late notifications and will be subject to significant change in future.

Notes:

1. Appeals figures are subject to change as more current data becomes available.
2. IB figures are rounded to the nearest 100.
3. Appeals figures are rounded to the nearest five.

Source:

DWP Information Centre

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people were claiming jobseeker's allowance in *(a)* Somerset and *(b)* Taunton Deane at the end of each fiscal quarter since January 2000. [127824]

Mr. Pond: The information is in the table:

Number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance

Month	*Taunton Deane Local Authority Area*	*County of Somerset*
January 2000	1,308	6,398
April 2000	1,173	5,447
July 2000	1,077	5,046
October 2000	954	4,651
January 2001	996	5,153
April 2001	979	4,836
July 2001	899	4,335
October 2001	752	3,853
January 2002	782	4,533
April 2002	793	4,082
July 2002	734	3,731
October 2002	693	3,641
January 2003	822	4,393
April 2003	784	4,037
July 2003	762	3,785

Source:

JSAPBS

Notes:

1. Figures are based on a 100 per cent count of unemployment-related benefits, including clerically held cases.
2. Somerset figures exclude Unitary Authorities within the ceremonial boundary of Somerset, namely "Bath and North East Somerset" and "North Somerset".

3. The number of Jobseeker's Allowance claimants are normally counted on the second Thursday of a month. For example, April 2003 claimant figures represent the number of claimants at the end of business on Thursday 10 April.

Mental Health

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the impact of the draft Mental Health Bill on the services his Department provides for people with mental health needs. [126004]

Maria Eagle: The draft Mental Health Bill will break the automatic link between compulsory treatment and detention, allowing patients to be treated in the setting most appropriate to them. Treatment in the community will provide a positive alternative for the many patients who do not want or need to be detained in hospital and an opportunity to minimise the disruption to their lives.

Jobcentre Plus services are designed to meet the needs of disabled people, including those with mental health problems. The reform will allow more people with complex mental health problems to access Jobcentre Plus services. Officials are considering the implications for the training of front line Jobcentre Plus staff.

Pensions

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of pensioners received an income from *(a)* state and *(b)* private pension schemes in each year between 1992 and 2002; and if he will make a statement. [128549]

Malcolm Wicks: Information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is given in Table 8 (state pension) and Table 14 (private pensions) of The Pensioners' Incomes Series 2001/2 a copy of which is available in the Library.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the number of low income earners to have taken up stakeholder pensions since their inception. [128555]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is not available. Such information as is available is as follows. The 2001/02 Family Resources Survey showed that some 20 per cent. of stakeholder pension sales were to working individuals earning less than £10,000 a year, and that the majority of sales (55 per cent.) were to people earning between £10,000 and £29,999 a year.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the size of the garrison in Afghanistan. [127161]

Mr. Ingram: We shall continue to deploy around 400 troops in Afghanistan.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 17 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 477W whether the United Kingdom has further plans to contribute to the payment of Afghan National Army salaries. [128526]

Mr. Ingram: The £5 million made available through the United Nations' Trust Fund for Afghanistan to pay the salaries of the Afghan National Army is intended for use over the current financial year. We are considering whether to make any further contributions.

Aircraft Carriers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to increase the number of escorts when the new supercarriers are commissioned. [127253]

Mr. Ingram: There are no plans to increase the number of Royal Navy destroyers and frigates when the new aircraft carriers are brought into service.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the estimated cost of the new aircraft carriers is; what the estimated cost was in 1998; and if he will make a statement on the procurement status of the carriers. [128074]

Mr. Ingram: The method by which the Department estimates the costs for equipment projects has changed since 1998 as a result of the adoption of resource accounting and budgeting in 1999. In 1998, the estimated cost based on a STOVL design was around £2 billion, based on 1998–99 constant prices (which excluded inflation). The estimated procurement cost of the future aircraft carriers using the innovative, adaptable design is around £3 billion at resource outturn prices (which includes compound inflation). The CVF Programme is still in the Assessment Phase and we expect to award the Demonstration and Manufacture contract in Spring 2004 as planned.

C17

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many flying hours have been accumulated by RAF C17 aircraft; and how many were expected. [127117]

Mr. Ingram: From June 2001, when the C17 was first available for tasking, to 31 July 2003, 11,540 hours have been flown. The original planned flying task for the aircraft was 3,000 hours per year for the seven years of the lease. From 1 April 2003, this was increased to 4,000 hours per year.

Coastal Training Craft

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the annual running cost is of P2000 class coastal training craft. [127119]

Mr. Ingram: The annual running cost of the 16 P2000 class craft in financial year 2002–03 was £5.835 million. These figures include the cost of capital and depreciation. In addition the annual average maintenance cost for the P2000 fleet is £1.873 million.

Deepcut Barracks

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 11 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 1030W how many cases of self-harm overdoses there were at each Army barracks in each year since 1995. [127070]

Mr. Caplin: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 11 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 1030W what assessment he has made of the reasons for self-harm incidents at Deepcut barracks since 1995; what measures are being taken to prevent further incidents; and if he will make a statement. [127071]

Mr. Caplin: There are no discernible trends to the number of self-harm overdose incidents at Deepcut, although in most cases the decision to overdose appears to have been taken on the spur of the moment. Causes identified include homesickness, depression and boredom.

A number of measures are in place in an effort to prevent self-harm incidents. As in all Army training establishments, the permanent staff at Deepcut are trained to be on the alert for signs of depression, altered behaviour and other possible indicators of self-harm; new recruits receive education on substance misuse and are encouraged to focus on themes such as looking out for each other and team cohesion. Details of helplines for a number of welfare organisations, including the Samaritans; the Army Welfare Service; and a Confidential Support Line, provided by the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association Forces Help, are promulgated widely throughout the barracks.

Defence Staff

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* service personnel of officer rank, *(b)* service personnel of other ranks, *(c)* industrial civilian personnel and *(d)* non-industrial civilian personnel were employed by (i) the United Kingdom Defence Standardisation team in each year since its inception and (ii) the Directorate of Standardisation in each year from its inception to its re-organisation in 1999; how many of these were employed in Scotland; what the total manning costs were for each category in each year; what the manning costs were for Scotland in each year; and if he will make a statement. [128037]

Mr. Caplin: The Directorate of Standardisation (DStan) was formed in the mid 1960s and since then has gone through a number of reorganisations and change of location. As a consequence many of the historical records no longer exist.

What is known is that in 1978 the complement was 121 Civilian non-industrial staff and 2 Service personnel of officer rank, all working in London. Since then there has not been any industrial or non-officer service personnel within the organisation.

In August 1983 the majority of DStan staff (83) were dispersed to Glasgow (Montrose House) with 8 posts remaining in London. In late 1986 DStan moved to the newly opened Kentigern House in Glasgow and a further three posts were transferred to Glasgow. In the years from 1996 to 2003, the total number of Dstan staff has varied between 35 and 40, between 30 and 33 of whom have worked in Scotland. More detailed, though not exhaustive, records are available from 1989 and are summarised in the following table.

Year	*Total Staff*	*Scotland*	*Elsewhere*	*Non Industrial*	*Service*	*Approximate Costs (£ million) Scotland/ Total*
1989	78	73	5	77	1	Not known
1990	78	73	5	77	1	Not known
1991	76	73	3	75	1	Not known
1992	57	54	3	56	1	Not known
1993	52	51	1	52	0	Not known
1994	50	48	2	50	0	Not known
1995	51	49	2	51	0	Not known
1996	35	33	2	35	0	Not known
1997	35	30	5	35	0	0.70/0.82
1998	36	31	5	36	0	0.85/0.99
1999	36	31	5	36	0	0.90/1.04
2000	38	31	7	38	0	0.89/1.09
2001	38	31	7	38	0	0.95/1.16
2002	38	32	6	38	0	0.99/1.18
2003	40	33	7	39	1	1.13/1.37

Defence Training

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when the Defence Training Review Rationalisation Programme began; [127249]

(2) what the earliest date is on which decisions on the Defence Training Review can result in the implementation of a major relocation of service police; [127236]

(3) when the first major relocation from the Defence Training Review Rationalisation programme will be completed. [127250]

Mr. Ingram: The intention to review defence education and individual training was announced by my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Robertson, the then Defence Secretary on 22 July 1999, *Official Report*, columns 614–15W, and the outcome of that review which included the recommendation for the rationalisation programme was announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 27 March 2001, *Official Report*, columns 547–48W.

The Ministry of Defence is currently engaging with industry to determine the most appropriate and cost effective locations for the Defence Training Establishments within the rationalisation programme. The earliest that any decisions on the locations of training units will be made is December 2004. It is anticipated that contracts with the successful bidders will be signed in 2005 and any relocations will take place after that date. Opportunities for early implementation will however be kept under review.

Destroyers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the average operating cost of *(a)* batch 3 type 22, *(b)* type 23 and *(c)* type 42 destroyers were in each of the last two years; and if he will make a statement. [127274]

Mr. Ingram: The actual cost of operating various types of frigates and destroyers will vary considerably from year to year, dependent on the tasking and maintenance undertaken during that period. Average annual operating costs, based on historic costs over the last two full financial years are given in the table. The

figures include manpower, maintenance, fuel, stores and other costs (such as harbour dues), but exclude depreciation and cost of capital.

£ million

	Financial Year	
	2001–02	*2002–03*
(a) Batch 3 Type 22 Frigate	11.9	13.1
(b) Type 23 Frigate	10.3	10.3
(c) Type 42 Destroyer	13.0	13.5

HMS Bridport

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for HMS Bridport. [127275]

Mr. Ingram: HMS Bridport is being held in extended readiness at Faslane.

Hutton Inquiry

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria his Department used to decide which documents to disclose to the Hutton inquiry. [128603]

Mr. Hoon: We have disclosed all documents that appeared to be relevant to the inquiry's work. We have also supplied further material which the inquiry has requested.

Iraq

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* scientific and *(b)* medical evidence was used as the basis of the statements in paragraph 4.10 of his Department's report on first reflections on operations in Iraq, that there is no reliable scientific or medical evidence to suggest depleted uranium has previously been responsible for post-conflict incidences of ill-health. [126923]

Mr. Hoon: The Royal Society's independent expert Depleted Uranium Working Group recently completed an extensive review of the scientific work on potential health and environmental effects of depleted uranium (DU) munitions. The findings of the review are detailed in two reports entitled "The Health Hazards of Depleted Uranium Munitions" (2001, 2002). They support the Ministry of Defence's view that risks posed by DU to the health of soldiers on the battlefield are minimal except for a small number of extreme cases. The United States Government has carefully monitored the health of those US soldiers who were exposed in extreme circumstances when DU rounds accidentally hit their vehicles during the 1990–91 Gulf Conflict. Some seventeen of them have had DU shrapnel embedded in their bodies for the last twelve years. None of the groups shows signs of health problems attributable to DU. The offspring of the highly-exposed US veterans, amounting to some sixty children, are all healthy.

Some 53,000 British troops took part in the 1990–91 Gulf Conflict, and some 3,300 subsequently felt the need to attend the Gulf Veterans Medical Assessment Programme. The results of the first 3,000 patients to attend have been published: 75 per cent. were found to be well, no novel or unusual conditions were found and the most common condition was found to be post-traumatic stress disorder. No evidence of ill-health due to DU exposure was found.

The findings of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) studies in Kosovo (2001), Serbia and Montenegro (2002) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (2003) note very low levels of DU contamination which do not present immediate radioactive or toxic risks for human health. UNEP's findings are consistent with MOD's view that any DU contamination will be limited and localised and that actions to reduce any potential intakes will only be necessary in some extreme cases.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many *(a)* camp beds and *(b)* NBC suits and respirators were used during Telic 1; and what shortfalls there were; [127109]

(2) how much body armour was issued during Telic 1; and what shortfall there was. [127108]

Mr. Ingram: I assume that Telic 1 relates to the period between initial deployment of troops to the Gulf region and the end of major hostilities. The quantities of camp beds, NBC suits, respirators and body armour deployed to theatre are detailed in the table. It is not possible to identify the quantities actually used during that time for which the information is not held centrally.

Equipment type	*Number issued*
Camp beds	25,280
NBC suits	218,000
S10 respirators	31,500
Enhanced Combat Body Armour (ECBA) sets	38,200

The S10 respirator, referred to in the table, is an item of personal issue to all Service personnel, to be retained at all times; the number shown deployed to theatre was to provide replacement stocks.

Although sufficient quantities of the equipments were supplied to theatre, I am aware that local supply difficulties may have resulted in shortfalls in some areas. In particular, some redistribution of ECBA ceramic plates was required, with priority given to front-line combat units. Supply difficulties will be addressed as part of the on-going departmental review of the operation.

Joint Service Military Training

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment he has made of the risks of joint service military training. [127248]

Mr. Ingram: The risks associated with the programme to create defence training establishments have been identified and are being appropriately managed and mitigated.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the capital cost is of work required at RAF Halton in order to make it serviceable for joint service police training. [127237]

Mr. Ingram: The initial estimate of the capital works required at the RAF Halton site to accommodate joint service police training is £90 million. This will provide modernised domestic accommodation, improved site infrastructure and a new joint police training facility.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the capital cost is of work required at Chichester to provide joint police service training, excluding the MoD police; [127238]

(2) if he will estimate the capital cost of initiating a pilot scheme of joint service police training; [127235]

(3) how long it would take to begin operations if a decision were taken to start a pilot of joint service police training; [127234]

(4) whether his Department has done a cost benefit analysis of Chichester as a location for a pilot scheme to extend joint service police training; [127233]

(5) if he will permit a consortium to bid for a pilot scheme incorporating more joint military police training before completion of the Defence Training Review Rationalisation Programme. [127232]

Mr. Ingram: In 1999 it was estimated that the capital works required at Chichester to provide joint police service training, excluding provision for the Ministry of Defence Police, would be £3.5 million. Subsequent study has shown that the site does not offer the opportunity for redevelopment and modernisation to accommodate the full requirement for joint police training, including the MOD Police.

No pilot scheme is planned for joint service police training.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what initial estimate he has made of the total saving from moving the Royal Military Police from Chichester to the lowest cost site, assuming maintenance of the same overall level of training output. [127239]

Mr. Ingram: The initial estimate of the total savings from moving the Royal Military Police from Chichester to the lowest cost site is £695,000 per annum. In addition, a receipt from the disposal of the Chichester site will be realised. Over a 25 year period moving from the current service police, MOD Police and Guard Service training locations at Chichester, HMS Excellent, Wethersfield and Worthy Down to the benchmark site at RAF Halton is calculated to generate savings of at least £430 million.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what priority he attaches to joint service military training in relation to other parts of the review of joint service activity. [127240]

Mr. Ingram: Joint service training plays an important role in underpinning joint operational capability. A high priority is placed on delivering joint training when it is appropriate.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether the initiation of full joint service military police training needs to await the outcome of the Defence Training Review Rationalisation Programme; [127242]

(2) what joint service military police training is taking place; at what cost; and what proportion *(a)* by number of trainees and *(b)* by cost of all military police training, (i) excluding and (ii) including Ministry of Defence police, it represents. [127241]

Mr. Ingram: There are no plans to initiate joint Service military police training other than through the Defence Training Review rationalisation programme. However, the training at the Royal Military Police Training School (RMPTS) is open to all three Services and some common training has also been carried out with the MOD Police. In practice, personnel from the Royal Marines, Royal Navy and RAF have attended the following courses: Royal Military Police (RMP) Junior Non Commissioned Officers (JNCO), RMP Investigations, and RMP Scenes of Crime. Information for 2001–2002, which is the most recent year for which data are readily available, shows that students from the Royal Air Force, Royal Navy and Royal Marines make up 2.5 per cent. of the total student throughput and represented 2.4 per cent. of the total cost of RMPTS courses.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether recent experience of joint service operations in Afghanistan, the Gulf, Sierra Leone and the Falklands have resulted in joint service military training being placed at a higher priority. [127243]

Mr. Ingram: We have always placed importance on joint service training. Training provided is reviewed in the light of lessons learned from all campaigns.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many army military policemen have been deployed at short notice to support other service policemen to assist with incidents in operations overseas; and in how many cases. [127244]

Mr. Ingram: Since January 2003, 18 members of the Royal Military Police have supported deployed Military Police assets, at short notice, for seven incidents conducted in four overseas locations.

David Kelly

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether his Department has complied with Dr. David Kelly's terms and conditions of employment in handling the matter of his discussions with Mr. Andrew Gilligan; [127159]

(2) on how many occasions Dr. David Kelly spoke to Mr. Andrew Gilligan; and whether his line managers knew this; [127156]

(3) how many of his Department's personnel have been interviewed in connection with the dossier story reported by Mr. Andrew Gilligan; [127157]

(4) what inquiries are being conducted by his Department into unauthorised briefings of the BBC in connection with Iraq; [127158]

(5) what *(a)* civil service and *(b)* MOD rules and regulations may have been infringed by Dr. David Kelly in talking to Mr. Andrew Gilligan. [127155]

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman will recognise that these are all matters that are being addressed by Lord Hutton's Inquiry. Lord Hutton will publish his report in

due course. I am therefore withholding the information requested under Exemption 4a of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which journalists Mr. David Kelly has met over the past two years other than Mr. Andrew Gilligan of the BBC; and for what purpose each meeting was held; and when each meeting took place; [126331]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 17 July 2003]:* My hon. Friend will understand why it was not possible to answer these questions on the day named. These matters are now being addressed by Lord Hutton's inquiry.

The information requested has been passed to the inquiry. Lord Hutton will publish his report in due course. I am therefore withholding the information under Exemption 4a of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Deployments

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when, since 1997, units were attached to other *(a)* battalions and *(b)* corps to bring them up to strength for the purposes of operational deployment; and if he will make a statement. [128408]

Mr. Ingram: All front line units undertake regular operational deployments. The transfer of personnel to units on operational tours is and has always been a matter of routine. This information is therefore not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Royal Air Force

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what estimate he has made of *(a)* the cost and *(b)* the time needed for decontamination when the RAF leaves RAF Lyneham; [127104]

(2) what recent survey he has undertaken of land and building contamination at RAF Lyneham; and if he will publish it. [127103]

Mr. Ingram: A land quality assessment has been commissioned, which will detail a range of proposals for the remediation of RAF Lyneham together with the associated costs. A land quality statement, which summarises the findings of the assessment, will be made available to interested parties.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* civilian and *(b)* military air movements there were at RAF Northolt in each of the last 12 months. [128092]

Mr. Caplin: The following table shows the number of military and civil air movements at RAF Northolt in each of the last 12 months:

Month	*Military*	*Civil*	*Total*
August 2002	253	277	530
September 2002	372	673	1,045
October 2002	419	669	1,088
November 2002	386	645	1,031
December 2002	224	295	519
January 2003	348	431	779
February 2003	328	557	885
March 2003	441	635	1,076
April 2003	426	519	945
May 2003	474	815	1,289
June 2003	529	914	1,443
July 2003	465	694	1,159
Total	4,665	7,124	11,789

Civil aircraft movements at RAF Northolt are limited to 7,000 per calendar year; the number of movements in any other 12-month period may, as in this case, exceed this figure.

Reservists

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many reservists served in *(a)* the first Gulf War and *(b)* Kosovo during 1999–2001. [128409]

Mr. Caplin: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie), gave him on 28 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 843W.

Sea Harrier

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions have been held with the Indian Government in respect of the disposal of Sea Harrier aircraft. [127122]

Mr. Ingram: The Disposal Services Agency (DSA) has held no discussions with the Indian Government in respect of the disposal of Sea Harrier.

Secondments

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his Department's policy is on employing secondees from the private sector; how many secondees from the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sectors his Department employed in each year since 1997; from which companies and organisations they were seconded; at what level they were employed; and if he will make a statement. [127[illegible]]

Mr. Caplin: The interchange of personnel between the public and commercial sectors is an important feature of the Ministry of Defence's long-standing programme to build stronger links with other sectors of the economy. This programme aims to enhance business performance by exchanging ideas, skills and experiences. Encouraging interchange activities is a key part of the Civil Service reform agenda.

Inward secondments financial year 1997–1998

Parent Company or Organisation	*Start Date*	*End Date*	*Level*
Vickers	April 1997	April 1998	B2
Vosper Thornycroft	April 1997	December 1999	B2
Rolls Royce	December 1997	December 1999	B2
POSG Support Services	January 1998	January 1999	Patent Officer
British Aerospace	March 1998	April 2001	C1
Kent Probation Service	March 1998	March 2003	Senior Probation Officer

Inward secondments financial year 1998–99

Parent company or organisation	*Start date*	*End date*	*Level*
British Aerospace	May 1998	December 1999	C1
Devonport Management Ltd.	August 1998	August 2000	B2
Simmons and Simmons	September 1998	August 1999	B2
Wragg and Company	September 1998	March 2000	B2
PA Consulting Group	September 1998	August 1999	B2
City and Hackney Community Service NHS Trust	October 1998	October 1999	C1
Gardiner and Theobalds	December 1998	December 1999	B1
TI Group	December 1998	November 2001	SCS
AWE plc	December 1998	March 2002	C1
British Aerospace	January 1999	January 2001	C2
UK Smart Procurement	February 1999	February 2000	
BNFL	March 1999	March 2000	B2
West Yorkshire Probation Service	January 1999	January 2004	Probation Officer

Inward secondments financial year 1999–2000

Parent company or organisation	*Start date*	*End date*	*Level*
MayDay NHS Trust	December 1999	June 2003	B2
Defence Acquisition Group	April 1999	August 1999	B2
Dibb, Lupton Alsop	April 1999	April 2000	B2
British Aerospace	August 1999	July 2001	B2
Price Waterhouse Coopers	October 1999	October 2000	B2
Marconi Electonic Systems (Avionics Group)	November 1999	November 2001	B2
British Aerospace	November 1999	October 2001	B2
GEC Marconi	January 2000	March 2001	C1
GKN Westlands	February 2000	February 2003	B1
Thomson Marconi Sonar Ltd	March 2000	September 2000	C1
BMT Defence Services	March 2000	September 2000	C1
NNC	March 2000	September 2000	B2

Inward secondments financial year 2000–01

Parent company or organisation	*Start date*	*End date*	*Level*
Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust	May 2000	May 2001	B2
BAE Systems	April 2000	October 2000	C1
Addleshaw Booth and Company	May 2000	April 2001	B2
BAE Systems	June 2000	June 2002	C1
BAE Systems	June 2000	June 2001	C1
AXA Corporate Solutions	August 2000	January 2001	D
BAE Systems	August 2000	March 2001	B1
AXA plc	August 2000	March 2001	D
BAE Systems	September 2000	March 2001	C1
BAE Systems	September 2000	September 2002	C1
BAE	September 2000	March 2001	C1
Babtie Group	October 2000	June 2001	C1
Price Waterhouse	October 2000	October 2001	C1
BAE Systems	November 2000	November 2003	B1
URS Ltd	November 2000	April 2001	B2
BAE	December 2000	December 2003	B1
BAE Systems	February 2001	September 2003	B1
Ernst and Young	February 2001	February 2002	C1
Rolls Royce	March 2001	March 2003	C2

Inward secondments financial year 2001–2002

Parent company or organisation	*Start date*	*End date*	*Level*
Hertfordshire Probation Service	June 2001	January 2002	Probation Officer
Suffolk Probation Service	June 2001	November 2001	Probation Officer
Manchester Probation Service	June 2001	December 2001	Probation Officer
QinetiQ	June 2001	July 2003	B2
QinetiQ	July 2001	July 2003	C2
Burges Salmon	September 2001	April 2002	B2
BAE	October 01	October 2003	B1
Ernst and Young	October 2001	August 2002	B2
Mass Consultants Ltd.	February 2002	February 2006	C1
Mass Consultants Ltd.	March 2002	March 2006	C1
AMS UK	March 2001	March 2004	B1
Hagglunds Vehicle AB, Sweden	March 2002	January 2004	C2

Inward secondments financial year 2002–03

Parent company or organisation	*Start date*	*End date*	*Level*
Peterborough Hospitals NHS Trust	May 2002	May 2004	B2
Service Children's Education	August 2002	July 2003	Teacher
Kennet Primary Care Trust	October 2002	October 2004	C1
West Midlands Health Authority	November 2002	March 2003	C1
Wragg and Company	June 2002	March 2003	B2
BAE	June 2002	June 2004	SCS
Rolls Royce	July 2002	July 2005	B1
Price Waterhouse	August 2002	August 2003	B2
British Nuclear Fuels Ltd	September 2002	September 2005	B2
BAES	September 2002	September 2005	SCS
BAE Systems	October 2002	October 2004	B1
BAES	November 2002	February 2004	C1
BAE Systems	November 2002	May 2003	Graduate Trainee
BAE Systems	November 2002	November 2003	C1
BAE Systems	January 2003	December 2004	C2
AWE	April 2003	April 2005	C1
AWE	April 2003	April 2005	C1
Rolls Royce	April 2003	October 2004	C1
BAES	April 2003	October 2003	Graduate Trainee
Lockhear Martin	May 2003	May 2005	C1
BAES	August 2003	July 2005	C2
MBDA Missile Systems	September 2003	March 2004	C1
BAE	July 2003	January 2004	D

War Pensioners

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many of the war pensioners, suffering from a wholly psychiatric illness who lost their incapacity benefit in the three years up to 31 August 2002, subsequently lost all or part of their war disability pension; how many of these submitted a worsening condition application; and how many who did not lose all or part of their war disability pension submitted a worsening condition application; [127950]

(2) what the average amount lost each week in war disability pension was by those war pensioners, suffering from a wholly psychiatric illness who, having lost their incapacity benefit in the three years up to 31 August 2002, then went on to lose all or part of their war disability pension; [127951]

(3) what the average amount of money lost each week in war disability pension to individual war pensioners suffering from wholly psychiatric disorders was in each year from 1995 to 2002. [127953]

Mr. Caplin: The information requested is not available in the format required and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

West Freugh Airstrip

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the maintenance programme for the airstrip at West Freugh. [127850]

Mr. Caplin: Under the terms of the Long Term Partnering Agreement, QinetiQ is contracted by the Ministry of Defence to maintain the West Freugh airfield infrastructure on a care and maintenance basis.

This level of maintenance meets MOD's requirements for the airfield and is consistent with its current status of disused and unlicensed.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions her Department have had with government representatives from *(a)* Armenia, *(b)* Azerbaijan, *(c)* Georgia and *(d)* Russia on the issue of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline project; when these discussions took place; what the result of these discussions was; and if she will make a statement. [128067]

Mr. Timms: Representatives from the prospective lenders to the project, including the Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD), met Government representatives from Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey during a trip to the pipeline transit countries in July 2003. Discussions centred mainly on the Host Government Agreements (HGAs) entered into separately between the three countries and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline Company. ECGD is now awaiting information from the relevant Governments about the drafting of the HGAs.

An ECGD business principles expert also took part in a trip to the region in June 2003, where he met the Georgian Minister of Environment.

ECGD has had no discussions with Government representatives from Armenia or Russia.

Representatives of TradePartners UK have from time to time had meetings with Government representatives from Azerbaijan at which the project has been discussed.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what Government assistance has been sought by BP for the Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan pipeline project; what assistance has been granted; and if she will make a statement. [128082]

Mr. Timms: The project Sponsors, led by BP, have approached the Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD) regarding cover for the supply of UK goods and services, and for UK investments related to the

project. Cover will be provided only if ECGD are satisfied that the relevant environmental, social and human rights impacts have been properly addressed and that the financial and project risks are acceptable.

Cotton

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations the Government will be making at Cancun on the effect of subsidies on cotton produced in developed countries on the economies of less developed countries; and if she will make a statement. [125082]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK Government are committed to the Doha mandate aimed at achieving substantial reductions on trade distorting domestic support and reductions of, with a view to phasing out, all forms of export subsidies. We will push for progress on both these areas at Cancun. That way we will achieve benefits for all Developing Countries in all sectors.

The UK Government also recognise the important role of commodities like cotton for development and poverty reduction in many developing countries. For this reason we welcome the fact that four West African countries—Benin, Chad, Mali and Burkina Faso—have come together to identify their common interests on cotton and argue their case in the WTO. The UK Government have provided €50,000 to the non-governmental organisation IDEAS who will offer technical assistance to these countries to strengthen their WTO case. It will, however, be important to ensure that the focus of negotiations at Cancun remains on achieving substantial reductions in agricultural support across all products to maximise gains for developing countries as a whole.

Electricity Generation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the maximum electricity demand was in each year since 1983; and what the percentage change in maximum demand was in each year. [128303]

Mr. Timms: Available data are shown in the following table. From 1987 onwards data are for the United Kingdom. Before 1987 data are for Great Britain only. 1987 is given for both geographical bases.

Simultaneous maximum demand for electricity

MW

Year ending March	*Maximum demand*	*Percentage change on a year earlier*
Great Britain		
1983	47,333	−2.5
1984	47,396	+0.1
1985	51,710	+9.1
1986	50,943	−1.5
1987	53,980	+6.0
United Kingdom		
1987	55,330	
1988	53,833	−2.7
1989	53,555	−0.5
1990	53,414	−0.3
1991	54,068	+1.2
1992	54,472	+0.7
1993	51,663	−5.2
1994	54,848	+6.2
1995	52,362	−4.5
1996	55,611	+6.2
1997	56,815	+2.2
1998	56,965	+0.3
1999	56,312	−1.1
2000	57,849	+2.7
2001	58,425	+1.0
2002	58,589	+0.3
2003	61,717	+5.3

Source:

Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics 2003 and earlier years.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what powers she has to require the owners of out of commission generating capacity to bring it back into operation. [128300]

Mr. Timms: As stated in the Energy White Paper, we will not intervene in the market except in extreme circumstances, such as to avert, as a last resort, a potentially serious risk to safety. However, under section 34 of the 1989 Electricity Act my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry does have the power to order generators to run power plant.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total generating capacity available from *(a)* coal-fired, *(b)* oil-fired, *(c)* gas-fired, *(d)* nuclear and *(e)* renewable sources was in each year since 1983. [128298]

Mr. Timms: Available data are shown in the following tables. From 1986–87 onwards data are for the United Kingdom. Before 1986–87 data are for Great Britain only and fewer types of station are identified. 1986–87 is given for both geographical bases.

Electricity generating capacity

Great Britain *MW*

	Total	*Nuclear*	*Oil-fired*	*Other (steam coal-fired and coal/oil fired)*	*Other (including gas turbines, oil engines and hydro)*
At end of financial year					
1982–83	64,930	6,535	11,973	40,782	5,640
1983–84	61,100	6,535	9,889	38,778	5,898
1984–85	61,340	6,609	9,170	38,442	7,119
1985–86	61,677	7,189	8,404	38,730	7,354
1986–87	61,865	7,189	8,059	32,295	7,322

Source:

Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics 1990 and earlier years

Electricity generating capacity

United Kingdom *MW*

	Total	*Nuclear*	*Oil-fired*	*Coal-fired*	*Mixed/dual fired (including gas fired non CCGT and all conventional steam plant operated by generators other than major power producers)*	*CCGT*	*Gas turbine and oil engines*	*'Hydro' (including pumped storage)*	*'Renewables' (other than hydro*
1986 87	66,687	7,189	8,675	35,662	7,516	-	3,476	4,168	1
1987 88	67,629	7,229	10,317	35,369	7,507	-	3,041	4,163	4
1988 89	70,237	8,308	11,581	35,173	7,694	-	3,313	4,163	4
1989 90	74,557	11,083	12,487	34,583	8,642	76	3,356	4,194	136
1990 91	73,518	11,353	11,895	34,298	8,451	76	3,130	4,190	125
1991 92	70,528	11,353	10,817	32,686	8,017	331	2,968	4,199	157
1992 93	67,499	11,353	8,556	30,523	8,762	1,334	2,539	4,212	220
1993 94	69,117	11,894	6,487	29,132	8,887	6,163	2,018	4,220	317
1994 95	68,741	12,037	5,145	27,774	8,791	8,517	1,895	4,213	369
1995 96	70,126	12,762	5,214	27,494	8,768	9,377	1,890	4,220	401
At end of calendar year									
1996	73,271	12,916	3,989	26,796	11,637	12,462	1,721	4,243	507
1997	72,865	12,946	4,069	[illegible]96	11,015	12,716	1,526	4,244	553
1998	73,380	12,956	2,829	[illegible]4	10,176	15,643	1,492	4,263	697
1999	75,446	12,956	2,829	25,[illegible]	10,332	17,353	1,333	4,265	797
2000	78,288	12,486	2,933	24,8[illegible]	10,416	21,058	1,323	4,273	964
2001	79,488	12,486	2,933	24,83[illegible]	10,309	22,294	1,323	4,296	1,012
2002	76,588	12,486	2,708	22,452	10,004	22,089	1,463	4,254	1,132

Source:
Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics 2003 and earlier years

Insider Trading

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received on insider trading. [127783]

Jacqui Smith: None.

Since 1 December 2001 the Financial Services Authority has been the primary enforcer of the insider dealing legislation.

Nanotechnology

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received on the progress of nanotechnology development in the UK. [127792]

Ms Hewitt: Since the beginning of this year, the Minister responsible for nanotechnology in my Department, my noble Friend, the Minister for Science and Innovation, has received 14 letters and has held 8 meetings concerning the progress of nanotechnology development in the UK. In addition, there has been continuous dialogue between my Department's officials in the Innovation Group and the Office of Science and Technology with industry and science based representatives across a wide range of nanotechnology related issues.

Offshore Wind Power

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what criteria were used to select the second round sites for offshore wind licensing; and by what process companies interested in developing offshore wind in areas not cited in round two of offshore wind licensing can proceed with their plans. [127192]

Mr. Timms: The round two strategic areas, within which developers are invited to apply for site leases for offshore windfarms, were identified primarily as areas with the greatest concentration of potentially suitable sites on the basis of sea depth and proximity to the electricity grid network. A particularly sensitivity coastal strip was excluded following strategic environmental assessment of the three areas. Developers interested in developing offshore windfarms in areas outside of the round two areas should inform DTI of their plans, as indicated in the DTI's consultation paper "Future Offshore—A Strategic Framework for the Offshore Wind Industry". This information will feed in, along with the results of DTI's current review of the UK offshore marine renewable resource, to the planning of the future strategic environmental assessment programme that will determine the programme of future site leasing rounds.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment has been made of the offshore wind potential off the north coast of Scotland. [127194]

Mr. Timms: In 2001 Garrad Hassan and Partners Ltd. completed a study for the Scottish Executive entitled "Scotland's Renewable Resource 2001". This included tidal stream and wave in addition to offshore wind. It can be viewed on the web at http://www.Scotland.gov.uk/enterprise/energy (click on More Information on Renewables). DTI is commissioning a survey of marine energy resources across all UK waters, which should be completed early in 2004. The results of this survey will be used to inform the programme of future strategic environmental assessments. Strategic environmental assessment of an area is necessary before that area can be offered to developers to tender for site leases for offshore renewable development.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when round three of licensing for offshore wind farms will commence. [127195]

Mr. Timms: No date has yet been set for a third site leasing round for offshore wind farms. The DTI is commissioning a review of the potential UK marine renewable resource, which will inform the programme of future strategic environmental assessment work.

Strategic environmental assessment of an area proposed for a future round of offshore renewable development is a requirement before a competition can be announced to invite tenders for site leases.

Postal Services

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment her Department has made of the impact of the European Commission proposal to apply value added tax to all suppliers of postal services in the EU and end the exemption from VAT for Royal Mail and other national universal service providers of postal services under the 6th VAT Directive (77/388/EEC). [128529]

Mr. Timms: This is a matter for the Treasury. I understand that the European Commission proposal (9060/03 COMM(2003)234) for a Council Directive amending Directive 77/388 as regards value added tax on services provided in the postal sector was the subject of an Explanatory Memorandum deposited and sent to Scrutiny Committees by the Paymaster General on 19 May. As indicated in the Explanatory Memorandum, a Regulatory Impact Assessment for the Commission proposal will be submitted as soon as possible.

Public Service Contracts

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many public service contracts were awarded by her Department *(a)* in total and *(b)* to SMEs in each year since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [127801]

Nigel Griffiths: Governments have not collected information on the division between contracts awarded to SMEs and large businesses.

The Small Business Service is undertaking an annual survey of Government procurement to ensure this information is available.

(a) Central records indicate that the following numbers of contracts in total were awarded.

	Number
1999[1]	6,924
2000	20,329
2001	24,267
2002	25,946
2003[2]	7,391

[1] From 1 April
[2] To 4 April

Data for earlier years are not readily available and can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

(b)

Simultaneous maximum demand for electricity

MW

Year ending March	*Maximum demand*	*Percentage change on a year earlier*
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1983	47,333	−2.5
1984	47,396	+0.1
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1993	51,663	−5.2
1994	54,848	+6.2
1995	52,362	−4.5
1996	55,611	+6.2
1997	56,815	+2.2
1998	56,965	+0.3
1999	56,312	−1.1
2000	57,849	+2.7
2001	58,425	+1.0
2002	58,589	+0.3
2003	61,717	+5.3

Source:
Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics 2003 and earlier years

Regional Assistance Schemes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans there are to assess the effectiveness of regional assistance schemes with particular reference to Regional Selective Assistance and Enterprise Grants; and if she will make a statement. [128672]

Jacqui Smith: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 9 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 796–97W.

Technology Sector

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on Government initiatives to encourage growth in the technology sector. [127782]

Ms Hewitt: There is a wide range of supporting initiatives to encourage growth in technology intensive sectors. These range from support for fundamental research and education in the science base via Office of Science and Technology through targeted collaborative research schemes and grants for Research and Development delivered through Business Links and the Small Business Service. Further support is given across the economy through the R&D tax credits administered by the Inland Revenue. Further details relating specifically to supporting technology and innovation will be made later this year when I publish the results of the Innovation Review.

WALES

Wanless Review

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Welsh Assembly Government on the need for primary legislation in order to implement the recommendations of the Review of Health and Social Care in Wales advised by Derek Wanless; and which of the four options proposed by the Review to solve the problem of bed-blocking would require primary legislation. [126458]

Mr. Touhig *[holding answer 17 July 2003]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 17 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 447W.

I have regular discussions with the Assembly Minister for Health and Social Services and we have of course covered the Wanless Report and its implications. However, it would be inappropriate to comment on the likely need for primary legislation to solve that issue at this time. The Assembly have yet to publish their detailed response and action plan which is due for publication in November.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether his Department has had discussions with the Welsh Assembly Government about implementing the four options proposed by the Review of Health Care in Wales to solve the problem of bed-blocking. [126459]

Mr. Touhig *[holding answer 17 July 2003]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 17 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 447W.

I have regular meetings with the Assembly Minister for Health, Jane Hutt AM, during which she updates me on health policy initiatives launched by her administration.

I am aware that the Assembly will be publishing a detailed response and action plan in the autumn and it is therefore premature to comment on implementing the recommendations of the report before then. I will of course keep the matter under review.

Devolution

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to meet the Richard Commission to discuss the future devolution settlement in Wales. [128472]

Mr. Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) on 1 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 257–58.

Ministerial Visits

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the *(a)* foreign and *(b)* UK visits he has made since 1 April; what the cost was to public funds of each trip; who he met; and what gifts were received. [126985]

Mr. Hain: The Government publish the overall costs of all ministerial travel and a list of overseas visits by Cabinet Ministers costing in excess of £500 on an annual basis. The list for the period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003 was published by the Prime Minister on 16 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 482W. The next list for the period 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004 will be published at the end of the financial year.

I have undertaken a number of official visits in Wales since April 2003. These have included attendance at the Wales TUC Annual Conference; attending three Eisteddfods, meeting with executive members of farming unions, meeting representatives of industry and commerce and visiting Welsh manufacturing facilities.

The total cost of these visits, including my officials was approximately £4,500.

In respect of gifts received, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 14 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 482W.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Biodiversity and Bushmeat

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the terms of reference have been agreed for the inter-departmental ministerial group on biodiversity and bushmeat. [128366]

Mr. Morley: Officials are working on the arrangements for the Biodiversity working group. I hope the arrangements, which will include the terms of reference, will be concluded shortly and that the group can then meet.

Convention on the Future of Europe

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment her Department has made of the effect of the European Constitution on her Department's responsibilities; [128176]

(2) what assessment her Department has made of the effect of the establishment of an EU Foreign Minister on the representation of her Department in international fora. [128177]

Mr. Bradshaw: The new European Constitution is not expected to have any direct effect on this Department's responsibilities nor on its role representing the UK Government in international fora. The draft of the new Treaty prepared by the Convention on the Future of Europe for discussion at the Inter Governmental Conference this autumn retains the key provisions of the current treaties relating to the environment, agriculture and fisheries.

The UK is however opposed to the proposal to establish a Single Legislative Council. This would weaken the direct involvement of Environment, Agriculture and Fisheries Ministers in policy formation as well as in negotiating legislation.

GM Crops

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the approvals procedure for genetically modified crops; whether she plans to amend the regulations; and if she will make a statement. [128330]

Mr. Morley: From 1998 to 2001, the UK and our EU partners conducted a thorough review of the EU procedure for assessment and approval of genetically modified organisms, including GM crops. This culminated in the revised EU Directive 2001/18, which entered into force in October 2002, replacing previous EU legislation in this area.

The Government strongly support decision making under the updated and improved Directive. It provides a robust framework by which the UK authorities and our EU partners can make effective, evidence-based decisions on whether or not to allow the release or placing on the market of particular GM crops according to the merits of each case. The Directive has been fully transposed in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Notwithstanding our support for Directive 2001/18, the Government have a voluntary agreement with the UK biotech industry that GM crops will not be grown commercially in this country until we have assessed the results of our Farm Scale Evaluations (FSE) crop trials. We will review our policy on GM crops in light of the FSE results and other relevant information, including the report of the GM public debate.

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether GM crops that reduce acrylamide formation have been produced. [128693]

Mr. Morley: No GM crops that show reduced acrylamide formation have been trialled in the UK, and there are no current applications to market such crops in the EU. Acrylamide is formed during the cooking of some foods, and is believed to be produced as a result of a chemical reaction between the sugars and amino acids that naturally occur in foodstuffs. Recent research has indicated that acrylamide may be harmful to consumers. It might be feasible to reduce the formation of acrylamide during cooking by altering the composition of crops. This could be achieved either using conventional plant breeding or genetic modification.

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) by how much *(a)* diesel fuel consumption by farmers and *(b)* soil erosion would be reduced if 50 per cent. of UK sugar beet, maize and oilseed rape farmers switched to GM herbicide-tolerant varieties and conservation tillage; [128694]

(2) how many kilos of soil-acting herbicide would be saved if 25 per cent. of the UK forage maize crop were to be sown as GM herbicide-tolerant varieties. [128700]

Mr. Morley: It is not possible to give precise estimates of the impact of growing GM herbicide-tolerant (GMHT) crops in the UK on fuel consumption, soil erosion or herbicide usage. These issues are analysed in the report published by the Government's Strategy Unit in July on the costs and benefits of GM crops www.strategy.gov.uk. This notes the potential for GMHT crops to deliver various benefits through improved crop management practices, but does not offer firm conclusions because of the complexity of the issues and the limitations of the available evidence.

Nuclear Storage

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on discussions at European Community level on a common nuclear storage facility. [128172]

Mr. Morley: I am not aware of any such discussions. However, the European Commission has presented a proposal to the Council for a Euratom Directive on the management of spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste. The draft Directive would require each member state to establish a clearly defined programme for radioactive waste management that includes all radioactive waste under its jurisdiction and covers all stages of management. The Commission's draft favours disposal in a deep repository, without the intention of retrieval, as the most suitable method for long-term management of the most hazardous forms of solid and solidified radioactive waste.

The draft directive also provides that a member state's programme may include shipments of radioactive waste or spent fuel to another member state or third country if such shipments are:

(i) fully in compliance with existing EU legislation, principally Directive 92/3/Euratom, and international commitments;

(ii) covered by firm contracts;

(iii) made only to states with appropriate facilities that meet accepted norms and standards of the member state of origin; and

(iv) are conducted under adequate safeguards, where they involve ores, source materials and "special fissile materials" (uranium and plutonium).

The Government are actively engaged in discussion of the Commission's proposal in the Council working group. However, my Department is also currently carrying out a programme of consultation and public participation to develop a long term radioactive waste management policy. That process will examine all the management options available, with no presumption in favour of deep disposal.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Anti-Semitism

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what liaison there has been between his Department and the Department for Education and Skills on dealing with anti-semitism in schools, with particular reference to teaching controversial issues. [126942]

Fiona Mactaggart *[holding answer 8 September 2003]*: The Home Office and Department for Education and Skills work closely together on a number of issues some of which may be regarded as controversial. They do so in close discussion but within the confines of their own individual remits. Both Departments have worked particularly closely over the last three years in the preparation of Holocaust Memorial Day, which in addition to commemorating the victims of the Holocaust also seeks to address and confront the dangers of prejudice and discrimination today. The Department for Education and Skills produces free resources for schools for Holocaust Memorial Day, which amongst other issues addresses anti-semitism. The resources are promoted with the support and co-operation of both Departments.

Drugs

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of property crime is attributable to the misuse of Class A drugs. [127672]

Caroline Flint: Recorded crime figures include statistics on drugs offences, such as possession, and on property crimes, such as burglary, but do not record whether the latter are related to an offender's drug habits.

However, the Home Office sponsored New English and Welsh Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (NEW-ADAM) research programme, which involved interviewing and drug testing those arrested by the police, provides an insight into the proportion of crimes that are drug related.

Analysis of the data from the first eight sites in the survey, collected during 1999–2000, shows that 65 per cent. of arrestees tested positive for one or more illegal drug, with up to 29 per cent. testing positive for opiates (including heroin) and/or cocaine (including crack). Whilst users of both heroin and cocaine/crack represent just under one quarter of all arrestees interviewed in NEW-ADAM, they were responsible for more than three fifths of all the illegal income reported.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there were of people accused of possessing Class A drugs in the most recent year for which figures are available. [128126]

Caroline Flint: There were 17,634 prosecutions for Class A drug possession offences, and 12,388 convictions, in 2000 in England and Wales.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimates he has made of the size of the illegal drugs market in the UK in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* the present day. [128125]

Caroline Flint: The Home Office has only produced one estimate of the size of the illegal drugs market in the UK. This was for 1998. The estimated quantity of drugs consumed over the course of a year was estimated at 566 thousand kilogrammes (this did not include ecstasy tablets, which are measured in tablets not weight. The estimated number of ecstasy tablets for the same period was 27,000). In total the estimated value of illegal drugs for that year was £6.6 billion.

Criminal Justice Bill

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for making appropriate treatment more widely available for the purposes of clause 16 of the Criminal Justice Bill. [127673]

Caroline Flint: We are already significantly expanding drug treatment provision for those referred from both the Criminal Justice system (CJS) and other sources, as part of the Updated Drug Strategy.

Additional resources are being made available to fund this expansion. The National Pooled Treatment Budget for 2002–03 was £191 million. In 2003–04 it will increase by 23.5 per cent to £236 million and will continue to rise to £299 million by 2005–06.

Subject to Royal Assent of the Criminal Justice Bill, the provisions under Clause 19 ("Drug users: restriction on bail", previously Clause 16) will be piloted in a limited number of areas initially, and will only be brought into force in a given area where appropriate assessment and treatment are available.

Police Custody

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people detained by police were released within *(a)* 24 hours and *(b)* 36 hours in the last 12 months; [127668]

(2) how many of those detained by police were released within *(a)* 24 hours and *(b)* 36 hours in the last year for which figures are available. [128622]

Ms Blears: Information is not collected centrally on the number of people detained under Part IV of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) 1984 and released within 24 hours. The number of persons detained for more than 24 hours and released without charge within 36 hours is as follows:

Persons detained for more than 24 hours and released without charge—England and Wales (number and percentages)

Year	*Total*	*Released within 36 hours*	*(per cent.)*	*Detained under warrant of further detention*
1997–98	674	603	(89)	71
1998–99	710	650	(92)	60
1999–2000	570	505	(89)	65
2000–01	525	449	(86)	76
2001–02[1]	505	453	(90)	52

[1] Figures amended since publication of 2001/02 Bulletin.

Source:
Home Office Statistical Bulletin 12/02: Arrest for Notifiable Offences and the Operation of Certain Police Powers under PACE, England and Wales 2001/02.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Sao Tome and Principe

Angus Robertson: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development how much aid is spent multilaterally by the Department in Sao Tome and Principe *(a)* through the EU and *(b)* through the UN; and if he will make a statement. [127261]

Hilary Benn: In 2002, the EC spent €2.768 million in Sao Tome and Principe. Out of this, €1.993 million came from the European Development Fund (EDF) and €0.775 million from the EC's External Relations budget.

DFID's share of the EDF in 2002 was about 12 per cent. and of the EC Budget about 19 per cent.

In 2001, the latest year for which figures are available, the UN spent US$ 1.7 million on Sao Tome and Principe. The amount contributed by DFID to Sao Tome and Principe through the UN during this year is not available, although our core contribution to the UN agencies contributing to this country in 2001 was some £45 million.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Parliamentary Hours

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Leader of the House if he will make a statement on changes to the sitting hours of the House. [128480]

Mr. Hain: In October last year a majority of Members voted to alter the sitting hours so that the House now sits from 11.30 am on Tuesday and Wednesday. The Standing Orders were changed for the rest of this Parliament, which will allow us a sufficient period to make a considered judgment on the effect of the changes.

SCOTLAND

Darwin Mounds

1. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his participation in discussions with *(a)* the European Commission and *(b)* the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on the Darwin Mounds. [128443]

Mrs. McGuire: Discussions involving the Government, the Scottish Executive and the European Commission led to the announcement of an EU ban on seabed trawling in the Darwin Mounds area on 20 August. The Government are proposing the notification of the Darwin Mounds as a Special Area of Conservation in a consultation paper issued today.

Common Agricultural Policy

7. **Mr. Liddell-Grainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the effect the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy will have on Scotland. [128449]

Mrs. McGuire: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs made a statement on the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy on 26 June. The agreement to which she referred is a good agreement for farmers, consumers and taxpayers and for the environment in the whole of the United Kingdom, including Scotland.

Post Office Accounts

9. **Mr. MacDonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which banks with branches in Scotland have made agreements with the Post Office to allow the bank's customers to access their bank accounts via their local post offices. [128451]

Mrs. McGuire: All of the leading UK banks have made their basic bank accounts accessible at post offices as a result of the Post Office's Universal Banking Project. Agreements to access existing bank accounts at the Post Office are a commercial decision for the banks.

Scottish Agriculture College

11. **Mr. Savidge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to discuss the future of the Scottish Agriculture College with the Scottish Executive. [128453]

Mrs. McGuire: The future of the Scottish Agriculture College is a matter for the Scottish Executive.

Winter Fuel Payments

12. **Mr. MacDougall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in Scotland will be eligible for Winter Fuel Payments in 2003–04; and if he will make a statement. [128454]

Mrs. McGuire: The information requested is not available, however the number of people in Scotland who received the Winter Fuel Payment in 2002–03 is estimated to have been 1,009,090, made up of 430,665 men and 578,425 women.

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many pensioner households are receiving winter fuel allowance in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Glasgow and *(c)* Glasgow, Anniesland. [128450]

Mrs. McGuire: In 2002/2003, 679,710 households in Scotland, 62,805 in the Glasgow parliamentary constituencies and 8,170 in Glasgow, Anniesland constituency are estimated to have received the winter fuel payment.

Health

13. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has had with other Ministers about cross-border health issues. [128455]

Mrs. McGuire: My right hon. Friend and I have frequent discussions with ministerial colleagues on a wide range of issues.

Fallen Stock

14. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the Scottish Executive to discuss arrangements for the disposal of fallen stock on offshore islands. [128456]

Mrs. McGuire: Responsibility for agricultural matters in Scotland rests with the Scottish Executive.

Scottish Boundary Commission

15. **Angela Watkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will publish the recommendations of the Scottish Boundary Commission. [128457]

Mr. Darling: I refer the hon. Lady to my reply of earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty), *Official Report*, c. 152.

Devolution

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the devolution settlement as it affects Scotland. [128463]

Mr. Darling: The Scottish devolution settlement is well established and successful. The recent changes to the machinery of government at Westminster reflect its maturity.

Road Haulage Industry

Jim Sheridan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has had with the Scottish Executive about the road haulage industry in Scotland. [128452]

Mr. Darling: I have regular discussions with Scottish Ministers on a wide range of issues affecting Scotland, including transport.

TRANSPORT

Robin Rigg Windfarm

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he first discussed with the Scottish Executive the safety zones for shipping around the proposed Robin Rigg windfarm. [127860]

Mr. Jamieson: The Scottish Executive attended a meeting on 11 February 2003 at which UK Government Departments discussed policy on the development of offshore windfarms and their impacts on the safety of navigation including the case for safety zones around such structures. The Robin Rigg windfarm was one of a number of offshore renewable energy projects discussed.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he first discussed the exclusion of unauthorised shipping from Robin Rigg windfarm with the Scottish Executive. [128020]

Mr. Jamieson: My officials from the Maritime and Coastguard Agency appeared before the Convenor of the Robin Rigg Offshore Wind Farm (Navigation and Fishing) (Scotland) Bill Committee at the Bill's preliminary stage on 11 November 2002. There they were questioned about the proposals to establish an exclusion zone around the Robin Rigg Offshore Wind Farm. Their appearance before the Committee was discussed at a meeting between my officials and the Scottish Executive on 15 November 2002.

Transport Responsibilities

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on responsibility for transport between *(a)* parts of the United Kingdom covered by devolved Administrations, *(b)* England and *(c)* Northern Ireland. [127778]

Mr. Jamieson: The responsibility for transport between the United Kingdom Government, devolved Administrations and Northern Ireland is outlined as follows:

Wales

The National Assembly for Wales's powers are limited to those functions specifically transferred to it by a Transfer of Functions Order, or conferred on it by specific primary legislation or an EU Designation Order. The functions which have been devolved in the field of transport include, among others, maintenance and improvement of the Welsh trunk road network, funding local authority expenditure on roads, a range of road safety responsibilities, concessionary parking schemes for disabled and blind people, land use and surface access planning. Railways, aviation and shipping issues in Wales are generally the responsibility of the UK Government.

Scotland

Unless a matter is expressly reserved to the UK Government in Schedule 5 of the Scotland Act 1998, it is devolved. The Scottish Parliament has legislative competence in areas of transport including the Scottish road network; parking controls; promotion of road safety; bus policy; concessionary fares; cycling; taxis and minicabs; non-technical aspects of transport for disabled people; promotion and construction of new railways which start and end in Scotland; grants for passenger rail services; consultative arrangements in respect of public transport; ports, harbours, piers and boatslips; provision of freight shipping and ferry services, including CalMac; activities of Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd.; planning and environmental issues relating to airports; and inland waterways

In addition, the Scottish Executive have power to issue directions and guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority in relation to franchised rail services that both start and end in Scotland; power to issue directions and guidance to the SRA in respect of franchised sleeper services; power to give advice to the SRA in relation to cross-border franchised rail services; applications to the EU for the designation of lifeline air services; and enforcement of vehicle emissions standards. The Executive are also the highway authority for the Scottish Trunk Road network.

Functions reserved to the UKG in the field of transport in Scotland include transport security; transport safety and regulation, including the regulation of air transport and shipping, marine and air safety, the provision and regulation of railway services including rail safety; and marine, air and rail accident prevention and investigation; some aspects of road traffic regulation, including driver and vehicle licensing and testing, road signing, vehicle standards, general speed limits; some aspects of road safety; and technical standards relating to the transport of disabled persons.

Northern Ireland

While devolution in Northern Ireland is suspended, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has assumed responsibility for the direction and control of the Northern Ireland Departments including that dealing with transport.

England

The Secretary of State for Transport is responsible for all legislative matters regarding transport in England. He is also the highway authority for the trunk road network in England.

A27

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether it is his intention to undertake a safety review of the A27 between Beddingham and Polegate with a view to identifying on-line safety improvements. [127218]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State announced on 9 July 2003 that the bypasses of Selmeston and Wilmington proposed by the south coast multi-modal study (SoCoMMS) were not acceptable in the form

proposed. Therefore, he asked the Highways Agency to work with local authorities and statutory environmental bodies to identify less damaging options, including management measures that reduce the need for major road construction, and report back. The Agency will be looking at the current problems and safety issues on the existing road between Beddingham and Polegate as part of this work.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what timescale will apply to the redesign of the A27 Southerham-Beddingham scheme; what public consultation process will apply to the redesigned scheme; and if he will make a statement. [127219]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Agency will provide further advice on a redesigned scheme in October 2003. In the light of that advice, a recommendation will be announced together with arrangements for consultation.

Aggregate

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his Answer of 2 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 267W, on aggregate, what assessment his Department has made of the environmental impact of mineral extraction to provide aggregate for road building and maintenance; and when estimates of the amount of aggregate required for road improvement schemes in the Ten Year Plan will be made. [127203]

Mr. Jamieson: Revised national and regional guidelines for the provision of aggregates for all end uses for the 16-year period 2001–16 were issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in June of this year. Regional Planning Bodies in England will take into account the likely environmental impacts of the implied extraction when apportioning the regional guidelines to mineral planning authority areas. Estimates of the amount of aggregate required for road improvement schemes in the Ten Year Plan will be made on a scheme specific basis as the design for each scheme is developed.

Air Quality (London)

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has collated on changes in air quality in central London since the introduction of congestion charging. [127180]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of 15 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 339W. The position remains unchanged. The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs publish regular data on pollution levels in London which can be seen at: http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/airquality/index.htm

Car Travel

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the answer to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) of 14 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 26W, on car travel, if he will provide figures for 1979 to 1998. [127577]

Mr. Jamieson: Figures for average car occupancy are available from the National Travel Survey for 1985–86 and for 1990–2000.

Average car occupancy: 1985–86 to 2000

	Number
1985–86	1.64
1990	1.62
1991	1.61
1992	1.61
1993	1.62
1994	1.62
1995	1.62
1996	1.61
1997	1.60
1998	1.59
1999	1.59
2000	1.59

Note:
Figures for 1990–2000 are estimated using the average of three years of survey data, e.g. the figure for 2000 is the average occupancy for the period 1999–2001.

Highways (Street Works)

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the average cost charged to companies was by each local authority in England for the occupation of highways during street works, in each year since the introduction of the Street Works (Charges for Occupation of the Highway) (England) Regulations. [128602]

Mr. Jamieson: To date, charges under the Street Works (Charges for Occupation of the Highway) (England) Regulations have only been applied on roads within Middlesbrough and the London borough of Camden. Comprehensive figures for charges levied are not available at this stage. However, we have appointed consultants—Halcrow—to monitor the operation of the charging scheme, and they will be reporting to us shortly with an assessment of the scheme's first 12 months. Copies of their report will be placed in the Library of the House later in the year.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 10 September 2003

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Iraq

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the position of the Christian community in Iraq since the commencement of allied military action earlier this year. [128077]

Mr. Rammell: Staff in the British Office, Baghdad and UK secondees in the Coalition Provisional Authority have been meeting representatives of many Iraqi political and religious groups, including the Christian community, to hear their views. These meetings are continuing.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he asked his officials to ascertain the reliability and robustness of the information contained in the UNMOVIC working document on Iraq's proscribed Weapons Programmes, of 6 March. [128597]

Mr. Mullin: Yes.

Palestinian Refugees

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have been held with the governments of *(a)* Jordan, *(b)* Lebanon and *(c)* Syria on the situation of the Palestinian community in their countries; and if he will make a statement. [127814]

Mr. Rammell: We have raised this issue on a number of occasions with Arab governments. We do have concerns about the living conditions experienced by some Palestinian refugees. But ultimately this issue is a matter for negotiation between the parties concerned within the context of a comprehensive peace agreement.

Syria

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have been held with the Government of Syria regarding their involvement in Lebanon; and if he will make a statement. [127812]

Mr. Rammell: We have a dialogue with Syria on a wide range of issues, Lebanon included. The relationship between the two countries is close. While Syria has a degree of influence in Lebanon, its presence has the support of the Lebanese Government and is arguably legitimate under agreements made at the end of the civil war. But we welcome the decrease in Syrian troop numbers and urge Syria to reduce numbers yet further.

HEALTH

Immigrants (Viruses)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that immigrants are free from easily transmissible viruses, with particular reference to HIV. [128680]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Cabinet Office is currently co-ordinating work between relevant Government Departments, including the Department of Health, to review immigration and infectious diseases and access to National Health Service services. The review aims to establish the facts about health and public expenditure impacts and propose solutions should action be required. The review is ongoing and no decisions have been taken yet.

Organic Maize

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the average levels of fumicosin and aflatoxin in UK maize grain produced organically; [128695]

(2) what estimate he has made of the average levels of fumicosin and aflatoxin in UK maize grain used in the human and animal food industry. [128696]

Miss Melanie Johnson: United Kingdom maize grain is either used as "corn on the cob" or for animal feed, usually as maize silage. There is no data available regarding the average level of fumonisins or aflatoxins in these products, whether conventionally or organically produced.

The Food Standards Agency is currently carrying out a survey of retail maize products, including "corn on the cob", for a range of mycotoxins, including fumonisins and aflatoxins. It is anticipated that the results of this survey will be available in December 2003.

Blood Cholesterol

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what progress has been made in encouraging health professionals to provide dietary and lifestyle advice on lowering blood cholesterol; [128540]

(2) what resources have been devoted to increasing public awareness of the health impact of raised blood cholesterol; and what plans he has for future programmes. [128541]

Miss Melanie Johnson: A number of lifestyle factors are known to be associated with raised blood cholesterol level, an important risk factor for heart disease, including diet (particularly a high intake of saturated fat), overweight and obesity and low levels of physical activity.

Improving diet, increasing physical activity levels and preventing and managing of obesity are at the heart of many of the Government's priority areas, as set out in the NHS Plan, Cross-Cutting Review on health inequalities, national service frameworks and the Priorities and Planning Framework.

The Priorities and Planning Framework for 2003–06 includes targets for reducing coronary heart disease (CHD). One of these targets requires practice-based registers (for patients with CHD and diabetes) and systematic treatment regimes, including appropriate advice on diet, physical activity and smoking. This also covers the majority of patients at high risk of CHD, particularly those with hypertension, diabetes and a body mass index greater than 30.

The quality and outcomes framework within the new general medical services contract, being introduced from 1 April 2004, will reward general practitioners who monitor, and can demonstrate control of, the cholesterol level of patients suffering from chronic heart disease.

Two new initiatives will be key in fostering healthier lifestyles. The Department of Health is leading on the development of a cross-government Food and Health Action Plan. The plan will pull together all the issues that influence what we eat and will address food production, manufacture and preparation, access to healthier food choices and providing information for consumers about healthy eating and nutrition. This is complemented by wide ranging action on physical activity, which will be progressed by a cross-government Activity Co-ordination Team, jointly led by the Department and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

The Department of Health has a range of actions already in place aimed at improving diet and increasing physical activity levels. These include: action to increase breastfeeding; reform of the Welfare Food Scheme; the Five a day programme, including the National School Fruit Scheme in England, to increase fruit and vegetable intakes; a wide range of programmes in schools; joint Department and Food Standards Agency (FSA) work with industry to address the sugar, fat and salt content of the diet; and Local Exercise Action Pilots. The FSA also has an important role in improving our diets, as outlined in their Nutrition Action Plan. They provide advice on what constitutes a healthy diet and also address food labelling and claims.

Chauffeur Services

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the annual cost to his Department is of the chauffeur service. [127686]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The contract cost of the core services for 2002–03 from the Government Car Service was £424,100. This includes the cost of Ministerial cars and cars for the Permanent Secretary and the Chief Medical Officer.

Combination Drugs

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the potential for future use of combination drugs to prevent coronary diseases and heart attacks. [127633]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Dr. Roger Boyle, National Director for Heart Disease, has invited the lead researchers to attend a meeting in October to discuss the "polypill" proposals. Although there are some clear attractions, there are significant clinical, practical and financial implications that need to be explored further.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Anti-Semitism

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the trend has been in anti-semitic attacks on *(a)* property and *(b)* persons over the last year in (i) England, (ii) the West Midlands and (iii) Coventry. [126941]

Fiona Mactaggart *[holding answer 8 September 2003]:* The Government publish general statistics on racist incidents and racially-aggravated crime, but do not hold figures on specifically anti-semitic incidents. However, figures are made available by the Community Security Trust (CST), a body that advises and represents the Jewish community on matters of anti-semitism and security.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Arts Council

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had with the Arts Council on the funding of sexually explicit material. [129504]

Estelle Morris: I have had no discussions with the Arts Council on this issue.

Tourism

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what investment is planned by her Department to help the British tourist industry recover from the effects of the war in Iraq; and what steps the Government proposes to take to boost tourism in the UK in the aftermath of the war. [128573]

Mr. Caborn: This year the Government are providing over £50 million to VisitBritain to encourage people in Britain and abroad to take their holidays here. In addition to on-going promotional work in its 27 overseas offices, VisitBritain is running two major overseas campaigns this year: a £2 million campaign launched in the summer with the industry to encourage US visitors to holiday in Britain, and a £4 million "City Breaks" campaign with the industry in Europe to be launched in the autumn. VisitBritain is also promoting domestic tourism in England and ran its first domestic campaign, 'Enjoy England', in April 2003. A further domestic campaign is planned for the autumn.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures the Government is taking to encourage British subjects to spend their holidays in the UK. [128578]

Mr. Caborn: This year the Government are providing VisitBritain with £10.4 million to lead and co-ordinate the domestic marketing of England as a tourist destination. VisitBritain's first domestic campaign, "Enjoy England", was launched in April 2003 and a

three-year domestic marketing strategy for England will be published in the autumn. We are providing £3.6 million to England's Regional Development Agencies to fund the English Regional Tourist Boards. We are also providing £3.6 million over two years from the Invest to Save budget to support the EnglandNet project, which will create an on-line tourism network for England.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much was spent by her Department, and the agencies for which she is responsible, to promote tourism in *(a)* the UK as a whole and *(b)* each of the UK regions in each year since 1997. [128579]

Mr. Caborn: The British Tourist Authority (BTA) was allocated baseline grant-in-aid by the Department as follows:

	Grant to BTA (£ million)
1997–98	35
1998–99	35
1999–2000	36
2000–01	37
2001–02	35.5
2002–03	35.5

In addition, £14.2 million was awarded in 2001–02 and a further £19 million in 2002–03 from the Reserve in order to help tourism recover from the impact of the foot and mouth outbreak and the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. BTA did not allocate funds for individual regions of Britain, but promoted Britain as a whole in a way which maximised the impact of its campaigns in individual markets overseas.

The English Tourist Board (ETB), from 1999 the English Tourism Council (ETC), was allocated baseline grant in aid by the Department as follows:

	Grant to ETB/ETC (£ million)
1997–98	9.9
1998–99	9.7
1999–2000	11.8
2000–01	11
2001–02	9.6
2002–03	11.6

In addition, £3.8 million was awarded in 2001–02 from the Reserve, over half of which was then passed to the 10 Regional Tourist Boards in England, and a further £1 million from the Reserve in 2002–03. In 2002–03, the English Tourism Council was also awarded £3.6 million over two years from the Invest to Save Budget to support the development of the EnglandNet project to establish an online tourism network for England.

Grant in aid from the ETB/ETC was allocated to the English Regional Tourist Boards as follows:

£000

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Cumbria	243	242	222	376	625	449
East of England	493	393	397	597	840	806
Heart of England	467	496	460	652	900	793
London	454	393	355	408	172	26
Northumbria	251	219	254	371	551	447
North West	293	293	292	413	594	575
South East England	321	287	282	363	534	544
Southern	459	479	438	571	734	766
South West Tourism	439	488	476	535	814	663
Yorkshire	506	513	469	563	730	655

In both 2001–02 and 2002–03, this Department provided £1.9 million to the Greater London Authority for tourism. Tourism is a devolved matter and is the responsibility of the respective Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to introduce an individual national tourism body for England. [128571]

Mr. Caborn: The Government have no plans to introduce an individual national tourism body for England. In April 2003 VisitBritain was created, combining the strengths and resources of the English Tourism Council and the British Tourist Authority. VisitBritain has responsibility for the promotion of Britain overseas and England to the domestic market. The England Marketing Advisory Board provides advice on the domestic promotion of England.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

A-Levels

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many A-levels were taken in *(a)* French and *(b)* German in 2003; what percentage change these figures represent from 2002; and what estimate he has made of the number of French and German A-levels which will be taken in 2004. [128548]

Mr. Miliband: These are provisional figures published recently by the Joint Council for General Qualifications. They cover GCE A-level entries for candidates of all ages in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

GCE A-level

	Entries		
Year	*2002*	*2003*	*% change*
French	15,614	15,531	−0.5
German	7,013	6,950	−0.9

The DfES has not made an estimate of the numbers taking these exams in 2004 due to unavailability of data.

Exclusions

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils were excluded from *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* city technology colleges, *(c)* other secondary schools and *(d)* special schools in each year since 1988; how many of these exclusions were taken to appeal; and how many of these exclusions were successfully overturned by an appeals panel. [127901]

Mr. Miliband: The available information, shown in the table, relates to permanent exclusions from 1995/96 onward.

Number of permanent exclusions by school type and summary of school exclusion appeals
England 1995/96–2001/02 (Provisional)

	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/01[p]
EXCLUSIONS							
PRIMARY SCHOOLS[1]							
Number of permanent exclusions	1,608	1,573	1,539	1,366	1,226	1,436	1,450
Percentage of school population[2]	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03
SECONDARY SCHOOLS[1]							
Number of permanent exclusions	10,344	10,463	10,187	8,636	6,713	7,305	7,740
Percentage of school population[2]	0.34	0.34	0.33	0.28	0.21	0.23	0.24
SPECIAL SCHOOLS[3]							
Number of permanent exclusions	524	632	572	436	384	394	340
Percentage of school population[2]	0.54	0.64	0.58	0.45	0.40	0.41	0.36
CITY TECHNOLOGY COLLEGES[4]							
Number of permanent exclusions	-	-	-	-	-	20	32
Percentage of school population[2]	-	-	-	-	-	0.12	0.20
EXCLUSION APPEALS							
PRIMARY, SECONDARY AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS[5]							
Number of appeals lodged by parents	1,339	1,455	1,287	1,216	948	1,095	1,125
Number of appeals overturned by an appeals panel	185	225	204	220	317	314	259
Percentage of appeals overturned by an appeals panel[6]	17.0	19.9	20.2	22.8	36.7	31.9	24.4

[1] Includes middle schools as deemed.
[2] Number of permanent exclusions expressed as a percentage of the number (headcount) of full and part-time pupils of all ages (excluding dually registered pupils in special schools) in January each year.
[3] Includes both maintained and non-maintained special schools.
[4] Information on exclusions from City Technology Colleges was collected for the first time in 2002 (relating to academic year 2000/01). There was no checking exercise to confirm the quality of exclusions data from City Technology Colleges so these figures should be used with caution.
[5] Information on exclusion appeals is collected at LEA-level for primary, secondary and special schools. This information is not available by school type.
[6] Number of appeals decided in parents' favour expressed as a percentage of all appeals heard by an appeals panel.
[p] provisional
- not available

GCSE/GNVQ

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the percentage change was between 2002 and 2003 in the number of pupils attaining A* and A grades in all GCSE subjects; and if he will make a statement. [128554]

Mr. Miliband: It is not possible at this stage to calculate numbers of 15 year-old pupils achieving GCSEs, how many GCSEs they achieved or at what grade. This information can be made available on a provisional basis in late October.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the equivalent GCSE grades represented by a GNVQ intermediate full award are at *(a)* distinction, *(b)* merit and *(c)* pass; and if he will make a statement. [128552]

Mr. Miliband: The contribution to the average GCSE/GNVQ point score is shown in the table below:

Grade	Points	Points per GCSE equivalent
Distinction	30	7.5
Merit	24	6
Pass	20	5

Points awarded for GCSEs range from 8 for a grade A* to 1 for a grade G. A GNVQ intermediate full award is the equivalent of 4 grades A*-C at GCSE, regardless of whether a distinction, merit or pass is achieved.

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has established this equivalence.

Key Stage 2

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of 11 year-olds in *(a)* the Taunton constituency and *(b)* Somerset have achieved Key Stage 2 in each year since 1997 in *(i)* Mathematics and (ii) English. [127774]

Mr. Miliband: The percentage of pupils achieving Level 4 or above at Key Stage 2 in *(a)* the Taunton constituency and *(b)* Somerset Local Education Authority (LEA) from 1997 to 2003 is as follows:

	English			Mathematics		
	Taunton Constituency	Somerset LEA	England	Taunton Constituency	Somerset LEA	England
2003*	74	74	75	72	72	73
2002	75	74	75	74	72	73
2001	75	74	75	71	69	71
2000	75	75	75	69	70	72

	English			Mathematics		
	Taunton Constituency	Somerset LEA	England	Taunton Constituency	Somerset LEA	England
1999	71	73	71	69	70	69
1998	66	67	65	60	58	59
1997	67	67	63	63	63	62

* Provisional

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Solway Firth Wind Farm

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from Allerdale district council on the proposed Solway Firth wind farm. [127861]

Mr. Timms: The Scottish Executive were responsible for dealing with the application for consent for the Solway Firth wind farm. There was no DTI involvement in the consents process and any representations made in respect of the application were dealt with by the executive.

Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions *(a)* she and *(b)* senior members of her Department have had with (i) UK based non-governmental organisations, (ii) EU based non-governmental organisations, (iii) non-governmental organisations based in the Caucasus region and (iv) US based non-governmental organisations on the issue of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline project; when these discussions took place; what the result of these discussions was; and if she will make a statement. [128066]

Mr. Timms: The following discussions have been held with NGOs on the issue of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline project:

(a) The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry: none.

(b) Officials in the Export Credits Guarantee Department:

(i) UK based NGOs:

The Corner House—30 November 2002 (at DFID), 29 May 2003 (at DFID) and 3 June 2003 (at ECGD)

Kurdish Human Rights Project—30 November 2002 (at DFID), 29 May 2003 (at DFID) and 3 June 2003 (at ECGD)

Bretton Woods Project—30 November 2002 (at DFID) and 29 May 2003 (at DFID)

PLATFORM—29 May (at DFID), 3 June (at ECGD) and 11 June (at EBRD)

Friends of the Earth—29 May (at DFID) and 3 June (at ECGD)

WWF(UK)—29 May (at DFID) and 3 June (at ECGD)

Amnesty International—20 May (at Carlton Terrace), 29 May (at DFID), 3 June (at ECGD) and 4 August (at ECGD)

Transparency International—3 June (at ECGD)

(ii) EU based NGOs: None

(iii) Caucasus based NGOs:

Society for Democratic Reform, Azerbaijan—30 November 2002 (at DFID)

Social-Democratic Party, Azerbaijan—30 November 2002 (at DFID)

Young Lawyers' Association, Georgia—30 November 2002 (at DFID)

IHD, Turkey—30 November 2002 (at DFID)

University of Mersin, Turkey—30 November 2002 (at DFID)

Caucasus NGO Federation, Azerbaijan—29 May (at DFID) and 16 June (in Baku)

CLEE, Azerbaijan—18 June (in Baku)

Green Alternatives, Georgia—29 May (at DFID) and 19 June (in Tbilisi)

WWF (Caucasus)—19 June (in Tbilisi)

DEHAP, Turkey (Kurdish political party)—29 May (at DFID) and 22 June (in Ardahan)

RUDF, Turkey—24 June (in Ankara)

Ankara University—24 June (in Ankara)

Caucasus Sub-regional NGO Network—18 July (at ECGD)

Association of Women Scientists of Georgia—18 July (at ECGD)

Georgian Society of Nature Explorers "Orchis"—18 July (at ECGD)

Institute of Social Researches—18 July (at ECGD)

'Save Borjomi'—18 July (at ECGD)

Ecology of the Caucasus—18 July (at ECGD)

(iv) US based NGOs: None

At all of these discussions the ECGD official(s) listened carefully to what was said and confirmed that they would take account of this information in their analyses of the potential environmental and social impacts of the project. The ECGD official(s) also stated that cover would only be offered if ECGD was satisfied that the relevant environmental, social and human rights impacts had been properly addressed and that the financial and project risks were acceptable.

Electricity Generation (Biomass)

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what targets have been set for electricity generation from biomass; and if she will assess the impact of such targets on industries dependent on the supply of wood residue. [127204]

Mr. Timms: The 10 per cent. target for electricity generation from renewables, as set in the Renewables Obligation, will be met by the total generation from all eligible renewable energy sources. The obligation does not specify targets for individual technologies as the obligation is a market-led mechanism with the selection and uptake of the technologies to be used to meet the 10 per cent. target a matter for industry, within the framework set by the obligation.

Offshore Wind Power

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the Ministry of Defence over the projected expansion of offshore wind power; and what assessments have been made of the potential interference with its radar system. [128127]

Mr. Timms: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Defence wrote to me recently to reaffirm the MOD's full commitment achievement for our target that 10 per cent. of the UK's electricity supplies are to be generated from renewable resources.

At official level officials in my Department maintain an on-going dialogue with their MOD counterparts on renewable energy issues including offshore wind power. The MOD attends the Wind Energy and Aviation Interests Working Group which is chaired by the Department and which provides a forum where a range of issues can be addressed.

Companies who intend to submit bids in response to the Crown Estate's July 2003 invitation to tender for offshore wind farm site options have been advised to consult the MOD and the Civil Aviation Authority who will advise whether they would object to development in any particular location on grounds on potential radar interference or for other reasons. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Defence has reassured me that where MOD objects to a development his Department will do whatever is practicable to negotiate with the developer to reach a mutually acceptable agreement that would result in objection being withdrawn.

More generally, the Wind Energy and Aviation Interests Working Group has commissioned research into the effects of rotating turbine blades on radar. Work is progressing on a computer model that will describe the effects of particular wind farms on individual radar systems. A second study is investigating measures to mitigate the potential effects on radar of wind turbines.

Wood Panel Industry

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will undertake further consultation with the wood panel industry on the effects of the renewable obligation subsidy on the supply of wood residues. [127173]

Mr. Timms: I will be meeting with a number of MPs and representatives of the Wood Panel Industries Federation on 21 October 2003 to discuss this issue.

On 29 August I launched a statutory consultation paper on the Technical Review of the Renewables Obligation. This consultation outlines a number of changes we propose to make with effect from April 2004 and seeks the views of all statutory consultees and others. One of the key proposals is a set of modifications to the rules on the co-firing of biomass with fossil fuels with a view to enhancing the prospects for the development of a market in energy crops.

My officials continue to facilitate work between representatives of the UK wood industry and co-firing power stations to explore the opportunities offered by co-firing under the Obligation for UK forestry, and, in particular, the potential for using by-products from existing wood industries. It is hoped that this initiative, if successful, will have the dual benefit of reducing imports and making more biomass available to a larger market in the UK, thereby helping to stabilise prices. We understand from the forestry industry that it can meet demand from power generators from existing surplus forestry material. My officials are obtaining further information on the availability of forestry material used by power generators and wood panel manufacturers.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Affordable Housing

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to increase the amount of affordable homes in rural areas; and if she will make a statement. [128338]

Alun Michael: The Rural White Paper published in November 2000 set out plans for delivering more affordable housing in rural settlements. Funding for the Housing Corporation doubled between 2000 and 2003 to benefit both rural and urban areas, and the Government doubled the target for the programme for small rural settlements (below 3,000 people) from 800 to 1,600 homes a year. The 2003 Sustainable Communities Plan White Paper has further increased this target to a total of 3,500 homes over 2 years (2004–05 to 2005–06).

The Housing Corporation has approved a total of 3,923 homes in small rural settlements (of 3,000 people or fewer) over the years 2000–01 to 2002–03, exceeding their target in each of the years. A further 7,082 homes were approved through other funding sources, Approved Development Programme and local authority funding, in rural settlements of all sizes including market towns.

Through the Countryside Agency and the Housing Corporation we are funding Rural Housing Enablers jointly with local partners, to work with rural communities, housing associations, local authorities and landowners to help increase the supply of affordable housing in rural settlements. Currently there are 37 enablers in post and we aim to have 47 by 2004–05 to give full national coverage.

As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Housing and Planning announced on 17 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 53WS, the Government are consulting on an update of the existing guidance on planning for affordable housing. The update will be supported by practice advice. The update addresses a number of matters including the provision of affordable housing in rural areas. The proposed changes give greater flexibility to local authorities to seek affordable housing on smaller sites where this is justified. It is also envisaged that in rural areas affordable housing provision may be supported by allocating sites solely for affordable housing, on land within or adjoining existing villages, which would not otherwise be released for housing and where this would contribute to the attainment of mixed communities.

The new Regional Housing Boards, introduced by the Communities Plan (2003), are now taking responsibility for the preparation of Regional Housing Strategies. They have been charged to rural proof their strategies with the assistance of the Countryside Agency. The strategies will then provide the basis for our decisions on strategic housing investment priorities in the regions.

Broadband

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her department is taking to improve broadband technology in rural areas. [128337]

Alun Michael: Defra Ministers and officials are working closely with colleagues at the DTI on the promotion of broadband access in rural areas which we both regard as crucial to the future of the rural economy. Defra officials work closely with the DTI policy team, and cooperation has been strengthened by the inclusion of a Defra official in the recently formed Rural Broadband Team in DTI. The team will focus on the problems and issues of broadband for rural areas including supporting local campaign groups.

The Government are making £1 billion available over 2003–06 to provide for public sector broadband connectivity. The DTI Broadband Aggregation project will aggregate the public sector demand for this purpose. Defra Ministers and officials are closely involved to ensure that this investment will help extend broadband availability into rural areas for the benefit of rural businesses and communities. Defra will continue to work closely with DTI on rural broadband issues.

GM Crops

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the Government will allow immediate commercial growing of those GM crops currently being assessed under the farm scale trials programme if the crops are found to be associated with environmental benefits and without any determinable drawbacks. [128697]

Mr. Morley: None of the crops being assessed in the farm scale evaluations yet have all the required authorisations to permit commercial growing in the UK.

To be authorised for commercial cultivation in the European Union (EU), a GM crop would need to be granted a consent on safety grounds under Part C of EU Directive 2001/18. Decisions under this Directive are taken collectively by the European Commission and EU member states on a case-by-case basis. No GM crop would be granted a Part C consent unless it passed a detailed assessment indicating that it posed no unacceptable risk to human health or the environment, and complied with the other requirements of the Directive. To date, only one of the four crops in the farm scale evaluations, a herbicide tolerant GM maize, has a Part C consent.

The UK will ensure that the results of the farm scale evaluations are taken into account in collective EU decisions on whether or not to grant Part C consent to each of the crops that do not yet have such authorisation—sugar beet, fodder beet and oil seed rape. In the case of the GM maize that already has a Part C consent, the results will inform us on whether the assessment underpinning that consent remains valid.

GM crops are also subject to other EU legislation. Before any new variety of a crop, including GM varieties, can be grown commercially in the UK, that variety must be entered on either the UK national seed list or the European common catalogue of seeds. To date, none of the GM crops in the farm scale evaluations has such listing.

In addition, if a crop was intended for use with a certain weed killer—as is the case with all four crops in the farm scale evaluations—it would need a consent under EU pesticides legislation before it could be used in conjunction with that weed killer. To date, none of the four crops concerned have such consent.

Furthermore, if a GM crop was intended for food use, it must also have a consent under EC novel foods legislation.

Hunting Bill

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to introduce financial aid to those disadvantaged by the Hunting Bill. [128685]

Alun Michael: No. It is not normal practice, nor a requirement of human rights legislation, to pay compensation to people affected by legislative change except where the legislation specifically deprives them of property. The Hunting Bill deprives no one of their property, but limits their use.

TRANSPORT

Aviation White Paper

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Department will publish the White Paper on the Future of Aviation. [129128]

Mr. McNulty: The Government intend to publish their conclusions on "the Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom" consultation in a White Paper later this year.

BAe 146 Aircraft

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a full assessment of international *(a)* research and *(b)* investigations into the causes of cabin air quality incidents affecting BAe 146 aircraft, with particular reference to problems with organophosphate jet engine lubricants; and if he will make a statement. [128543]

Mr. McNulty *[holding answer 8 September 2003]:* The Department for Transport Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB) is to publish a report following the investigation of a series of cabin air quality incidents involving BAe 146 aircraft. The report also considers similar incidents involving Boeing 757, Boeing 737 and Fokker F100 aircraft.

The AAIB report will include details of investigations and research conducted into incidents in Australia, Canada, and Sweden, together with the results of an extensive programme of testing and research conducted in the UK in response to earlier AAIB safety recommendations.

The AAIB report is expected to be published in December.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps have been taken to establish the cause and nature of the emergency in the BAe 146 aircraft, when fumes in the cabin necessitated evacuation of passengers, on Friday 1 August; and if he will make a statement. [128599]

Mr. McNulty *[holding answer 8 September 2003]:* The Department for Transport Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB) is conducting an investigation into the incident involving a BAe 146 aircraft on 1 August. The AAIB report will be published as soon as the investigation is completed.

European Aviation Safety Agency

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the purpose is of establishing the European Aviation Safety Agency; what powers it has in the United Kingdom; what its estimated annual cost is; and where it is located. [128822]

Mr. McNulty: The European Aviation Safety Agency has been established under Regulation (EC) 1592/2002. The principle objective of that Regulation is to establish and maintain a high uniform level of civil aviation safety in Europe.

The Agency has a pivotal role in achieving that objective through the drafting of common safety rules; through monitoring, where applicable, the implementation of those rules by member states' national aviation authorities; and through carrying out itself a number of certification tasks, initially mainly in the field of aircraft and product designs.

The Regulation gives the Agency all the necessary powers to carry out these duties in the United Kingdom, in particular powers to carry out relevant investigations for issuing certificates to UK applicants and for conducting standardisation audits of the Civil Aviation Authority.

The Agency is due to assume its certification responsibilities on 28 September 2003, initially outsourcing much of the work to national aviation authorities. The Agency's own staff will be built up over time and its annual costs will depend on decisions yet to be made by the Executive Director about the Agency's structure and working methods. A preliminary draft budget for 2004 of 17.24 M€ has been agreed by the EASA Management Board, of which the majority of the costs will be met out of Community funds.

A decision about the permanent location of the Agency has not yet been made. It has established a temporary headquarters in Brussels.

Rail Services (Merseyside)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps have been taken to increase the number of additional park and ride spaces serving the Merseyrail network for 2003–04. [128589]

Mr. McNulty: The following schemes are in progress at locations serving the Merseyrail network.

Formby

Refurbishment of the car park, up-grading provision for blue badge holders, construction of a bus interchange and taxi stands. The number of spaces is to be determined. A further phase is being considered for land off Andrews lane.

Birkdale

Refurbishment of the car park, up-grading provision for blue badge holders and delivery of a further 14 spaces. A further phase depends on the availability of land.

Maghull

Extension of the existing car park, delivering a further 88 spaces.

Aintree

A scheme to deliver a further 50 spaces is being considered, subject to planning constraints.

Kirkby

Refurbishment of the car park, and up-grading of the bus interchange, taxi stands and provision for blue badge holders. The scheme will deliver a further 10 spaces. A further phase could deliver another 100 spaces.

Whiston

Construction of a new car park and bus interchange, delivering a further 45 spaces.

Prescot

Refurbishment and enlargement of the existing car park including provision for blue badge holders, delivering a further 32 spaces.

Seaforth and Litherland

Refurbishment and enlargement of the existing car park including provision for blue badge holders, delivering a further 20 spaces.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps are being taken to improve standards of station seating, shelter and passenger facilities for the rail services in Merseyside. [128591]

Mr. McNulty: Through the Strategic Rail Authority's Modern Facilities at Stations (MFAS) programme, 21 stations in Merseyside will receive improvements. This will involve the installation of real time passenger information at 20 stations and improved waiting facilities (waiting rooms with heating, integral seating and automatic doors) at 16 stations.

Merseytravel Passenger Transport Authority and Executive is seeking, via its own programme, to deliver improvements at a further 25 stations through the local transport plan. Where shelters, seats and customer information systems are included as part of the improvement the aim is to deliver to MFAS standards were possible.

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of fare irregularities were detected in Merseyside over the past two years. [128592]

Mr. McNulty: The percentage of fare irregularities on Merseyside over the last two years was approximately 11 per cent. This figure is for all fare irregularities including passengers travelling with no ticket, those who travelled beyond the validity of the ticket and those travelling in the peak with an off-peak ticket, irrespective of intent. The figure is for the 24 months up to June 2003, being the most recent period for which data are available.

Ferries

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the Health and Safety Executive to discuss the risks associated with wake from ferries; and if he will make a statement. [127856]

Mr. Jamieson: My officials have regular contact with Health and Safety Executive (HSE) colleagues on a range of safety matters.

Conventional ferries, with relatively slow speed monohulls, do not generate undue wake and routine navigational safeguards are adequate to manage potential risk. However, we have been aware for some time of the hazards associated with the wake from fast ferries, in particular catamarans. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) requires a route risk assessment of passage plans for wake generation, as a pre-requisite to issuing a Permit to Operate for High Speed Craft. This requires the operator to identify circumstances where a hazardous wash may be created and take steps either to reduce the wake from the vessel or re-route the vessel as appropriate.

Ministerial Visits

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the *(a)* foreign and *(b)* UK visits he has made since 1 April; what the cost was to public funds of each trip; who he met; and what gifts were received. [126891]

Mr. McNulty: The Government publish the overall costs of all ministerial overseas travel and a list of all visits overseas by Cabinet Ministers costing in excess of £500 on an annual basis. The list for period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003 was published by the Prime Minister on 16 July, *Official Report*, column 482W. The next list for period 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004 will be published at the end of the financial year.

Since the 1 April the Secretary of State for Transport has undertaken the following UK visits:

On 8 April, he met representatives from South Central Trains at the Integrated Travel Centre, Brighton. The journey was made using the contracted Government car and train at a cost of £42.

On 24 April, he met the French Transport Minister and his delegation in Berkshire. The journey was made using the contracted Government car.

On 9 May, he met the Chief Executive of the DVLA and local staff at the DVLA, Edinburgh. The journey was made using a hired Government car at a cost of £62.50.

On 12 May, he met the Chief Executive of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency in Dover. The journey was made using the contracted Government car service and the train at a cost of £30.10.

On 20 June he met the Manchester and Liverpool Chamber of Commerce at Manchester Airport. He then went to the Stockport station and Edgely signalling Centre and met the Stockport project manager and Network Rail representative and Ann Coffey MP. The journey was made by plane, hired Government car and train at a cost of £453.60.

On 8 July he met representatives from Chiltern Railways and Laing Rail at Chiltern Railways, Aylesbury. The journey was made by contracted Government car.

In respect of gifts received, I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 14 March *Official Report*, column 482W.

Speed Cameras

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effects of speed cameras upon the number of *(a)* fatal and *(b)* other serious accidents. [129238]

Mr. Jamieson: On 11 February 2003 the Department published an independently produced evaluation report of the 2-year trial of the safety camera cost recovery system. This showed a 35 per cent. reduction in those killed or seriously injured at camera sites, equating to around 280 people and a 4 per cent. reduction in those killed or seriously injured across the pilot areas, equating to around 530 people.

TREASURY

Aggregates Companies

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many aggregates companies there are in each region of the UK; and how many there were in 2001. [127198]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Alex Salmond, dated 10 September 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on the number of aggregates companies there are in each region of the UK. I am replying in his absence. (127198)

The table below shows the number of companies, broken down by region, who reported aggregate material in 2001 and 2002. This information has been taken from the Annual Minerals Survey (AMRI), carried out by the Office for National Statistics on behalf of the Department for Trade and Industry and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Companies, broken down by region, who reported aggregate material in 2001 and 2002

Region name	*2001*	*2002*
North East	14	16
Yorkshire & the Humber	33	32
North West	29	28
West Midlands	29	28
East Midlands	34	32
East of England	44	44
South East	48	45
South West	50	50
Wales	36	32
Scotland	102	99
Total companies	353	341

The data relates to GB only.

The same company may appear in more than one region.

The total is the overall number of companies.

Child Care Vouchers

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps the Government will take in applying the Inland Revenue's salary sacrifice scheme for the purchase of child care vouchers to ensure that low income employees have the same advantages as higher paid employees; and if he will make a statement. [128293]

Dawn Primarolo: It is open to any employer and its employees to enter into a salary sacrifice arrangement linked to the provision of child care vouchers in order to take advantage of the exemption from national insurance contributions that applies to them.

The Government also provide help to parents in low to medium income families with the cost of child care through the child care element of working tax credit.

Census

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the Chairman of the Statistics Commission on the UK census. [127406]

John Healey: Treasury Ministers have not discussed the Census with the Chairman of the Statistics Commission. The Statistics Commission, which is independent of both Ministers and the producers of National Statistics, was established to advise on the quality, quality assurance and priority setting for National Statistics, and on the procedures designed to deliver statistical integrity. The Commission has announced that, using the Census results for Westminster city council as an example, it is considering evidence on whether Census 2001 was properly conducted and whether there are lessons to be learned for the future. The Commission has yet to publish its report, but expects to do so, probably in stages, between the summer and autumn of this year.

Cigarette Imports

Mr. Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of cigarettes imported from EU countries in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003. [R] [127945]

John Healey: The following table shows the number (in thousands) of cigarettes imported from EU countries in 2002 and up to May of this year (the latest month for which figures are available). The figures show cigarettes imported by way of trade and do not include personal imports.

Period	*Thousand*
January to December 2002	8,552,145
January to May 2003	2,154,815

These figures are also available on the Customs website www.uktradeinfo.com.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce on the spot fines for people caught bringing illegal meats and bushmeat into the UK. [128364]

John Healey: Customs have no current plans to introduce on the spot fines for people caught bringing illegal meats and bushmeat into the UK.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when HM Customs plan to trial passenger luggage x-ray equipment to detect illegal meat and bushmeat at UK ports of entry. [128365]

John Healey: Customs have already conducted some informal trials using existing equipment to look for illegal meat. They are currently in discussion with suppliers with a view to conducting further evaluation as soon as possible.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many illegal meat seizures have been made by HM Customs in each month since they assumed control of enforcement at UK ports of entry; and what percentage of these seizures are classified as bushmeat. [128367]

John Healey: Customs do not normally publish seizure information on a monthly basis. Exemptions 4(b) and 7(b) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information apply. However, annual seizure figures will be reported in the Government's "Annual Review of Controls on Imports of Animal Products" which is published by Defra.

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many dogs are used at air and sea ports of entry into the United Kingdom to detect illegal imports of food products. [128679]

John Healey: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Wealden (Mr. Hendry) on 6 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 618W.

Online Tax Assessment

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the Government's UK on-line agenda has met HM Treasury's stated expectations in the transformation of the delivery of its services. [127083]

Mr. Boateng: The Government recognise that there is considerable potential for electronic government to transform the delivery of public services. That is why the Treasury allocated significant resources in the 2002 Spending Review to further develop electronic services.

As part of the Spending Review the Cabinet Office reached a public service agreement with the Treasury to ensure Departments meet the Prime Minister's targets for electronic service delivery by Government: 100 per cent. capability by 2005, with key services achieving high levels of use. A growing number of services are now available on-line with more services being added through the UKonline portal.

Tax Credits

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many persons in the Chorley constituency are in receipt of *(a)* child tax credit and *(b)* working tax credit; and how many claims are outstanding. [127757]

Dawn Primarolo: Statistics on awards of these tax credits are being published today and are accessible on the Inland Revenue website (http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/personal-tax-credits/main-tables-july03.pdf and http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/personal-tax-credits/geographical-analysis-july03.pdf).

For progress in processing claims, I refer my hon. Friend to my remarks during debate on 7 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 859. Breakdowns by constituency of the figures that I gave are not available.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how applications for tax credits received after the 5 July deadline will be treated; and if he will make a statement. [128671]

Dawn Primarolo: Tax credits claims received by the Inland Revenue before midnight on Monday 7 July, the first full working day after the deadline, were treated as meeting the deadline for tax credits to be backdated to 6 April 2003, if appropriate. This was because the deadline fell at the weekend and to ensure that claims made through different channels were treated alike. Claims received after 7 July may be backdated for up to three months.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland Assembly

6. **Mr. Goodman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had about the restoration of the devolved Assembly. [128492]

7. **Mr. Ruffley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent representations he has received regarding the progress of the peace process. [128493]

12. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the resumption of power sharing in Northern Ireland. [128499]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), *Official Report*, column 314.

Regulatory Burdens

10. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to meet representatives of small business organisations to discuss regulatory burdens on business in Northern Ireland. [128496]

Mr. Pearson: I have met representatives of small businesses on several occasions recently and I shall be happy to them again in the future to discuss regulatory and other issues of mutual interest.

Manufacturing

11. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress he is making with increasing inward manufacturing investment into the Province; and if he will make a statement. [128497]

Mr. Pearson: In common with other regions, Northern Ireland has seen a decline in inward manufacturing investment as a result of the depressed global economic situation. Despite this, I am very pleased that in recent months major investment projects have been announced by Seagate and NACCO among others. Furthermore, Northern Ireland continues to be a particularly attractive investment location for service-based industry, as exemplified by the Abbey National's recent decision to open a new customer outreach centre at its Mays Meadow site in Belfast.

Housing

13. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the number of housing voids in Belfast. [128500]

Jane Kennedy: At 31 July 2003, there were a total of 6,593 empty properties of all tenures of which 2,181 are Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties and 4,412 are in the private sector. Over half the empty homes in the public sector are undergoing redevelopment or are awaiting demolition. The Northern Ireland House Condition Survey 2001 published in April 2003 shows that the level of vacancies is linked to inner-city decline factors and the emergence of new apartment developments.

Dangerous Wild Animals Act

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to extend the provisions of the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 to Northern Ireland. [128494]

Angela Smith: We are actively preparing proposals for legislation to regulate dangerous wild animals kept by private individuals in Northern Ireland. Legislation will aim to establish an appropriate regulatory regime in the interests of public safety.

We will be consulting on proposed legislation in the near future.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the prospects are for agriculture in Northern Ireland following the mid-term review of the Common Agricultural Policy. [128495]

Mr. Pearson: The recent agreement on the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy makes for a more stable policy environment and will help put the agricultural industry on a more sustainable footing. It will enable farmers to concentrate on producing for the market and encourage good farming and countryside management practices which society values.

PRIME MINISTER

Iraq

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Prime Minister what the basis was for his statement on 18 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 355, that extremists from Chechnya were among the foreign fighters engaging Coalition forces at the conclusion of the war in Iraq. [127913]

The Prime Minister: According to US military sources, US forces engaged a number of irregular fighters from the middle east, North Africa and Chechnya near Baghdad in April 2003. These sources were quoted in several media reports at the time.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) of 9 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 1156, whether the unsubstantiated reports of Chechens fighting Coalition forces in Iraq have been substantiated. [127914]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add at the current time.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

High Court (Backlog)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs what the current backlog is in the High Court. [120827]

Mr. Leslie: An exercise is currently underway to provide accurate management information on workload in the High Court Divisions. This work will be completed by the end of October 2003, and I will then write to my hon. Friend with full details. Currently we can estimate the number of outstanding cases in the three main divisions. The estimates are:

Chancery—7,400
Family
Divorce—4,000
Care—3,500
Queens Bench—8,000

Norton Report

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs if he will publish a response to the Norton report. [128010]

Mr. Leslie: No. It is not the Government's practice to publish responses to privately commissioned reports.

DEFENCE

Joint Terrorist Analysis Centre

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representation the Royal Navy has in the Joint Terrorist Analysis Centre. [128658]

Mr. Ingram: The Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre is a Government organisation which can draw on the expertise of a wide number of Departments and agencies, including the Royal Navy. Its staff includes personnel from the Naval Service.

Colonel Tim Collins

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the court martial into the conduct of Colonel Tim Collins last met; when any written statement announcing the verdict was issued; what contacts there were between his Department and *(a)* the BBC and *(b)* journalists concerning the matter prior to the issue of the statement; and what the policy of his Department's press office was if asked to confirm or deny the substance of the matter (i) prior to Monday 1 September and (ii) on Monday 1 September. [128816]

Mr. Ingram: Colonel Tim Collins was not the subject of a court martial. He was the subject of an internal investigation into his conduct during Operation TELIC, following allegations made against him. This investigation has now been completed and Colonel Collins has been informed that no formal disciplinary or administrative action would be taken against him.

In response to a specific media inquiry on 20 May naming Colonel Collins and claiming that he was subject to an investigation, the press office confirmed that an investigation was being conducted. Other than confirming this, the press office offered no further comment while the investigation continued. On 29 August, however, once the investigation had finished and Colonel Collins had been informed of the outcome, the press office were advised that, in response to inquiries, they could confirm that the investigations had concluded and that no formal action would be taken. Our records indicate that the first inquiries from the press were not received until 1 September.

The Ministry of Defence did not issue a written statement announcing either the commencement or conclusion of the investigation.

Consultation Documents

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the consultation documents issued by his Department in each of the last four years; what the cost was of producing each of these; how many documents were issued in each consultation; and how many responses were received in each consultation. [124567]

Mr. Ingram: The Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultation applies to all formal national public consultation documents issued by Departments from 1 January 2001 and the information requested before that date is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Since 1 January 2001, the Ministry of Defence has issued seven formal national public consultation documents. They are:

	Title	*Additional cost*
1	The Military Maritime Graves and the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986	No information available
2	Armed Forces Pension Scheme Review	£13,800 (cost of both together)
3	Joint Compensation Review	
4	Ministry of Defence Police Quinquennial Review	No additional cost

	Title	Additional cost
5	Proposed Introduction of the Voluntary Screening Programme following Health Concerns in Respect of Depleted Uranium	No additional cost
6	The Second Consultation Document on the Introduction of a Voluntary Screening Programme for Depleted Uranium	No additional cost
7	Future of the Defence Diversification Agency	No additional cost

The table identifies additional costs of producing the consultative documents. It does not include costs of the personnel who produced the documents.

Information on the number of consultation documents issued and the number of responses received is reproduced in the following table:

Title	Number issues	Number of respondents
The Military Maritime Graves and the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986	Over 300	78 replies were received
Armed Forces Pension Scheme Review Joint Compensation Review	1,500 Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS) Review and Joint Compensation Review (JCR) consultation documents were issued. 20,000 leaflets were also distributed to serving members of the armed forces	203 responses were received in total, with some respondents comments on both the AFPS and JCR
Ministry of Defence Police Quinquennial Review	Widely publicised by PG, announcement in Government Opportunities and on MOD Web	Responses were received from all those who were specifically targeted. The Ministry of Defence also received a written response from a member of the public
Proposed Introduction of the Voluntary Screening Programme following Health Concerns in Respect of Depleted Uranium	38 documents were issued	37 replies were received
The Second Consultation Document on the Introduction of a Voluntary Screening Programme for Depleted Uranium	No record available	20 replies were received
Future of the Defence Diversification Agency	78 documents were issued	21 replies were received

This list does not include reports and other working papers that have been put in the public domain for comment, but which are not put out for formal consultation within the terms of the Code of Practice (e.g. SDR New Chapter public discussion document).

The Government recommend that policy development should be done in close consultation with stakeholders. Formal consultation documents are only one part of this process, which includes:

Stakeholder meetings

Listening events/public meetings

Web forums

Public surveys

Focus groups

Regional events

Free phone and freepost surveys and events

Targeted leaflet campaigns

Road shows and exhibitions

Further information on these public consultations can be found on the Internet under http://www.mod.uk/consultations.

Dr. David Kelly

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what inquiries he has made since the death of Dr. David Kelly concerning Dr. Kelly's record of claims for subsistence allowances or expenses; and for what purposes these inquiries were made. [128817]

Mr. Hoon: The Ministry of Defence has examined a number of Dr. Kelly's claims in order to provide the Hutton Inquiry with the details of some of his more recent overseas visits, and to determine whether money was owed to him at the time of his death as a result of expenses incurred but unclaimed.

Gulf

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which RAF units are deployed to the Gulf region; what the *(a)* dates and *(b)* duration of the last three operational tours were in each case; and if he will make a statement. [128410]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

Iraq

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when front line units received grenade launchers for SA80A2 during Operation Telic. [125594]

Mr. Ingram: Underslung Grenade Launchers for SA80A2 ordered via the Urgent Operational Requirement process were first issued in theatre in early April. In addition, 3 Commando Brigade were already in possession of some Underslung Grenade Launchers, which had been procured earlier for operations in Afghanistan.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total daily expenditure on *(a)* regular and *(b)* reserve forces stationed in Iraq is; and what the total expenditure on the maintenance of British forces in Iraq would be between 1 September and 31 March 2004 if spending were to continue at the current rate. [128818]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence identifies the costs of Operations in terms of the net additional costs it has incurred. The costs, which the MOD would have

incurred had the operation not been undertaken—expenditure on wages and salaries or on conducting training exercises, for example—are deducted from the total costs of the operation.

Accounting records and costs are not maintained on a daily basis and to provide such an average would be misleading. The net additional costs of Reserve and Regular force personnel are not kept separately. Maintenance costs for the force includes stock consumption and impairment of fixed assets. These costs continue to be the subject of study and audit by the National Audit Office as does their proper allocation to financial years 2002–03 and 2003–04. I will write to the hon. Member when robust estimates are available and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House. This is unlikely to be before publication of the Departmental Resource Accounts.

Missile Defence

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the agreement of 5 February to upgrade RAF Fylingdales for missile defence purposes will require amendment to the agreement relating to the establishment and operation of a ballistic missile early warning station at Fylingdales Moor, of 15 February 1960. [128368]

Mr. Ingram: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence said in his Written Ministerial Statement of 5 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 12WS, the radar at RAF Fylingdales will continue after the upgrade to fulfil its ballistic missile early warning radar role and will continue to be operated and staffed by the RAF. The 1960 exchange of letters, which embodies these principles, will therefore remain the cornerstone of our relationship with the United States in respect of RAF Fylingdales, though we are examining the need for additional detailed operational agreements relating specifically to the use of the radar for missile defence purposes.

Procurement Contracts

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the forecast in-service date on 31 March 2002 was for the *(a)* Advanced Short Range Air-to-Air Missile, *(b)* Extended Range Ordnance/Modular Charge System, *(c)* Hercules C-130J, *(d)* Landing Platform Dock (Replacement), *(e)* Merlin HC Mk 3 Helicopter, *(f)* Merlin HM Mk1 Helicopter, *(g)* Seawolf Mid-Life Update, *(h)* Swiftsure and Trafalgar Class Submarine Update, *(i)* Tornado GR1 Mid-Life Update, *(j)* Challenger II and *(k)* Future Joint Combat Aircraft; [127605]

(2) what the forecast in-service date on 31 March 1998 was for the *(a)* Extended Range Ordnance/Modular Charge System, *(b)* High Velocity Missile System, *(c)* Merlin HC Mk3 Helicopter and *(d)* Multi-Role Armoured Vehicle; [127601]

(3) what the forecast in-service date on 31 March 1999 was for the *(a)* Extended Range Ordnance/Modular Charge System, *(b)* High Velocity Missile System, *(c)* Multi-Role Armoured Vehicle and *(d)* Tornado GR1 Mid-Life Update; [127602]

(4) what the forecast in-service date on 31 March 2000 was for the *(a)* Extended Range Ordnance/Modular Charge System and *(b)* Tornado GR1 Mid-Life Update; [127603]

(5) what the forecast in-service date on 31 March 2001 was for the *(a)* Challenger II, *(b)* A400M, *(c)* Alternative Landing Ship Logistic, *(d)* Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile, *(e)* Eurofighter Aircrew Synthetic Training Aids, *(f)* Future Joint Combat Aircraft, *(g)* Short Term Strategic Airlift, *(h)* Sonar 2087, *(i)* Successor Identification Friend or Foe, *(j)* Trojan and Titan and *(k)* Type 45 Destroyer; [127604]

(6) what the forecast in-service date on 31 March 1997 was for the *(a)* Conventionally Armed Stand-Off Missile, *(b)* Extended Range Ordnance/Modular Charge System, *(c)* High Velocity Missile System, *(d)* Merlin HC Mk3 Helicopter, *(e)* Spearfish Heavyweight Torpedo and *(f)* Sting Ray Lightweight Torpedo. [127600]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is set out in the following table. Boxes labelled N/R indicate that forecast in-service dates were not requested for these years.

	Forecast ISD as at:					
	31 March 2002	*31 March 2001*	*31 March 2000*	*31 March 1999*	*31 March 1998*	*31 March 1997*
ASRAAM	Already in service	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
ERO MCS	July 2005	N/R	December 2003	October 2003	February 2003	February 2003
Hercules C-130J	June 2000	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
LPD(R)	March 2003	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
Merlin Mk3	Already in service	N/R	N/R	N/R	March 2000	March 2000
Merlin Mk1	Already in service	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
Seawolf	August 2006	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
Swiftsure and Trafalgar Update	May 2002	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
Tornado GR1	Already in service	N/R	Already in service	Already in service	N/R	N/R
Challenger 2	Already in service	Already in service	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
FJCA	2012	2012	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
A400M	N/R	2009	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
ALSL	N/R	October 2004	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
BVRAAM	N/R	2012	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
Eurofighter Aircrew Synthetic Training Aids	N/R	2004	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
Short Term Strategic Lift	N/R	December 2001	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
Sonar 2087	N/R	Dec 2006 April 2004	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
SIFF	N/R	September 2005	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
Trojan and Titan	N/R	2005	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
Type 45	N/R	November 2007	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R

	Forecast ISD as at:					
	31 March 2002	31 March 2001	31 March 2000	31 March 1999	31 March 1998	31 March 1997
HVM	N/R	N/R	N/R	Already in service	Already in service	1 September 1997
MRAV	N/R	N/R	N/R	March 2008	March 2008	N/R
CASOM	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R	December 2001
Spearfish	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R	Already in service
Stingray	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R	May 2004

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the estimated cost was of the demonstration and manufacture phase on 31 March 2002 for the *(a)* Advanced Short Range Air-to-Air Missile, *(b)* Extended Range Ordnance/Modular Charge System, *(c)* Hercules C-130J, *(d)* Landing Platform Dock (Replacement), *(e)* Merlin HC Mk3 Helicopter, *(f)* Merlin HM Mk1 Helicopter, *(g)* Seawolf Mid-Life Update, *(h)* Swiftsure and Trafalgar Class Submarine Update, *(i)* Tornado GR1 Mid-Life Update and *(j)* Challenger II; [127620]

(2) what the date is of the initial gate approval or equivalent for the *(a)* Advanced Air-Launched Anti-Armour Weapon, *(b)* Advanced Short Range Air-to-Air Missile, *(c)* Astute Class Submarine, *(d)* Attack Helicopter WAH-64 Apache, *(e)* Conventionally Armed Stand-Off Missile, *(f)* Eurofighter, *(g)* Extended Range Ordnance/Modular Charge System, *(h)* Hercules C-130J, *(i)* High Velocity Missile System, *(j)* Merlin HC Mk3 Helicopter, *(k)* Multi-Role Armoured Vehicles, *(l)* Nimrod Maritime Reconnaissance & Attack Mk4 and *(m)* Seawolf Mid-Life Update; [127606]

(3) what the target date is for main gate approval or equivalent for the *(a)* Merlin HM Mk1 Helicopter, *(b)* Multi-Role Armoured Vehicle and Seawolf Mid-Life Update, *(c)* Spearfish Heavyweight Torpedo, *(d)* Sting Ray Lightweight Torpedo, *(e)* Swiftsure and Trafalgar Class Submarine Update, *(f)* Tornado GR1 Mid-Life Update, *(g)* Future Joint Combat Aircraft, *(h)* Short Term Strategic Airlift and *(i)* Type 45 Destroyer; [127609]

(4) what the estimated cost is of the demonstration and manufacture phase at initial gate or equivalent for the *(a)* Nimrod Maritime Reconnaissance & Attack Mk4, *(b)* Seawolf Mid-Life Update, *(c)* Spearfish Heavyweight Torpedo, *(d)* Sting Ray Lightweight Torpedo, *(e)* Swiftsure and Trafalgar Class Submarine Update, *(f)* Tornado GR1 Mid-Life Update, *(g)* Challenger II, *(h)* A400M, *(i)* Future Joint Combat Aircraft and *(j)* Short Term Strategic Airlift; [127613]

(5) what the estimated cost is of the demonstration and manufacture phase at initial gate or equivalent for the *(a)* Advanced Air-Launched Anti-Armour Weapon, *(b)* Advanced Short Range Air-to-Air Missile, *(c)* Airborne Stand-Off Radar, *(d)* Astute Class Submarine, *(e)* Conventionally Armed Stand-Off Missile, *(f)* Eurofighter, *(g)* Extended Range Ordnance/Modular Charge System, *(h)* Hercules C-130J, *(i)* High Velocity Missile System, *(j)* Landing Platform Dock (Replacement), *(k)* Merlin HC Mk3 Helicopter, *(l)* Merlin HM Mk1 Helicopter and *(m)* Multi-Role Armoured Vehicle; [127612]

(6) what the estimated cost was of the demonstration and manufacture phase on 31 March 2001 for the *(a)* Challenger II, *(b)* A400M, *(c)* Alternative Landing Ship Logistic, *(d)* Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile, *(e)* Eurofighter Aircrew Synthetic Training Aid, *(f)* Future Joint Combat Aircraft, *(g)* Short Term Strategic Airlift, *(h)* Sonar 2087, *(i)* Successor Identification Friend or Foe, *(j)* Trojan & Titan and *(k)* Type 45 Destroyer; [127619]

(7) what the target date is for main gate approval or equivalent for *(a)* Advanced Air-Launched Anti-Armour Weapon, *(b)* Advanced Short Range Air-to-Air Missile, *(c)* Astute Class Submarine, *(d)* Attack Helicopter WAH-64 Apache, *(e)* Conventionally Armed Stand-Off Missile, *(f)* Eurofighter, *(g)* Extended Range Ordnance/Modular Charge System, *(h)* High Velocity Missile System, *(i)* Landing Platform Dock (Replacement) and *(j)* Merlin HC Mk3 Helicopter; [127608]

(8) what the date of the initial gate approval or equivalent is for the *(a)* Spearfish Heavyweight Torpedo, *(b)* Sting Ray Lightweight Torpedo, *(c)* Swiftsure and Trafalgar Class Submarine Update, *(d)* Tornado GR1 Mid-Life Update, *(e)* Challenger II, *(f)* Alternative Landing Ship Logistic, *(g)* Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile, *(h)* Future Joint Combat Aircraft, *(i)* Short Term Strategic Airlift, *(j)* Sonar 2087, *(k)* Successor Identification Friend or Foe, *(l)* Trojan & Titan and *(m)* Type 45 Destroyer; [127607]

(9) what the *(a)* approved cost of the the assessment phase at initial gate or equivalent and *(b)* actual cost of the assessment phase is for the (i) Extended Range Ordnance/Modular Charge System, (ii) Merlin HC Mk3 Helicopter, (iii) Sting Ray Lightweight Torpedo, (iv) Tornado GR1 Mid-Life Update and (v) Short Term Strategic Airlift; [127611]

(10) what the estimated cost was of the demonstration and manufacture phase on 31 March 2000 for the *(a)* Extended Range Ordnance/Modular Charge System and *(b)* Tornado GR1 Mid-Life Update; [127618]

(11) what the date for main gate approval or equivalent is for the *(a)* Merlin HC Mk3 Helicopter and *(b)* Spearfish Heavyweight Torpedo; [127610]

(12) what the approved cost is of the demonstration and manufacture phase at main gate for procuring all three tranches of the Eurofighter Aircrew Synthetic Training Aids programme. [127599]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

RAF

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the rates of separated service were for the RAF, broken down by unit, for each of the last two years; and if he will make a statement. [128411]

Mr. Caplin: Information on Separated Service is not collated by individual unit and could be provided in that format only at disproportionate cost. However, the following table shows the rates of Separated Service recorded by the RAF for the last two years.

Incidences of Separated Service for operations and training[1]	*Average Trained Strength*	*Personnel on Separated Service spending*					*Total personnel spending time on Separated Service*	*Percentage of average trained strength who were on Separated Service*	*Total days spent on Separated Service*
		Less than 28 days	*28–89 days*	*90–139 days*	*140–279 days*	*280+ days*			
FY 2001–02	49,266	13,455	11,322	6,514	2,432	87	33,810	69	1,999,168
FY 2002–03	48,690	12,668	13,798	6,830	2,858	48	36,202	74	2,207,041
FY 2003–04[2]	48,516	13,427	8,744	912	0	0	23,083	48	695,963
1 August 2002–31 July 2003[3]	48,606	12,638	12,812	7,026	2,951	61	35,488	73	2,204,507

[1] An incidence of Separated Service is recorded when an individual is absent from their parent unit on duty for three nights or more and a permanent order has not been issued. The table shows Separated Service for operational and training commitments excluding resettlement and expedition training.
[2] Information up to 31 July 2003 only.
[3] Latest 12-month period available ending 31 July 2003. Information from April 2000 excludes weekends where personnel are able to return home while on detached duty.

The rates of Separated Service have shown an increase over the last two years due to the increased operational tempo as a result of the RAF providing support to the civil authorities during the fire-fighters strike, Exercise Saif Sareea and deployments to Afghanistan and the Gulf.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 11 September 2003

PRIME MINISTER

Intelligence and Security Committee

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to lay the Intelligence and Security Committee's Report on Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction—Intelligence and Assessments before Parliament. [130290]

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the Intelligence and Security Committee for their Report on Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction—Intelligence and Assessments. I have today laid the Report before the House. The Government will respond formally to it in due course. Copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Jonathan Powell

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will rescind the powers given to Mr. Jonathan Powell to direct civil servants. [129278]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so.

Peter Mandelson

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister under what circumstances he has sought advice on presentational matters from the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson). [129279]

The Prime Minister: I have regular meetings and discussions with ministerial colleagues and others on a wide range of subjects and will continue to do so. As with previous Administrations, it is not my practice to provide details of confidential discussions, under exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Carbon Trust

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much public funding the Carbon Trust has received since it was established. [128034]

Mr. Morley: The Carbon Trust was allocated £26.5 million in 2001–02 by my Department, and a total of £49.6 million for 2002–03 (including £17.1 million from the Energy Efficiency Best Practice programme). The Carbon Trust has been allocated £50.6 million for 2003–04 (including £17.1 million from the Energy Efficiency Best Practice programme).

The devolved Administrations have separate funding relationships with the Carbon Trust.

Waste Management

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to introduce waste minimisation targets. [126715]

Mr. Morley: The Government recognise that progress must be made to reduce waste. However, before considering setting waste reduction targets for local authorities, the Government will consider the levers local authorities have for reducing waste and whether a reduction target would be an effective means of encouraging waste reduction.

Water Companies

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the water companies supplying domestic industries, indicating the nationality of the individuals and organisations with a controlling interest. [128297]

Mr. Morley: The following table shows the information for water and sewerage and water only undertakers. The table shows in brackets the country where the ultimate holding company's head office is located.

Water and sewerage undertakers/ water undertakers	*Significant shares (over 25 per cent.) in appointee*	*Ultimate holding company and where H is based*	*Significant shares (over 25 per cent.) in holding company*
Anglian Water Services Ltd.	100 per cent. AWG plc	Anglian Water Group plc (UK)	None over 25 per cent.
South Staffordshire Water plc	100 per cent. South Staffordshire Group plc	South Staffordshire Group plc (UK)	None over 25 per cent.
Severn Trent Water Ltd.	100 per cent. Severn Trent Water plc	Severn Trent Water plc (UK)	None over 25 per cent.
Cambridge Water plc	100 per cent. Ufacex UK Holdings plc	Union Electricia Fensoa SA (Spain)	n/a
Tendring Hundred Water Services Ltd.	99.23 per cent. VW Capital Funds plc	Veolia Environnement (France)	n/a
Northumbrian Water Ltd.	100 per cent. Northumbrian Water Services	Northumbrian Water Group plc (UK)	None over 25 per cent.
United Utilities Water plc	100 per cent. United Utilities plc	United Utilities plc (UK)	None over 25 per cent.
Southern Water Services Ltd.	100 per cent. SWS Holdings Ltd.	Southern Water Investment Ltd. (UK)	Royal Bank of Scotland
Portsmouth Water plc	100 per cent. Portsmouth Water Holdings Ltd.	South Downs Capital Ltd. (UK)	n/a privately owned
South East Water plc	100 per cent. Saur Water Services plc	Boygues SA (France)	100 per cent. Saur (UK) Ltd.
Mid Kent Water plc	99.98 per cent. Mid Kent Financing Ltd.	Swan Capital Group Ltd./WestLB (UK)	n/a privately owned
Folkestone and Dover Water Services Ltd.	74.07 per cent. VW Capital Funds plc, 25.05 per cent. Southern Water plc	Veolia Environnement (France)	n/a
South West Water Services Ltd.	100 per cent. Pennon Group plc	Pennon Group plc (UK)	None over 25 per cent.
Thames Water Utilities Ltd.	100 per cent. Thames Water plc	Thames Water Aqua Holdings GmbH (RWE AG) (Germany)	None over 25 per cent.
Three Valleys Water Services plc	100 per cent. VW Capital Funds plc	Veolia Environnment (France)	n/a

Water and sewerage undertakers/ water undertakers	*Significant shares (over 25 per cent.) in appointee*	*Ultimate holding company and where H is based*	*Significant shares (over 25 per cent.) in holding company*
Sutton and East Surrey Water plc	100 per cent. East Surrey Holdings plc	East Surrey Holdings plc	39.2 per cent. AXA S.A
North Surrey Water Ltd.	(Under single licence with Three Valleys)	—	—
Dwr Cymru Cyfyngedig	100 per cent. Glas Cymru Cyfyngedig	Glas Cymru Cyfyngedig (UK)	No shareholders (company limited by guarantee)
Dee Valley Water plc	100 per cent. Dee Valley Group plc	Dee Valley Group plc (UK)	35.1 per cent. AXA S.A
Wessex Water Services Ltd.	YTL Utilities (UK) Ltd.	YTL Power Berhad (Malaysia)	—
Bournemouth and West Hampshire Water plc	100 per cent. Cascal Services Ltd.	50 per cent. Biwater plc, 50 per cent. NV NUON	YTL Corporation Berhad 60 per cent. (Malaysia)
Bristol Water plc	100 per cent. Bristol Water Holdings plc	Bristol Water Holdings plc (UK)	None over 25 per cent.
Cholderton and District Water Company	100 per cent. Cholderton and District Water Company	Cholderton and District Water Company (UK)	None over 25 per cent.
Yorkshire Water Services Ltd.	100 per cent. Kelda Group plc	Kelda Group plc (UK)	None over 25 per cent.

TRANSPORT

Civil Contingencies

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the major civil emergency exercise postponed from 23 March 2003 will take place in London. [128656]

Mr. McNulty: An exercise to test specific elements of the emergency services' response to a chemical attack on the London Underground, postponed from 23 March 2003, took place on 7 September 2003. This was one of a regular series of exercises being held in London and throughout the UK.

Radioactive Materials

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures are in place to ensure the safe transport of radioactive materials; and what recent discussions have taken place with the nuclear industry regarding the safe disposal of its radioactive waste. [128109]

Mr. Jamieson: The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) publishes internationally agreed standards for the transport of radioactive material. These are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure they reflect current safety standards and reflect current transport practices. These IAEA standards form the basis for various modal standards, which in turn, become the basis of legislation in the UK. There is a continuous cycle of reviewing IAEA standards and implementing them nationally.

Legislation in the United Kingdom is brought into line with the currently applicable version of these IAEA technical requirements on a regular basis, the latest amendment being SI 2003 No. 1867, The Radioactive Material (Road Transport) (Amendment) Regulations 2003.

Policy for the long-term management of the UK's higher activity radioactive waste is currently under review as part of the "Managing Radioactive Waste Safely" programme. Industry had the opportunity to input its views in respect to the original September 2001 consultation document. There will be further opportunities for input of views as the programme proceeds under the oversight of the new Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM). Ownership of the UK's low level waste disposal facility at Drigg will pass to the proposed new Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) when this is established. The July 2002 "Managing the Nuclear Legacy" White Paper offered opportunity for industry to comment on the proposed arrangements. There is on-going discussion with industry as the NDA is being set up, however, this is currently at a preliminary stage.

Airports

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to be able to make an announcement regarding airport expansion. [R] [129633]

Mr. McNulty: The Government intend to publish their conclusions on 'The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom' consultation in a White Paper later this year.

Lane Designation

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will publish the regulations required to help local authorities designate Quiet Lanes. [128869]

Mr. Jamieson: We are aiming to publish regulations on Quiet Lanes in draft for consultation later this year.

Maritime Safety

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to change regulations to ensure that anyone who sails a boat at sea has first participated in adequate safety training; and for what reasons there are no training requirements in place for those taking boats under 25 feet out to sea. [129119]

Mr. Jamieson: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) in conjunction with other safety organisations has produced a voluntary code of Best and Safe Practice for Leisure Craft Users. This code is widely available, and encourages boat users to become familiar with their craft and to take a recognised training course. We keep the voluntary approach to training under review, taking account of the practicalities of implementation and enforcement that a regulatory regime would involve. All craft using our seas, regardless of size, must follow the rules of the International Regulations for the Avoidance of Collisions at Sea 1972 (as amended).

Railways

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the companies holding railway franchises indicating the nationality of the individuals and organisations holding a controlling interest. [128305]

Dr. Howells: The majority of the holding companies are of British origin except for Keolis and Vivendi who are French. We do not hold information about the nationality of individual directors. Information about franchise operators and franchisees is available on the website of the Strategic Rail Authority at: http://www.sra.gov.uk/passengers/tocs.tt2

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what public subsidies have been made available to the railway industry in each year since 1983. [128304]

Dr. Howells: I refer my right hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on 28 April 2003, *Official Report*, columns 7–10W. In 2002–03, central Government support to the rail industry was £2,284 million. The increase in support since 2000–01 has helped to fund a substantial increase in investment from £2,958 million in 2000–01 to £4,888 million in 2002–03.

Road Safety

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in how many accidents involving drivers *(a)* mobile telephone use and *(b)* smoking were identified as contributory factors in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [128812]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested is not available as the official road casualty statistics which are collected by the police and reported to the Department using the STATS 19 accident report format does not currently include information on either smoking or mobile phones.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* passengers and *(b)* crew in (i) public service vehicles, (ii) hired coaches and minibuses and (iii) taxis and private hire vehicles suffered fatal accidents in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [129334]

Dr. Howells: The number of passengers and drivers of coaches, minibuses and taxis who have died in road accidents is given in the tables below. Vehicles are defined by body type.

a) Passengers

	1998	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Bus or Coach[1]	17	11	14	10	17
Minibus[2]	N/A[4]	10	11	19	5
Taxi[3]	3	4	4	3	2

b) Drivers [5]

	1998	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Bus or Coach[1]	1	0	1	4	2
Minibus[2]	N/A[4]	5	3	5	2
Taxi[3]	2	6	8	1	4

Notes and Definitions:
1. Bus or Coach (with 17 or more passenger seats) and including hired coaches
2. Minibus (8—16 passenger seats)
3. Taxis are defined as vehicles operating as a hackney carriage, regardless of construction, and bearing the appropriate district council or local authority hackney carriage plates.
4. N/A—Data not available prior to 1999
5. No data on crew other than drivers are available

Road Projects

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes since 1997 have been made to the COBA formula for determining the value of road projects, with particular reference to the weighting of environmental factors against economic and safety considerations. [129261]

Mr. Jamieson: All major (and many minor) road projects are now analysed within the New Approach To Appraisal (NATA) framework, implemented in 1998. The NATA is a problem-oriented approach, focused on a range of alternative options to determine which provides the most effective solution within the context of a range of economic, environmental and social (including safety) objectives. Environmental factors are not given any explicit weighting. Rather an appropriate measure of each impact is presented to decision takers in the form of a one page Appraisal Summary Table to ensure that the full range of economic, environmental and social factors are actively considered during analysis and at decision points.

Runway Capacity (South-East)

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much additional terminal capacity would be required if two new runways were to be built at Gatwick; and how this additional capacity would be expressed as a multiple of the capacity at Heathrow Terminal 5. [128999]

Dr. Howells: The option for two new runways at Gatwick would provide total capacity of 115mppa. This is an additional terminal capacity of 75mppa beyond the base case capacity of 40mppa. Terminal capacity at Gatwick would be a multiple of 2.5 of the capacity at Heathrow Terminal 5 (based on T5 capacity of 30mppa). The amount and timing of terminal capacity provided would, in practice, depend on actual demand.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the total net economic benefit would be using the assumptions recommended by the Treasury, of *(a)* a close parallel runway, *(b)* a wide spaced runway at Gatwick and *(c)* a new runway at (i) Heathrow and (ii) Stansted. [129006]

Dr. Howells: The total net economic benefit in present value terms, using the Treasury's assumptions, of *(a)* a close parallel runway at Gatwick is £1.8 billion, *(b)* a wide spaced runway at Gatwick is £4.4 billion, *(c)* (i) a new runway at Heathrow is £6.3 billion and (ii) a new runway at Stansted is £5.4 billion.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy that in the forthcoming White Paper on Air Transport there will be no positive reference to new runways at sites, which were not included in the consultation on the Future Development of Air Transport, without a full public consultation. [129009]

Dr. Howells: The Government have not yet taken any decisions on policies for the air transport White Paper. A number of proposals for new airport capacity at sites which were not included in the Government's consultation document have been submitted as responses to the consultation. These are being

considered. If the Government were minded to favour any of these options it would be necessary to consult separately on them.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will publish his responses to the consultation on the Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom. [129010]

Dr. Howells: The Government intend to publish their conclusions on the Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom consultation in a White Paper later this year.

The Secretary of State gave an undertaking to the Transport Select Committee, in oral evidence on 21 May, to publish the White Paper before the end of 2003.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he plans to recommend that BAA and the West Sussex County Council extend their 2001 legal agreement on Gatwick Airport until 2030. [129011]

Dr. Howells: The Government have not yet taken any decisions on policies for the air transport White Paper. The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom consultation closed on 30 June and the many thousands of responses are currently being analysed. It remains the intention to publish the White Paper later this year.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what total percentage fall in the cost of air travel over the period 2000 to 2030 is assumed in the future demand forecasts given in the consultation paper 'The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom'. [129012]

Dr. Howells: The central national forecast published in 'Air Traffic Forecasts for the United Kingdom 2000', May 2000, assumed that there will be a 1 per cent. reduction per annum in air fares in real terms between 2000 and 2020. No further reduction was assumed between 2020 and 2030. However, as described in Chapter 5 of 'The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom—South East', February 2003, greater competition between airlines, including the impact of the No Frills sector, suggests that the decline in the cost of air travel will be greater. It is argued in 'The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom—South East' that air fares are likely to fall by 1.5 per cent. per annum in real terms between 2000 and 2020, giving a total percentage reduction in the cost of air travel of around 26 per cent. in the period from 2000 to 2030.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has requested the owners of Redhill aerodrome to provide additional details of their expansion proposals. [129103]

Dr. Howells: The Department held discussions earlier this year with several promoters of proposals for new airport capacity that are alternatives to, or variants of, options set out in the Government's consultation document, including with the owners of Redhill aerodrome.

The aim was to provide guidance on the methodology used to appraise options in the SERAS study and on the information that was needed by the Department in order to appraise their proposals.

A number of the promoters submitted further material on their proposals. This is being considered.

Transport Infrastructure (Crosby)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what *(a)* grants and *(b)* other assistance have been given by his Department for the improvement of transport infrastructure in Crosby since 1997. [129454]

Mr. McNulty: Government assistance for transport improvements is provided through Local Transport Plans. These are the cornerstone of our integrated transport policy at the local level.

Figures are not available for Crosby. Since 1997 Sefton borough council has received £35,136,000 for transport improvements. For details of individual schemes, I refer my hon. Friend to the Director of Technical Services, Sefton BC, Balliol House, Balliol House, Bootle, L20 3NJ.

DEFENCE

Campaign Medals

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the campaigns since 1974 that resulted in a medal being struck, what the duration was of each campaign, and when the first medal in each case was presented. [129304]

Mr. Caplin: Specific campaign medals and clasps to both the General Service Medal (GSM) 1962 and, more recently, the Operational Service Medal (OSM) have been instituted for the following campaigns and operations since 1974. It is not possible to say when any given campaign started or was completed, but the dates specified in the table represent the qualifying period considered to be suitable for the award.

Medal Clasp (as required)	*Qualifying dates*
GSM Northern Ireland	14 August 1969-ongoing
GSM Dhofar	1 October 1969–30 September 1976
The Rhodesia Medal	1 December 1979–20 March 1980
South Atlantic Medal	2 April 1982–14 June 1982
GSM Lebanon	7 February 1983–9 March 1984
GSM Mine Clearance Gulf of Suez	15 August 1984–15 October 1984
GSM Gulf	17 November 1986–28 February 1989
The Gulf Medal	2 August 1990–7 March 1991
GSM Kuwait	8 March 1991–30 September 1991
GSM Northern Iraq and Southern Turkey	6 April 1991–17 July 1991
GSM Air Ops Iraq	16 July 1991–18 March 2003 (Op Resinate South) 16 July 1991–30 April 2003 (Op Resinate North)
OSM Sierra Leone	5 May 2000—31 July 2002

No record was made of when these medals were first issued to eligible recipients. Medals for campaign service are generally posted direct to individuals or, if still serving, sent in batches to their Unit/Regiment/Ship/

Squadron and distributed. Any formal presentation ceremony would be a local initiative organised by the commanding officer of the unit concerned.

Deepcut Barracks

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of Her Majesty's armed forces have died through deaths ruled as suicide or self-inflicted at Deepcut Barracks since 1 January 1996. [129329]

Mr. Ingram: Only a coroner can rule on the cause of a death.

Since 1 January 1996, the coroner has recorded no verdicts of suicide relating to deaths at Deepcut.

HMS Dryad

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 13 June, *Official Report*, column 112W, on HMS Dryad, if he will make it his policy to ensure that, before marketing arrangements are made, the neighbouring local authorities are consulted in the event of a decision to dispose of the site of HMS Dryad; and if he will make a statement. [120316]

Mr. Caplin: It is already departmental policy to ensure that there is full consultation with all parties in the run up to any disposal, including with local authorities, English Heritage and the local community.

Iraq

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the estimated Iraqi civilian death toll is from when hostilities began to 28 August 2003. [128941]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 16 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 55W to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker).

Operation Telic

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many call out notices for reservists have been issued for Operation Telic; how many reservists have been accepted into service; and if he will make a statement. [128412]

Mr. Caplin: As at 29 August 2003 a total of 11,668 call-out notices had been served. 298 of these call-out notices were revoked before the individual reported for service. A total of 8,955 Reservists reported for service, of which 7,514 were accepted for service. Of those accepted for service, 4,236 have been demobilised after completing an operational tour.

Military Police

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will order an independent inquiry into the effectiveness of the Ministry of Defence police investigation branch; and if he will make a statement. [128384]

Mr. Caplin: No. The Criminal Investigation Department of the MOD Police is inspected by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary who have stated that the force as a whole continues to provide an efficient and effective service.

RAF Halton

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the *(a)* state of the runways at RAF Halton and *(b)* the future repair programme for the runways. [129276]

Mr. Caplin: During the recent prolonged period of hot, dry weather experienced across the United Kingdom, a number of cracks developed in both of the primary grass runways at RAF Halton airfield. As a flight safety precaution, both runways have been closed and a single, temporary runway has been brought into use to allow limited flying to continue.

Specialists in the maintenance of grass airfields are being consulted to identify the options for returning the airfield to full availability and the future repair programme will be informed by their advice.

Gliding Centres

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons he decided not to proceed with his proposal to relocate *(a)* the Joint Services Adventurous Training (Gliding) Centre and *(b)* the RAF Gliding and Soaring Association Centre to Rissington. [129232]

Mr. Caplin: The RAF Gliding and Soaring Association withdrew from consideration of relocating its Bicester Centre to Little Rissington because they could not afford to build the new hangar they would have needed to operate at Little Rissington. An option of moving the publicly funded Joint Services Adventurous Training (ISAT (G)) gliding activity to Little Rissington was considered but would have required considerable initial investment in equipment, which was deemed unaffordable.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the additional number of flights that will take place from RAF Halton as a result of the relocation of *(a)* the Joint Services Adventurous Training (Gliding) and *(b)* the Royal Air Force Gliding and Soaring Association centres. [129233]

Mr. Caplin: The Joint Services Adventurous Training (Gliding) unit is tasked by the Ministry of Defence sponsor with providing places on its courses which will result in a maximum of 4,800 launches per year.

Until the closure of the RAF Gliding and Soaring Association Club at Bicester, it will not be clear how many of its members will join the Association's Club at RAF Halton. It is possible that the increased membership could double the level of activity undertaken by the Chiltern Gliding Club at RAF Halton to approximately 8,000 launches, which would return it to that undertaken eight years ago, however, it may be fewer than that.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the number of local residents who will experience increased intrusion from aircraft noise following the relocation to RAF Halton of *(a)* the Joint Services Adventurous Training (Gliding) and *(b)* the RAF Gliding and Soaring Association centres. [129277]

Mr. Caplin: The airfield at RAF Halton is currently very well used by light aircraft; motorised gliders and winch launched gliders. The relocation of the Joint Services Adventurous Training (Gliding) activity to the airfield is expected to cause very little increased aircraft noise. The gliders used are, in the main, not motorised. The tug aircraft have four bladed propellers and their performance is maximised for quick take off and climb. This allows engine power to be reduced during the climb, all of which reduces noise output. Return to the airfield invariably utilises a constant descent at reduced power, causing very little noise.

The relocation of the RAF Gliding and Soaring Association assets to RAF Halton is not expected to increase intrusion from aircraft noise as the gliders do not have motors and are winch launched.

Sonar

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the effects upon marine mammals of low frequency active sonar operating at levels up to 240 decibels. [128949]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has conducted an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of Sonar 2087, a Low Frequency Active Sonar (LFAS) system. The EIA indicated that the sonar had the potential to be harmful to marine mammals. The effect is determined by the duration and frequency of the sound, as well as its intensity: the EIA looked at these at varying levels in different environmental conditions and developed a range of mitigation measures to minimise the impact. A copy of the EIA will be placed in the Library of the House later this month.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has to introduce low frequency active sonar operating at levels up to 240 decibels in Royal Navy ships. [128950]

Mr. Ingram: We plan to fit Sonar 2087, a tactical, variable-depth, low frequency active and passive sonar to Type 23 Frigates during their refit cycle. It will replace the Type 23fs current passive towed array Sonar 2031 (where this is fitted) and will be integrated with the existing bow-mounted, active Sonar 2050. The system is expected to begin to enter operational service in 2006, once trials of the first production sets are complete.

Suez Medal

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the proposal to introduce a medal for service in the Suez Canal Zone has received Royal Assent; and when he expects issue of medals to commence. [128946]

Mr. Caplin: Her Majesty The Queen has agreed in principle to the institution of a new medal for service in the Suez Canal Zone, as announced in the House by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 11 June. Final agreement to the detailed qualifying criteria for the medal is still awaited. It is hoped that the first medals will be issued shortly after receiving the Royal Assent.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the qualifying criteria for the Suez Canal Zone medal will be. [128947]

Mr. Caplin: Proposals for the detailed qualifying criteria for the Naval General Service Medal 1915–62 and General Service Medal 1918–62, for service in the Suez Canal Zone between 1951 and 1954, have been passed to the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals for their consideration. They will be published in a White Paper when The Queen has agreed them.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the application process for a Suez Canal Zone medal will be. [128948]

Mr. Caplin: Veterans of the Canal Zone, or the next-of-kin of those who have died, will need to apply in writing to the appropriate medal office, giving full name, date of birth and Service number. The addresses of the medal offices are as follows:

Royal Naval Medal Office, Room 1068, Centurion Building, Grange Road, Gosport, Hampshire PO13 9XA

Royal Marines Medal Office, Room 038, Centurion Building, Grange Road, Gosport, Hampshire PO13 9XA

Army Medal Office, Government Buildings, Worcester Road, Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire WR9 8AU

Royal Air Force Medal Office, Room 6, Building 248A, RAF PMA,

RAF Innsworth, Gloucester, Gloucestershire GL3 1EZ.

All applications will be acknowledged on receipt and will be dealt with strictly in the order they are received. The Ministry of Defence will arrange for the individual Service files of those who apply to be recalled from the archives and will assess entitlement from these detailed records.

SCOTLAND

Annual Report

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many copies of the Scotland Office Annual Report 2002–03 have been printed; at what cost; and how it was distributed. [128007]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scotland Office had 150 copies of the Departmental Report produced at a total cost of £4,036. Copies of the report were provided to the Scottish Affairs Committee, other Government Departments and for use within the Department. The report is also available on the department's website.

The Stationery Office determines the number of copies it requires for retail sale and meets the costs of printing and publication.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* press officers, *(c)* civil servants, *(d)* advisers to civil servants and *(e)* permanent staff were working for the Scotland Office in each year since 1996. [126474]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scotland Office was established on 1 July 1999.

Details of staff numbers which cover permanent staff, including press officers, are given in Table C of the annual publication, "Civil Service Statistics". Copies of this publication are available from the Libraries of both Houses.

The Department employed three special advisers in 1999–2000 and 2000–01, one of whom was unpaid; and two special advisers in 2001–02 and 2002–03.

The Department does not employ any staff as advisers to civil servants.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff in his Department have been transferred to new responsibilities within the Department for Constitutional Affairs. [127847]

Mrs. McGuire: The staff of the Scotland Office transferred to the Department for Constitutional Affairs on 12 June. They have retained their existing responsibilities.

Friends of Scotland

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff in his Department were allocated to the Friends of Scotland project, expressed as full-time equivalents in the last year for which figures are available. [127846]

Mrs. McGuire: In 2002–03, five staff were allocated to the Friends of Scotland project.

IT Contracts

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many outsourced IT contracts have been signed by his Department in each year since 1997; how much each of these contracts is worth; with whom they are signed; how many have been renegotiated; how many are still in place; and if he will make a statement. [126194]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scotland Office was established on 1 July 1999. The Department's IT systems and support are provided through the Scottish Executive. The Scotland Office has no outsourced IT contracts.

Private Sector Secondees

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what his Department's policy is on employing secondees from the private sector; how many secondees from the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sectors his Department employed in each year since 1997; from which companies and organisations they were seconded; at what level they were employed; and if he will make a statement. [127062]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scotland Office was established on 1 July 1999. Since then the department has employed two individuals from the private sector (Bank of Scotland) at Grade 7 and SEO levels in 2002 and two individuals from the public sector (House of Lords) at Grade 7 and SCS level, one in 2001 and one in 2002.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children of asylum seekers were being held in custody at each removal centre on 1 July 2003; and if he intends to end the practice. [124066]

Beverley Hughes: The latest published information on the number of children of asylum seekers held in removal centres is for 2 April 2003.

At this date an exercise was carried out to access the number of children under the age of 18 who were detained in Dungavel, Harmondsworth, Oakington and Tinsley House Immigration Service Removal Centres. These centres are the only ones that deal with family cases. The results of the exercise are contained in the following table.

Immigration service removal centre	*Children under 18 years of age in detention at 2 April 2003*
Dungavel	21
Harmondsworth	18
Oakington	14
Tinsley	3
Total	56

Children under 18 years are detained only in two limited circumstances: first, as part of a family group whose detention is considered appropriate; second, when unaccompanied, while alternative care arrangements are made and normally just overnight.

While the detention of families with children is very regrettable, it nevertheless remains necessary in appropriate cases in order to maintain an effective immigration control and to tackle abuses of the asylum system.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Iraq

Mr. Page: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will place the Department's pre-conflict plans for the reconstruction of Iraq and their estimated costs in the Library. [128943]

Hilary Benn: Details of the Department for International Development's pre-conflict planning for Iraq are contained in the Memoranda submitted to the International Development Committee by the Department in February and June this year.

Malaria

John Barrett: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what plans there are to expand the use of the RTSS/AS02A malaria vaccine following its trial in Mozambique. [127935]

Hilary Benn: The RTSS/AS02A vaccine (a GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) Biologicals' product) is a new product for malaria which has yet to undergo the full approval process.

An international partnership involving GSK, Mozambique's Ministry of Health (MOH), and Centro de Investigacio em Saude de Manhica (CISM), the Hospital Clinic of the University of Barcelona, and the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH)'s Malaria Vaccine Initiative (MVI) has now conducted phase 2 paediatric clinical trials.

The UK Government welcome the apparent success of the vaccine to date, but will wait to see the final outcome of the trials before planning any expansion of its use.

WALES

Public Appointments

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what public appointments have been made by holders of his office since June 1999 *(a)* individually and *(b)* jointly with other Ministers. [103813]

Mr. Hain: Information about ministerial appointments to public bodies is included in the Cabinet Office's annual report "Public Bodies", copies of which are placed in the Library of the House and which is published on the Cabinet Office website.

(a) Since June 1999, holders of the office of Secretary of State for Wales have made one appointment to the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales. In addition the Secretary of State for Wales offers advice to Her Majesty about a number of Crown Appointments.

(b) Appointments to the Audit Commission are made jointly with my right hon. Friends the Deputy Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Health.

All decisions about public appointments are made with regard to the Commissioner for Public Appointments' Code of Practice.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Museum Charging

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent assessment has been undertaken of museum entry prices; what plans there are to make an assessment; and if she will make a statement. [128777]

Estelle Morris: Since 1 December 2001, all the principal museums and galleries sponsored by this Department have offered free admission to all. This has been a huge success. In 2002–03, the first full year of free access, our sponsored museums and galleries received over 32 million visits—over 8 million more than in 1997.

School Sports Coaches

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what plans there are to increase the number of qualified school sports coaches employed at a local level; [128707]

(2) how many qualified school sports coaches were employed in *(a)* Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, *(c)* Tyne and Wear and *(d)* England, in each year since 1997. [128708]

Mr. Caborn: DCMS is investing £28 million to implement the key recommendations of the Coaching Task Force. These include the creation by 2006 of 3,000 qualified Community Sports Coaches, who will work in partnership at local level with schools, clubs and other local or regional organisations supporting sport. I expect the first phase of some 100 Community Sports Coaches to be operational during the current financial year.

The information requested about numbers of qualified school sports coaches could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

British Tourism

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether her Department has undertaken research into the potential effect of the tolls and charges proposed for using cars on British roads, on the British tourism industry. [128575]

Mr. Caborn: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has undertaken no such research. DCMS recognises that transport is a key issue for UK tourism and officials from DCMS and the Department for Transport are in regular contact on transport issues. The revenues raised from local authority congestion charging schemes must be reinvested into local transport improvements and can help deliver a quality transport system that will benefit all sectors of the economy, including tourism.

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment has been made of the provisional numbers of domestic and overseas tourists in England this summer. [128890]

Mr. Caborn: The latest provisional figures for the number of domestic tourism trips including an overnight stay in England show that over the three months April to June 2003 there were 31.4 million trips[1].

Figures for the number of overseas tourists visiting England are currently only available up to March 2003.[2] These figures show that over the three months January to March 2003 there were 4.3 million visits from overseas residents to England

[1] All figures for domestic tourism trips are taken from the UK Tourism Survey which is run by VisitBritain. Figures for domestic trips in England up to September 2003 will be available from early January 2004.

[2] All figures for overseas visits are taken from the International Passenger Survey which is run by the Office for National Statistics. Figures for overseas visits to England up to June 2003 will be available in October 2003, and data up to September 2003 will be available in January 2004.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether her Department has undertaken research into the effect of the congestion charge on tourism in London. [128576]

Mr. Caborn: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has undertaken no such research. Responsibility for tourism policy in London has been devolved to the Mayor and the London Assembly. Likewise, congestion charging is the responsibility of the Mayor. An initial three-month assessment of the scheme has been published by Transport for London. A six-month report is due to be published in October.

HEALTH

Hepatitis C

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what his latest estimate is of the incidence of hepatitis C among the prison population; [129137]

(2) what his latest estimate is of the proportion of prisoners with chronic hepatitis C who are receiving treatment in accordance with National Institute for Clinical Excellence guidelines; [129138]

(3) what his latest estimate is of the incidence of hepatitis C among prisoners *(a)* on reception and *(b)* on discharge; [129139]

(4) what steps he has taken to estimate the incidence of hepatitis C amongst the prison population. [129140]

Dr. Ladyman: Prisoners are not routinely screened for hepatitis C. Individual prisoners often ask to be tested for evidence of chronic hepatitis C infection and this is done, after pre-test counselling. The Public Health Laboratory Service undertook an unlinked, anonymised survey of the prevalence of blood borne viruses among prisoners in England in 1997–98. This indicated that 9 per cent. of adult men, 11 per cent. of all women and 0.6 per cent. of young men had evidence of previous exposure to hepatitis C. No research has been undertaken on the prevalence of hepatitis C on reception and discharge.

Prisoners newly diagnosed with hepatitis C are referred to national health service specialists for further assessment and treatment, as clinically appropriate. People received into prison with hepatitis C will have any treatment begun in the community continued while they remain in prison. Information about the number of prisoners receiving treatment for hepatitis C and what form that treatment takes is not collated centrally.

Lincolnshire NHS Trust

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding Lincolnshire NHS Trust received from the Government in *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04. [129285]

Dr. Ladyman: Total income for 2002–03 for the Lincolnshire Partnership National Health Service Trust, including income from activities and all other operating income was £63,190,000. Figures for 2003–04 are not available.

Source:
The audited summarisation schedules for the Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Trust 2002–03.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Mail

David Winnick: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what progress has been made with the internal audit on the possibility of resuming later collections of parliamentary mail. [129231]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: The arrangements for the reinstatement of later collections have now been set out in a notice from the Serjeant at Arms and Black Rod to all users of the service:

In response to representations from Members of both Houses, from 9 September 2003 there will be a 7pm final collection on sitting days from the 15 main post boxes (detailed below). This reinstatement of service has been negotiated with Royal Mail to enable Members' and departments' letters to be processed through the Royal Mail network ensuring that they are delivered the following day wherever possible.

Central Lobby and Post Office Counter
Members' Lobby and Post Office Counter
Peers' Lobby
Members' Entrance
Peers' Entrance
Star Chamber Court
Ground Floor Portcullis House
Ground Floor Millbank House
Ground Floor 7 Millbank
Ground Floor Parliament Street
Ground Floor 1 The Abbey Garden
Ground Floor 2 The Abbey Garden
Ground Floor Norman Shaw North
Ground Floor Norman Shaw South
Ground Floor 7 Old Palace Yard

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Sittings of the House

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what the estimated cost to public funds is of interrupting the maintenance and building work in the Palace of Westminster for the two week sitting of the House in September. [129031]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: The Serjeant at Arms is collating the costs associated with interruptions to the works projects in the Palace of Westminster for the September sitting period and will write to the right hon. Gentleman when the figures are available.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Biotechnology Industry

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the change in *(a)* turnover and *(b)* employment in the UK biotechnology industry within the duration of the farm-scale trials programme. [128699]

Jacqui Smith: In the agricultural biotechnology sector, the following statistics are available:

December	*Revenue (£ million)*	*Employees*
2000	160	1,147
2001	198	1,145

Note:
No other figures are available for earlier years.

Employment Rights

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will introduce legislation removing the upper age limit on employment rights. [129038]

Mr. Sutcliffe: There is no upper age limit on the great majority of employment rights. However, under current legislation employees cannot generally complain of unfair dismissal if they have reached their employer's normal retirement age for their job, or, if there is no normal retirement age, the age of 65. Similarly, they have no entitlement to a statutory redundancy payment if they have reached the age of 65 or, if lower, the employer's normal retirement age for their job.

The public consultation on age discrimination launched on 2 July, "Equality and Diversity: Age Matters", proposes changing these provisions so that employees who believe they have been unfairly dismissed can seek redress at any age, but retirement at a justifiable retirement age will be a fair reason for dismissal. The upper age limit for entitlement to a statutory redundancy payment will depend on the decision we make about retirement ages. A final decision will be made in the light of responses to consultation.

THORP Reprocessing Plant

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the THORP reprocessing plant at Sellafield will close in 2010. [128272]

Mr. Timms: BNFL expects to complete their existing order book for reprocessing spent fuel at THORP by around 2010. Operation of THORP beyond completion of the existing order book would be dependent on there being new contracts for reprocessing further spent fuel at the plant which, in the first instance, is dependent on there being customer demand.

The Government's position on the future of THORP was set out in the July 2002 White Paper on Managing the Nuclear Legacy. We expect existing THORP contracts to be honoured. There are currently no proposals for new contracts for reprocessing further spent fuel at THORP. Before any such new THORP contracts could be concluded or changes made to existing contracts that increased the volume of spent fuel to be reprocessed at THORP, the approval of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry would be required. Before making a decision on any such future proposal, the Government would review it against the specific criteria that were set out in the White Paper and would consult publicly.

BAE Systems

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether the Export Credits Guarantee Department has reviewed allegations of corrupt practice by BAE Systems regarding the supply of a package of Hawk jets and Gripen planes to the Government of South Africa; what action is being taken by the Export Credits Guarantee Department regarding its guarantee to BAE Systems regarding the supply of this package following these allegations; when the Export Credits Guarantee Department first received allegations of corrupt practice by BAE Systems regarding the supply of this package; and if she will make a statement; [123018]

(2) whether allegations of corrupt practice by BAE Systems regarding the supply of a package of Hawk jets and Gripen planes to the Government of South Africa were raised during meetings during the visit of the then Minister for Trade to South Africa in November 2000. [123020]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have been unable to find any record of this issue having been discussed during the meetings referred to.

Bankruptcy

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the *(a)* bank rate of interest and *(b)* rate of interest accrual under the 1838 bankruptcy provisions has been in each year since 1992. [129499]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The information is as follows:

(a) The Bank of England publishes the base rates throughout the year and these can be accessed from their website www.bankofengland.co.uk. In November 1992 the "base rate" was 6.87 per cent. and since July of this year it has been 3.5 per cent.

(b) On 1 April 1993 the judgment rate of interest was set at 8 per cent. and has been 8 per cent. since that date. Immediately prior thereto, including for the whole of 1992, it was set at 15 per cent.

British Overseas Territories

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what responsibilities her Department undertakes in connection with British Overseas Territories. [123990]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 16 July 2003]:* The Radiocommunications Agency of the Department for Trade and Industry is responsible for representing the interests of the Overseas Territories in the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). In doing so, the Radiocommunications Agency has to ensure compliance with the obligations, procedures and practices that derive from the UK's membership of the ITU in respect of facilitating efficient international telecommunications and, more particularly, on the use of radio frequencies and satellite orbits for delivering all types of radiocommunication services.

Bull and Company

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the inquiries initiated by the European Commission on the subsidising by France of the computer group Bull and Company; and what the outcome of the inquiries has been. [128823]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 10 September 2003]:* The European Commission announced on 9 April 2002 that it was launching an investigation into a €450 million cash advance by France to Bull. On 13 November 2002, it authorised the aid and ordered France to submit evidence of the reimbursement by Bull

of the advance with interest by 17 June 2003. Copies of the notices appear in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*, C 128, 30.5.2002 and C 209, 19.8.2003 respectively.

Photovoltaics

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much of the *(a)* major photovoltaics demonstration programme budget, *(b)* clear skies programme budget, and *(c)* Scottish community renewables initiative budget (i) has been allocated and (ii) remains to be allocated; and where each of these schemes are advertised. [128780]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 9 September 2003]*: The information is in the following table.

Scheme	*Funds allocated at 9 September 2003 including management costs (£ million)*	*Unallocated (£ million)*	*Advertised at*
Major Photovoltaic Demonstration Programme	11.55	8.45	www.solarpvgrants.co.uk editorial in national and local press, radio and TV
Clear Skies	2.31	7.69	www.clear-skies.org editorial in national and local press, radio and TV
Scottish Community Renewables Initiative	0.65	4.62	www.est.co.uk/scbri and www.hie.co.uk

Corporate Energy Consumption

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the recommendations for reducing corporate energy consumption in the Government's sustainable development strategy—"A Better Quality of Life". [128568]

Mr. Timms: The 1999 strategy for sustainable development for the UK, A better quality of life, sets out key UK Government actions to achieve sustainable development, including those to achieve more prudent use of energy by the business sector.

The Climate Change Levy was launched in April 2001 to help fund measures to promote energy efficiency in business and the public sector. As part of the CCL package a number of measures were introduced including:

The EGA scheme offering tax incentives to firms investing in approved energy saving technologies.

The Carbon Trust (CT) was launched "to take the lead on energy efficiency for business and the public sector, and to support the development of a low carbon economy", delivered through the trust's two main programmes: the Low Carbon Innovation Programme, and Action Energy (formerly the non-domestic part of the Energy Efficiency Best Practice programme) the UK's main energy efficiency information, advice and research programme for organisations in the public and private sectors. Since 1989, the EEBPP has helped many organisations save up to 20 per cent. of their energy bills, which equates to total UK energy savings of around £800 million a year.

Envirowise (formerly the Environmental Technology Best Practice Programme) is the main programme promoting the resource efficiency message to business. Since it was established in 1994, the EETBP has helped UK business make resource efficiency savings of approximately £800 million.

A review of "A better quality of life" has just started, to have a revised strategy in place by 2005. We intend to take a fresh look at how we achieve sustainable development in the UK, building on the current strategy to improve delivery.

Employment Legislation

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list all the documentation issued by her Department that an employer must complete when he or she takes on his or her first employee, in order to be fully compliant; and if she will make a statement. [128690]

Mr. Sutcliffe: None. However, employment legislation for which the Department is responsible requires employers to keep records showing compliance with the national minimum wage legislation and weekly working time and night work limits; and to provide the following documents: an itemised pay statement, issued at or before the time of payment; a written statement of employment particulars for employees who are employed for one month or more; and, for shop and betting workers in England and Wales who are or may be required to work on Sundays, a written statement explaining how they can opt out of Sunday work. The wording of that opt-out statement is prescribed by law and the written statement of employment particulars must contain certain prescribed information. The Department publishes an example form of the written statement of employment particulars for the assistance of employers.

The Department is fully aware of the need to regulate only where it is necessary to do so and to keep compliance requirements as simple as possible.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many employment tribunals were attended by small businesses, as a result of non-compliance with employment legislation in the last 12 months; and if she will make a statement. [128691]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Employment Tribunals Service does not record the numbers of employment tribunals that are attended by small businesses because no information is held on the size of the employer's business that may be subject to tribunal proceedings.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many employment regulations were introduced by her Department in each year since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [127802]

Mr. Sutcliffe: In its first term (1997–2001), the Government introduced a foundation of minimum standards in the workplace. Every employee now has, for example, the right to a minimum wage, paid holidays, rest breaks, time off for family emergencies, and a cap on the working week. Trade unions have the right to recognition by the employer where a majority of the workforce want it. Part-time workers have the same rights as their full-time colleagues.

In their second term, the Government are building on all these measures in its drive to raise productivity, including a range of changes to support families and to make work pay. The Government have improved existing maternity rights and introduced paid paternity and adoption leave for the first time. For example, the payment period of statutory maternity pay and maternity allowance has been extended to 26 weeks. It has also introduced a right for working parents with children under six, or disabled children under 18, to request flexible working. This new right builds on existing best practice and further enforces our aim to promote greater dialogue in the workplace to find flexible solutions that suit both employers and employees.

Recently, both Houses have passed regulations to tackle discrimination in employment on the grounds of sexual orientation and religion or belief, which will take effect in December 2003.

Energy Supply

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the future of the UK's energy supply; and how the Government intends to bridge future energy generation shortfall. [128645]

Mr. Timms: The Government's Energy White Paper 'Our energy future—creating a low carbon economy', published on 24 February this year, covered both these points. It set out the Government's new energy policy, designed to deal with the major challenges that confront our energy system, namely climate change, our declining indigenous energy supplies and updating our energy infrastructure. The position remains as set out in the White Paper.

Estate Agents

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 10 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 888W, when she expects to receive the report of the Director General of Fair Trading on estate agents; and on what date she expects to publish the report. [126752]

Mr. Sutcliffe: I expect the Office of Fair Trading to publish its report on estate agents in the autumn.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 10 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 888W, (1) how many estate agents are practising in the United Kingdom; and what percentage of estate agents are members of the Ombudsman for Estate Agents Scheme; [126753]

(2) how much was paid out in each year since 1997 by way of compensation by the Ombudsman for malpractice by estate agents. [126756]

Mr. Sutcliffe: This information is not collected by the Department.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 10 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 888W, what procedures are in place to ensure that estate agents banned by the Office of Fair Trading *(a)* no longer practise and *(b)* are no longer involved in the management of estate agency companies; how many estate agents banned since 1997 have subsequently been discovered to have continued or recommenced estate agency work; how many estate agents have been prosecuted since 1997 for such practices; what the penalties received were; and what procedures are in place to monitor estate agents whose conduct has resulted in warning letters being issued by the Director General of Fair Trading. [126754]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The banning of an estate agent by the Office of Fair Trading results in a press release that alerts other local estate agents and consumers. Local Trading Standards Officers are advised separately, and the OFT relies on them to notify it if the banned agent continues in business or is involved in the management of an estate agency company. It is a criminal offence for an agent banned by the OFT to continue doing estate agency work.

No estate agents banned since 1997 have subsequently been discovered to have continued or recommenced estate agency work or been prosecuted for such practices.

The OFT does not publicise the issue of warning letters to estate agents, and does not formally monitor estate agents whose conduct has resulted in a warning letter being sent. However, a copy is sent to the local Trading Standards Department to alert them to the action taken. Formal warning orders are treated as per banning orders.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 10 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 888W, on estate agents, how many complaints were investigated by the Office of Fair Trading in each year since 2000; how many were upheld in each year since 1997; what the average time taken to investigate a complaint is; and what the longest time taken to investigate a complaint is. [126755]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The following table contains details of the complaints about estate agents investigated by the Office of Fair Trading and the number of complaints upheld in each year since 2000. The OFT did not record details of how many complaints were upheld prior to 2001.

	Complaints investigated by the Office of Fair Trading	*Complaints upheld by the Office of Fair Trading*
2000	213	—
2001	170	80
2002	206	97
2003	[1]126	[1]47

[1] Up to 31 July 2003

The three main areas of complaints were: agents not passing on offers, failing to declare a personal interest and misrepresentation as to the details/existence of a prospective purchaser.

The average time taken to investigate a complaint is three months. Complex cases may take up to a year.

Flexible Working

Dr. Ashok Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans there are to monitor and record the number of workers *(a)* requesting and *(b)* being granted flexible working in (i) central government, (ii) local government, (iii) the public sector and (iv) the private sector; and if she will make a statement. [128673]

Mr. Sutcliffe: In addition to the detail in my answer to my hon. Friend on 1 July, *Official Report*, column 214W, my Department has since commissioned questions on flexible working to appear in the monthly Office for National Statistics omnibus survey.

The Government is taking a strategic approach to monitoring flexible working. This will feed into the review of the new flexible working law it is committed to commencing in 2006 and to the future work of the Government's Work-Life Balance campaign. The approach involves gathering qualitative and quantitative evidence to establish a comprehensive research base.

The Government is circulating a summary of the Government's approach to how it is monitoring all the new working parent laws introduced in April 2003 to interested parties, which is also available at www.dti.gov.uk/workingparents. This invites others to share their own experience of the new laws, including flexible working.

GATS

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the openness of the GATS negotiations; and what she estimates the benefits were of *(a)* open and *(b)* closed discussions during this process. [118914]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 16 June 2003]*: The Government believe that all WTO negotiations should be as transparent as possible, consistent with protecting negotiating positions. To this end the Government have been as open as possible with civil society about progress with the negotiations, meeting them frequently.

In relation to the GATS, we published our second public consultation document last year, setting a lead that other governments and the European Commission have followed. We will shortly be publishing our response. We also pressed strongly for the EU's initial GATS offer to be published at the time of its submission to the WTO. A number of other WTO Members have done so.

However, transparency is a matter for each government and we must respect the wishes of those who have asked for their GATS requests or offers to be treated as restricted. For this reason, we have not published other countries' requests to us in full, but summarised them in our consultation document. That is the balance we have struck.

Home Accident Surveillance System

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will change her policy on the termination of the collection and analysis of the Home Accident Surveillance System statistics. [128369]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Since the decision to stop HASS was announced on 2 May, contracts to collect the data have been terminated and the work within the DTI is being wound up. I have no plans to reverse this policy.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether she plans to establish a new Government accident recording system to ensure and improve the safety standards of home and leisure products and activities. [128370]

Mr. Sutcliffe: I have no plans to establish such a system. I have, however, offered to support initiatives that the Department of Health might launch to strengthen the surveillance of accidental injury at regional and local levels in the NHS.

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many representations she has received in opposition to the decision taken by her Department to cease the collection by Home Accident Surveillance Systems of statistics relating to accidents in the home. [127057]

Mr. Sutcliffe: I have received approximately 80 representations opposing the decision to stop HASS.

Independent Chief Engineer

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Government have plans to create an independent chief engineer. [128646]

Mr. Timms: The Government have no plans to appoint an independent chief engineer.

Inward Investment

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations her Department has received from major inward investors on the effects on their investment decisions of the condition of the transport system. [124732]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Invest-UK, British Trade International's inward investment arm, has received one such recent representation from a major inward investor—Pfizer Global Research laboratories based in Sandwich.

In their continuing dialogue with key major inward investors, Invest UK has identified the UK's transport infrastructure as one among a number of important

competitiveness factors for investors when looking to maintain or further develop their UK presence. UK inward investment figures for the year to March 2003 show that the UK remains by a good margin the top destination in the EU.

Structural Funding (Merseyside)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many jobs were created by the first Merseyside Objective 1 Programme between the years 1994 to 1999; [128563]

(2) what the five key targets were for the first Merseyside Objective 1 Programme which ran from 1994 to 1999; and what the outcomes were for each target; [128562]

(3) how many people accessed further education or training between the start of the first Merseyside Objective 1 Programme in 1994 until its end in 1999; [128565]

(4) how many cases there were of business assistance provided by the first Merseyside Objective 1 Programme from 1994 to 1999 in Merseyside. [128564]

Jacqui Smith: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 9 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 798W.

National Grid

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total generating capacity available to the National Grid was in each year since 1983; and what the percentage change in generating capacity was in each year. [128302]

Mr. Timms: Available data are shown in the following table.

Generating capacity available to the National Grid

Year	*Capacity (MW)*	*Change in year (MW)*	*Change in year (percentage)*
At end of financial year			
1983–84	57,640	—	—
1984–85	58,225	585	+1.0
1985–86	59,270	1,045	+1.8
1986–87	61,615	2,345	+4.0
1987–88	61,194	−421	−0.7
1988–89	61,376	182	+0.3
1989–90	65,592	4,216	+6.9
1990–91	63,822	−1,770	−2.7
1991–92	61,931	−1,891	−3.0
1992–93	60,636	−1,295	−2.1
1993–94	61,358	722	+1.2
1994–95	58,946	−2,412	−3.9
1995–96	58,265	−681	−1.2
1996–97	62,758	4,493	+7.7
1997–98	61,885	−873	−1.4
1998–99	63,087	1,202	+1.9
1999–2000	64,049	962	+1.5
2000–01	66,465	2,416	+3.8
2001–02	67,593	1,128	+1.7
2002–03	66,468	−1,125	−1.7

Source:
National Grid Transco

Offshore Wind Power

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures have been put in place to ensure that new offshore wind power projects will have sufficient grid connection points and capacity capabilities to connect the required megawatts. [128128]

Mr. Timms: I have stated that transmission licences will apply throughout the strategic areas and I shall legislate to achieve this. Transmission licences covering the strategic areas will provide certainty for generators that there will be a connector of last resort, in addition to providing infrastructure that is efficient, economical and which guards against the owner of the connection wielding market power. DTI and Ofgem are working together to create the necessary regulatory regime and will issue licences in a timely way that ensure that generation and infrastructure development can run concurrently.

Science and Biotechnology Sectors

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of international and domestic *(a)* regulation and *(b)* financial support on the (i) science and (ii) biotechnology sectors in the United Kingdom. [128121]

Jacqui Smith: International and domestic regulation of science in general, and biotechnology in particular is necessary to encourage scientific and technological innovation, while protecting the legitimate interests of members of the public and other groups that might be affected by scientific developments.

The biotechnology regulations in place maintain a framework for ethical scientific study in an industry of rapid expansion and improvement. The Government realises that a supportive regulatory environment in the UK and Europe will be critical to the success of the UK biosciences sector.

The Government regularly monitors the effect of scientific regulation. The government/industry Bioscience Innovation and Growth Team is considering the topic of regulation and is likely to make recommendations for action in its report which is due to be published in the autumn.

The Government is committed to support UK science. In 2000 the budget for science and technology increased by 7 per cent. in real terms, year on year, and as a result of the last spending review it will be increasing at 10 per cent. per annum in real terms over the next three years. In 1997–8 the science budget was 1.3 billion. By 2005–6 it will be 2.9 billion. The Government has also invested heavily in modernising the scientific infrastructure of the country.

The Government's cross-cutting Review of Science and Research published in March 2002 included a review of funding of the UK science base, and the effectiveness of departments' own science and research programmes to ensure that they are delivering maximum long-term benefits to the economy and quality of life. Following this review, the Government published in July 2002 its strategy for science, engineering and technology—"Investing in Innovation"

The Government regularly assesses the effect of its financial support for the biotechnology industry. The Bioscience Innovation and Growth Team is also reviewing government support for the sector.

Trade Liberalisation

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment her Department has made of the consequences of dumping of goods by developed countries upon trade liberalisation in developing countries. [121283]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK has long been conscious that reductions in the currently high levels of trade-distorting support in the agriculture sector are necessary to address over-production in the developed world and the consequent disruption of world commodity markets, which are of vital interest to developing countries. So the UK was pleased that all WTO members agreed at Doha in November 2001 to "comprehensive negotiations aimed at: reductions of, with a view to phasing out, all forms of export subsidies; and substantial reductions in trade-distorting domestic support."

Unpaid Bills

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of bills remained unpaid in excess of 30 days in each year since 2001 in her Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies; what the *(a)* longest and *(b)* average time is that an invoice has remained outstanding for payment in that period; and whether it is her Department's policy to pay interest on late payment of invoice. [126653]

Ms Hewitt: The percentage of bills that were unpaid by the Department and its agencies within 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice was 2.3 per cent. for the financial year 2001–02 and 2.8 per cent. for the financial year 2002–03.

Information on the longest and average time that an invoice has remained outstanding for payment by the Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The Department's policy is to pay interest on late payment of undisputed and correctly presented invoices where appropriate in line with relevant legislation.

Wind Generators

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many wind generators are working in the United Kingdom; and how many are planned to be built in the next five years. [129062]

Mr. Timms: My Department does not collate figures for all wind turbine generators in the UK. Only if a wind farm application is referred to DTI through section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 or through the Transport and Works Act 1992 (wind farms of an installed capacity of 50 megawatts or above onshore and 1MW or above offshore) would this Department have figures. The British Wind Energy Association states that the current number of wind turbines operating in the UK which are grid connected is 1,030, and the total installed capacity for operating wind turbines in the UK is 587 megawatts.

Wind generation will provide an important contribution to the Government's target of generating 10 per cent. of electricity from renewable energy sources by 2010. It is for wind farm developers to bring forward their proposals for future developments. There have been an encouraging number of applications for wind farms that have received planning consent and I expect this trend to continue.

WTO Negotiations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent steps she has taken to protect water services in developing countries within the WTO negotiations. [120517]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Water services are the responsibility of individual WTO member countries, who are responsible for the regulatory environment and any other requirements on the provision of water services. The Department for International Development (DFID) provides technical assistance in a number of developing countries aimed at improving regulatory capacity. DFID also provides a range of trade-related support to help developing countries pursue their interests with respect to WTO agreements.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Al-Qaeda

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of co-ordinated al-Qaeda activity against British interests abroad. [129078]

Mr. MacShane: Al-Qaeda and related groups continue to pose a significant global threat, including to British interests abroad. The mounting of more than one attack simultaneously is a technique that has been employed by such terrorist groups. It remains vital for the international community to maintain a co-operative and comprehensive approach to tackling international terrorism. The capture of a significant number of senior al-Qaeda figures and the disruption of terrorist operations, planning, financing and support as a result of the international effort, has had, and continues to have, a substantial negative impact on the organisation.

Departmental Computer Security

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much has been *(a)* budgeted and *(b)* spent by his Department since April 2002 on (i) combating computer fraud, (ii) preventing theft of computers and (iii) safeguarding the security of information held on computer; and if he will make a statement. [128794]

Mr. Rammell: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) manages the security of its information, including information held on its computer systems, in accordance with the guidance given in the Manual of Protective Security, a comprehensive body of policy and interdepartmentally agreed security standards that is issued by the Cabinet Office.

It is not possible to identify the resources devoted to these activities, since they form a part of the FCO's overall effort to combat illegal and unauthorised actions against its computer and other systems, and the theft of official assets from its buildings.

The FCO's internal auditing services are designed to deter and detect all types of fraud, including ensuring that anti-fraud controls are integrated into all systems at the development stage.

Internal security and access controls are in part designed to act as a deterrent against theft of official assets.

IT security controls, including auditing, are deployed to safeguard the information held on official IT systems.

The FCO is also a full participant in the current programme of compliance with BS7799, the British Standard for Information Security, and expects to achieve this by the end of 2003.

Departmental Staff

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many jobs under the remit of his Department in *(a)* the core Department, *(b)* non-departmental public bodies, *(c)* executive agencies, *(d)* independent statutory bodies, organisations and bodies financially sponsored by his Department and *(e)* embassy and consular are in (i) Scotland, (ii) each region in England, (iii) Wales, (iv) Northern Ireland and (v) overseas, broken down by (A) whole-time equivalent jobs and (B) the percentage per individual Department, body or organisation. [127312]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information requested is detailed in the following table.

	London		*East*		*East Midlands*	
	Staff	*Percentage*	*Staff*	*Percentage*	*Staff*	*Percentage*
FCO[1]						
(i) UK based	2,430.00	41.53	0.00	0.00	970.00	16.58
(ii) Locally employed (LE)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
NDPBs[2]						
Britain-Russia Centre	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
British Assoc. for Central and Eastern Europe	4.20	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
British Council	621.00	8.51	4.00	0.05	1.00	0.01
Great Britain-China Centre	5.40	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission	2.50	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Westminster Foundation for Democracy	10.00	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Wilton Park[3]	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
BBC						
World Service	1,290.00	82.27	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Monitoring	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

	West Midlands		*South East*		*South West*	
	Staff	*Percentage*	*Staff*	*Percentage*	*Staff*	*Percentage*
FCO[1]						
(i) UK based	0.00	0.00	120.00	2.05	0.00	0.00
(ii) Locally employed (LE)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
NDPBs[2]						
Britain-Russia Centre	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
British Assoc. for Central and Eastern Europe	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
British Council	2.00	0.03	20.00	0.27	3.00	0.04
Great Britain-China Centre	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Westminster Foundation for Democracy	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Wilton Park[3]	0.00	0.00	69.00	100.00	0.00	0.00
BBC						
World Service	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Monitoring	0.00	0.00	391.00	75.48	0.00	0.00

	North East		*North West*		*Yorkshire*	
	Staff	*Percentage*	*Staff*	*Percentage*	*Staff*	*Percentage*
FCO[1]						
(i) UK based	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
(ii) Locally employed (LE)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
NDPBs[2]						
Britain-Russia Centre	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
British Assoc. for Central and Eastern Europe	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
British Council	2.00	0.03	362.00	3.96	2.00	0.03
Great Britain-China Centre	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

	North East		North West		Yorkshire	
	Staff	*Percentage*	*Staff*	*Percentage*	*Staff*	*Percentage*
Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Westminster Foundation for Democracy	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Wilton Park[3]	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
BBC						
World Service	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Monitoring	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

	Wales		Northern Ireland		Scotland	
	Staff	*Percentage*	*Staff*	*Percentage*	*Staff*	*Percentage*
FCO[1]						
(i) UK based	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
(ii) Locally employed (LE)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
NDPBs[2]						
Britain-Russia Centre	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
British Assoc. for Central and Eastern Europe	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
British Council	7.00	0.10	26.00	0.36	37.00	0.51
Great Britain-China Centre	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Westminster Foundation for Democracy	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Wilton Park[3]	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
BBC						
World Service	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Monitoring	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

	Overseas		
	Staff	*Percentage*	*Total*
FCO[1]			
(i) UK based	2,331.00	39.84	[1]5,851.00
(ii) Locally employed (LE)	9,792.00	100.00	[1]9,792.00
NDPBs[2]			
Britain-Russia Centre	0.00	0.00	[2]0.00
British Assoc. for Central and Eastern Europe	0.00	0.00	4.20
British Council	6,213.00	85.11	[3]7,300.00
Great Britain-China Centre	0.00	0.00	5.40
Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission	0.00	0.00	2.50
Westminster Foundation for Democracy	0.00	0.00	10.00
Wilton Park[3]	0.00	0.00	69.00
BBC			
World Service	278.00	17.73	1,568.00
Monitoring	127.00	24.52	518.00

[1] The staff numbers for FCO include staff working at posts overseas, and include consular staff.

[2] As of 1 April 2003 the FCO no longer sponsors the Britain-Russia Centre.

[3] The staff figures for British Council include staff on local contracts and teachers on contract.

Diego Garcia

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 24 February to the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch), *Official Report*, column 245W, on Diego Garcia, what stocks of anti-personnel landmines are held on Diego Garcia; what assurances the Government received from the United States during 2003 relating to munitions kept on Diego Garcia; and if he will make a statement. [129509]

Mr. Straw: UK officials raised these issues in the course of the annual bilateral talks on the British Indian Ocean Territory in June 2003. US officials assured us that no anti-personnel landmines are stored on Diego Garcia.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 15 July to the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch), *Official Report*, column 193W, on Diego Garcia, whether prisoners have been held in *(a)* US vessels and *(b)* US merchant vessels chartered by the US Government moored in Diego Garcia waters; what jurisdiction such prisoners would fall under; and if he will make a statement. [129511]

Mr. Straw: The United States Government have explicitly assured us that there have never been any prisoners in detention on any US vessels moored in Diego Garcia waters. The British Government are satisfied that this is correct.

Iraq

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of reports from members of the Christian community in Iraq that they have been subject to assaults, murder and discrimination since the commencement of military action in Iraq earlier this year. [128081]

Mr. Rammell: The British Office in Baghdad has received no reports from members of the Christian community suggesting any form of discrimination against them since the commencement of military action in Iraq. However, FCO Ministers have received correspondence from MPs passing on constituents' concerns about religious freedom in Iraq. Our staff in Iraq meet regularly with representatives of many Iraqi political and religious groups, including Christians, and we will continue to monitor the situation closely.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received in respect of the position of the Christian community in Iraq. [128083]

Mr. Rammell: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers and the British Office in Baghdad have not received any formal representations in respect of the position of the Christian community in Iraq. We have had some correspondence from MPs and others on the subject of religious freedom in the country.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many police officers from each police authority volunteered in response to the request to go to Iraq to help train the Iraqi Police Force; how many will be going; and for how long. [129327]

Mr. Rammell: With the agreement of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary asked the Association of Chief Police Officers to seek up to 200 volunteers to create a pool of United Kingdom police officers for training for potential deployment to Iraq. The pool is intended to sustain the deployment of up to 100 United Kingdom officers at any one time. Some may be deployed to a third country to assist in the out of country training of the Iraqi Police service. In the event of deployment, secondments will be for a period of six to twelve months.

We are continuing to receive applications and have started the selection process. To date, we have received in excess of 230 applications from 23 forces.

North Korea

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations the Government have made *(a)* directly and *(b)* through the UN Security Council to the North Korean Government on their nuclear weapons programme. [129467]

Mr. Rammell: The Government make all representations to the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) directly, through our Embassy in Pyongyang and through the DPRK Embassy in London. We continue to express our concerns about North Korea's nuclear programmes to the DPRK authorities on a regular basis. I also raised the issue with DPRK Vice Foreign Minister Choe Su Hon during his visit to London in April this year.

Telecommunications

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what interruptions of service his Department's telecommunications network has suffered since March. [129466]

Mr. Rammell: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has a Private Finance Initiative contract for the provision of its telecommunications services which gives an overall operational availability of at least 98.5 per cent. Monthly service reports confirm that this requirement is being met or exceeded. There are typically 60—70 failures per month on a network covering over 170 locations worldwide. Many of these failures last just a few minutes and some occur out of office hours. Around 40 per cent. of failures are caused by local in-country electrical supply problems. The introduction of dedicated satellite links to the FCO's more remote embassies has significantly improved network reliability.

Titanic Agreement

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the letter of 12 August, from the Under-Secretary of State, when he expects the Titanic Agreement to come into force; and if he will make a statement. [128269]

Mr. Rammell: The situation remains the same as in my letter of 12 August 2003 to my hon. Friend. The Agreement is being prepared for signature by the UK and will enter into force when it has been signed by two States.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Astra Training Services

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what research he has commissioned into the circumstances surrounding the collapse of Astra Training Services; what obligation the Government have to recompense former employees for lost pension payments; and if he will make a statement. [127072]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I have been asked to reply.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie), the responsible Minister at the time, carried out a review of the Astra collapse in 1999. That review concluded that the Government did not have any case to answer to recompense former Astra employees for lost pensions. Although I have a great deal of sympathy for the situation of former Astra employees, I consider that this is a private matter between those former Astra employees and the trustees, Fountain Trustee Limited.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to ensure that the Child Support Agency investigates the financial status of absent parents found to be in maintenance arrears. [127289]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Brian Jenkins, dated 11 September 2003:

The Secretary of State in replying to your recent Parliamentary question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You ask what steps he is taking to ensure that the Child Support Agency investigates the financial status of absent parents found to be in maintenance arrears.

When any non-resident parent is found to be in arrears, Child Support Agency caseworkers use a standardised process and approach to secure outstanding debt. This generally involves a caseworker contacting the non-resident parent by telephone to establish the non-resident parent's financial position. This would be the starting point to establishing how they wish to address the outstanding maintenance and pay arrears. If there is evidence that the non-resident parent knowingly provides false information this is referred to a specialist fraud team for full investigation.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will *(a)* enable and *(b)* encourage the Child Support Agency to make deduction of earnings orders against self-employed absent parents; [127293]

(2) what action he is taking to align the processes by which the Child Support Agency treats self-employed absent parents and PAYE absent parents. [127302]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Brian Jenkins, dated 11 September 2003:

The Secretary of State in replying to your recent Parliamentary question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You ask what action is being taken to align the processes by which the Child Support Agency treats self-employed absent parents and PAYE absent parents.

You also asked if he will *(a)* enable and *(b)* encourage the Child Support Agency to make deduction of earnings orders against self employed absent parents.

The Child Support Agency calculates maintenance due from employed and self-employed non-resident parents using broadly the same processes. In essence this requires the non-resident parent to verify their declared income and if we are satisfied, for a calculation to be made.

Deductions from earnings orders require an employer to deduct money from the salary of their employee. For self-employed non-resident parents, this method of collecting maintenance is not normally appropriate. Instead we deploy a range of alternative enforcement mechanisms, including:

(a) Levying of distress involving the use of Bailiffs

(b) Establishing a third party debt order—allowing money owed to the debtor to be frozen and sent to us to cover the outstanding debt

(c) Establishing a charging order—registering the debt against certain assets owned by the debtor

(d) Registering a County Court judgement, which may affect the debtors credit rating

(e) Applying for a warrant to commit the debtor to prison or for an order preventing them from holding or obtaining a driving licence.

The position I describe applies to England and Wales with a different but broadly similar approach in Scotland.

There are no current proposals to align enforcement arrangements to ensure exactly the same approach is taken to achieve compliance.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what funding the Child Support Agency received in 2002–03; and how many parents he estimates are not contributing to their children's welfare because they cannot be found. [128072]

Mr. Pond: The operation of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. James Wray, dated 11 September 2003:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You ask what funding the Child Support Agency received in 2002/03; and how many parents he estimates are not contributing to their children's welfare because they cannot be found.

Our annual report for 2002/03 indicates that we received £215 million as funding for core running costs. I estimate that at the end of June we do not hold a current address for around 100,000 non resident parents. The majority of these are not likely to have a current maintenance assessment requiring a payment but I do not have precise figures.

Community Care Grants

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the *(a)* highest, *(b)* lowest, *(c)* mean and *(d)* median and *(e)* modal amount was for community care grants given as a result of domestic violence in each year since 1998. [125741]

Mr. Pond: The available information is in the table, data for other years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Community care grants awarded to victims of domestic violence: 2000–01

	£
Highest amount	3,275
Lowest amount	4
Mean amount	672
Median amount	604
Modal amount	300

Notes:
1. The scan contains the total amount awarded for each application just after the latest decision on it during 2000–01. The quantities asked for (except the modal amount) given by the scan will therefore be greater than or equal to those for initial awards and less than or equal to those for final awards.
2. The lowest amount was requested and awarded in full under Direction 4*(b)*, ie for travelling expenses.
3. The modal amount corresponds to just 1.1 per cent of awards to victims of domestic violence.
4. Data are for Great Britain.
5. The information relates only to those people who have been awarded community care grants specifically as a result of domestic violence. Community care grants may also have been awarded for other reasons to other people who have been the victims of domestic violence.
6. Figures are rounded to the nearest £.

Source:
Scan of the Social Fund Computer Systems.

Disability Bill

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to introduce a Disability Bill; and if he will make a statement. [129183]

Maria Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the written statement given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 22 January 2003, *Official Report*, columns 12–13WS.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) who he recommended as preferred suppliers for the software package required by local authorities for housing benefit; [129186]

(2) whether he considered a single software package provider for local authorities with respect to housing benefit. [129187]

Mr. Pond: Local authorities have statutory responsibility for the administration of housing benefit, and have complete autonomy to select and contract with the software provider of their choice. It would, therefore, be inappropriate for the Department to consider a single software provider or recommend a preferred supplier.

We do, however, provide local authorities with good practice advice in the management of contracts with software providers.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will allow an open tender for the delivery of housing benefit in Swale; [129189]

(2) if he will send an emergency team to Swale borough council to resolve delays in housing benefit. [129188]

Mr. Pond: Local authorities are statutory independent bodies responsible for the administration of housing benefit. A decision to offer the delivery of housing benefit for tender is ordinarily a matter for the individual authority.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has powers to direct an authority to put its benefits administration out to tender in prescribed circumstances, namely when: the authority has failed to meet the standards of administration set out in a previously issued direction; or the authority is failing to meet the requirements of the legislation relating to Best Value, particularly where it is failing to put in place the necessary steps to improve its benefits administration.

However, these powers would only be used as a matter of last resort. The Government's policy is to work with, and to lend appropriate support to, struggling authorities in order to achieve sustained improvement. In line with this policy, our Departmental Help Team, a multi disciplinary team of management consultants and benefits practitioners who, by invitation, work with authorities experiencing difficulties, is due to visit Swale borough council on 29 September.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many local authorities who distribute housing benefit have contracts with Capita. [129190]

Mr. Pond: Seven local authorities contract out their benefit administration to Capita. In addition, Capita also offers a range of other services to local authorities; however, a record of those contracts is not held centrally.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Family Courts

Dr. Cable: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs whether he has consulted solicitors on the proposed re-organisation of family courts in London. [128960]

Mr. Lammy: The Greater London Magistrates' Courts Authority (GLMCA), which has responsibility for magistrates courts in the Greater London area, has recently closed a consultation period on the future organisation of its family proceedings courts. The GLMCA is currently considering the responses to its consultation paper and I am sure that it will wish to take into account the views of all involved before settling its plans. Unless a matter is referred to the Lord Chancellor according to statute this Department is not able to intervene.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

School Budgets

11. **Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools will start the school year with a budget deficit. [128979]

Mr. Miliband: Figures for balances are collected at the end of each financial year. The latest complete figures are for 31 March 2002, when balances stood at £1.1 billion. Figures for 31 March 2003 are due in October.

Teach First

13. **Jim Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the number of teachers recruited by schools since September 2002 as a result of Teach First. [128981]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Khabra).

Adult Education

16. **Mr. Joyce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the operation of the Adult Learning Grant pilots. [128984]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Adult Learning Grant pilots started this month in 10 local Learning and Skills Council areas. The grant offers up to £30 a week to help adults in further education with the costs of learning. Some 80 colleges and other further education providers are involved, together with other national and local partners. The pilots will help us establish the best operational design for future adult learning grants.

Arson

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools in each of the last five years have been subject to arson attacks; and if he will make a statement. [128776]

Mr. Miliband: The Department does not collect these figures, but takes the problem of arson in schools very seriously.

If a fire should happen in a school, the Department's primary concern is for the safety of pupils, teachers and other users. Regulation 17 of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 requires that every part of a school building, and of the land provided for a school, shall be such that the safe escape of the occupants in case of fire is reasonably assured. Schools are also covered by the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and by subsequent related regulations. These include aspects of fire safety.

Further to this, the Department has produced the guide "Fire Safety", which includes advice on how to reduce the risks of arson attacks. This complements our guidance on reducing crime in schools, such as the booklet "Improving Security in Schools" and the video "Can You See What They See?" We also have a school security website—www.dfes.gov.uk/schoolsecuritv.

Officials from my Department sit on the Arson in Schools Working Group, a group of experts representing the insurance industry, the fire and police services, local authorities and Government Departments. One of its outputs has been the publication of the guide "How to Combat Arson in Schools", which is available free and has been well received by schools.

Children's Centres

17. **Mrs. Dean:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the progress made in establishing children's centres. [128986]

Margaret Hodge: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given earlier today to my hon. Friends the Members for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) and for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths).

Children's Social Services

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will ring-fence additional funds for children's social services. [127926]

Margaret Hodge: When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, announced additional resources for children's social services on 17 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 455–58, he said that the details would be given in the autumn.

Class Sizes

Mr. Dorrell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools in Leicestershire have class sizes of more than 30 for seven to 11-year-olds. [127264]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: As at January 2003 there were 107 schools in Leicestershire with key stage 2 classes taught by one teacher where there were more than 30 pupils.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* press officers, *(c)* civil servants, *(d)* advisers to civil servants and *(e)* permanent staff were working for his Department in each year since 1996. [126482]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The numbers of Special Advisers and Press Officers in my Department for the years in question were:

	Special adviser	*Press officer*
1997	3	20.5
1998	3	29.5
1999	3	28
2000	3	28
2001	2	[1]23
2002	2	26
2003	2	23.5

[1] This excludes five members of staff who transferred to the Department for Work and Pensions following the Machinery of Government changes in 2001.

The term "adviser to civil servants" is not recognised.

Information on permanent civil service staff numbers in each department and agency is contained in Table C of the annual publication "Civil Service Statistics". Copies of the publication are laid in the Libraries of both Houses. The latest edition, based on April 2002 data, was published on 24 July 2003 and provides details of staff numbers between 1996 and 2002. The staff numbers include Press Officers.

Alternatively, this information is available at the following address on the Cabinet Office Statistics website: http://www.civil-service.gov.uk/statistics/css.htm

Fresh Start

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* failing schools have closed and *(b)* new schools opened under the Fresh Start programme since 2000; and if he will make a statement. [129315]

Mr. Miliband: Since January 2000, 29 failing schools have closed and 25 new schools have opened under the Fresh Start programme. In three cases, two adjacent failing schools have closed, to be replaced by a single Fresh Start school. In another four cases, there has been an amalgamation of a failing and a non failing school to create a new institution. One Fresh Start school, Telegraph Hill in Lewisham, which opened in 1999 and was subsequently deemed to be failing, closed in August 2001.

Further Education

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what mechanisms are in place to ensure that further education colleges offer a wide variety of courses; and what precautions are in place to prevent further education colleges from cutting back on certain types of courses which do not contribute to those colleges meeting Government targets. [129144]

Alan Johnson: Further education colleges themselves determine the range and volume of courses they offer, following discussions with the relevant local Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The local LSC is responsible for ensuring that public funding supports a broad offer of post-16 education and training adequate to meet the

needs of local communities, learners and employers, as well as focusing resources on national, regional and local priorities. Each college is in the process of agreeing a Development Plan with its local LSC which sets out how the college will contribute to the range of needs and priorities over the period 2003–06. Looking ahead, each local LSC is now leading a Strategic Area Review which aims to ensure that the future supply and distribution of courses offered by colleges and other providers offers breadth of choice and high quality to local people. The pattern of provision across a local area, and the precise mix and volume of provision offered by individual colleges, will and should evolve over time. We do not propose to put in place artificial constraints to prevent that. We have made clear our intention that we expect local LSCs to maintain a broad range of post-16 provision for local people and are confident that the mechanisms above will deliver this.

GCSEs

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what boundaries were set by each awarding body for GCSE grades A*-U in *(a)* English Language and *(b)* English Literature from 1988 to 2002; and if he will make a statement. [128553]

Mr. Miliband: The hon. Member will be aware from my answer to his earlier question on the grade boundaries for mathematics (123952) that information on grade boundaries is not routinely collected.

This is matter for QCA. Although QCA has access to detailed information on the grade boundaries set in all subjects at GCSE for each awarding body, further work will be required on this data to present it in the form requested. It will be lodged in the House of Commons Library in due course and will show the grade boundary marks for grades A*-G. 'U' does not constitute a grade it signifies an unclassified result.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 10 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 784W, on GCSE point scores, what the average capped GCSE point score was in *(a)* French, *(b)* Spanish and *(c)* German in 2003 for pupils in (i) specialist languages colleges and (ii) non-selective maintained schools; and if he will make a statement. [128560]

Mr. Miliband: The 2003 GCSE data required to answer this question is not yet available. Once the data are available, towards the middle of October, the answer will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Higher Education

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will take steps to improve arrangements for the distribution of higher education research funding. [128969]

Alan Johnson: The Government are committed to supporting and encouraging the highest quality research to ensure that we remain internationally competitive. On behalf of the Government the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) allocates research funding selectively to universities according to the quality and volume of their research activity. HEFCE is currently reviewing its research funding method for future years and consulting stakeholders on proposed changes.

Intermediate Skills

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action he is taking to increase the level of intermediate skills in the United Kingdom. [128210]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Secretary of State's responsibilities for skills are limited to England. Responsibility for the rest of the United Kingdom rests with the devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

We are taking forward a range of measures designed to raise the levels of intermediate skills. On the 9 July we published our National Skills Strategy. This White Paper sets out how we intend to address the challenge of ensuring that all employers have the right skills to support the success of their business, and individuals have the skills they need to be employable.

The skills strategy builds on our recent proposals to reform vocational routes for young people. It includes a new entitlement to free learning for those adults without a good skills foundation. We will also provide targeted support to meet priorities identified by sectors and regions, with the emphasis on technician and higher craft level skills. We will strengthen modern apprenticeships and lift the age cap, so that adults as well as young people can benefit from a high-quality vocational route to employment and further learning.

From September this year, we are piloting a new learning grant for some adults in further education in 10 pilot areas, and we will provide better advice and guidance on skills, training and qualifications, so that people know what is available, what the benefits are, and where to go. By summer 2004, a full network of Sector Skills Councils will be in place to identify skill needs in their sectors and stimulate action by employers to meet those needs.

Learning and Skills Councils

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many colleges of further education are located in each Learning and Skills Council area. [129182]

Alan Johnson: The information requested is provided in the table:

Local LSC name	*Number*
Bedfordshire and Luton	4
Berkshire	5
Birmingham and Solihull	11
Black Country	7
Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole	3
Cambridgeshire	6
Cheshire and Warrington	8
County Durham	4
Coventry and Warwickshire	7
Cumbria	5
Derbyshire	3
Devon and Cornwall	10
Essex	10

Local LSC name	*Number*
Gloucestershire	5
Greater Manchester	27
Greater Merseyside	11
Hampshire and Isle Of Wight	22
Herefordshire and Worcestershire	9
Hertfordshire	4
Humberside	9
Kent and Medway	8
Lancashire	13
Leicestershire	8
Lincolnshire and Rutland	4
London Central	14
London East	14
London North	9
London South	11
London West	7
Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire	8
Norfolk	6
North Yorkshire	7
Northamptonshire	4
Northumberland	1
Nottinghamshire	9
Shropshire	6
Somerset	6
South Yorkshire	8
Staffordshire	9
Suffolk	4
Surrey	11
Sussex	14
Tees Valley	12
Tyne and Wear	6
West of England	6
West Yorkshire	18
Wiltshire and Swindon	4
Total	397

Notes

1. In Greater Manchester the Co-operative College and Bridge College are independent and do not receive FE funding from the LSC. However, they have the legal status of FE colleges and are therefore included in the numbers above.

2. In North Yorkshire there is a similar situation with Henshaw's College. This does not receive FE funding from the LSC but is an FE college in legal terms.

3. In Nottinghamshire, Welbeck College is the MOD College for the Army. This is funded by the MOD but has the legal status of an FE college.

Source:

Provider Performance Database—DfES, Provider Plus Governance and Organisation Team—DfES, and the LSC's Provider Information Management System, September 2003.

Ofsted

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 2 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 293W, what percentage of maintained secondary school lessons inspected by Ofsted between 1995–2002 in *(a)* Year 7, *(b)* Year 8, *(c)* Year 9, *(d)* Year 10 and *(e)* Year 11 were recorded as set by ability in (i) English, (ii) French, (iii) mathematics and (iv) science; and if he will make a statement. [129133]

Mr. Miliband: This is a matter for Ofsted. HM Chief Inspector, David Bell, will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Physical Exercise

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans there are to respond to the recent Ofsted report concerning the quality of school physical exercise lessons; and if he will make a statement. [128674]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 2 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 290W.

Re-offending

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research he has commissioned into a link between numeracy and re-offending by prisoners after release. [128973]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We have commissioned the Office for National Statistics to measure the extent to which prisoners' literacy and numeracy are improved through their basic skills training, and how this relates to reducing re-offending and other aspects of their lives after release. We expect the final report to be available at the end of this year.

School Exclusion Appeals

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance notes have been sent by his Department to school exclusion appeals panels since 1998. [127891]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Between 1998 and 2001 a number of changes were made to schools exclusion and LEA appeal panel arrangements. In 2003, Chapter 6 and Annex D of Circular 10/99 were superseded by guidance called Improving Behaviour and Attendance: Guidance on Exclusion from Schools and Pupil Referral Units ref DfES/0087/2003 and further reflected changes made to exclusion policy. The changes included:

- the requirement that panels balance the interests of the permanently excluded child with that of others in the school;
- preventing panels from reinstating a pupil solely on the basis of minor technicalities in prior procedure;
- changes to the composition of appeal panel members to include head teacher(s), school governor(s) and a lay member which brought with a wealth of school based experience;
- enabling panels to decide because of exceptional circumstances or other reasons it is not practical to require reinstatement when it would otherwise have been appropriate to have given such a direction.

In addition, LEA Independent Appeal Panels were issued with an Exclusion Appeal Panels' training pack in 2001 (this was updated in 2003). This has equipped all LEAs with the resource to train their panel members on the changes.

Section 28

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions his Department has had with *(a)* the leader of Kent County Council and *(b)* officials at Kent County Council regarding section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988; and if he will make a statement. [128773]

Mr. Miliband: The Department has had no discussions with the leader of Kent County Council, or with officials, regarding Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988. Local Authorities do not determine sex education in schools and repeal of Section

28 will have no effect on what is taught. The Education Act 1996, as amended by the Learning and Skills Act 2000, places responsibility for sex and relationship education firmly on teachers and governors. Guidance sent to all schools in July 2000 makes this position clear.

Student Finance

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the name given to the student contribution towards tuition costs. [128967]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The White Paper "The Future of Higher Education" makes clear that, from 2006, neither students nor their families will have to make any contribution towards tuition costs while they are studying for their degree. Instead, they will be able to pay through a Graduate Contribution Scheme, as set out in the White Paper.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to change the interest rates charged to students who receive loans from the Student Loans Company. [129460]

Alan Johnson: Student loans are not commercial loans. The Government subsidise the actual cost of interest on the loans. However, to make sure that all borrowers pay back the same amount that they borrowed in real terms, the Government uprates the value of what is owed in line with the general rate of inflation. This is done by using the Retail Prices Index (RPI) and fixing the interest charged to that rate. The interest rate on student loans is set every year from 1 September and is based on the RPI for the previous March. This is the only way in which it changes. There are no plans to change this basis of setting the interest charged on student loans.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the effect of the introduction of top-up fees on the debt problem for students from a poorer background entering into a career in medicine. [128405]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 9 September 2003]:* My Department has responsibility for fee support for English domiciled medical students in years 1 to 4 of their courses. During those years they have the same student support as any other eligible higher education students. Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary legislation, from 2006–07 students will be liable for tuition fees of up to a maximum of £3,000 pa which they can defer, adding to their loan instead. Students from poorer backgrounds will continue, as now, to receive means tested grants for fees of £1,125 pa (2003–04 rate). Three in ten of all students will also receive means tested Higher Education Grants of £1,000. Many poorer students should in addition be eligible for bursaries and other support from universities under arrangements agreed by the Office of Fair Access. We therefore anticipate only a small average increase annually in low income students' loans as a result of the introduction of variable fees, and thus in their debt on graduation.

Fee support for English domiciled medical students in years five and six is the responsibility of the Department of Health. Currently students in those years pay no contributions to fees. In addition students may also receive a means tested NHS Bursary of up to £2,703 for those students studying in London. They remain eligible for the reduced rate of loan under the student support regulations. Department of Health Ministers have indicated that, whatever the future levels of tuition fees, they will take measures to ensure that any increase in the cost of university courses will not have an adverse impact on the supply, retention, diversity or quality of students on health professional courses, including medicine.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will *(a)* defer the payment of tuition fees until after students have completed their university course and *(b)* freeze tuition fee levels. [129093]

Alan Johnson: Students at English Higher Education Institutions will be able to defer payment of tuition fees charged in respect of academic year 2006 onwards until after they have completed their course: they will start repaying when their salary is above £15,000. The Government has made it clear that HE Institutions need greater levels of funding to compete internationally, and that it is right to seek a greater contribution from students towards the cost of their course. It therefore intends to give HE Institutions the freedom to charge fees of between £0 and £3,000 from 2006: those that wish to charge above the standard fee will only be able to do so if they have an access agreement approved by the Office of Fair Access (OFFA).

University Teachers

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to change the London allowance for university teachers; what representations he has received regarding an increase; and if he will make a statement. [128803]

Alan Johnson: The Department has no plans to intervene in what is a matter for universities themselves. As universities are independent and autonomous bodies the Government plays no part in setting the levels of pay in the higher education sector, including London weighting. These are subject to regulations between employers, their staff and their representative trade union bodies. Both my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills and myself have had correspondence and discussions with the unions for staff in higher education and the universities on this issue and we have stressed that we cannot intervene on this matter.

Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action he is taking to increase qualifications at *(a)* apprenticeship, *(b)* skilled craft and *(c)* technician level. [128209]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We will reform the qualifications framework so that it is more flexible and responsive to employers' and learners' needs. In particular, we will strengthen and extend Modern Apprenticeships as a top

quality vocational route, lifting the age cap so that adults can benefit. Through the Learning and Skills Council, we will improve standards in Modern Apprenticeships, engage more employers in providing them and ensure they meet employers' needs. Our target is that by 2004, 28 per cent. of young people will start a Modern Apprenticeship by age 22. We will also support individual learners through a new guarantee of free tuition for any adult without a good foundation of employability skills, so that many more can progress to skilled craft and technician level qualifications, and from there on to the Foundation Degree, a vocational, higher education qualification. We will test this approach from September 2004, before beginning to roll out nationally from 2005 onwards.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Explanatory Notes

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Leader of the House what plans he has to ensure that Government departments make Explanatory Notes available *(a)* on the first day that a Bill is published and *(b)* well in advance of Second Reading. [128647]

Mr. Hain: The usual practice is for Explanatory Notes to Government Bills to be made available with the Bill when it is first published. Only very occasionally has there been any delay, and in those cases the Explanatory Notes have been made available well in advance of Second Reading. Departments have been made aware of the importance of avoiding late publication.

TREASURY

Alcohol Imports

Mr. Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the volume of *(a)* tax-paid wine and *(b)* tax-paid beer imported from EU member states in (i) 2002 and (ii) 2003.[R] [127947]

John Healey: UK trade imports of beer and wine from EU member states enter the UK free from taxes and duties levied in the exporting country but pay UK duty and tax on entry into this country.

Imports into the UK arising from cross-border shopping or cross-channel passenger smuggling typically enter the UK having already paid duty and tax elsewhere in the EU and do not additionally pay UK tax and duty—legally so in the case of cross-border shopping, illegally so in the case of smuggling.

The most recent available volumes of wine and beer imported into the UK where tax was paid in another EU member state are shown in the tables. Estimates for 2003 are not yet available.

Cross-border shopping—financial year 2000–01

	Million litres
Beer	[1]100
Wine	[1]100

[1] Rounded to the nearest 50 million litres.

Cross-channel passenger smuggling—calendar year 2002

	Million litres
Beer	[1]15
Wine	[1]5

[1] Rounded to the nearest 5 million litres.

Cigarette Imports

Mr. Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many tax-paid cigarettes were imported from EU member states in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003. [R] [127948]

John Healey: UK trade imports of cigarettes from EU member states enter the UK free from taxes and duties levied in the exporting country but pay UK duty and tax on entry into this country.

Imports into the UK arising from cross-border shopping or cross-channel passenger smuggling typically enter the UK having already paid duty and tax elsewhere in the EU and do not additionally pay UK tax and duty—legally so in the case of cross-border shopping, illegally so in the case of smuggling.

The most recent available volumes of cigarettes imported into the UK where tax was paid in another EU member state are shown in the table. Estimates for 2003 are not available.

Cigarettes

	Number
Cross-border shopping—financial year 2001–02	[1]3.5
Cross-channel passenger smuggling—calendar year 2002	[2]900

[1] Rounded to the nearest half billion sticks.
[2] Rounded to the nearest hundred million sticks.

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 24 July regarding a constituent, ref: 2/03382/2003. [128956]

Mr. Boateng: I have replied to my hon. Friend.

Debt and Borrowing

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he estimates will be the levels of *(a)* national debt and *(b)* government borrowing in each of the next five years. [129082]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Member to table 2.7, Chapter 2 of the Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report, Budget 2003, Building a Britain of economic strength and social justice.

European Court of Justice

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the implications for public procurement policy of the ruling of the European Court of Justice in the Helsinki buses case (18 September 2002) about the use of environmental criteria in public procurement. [129366]

Mr. Boateng: There are no implications for the Government's public procurement policy stemming from the ruling of the European Court of Justice in the

Helsinki buses case. While the Court stated that it is permitted in principle to use criteria "relating to the preservation of the environment" when awarding a contract, the judgment makes it clear that such criteria must: be linked to the subject of the contract; not confer an unrestricted freedom of choice on the authority; be expressly mentioned in the contract documents or the tender notice; and comply with all the fundamental principles of Community law, in particular non-discrimination. This is in line with the UK's understanding of the position under the current EC procurement directives and is consistent with the Government's procurement policy based on value for money.

Net Income

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the net income of a family with two dependant children aged 18 and 12, with a gross income of £15,000 a year; and what assessment he has made of the sources of that net income. [129181]

Mr. Boateng: A single full-time earner family with two dependent children aged 12 and 18 in full-time education and gross earnings of £15,000 a year will have an annual household income of nearly £16,600. This comprises the following elements:

	£
Gross earnings	15,000
Income tax	2,050
NICs	1,140
Child benefit	1,390
Child tax credit	3,390
Total	16,590

As a result of direct tax and benefit measures introduced since 1997 a single earner household with gross earnings of £15,000 a year and two dependent children aged 12 and 18 in full-time education is now nearly £2,750 a year better off in real terms.

Poverty Reduction

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the role of international trade in the reduction of poverty in the poorest countries. [129083]

John Healey: According to figures produced by the World Bank, international trade, under the right conditions, has the ability to lift up to 300 million people out of poverty by 2015. Global trade talks need to deliver on the interests of developing countries. It is for this reason that the UK government is committed to the Doha Development Agenda of achieving a fairer world trade system for developing countries.

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total amount received from the sale of *(a)* the electricity supply industry, *(b)* the water supply industry and *(c)* British Rail was, broken down by year in which revenue was received. [128306]

Mr. Boateng: A detailed analysis of privatisation proceeds from 1979–80 to 1996–97 was published in the Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses ("PESA") 1997–98 (Cm 3601), Table 3.13. The outturn for 1996–97 and figures for subsequent years are shown in the table.

Privatisation proceeds

Billion

	Electricity supply	*Water supply*	*British Rail*
1996–97	1.5	0.0	1.4
1997–98	0.8	0.0	0.9
1998–99	0.0	0.0	0.0
1999–2000	0.5	0.0	0.0
2001–02	0.0	0.0	0.0
2002–03	0.0	0.0	0.0

Unemployment Rates

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the unemployment rate is in *(a)* South Sefton, *(b)* postcode L20 and *(c)* the UK. [128882]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas, dated 11 September 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on what the unemployment rate is in *(a)* South Sefton, *(b)* postcode L20 and *(c)* the UK. I am replying in his absence. (128882)

The United Kingdom unemployment rate for the three months ending June 2003 was 5.0%.

Estimated unemployment rates for the South Sefton geographical area are not available. However, the latest estimated unemployment rate for the Sefton local authority area, for the 12 months to February 2002, is 5.0%.

Estimated unemployment rates are not available for postcode areas. However, the number of claimants of the Jobseeker's Allowance (ISA) are available for postcode areas. In postcode district L20 there were 1,333 ISA claimants in July 2003.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

English Partnerships

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the initial version of the register of public land being compiled by English Partnerships will be *(a)* completed and *(b)* published. [127762]

Keith Hill: English Partnerships completed an initial register of surplus public sector land on 30 July 2003 and this is available to all Government departments, their agencies and non-departmental public bodies. English Partnerships are now working on a more interactive version of the register, which will allow public sector landowners to input data directly to it. Information from the register may be made public.

Housing

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if the Government will increase the proportion of affordable housing as a condition of granting planning approval for major developments. [128643]

Yvette Cooper: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has published for consultation an update of the existing guidance on planning for affordable housing. This addresses a number of matters including the size of development that could be expected to contribute to affordable housing and the circumstances when this would be appropriate. The amount of affordable housing to be sought from residential development as a proportion of the overall dwelling provision on site is currently indicated by local authority development plans. There are no proposals to set proportions through national guidance.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether the Government took account of water, energy, and transport needs in the plans to build an additional 200,000 houses in South East England. [128641]

Keith Hill: The Government are taking full account of water, energy and transport needs.

Discussions were held with water companies by consultants who undertook the growth area studies for Ashford, Milton Keynes/South Midlands and London-Stansted-Cambridge that were published last year. Further detailed local studies are under way to help determine infrastructure requirements. Discussions have taken place and will continue between the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Water UK, involving the Department of the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), the water companies, the Environment Agency and OFWAT.

The Government are committed to increasing the standard to which all publicly funded housing is built. From April 2003, all new homes funded by the Housing Corporation are required, as a condition of grant, to achieve an EcoHomes "pass" rating. Housing associations are encouraged to aim higher and achieve a "good" rating. English Partnerships are already working towards the higher "very good" benchmark on their mainstream site disposals. The Millennium Communities programme, a scheme being taken forward by English Partnerships, is working towards the "excellent" target.

EcoHomes Standards cover matters such as access to public transport, proximity to local amenities, eco-labelling of white goods, provision of external space, the ecological value of the site, and water efficiency, all of which are outside the remit of Building Regulations. The revision of Part L of the Building Regulations, which deals with energy efficiency, that came into force last year is expected to produce savings of 1.4 million tonnes of carbon by 2010. The Energy White Paper announced a further review, with the aim of making further amendments by 2005. The review will seek to further reduce the carbon emissions from new homes, through measures like improving the thermal performance of the building envelope—both of which are EcoHomes targets. The Government are also considering how improved water efficiency can be achieved in the private-funded housing sector within developments in South East England.

Later this autumn, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will be holding a Better Buildings Summit, in conjunction with the Department for Trade and Industry and DEFRA, to consider issues relating to the efficiency of all buildings. The outcomes of this summit will feed into future Government policy.

Government transport investment of £2.2 billion in Thames Gateway and the three other growth areas will complement the £610 million the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is investing in directly targeted resources over the next three years, and lever in a further £3 billion from public and private sector partners.

Planning

Kate Hoey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister over what timescale the Government expects local planning authorities *(a)* to have carried out (i) an assessment of needs and (ii) an audit of existing facilities and *(b)* to have adopted local standards of provision, as required by PPG17. [128609]

Yvette Cooper: Local planning authorities should undertake assessments of needs for open space, sports and recreational facilities, audits of existing facilities and set locally derived standards for provision, in accordance with guidance in PPG17. The timescale for this is not prescribed. Local authorities need to take the guidance in PPG17 into account in the preparation of development plans and the Government expect plans to be kept up-to-date and to properly reflect national policy guidance.

PPG17 sets out the steps to be taken to maintain adequate supply of open space and sports and recreational facilities in the absence of a robust and up-to-date assessment by a local authority.

Property Gap Funding Scheme

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister in respect of *(a)* speculative and *(b)* bespoke developments, how many grants have been made under the business and commercial property gap funding scheme; what their total value is; to whom they have been made; what the total area of land involved is; and what proportion of the total land was previously undeveloped. [128957]

Keith Hill: The state aid approval for speculative and bespoke gap-funding of business and commercial developments enables English Partnerships, the Regional Development Agencies and Local Authorities to support private sector initial investment in land and property regeneration projects that would not have proceeded without public sector support.

Speculative and bespoke gap-funding of business and commercial developments received approval from the European Commission in May last year and since then has been used to facilitate a number of projects through grants and other mechanisms, with the Regional Development Agencies providing over £25 million in support to projects under these approvals up to the end of the fiscal year 2002–03 and predict providing support

of over £12 million for fiscal year 2003–04. It is expected that speculative and bespoke gap-funding will continue to enable projects to go ahead in the future.

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much additional money is being made available in 2003–04 to *(a)* English Partnerships, *(b)* Regional Development Agencies and *(c)* local authorities for making grants available under (i) the Business and Commercial Property Gap Funding Scheme, (ii) the Housing Gap Funding Scheme, (iii) the Heritage Aid Scheme and (iv) the Land Remediation/ Dereliction Aid Scheme; and what resources were available under the former Partnership Investment Programme. [128958]

Keith Hill: State aid approvals are purely enabling actions, which allow English Partnerships, the Regional Development Agencies and Local Authorities to spend from their existing allocations in accordance with the State aid regime. No extra money has been made available through the granting of these approvals; they simply facilitate the aid granting bodies in providing support for regeneration from their existing budgets.

English Partnerships' Partnership Investment Programme was financed from English Partnerships annual allocation; no money was ring-fenced within English Partnerships budget to finance the programme.

Public Buildings

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if the Government will *(a)* adopt minimum standards for design for public buildings in the UK and *(b)* give priority to buildings of higher quality and that will offer long-term value to the community. [128642]

Yvette Cooper: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister made clear to the House in his February statement on the Sustainable Communities plan that high quality design is a key element in delivering sustainable communities.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is already working hard to drive up standards of design for public buildings through our work with CABE and also our commitment to the Better Public Buildings Initiative, which expresses the Government's commitment to delivering quality in the buildings it procures, and across the public sector.

Later this autumn, we will be holding a Better Buildings Summit, in conjunction with DTI and DEFRA, to consider issues relating to the design of all buildings. The outcomes of this summit will feed into future Government policy.

The Government's planning policies expect good design to be the aim of all those involved in new development and to be encouraged everywhere. Securing good design is central to good planning.

Thames Gateway

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister in respect of the five strategic growth areas in the Thames Gateway area identified in his announcement on 30 July, Creating Sustainable Communities– Making it Happen, what the average residential density required of the new housing developments is in order to meet the objective of providing 120,000 new homes by 2016. [128959]

Keith Hill: The Thames Gateway contains a large number and wide range of development sites. Densities of specific schemes will be determined through the local planning process. Schemes will be expected to make the best use of available land through well designed and attractive development that reflect Government policies including those relating to density set out in Planning Policy Guidance 3.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Aggregates

Mr. Mates: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how much *(a)* virgin aggregate and *(b)* processed aggregate was used by the (i) public and (ii) private sectors in Northern Ireland in each financial year from 1998–99 to 2002–03; [127415]

(2) what quantity of *(a)* virgin aggregates and *(b)* processed aggregate products was imported into Northern Ireland in each financial year from 1998–99 to 2002–03. [127416]

Mr. Pearson: The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) carries out an annual survey in January under Article 18(1) of the Quarries (NI) Order 1983. Quarry owners are required to provide the Department with information on the output and value of the minerals extracted from each quarry and of the number of people employed. DETI publish the aggregated statistics, however, the specific information sought by the hon. Member is neither collected nor held by Northern Ireland Government Departments.

Attitudinal Research

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which *(a)* political parties, *(b)* other organisations and *(c)* individuals have been given access to the attitudinal research carried out by (i) Ulster Marketing Services and (ii) Milward Brown Ulster on behalf of the Department. [125315]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Attitudinal research carried out for the Northern Ireland Office by Ulster Marketing Services and Milward Brown Ulster was commissioned for internal use to inform the advice offered to Ministers by officials. The Northern Ireland Office has not given access to political parties or to any individuals or organisations outside Government.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much was paid to *(a)* Ulster Marketing Services and *(b)* Milward Brown Ulster by the Department in each year since 1997. [125316]

Mr. Paul Murphy: In relation to total amounts spent by my Department on attitudinal research, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State on 13 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 206W. To single out amounts paid to a particular company would constitute a breach of commercial confidence.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many attitudinal surveys have been carried out by *(a)* Ulster Marketing Services and *(b)* Milward Brown Ulster which included research into voting intentions on behalf of the Department in each year since 1997. [125317]

Mr. Paul Murphy: No attitudinal surveys were carried out by Ulster Marketing Services in the years since 1997. One attitudinal survey was carried out by Milward Brown Ulster in 2002 and one in 2003. Research respondents are classified as "adults" rather than "voters".

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish the material relating to attitudinal research carried out by *(a)* Ulster Marketing Services and *(b)* Milward Brown Ulster on behalf of the Department in each year since 1997. [125318]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The attitudinal research carried out by Ulster Marketing Services and Milward Brown Ulster was commissioned for internal use to inform the advice offered to Ministers by officials. The raw material was not prepared for publication and to do so would involve a disproportionate cost.

Business Rates

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has carried out of the effects of charging rates on industrial and manufacturing premises in North Belfast. [127421]

Mr. Pearson: The decision to phase out industrial derating from 1 April 2005 over a seven-year period was taken following extensive consultation and various detailed assessments and analyses. These included Equality and Regulatory Impact Assessments at District Council level and New TSN analysis at Ward level. A specific evaluation was not carried out in respect of North Belfast. No contrary evidence emerged during the public consultation associated with the Equality Impact Assessments which ended on 8 July.

Proposals for a hardship relief scheme that would be available in exceptional circumstances will be published in a policy paper later in the year. This paper will also cover the issue of a new and/or small business relief scheme. These proposals will also be informed by separate Impact Analyses.

Cancer Deaths (Killyleagh)

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many deaths as a result of cancer there were in the Killyleagh area in each of the past five years. [124559]

Mr. Pearson: In the years 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001, there were 10, 8, 5, 3 and 4 deaths respectively, caused by "malignant neoplasms" registered to residents of Killyleagh electoral ward within Down District Council.

Community Programmes

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money his Department has spent in each year since 1998 on community relations programmes; and what estimate he has made of the value for money of such expenditure. [122634]

Mr. Spellar: The amount of money spent on community relations programmes in each of the last five financial years was as follows:

Year	*£*
1998–99	12,741,741
1999–2000	13,542,188
2000–01	12,295,712
2001–02	10,471,580
2002–03	10,403,164
TOTAL	59,454,385

The totals include funding provided under the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation 1995–99 (Peace I), the EU Physical, Social and Environment Sectoral Programme 1994–99 and the interim funding arrangements pending the coming into operation of the Peace II Programme.

Regular independent evaluations of funding of community relations programmes are commissioned. Evaluations completed within the last 3 years of the funding provided to the Community Relations Council, District Council Community Relations Programme and Co-operation Ireland, which together amount to some £4.5 million of the mainstream Community Relations Programme provision of just over £5 million annually, were generally positive about the impact of their activities to promote better Community Relations in Northern Ireland. Both Programme and project evaluations carried out in relation to the EU funding have also been generally positive.

Connswater

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will take steps to ensure that the Connswater *(a)* river and *(b)* riverbanks are made free of litter and dumped materials. [126217]

Angela Smith: The removal of large items of litter, such as shopping trolleys, is the responsibility of the owner of the property through which the river flows. However, if the debris is restricting the flow, the Rivers Agency of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, as the body responsible for maintenance of the Connswater River as a drainage channel, will take action to remove the obstruction.

With regard to sewage related litter from sewage overflows into the river, the Water Service of the Department for Regional Development has recently installed screens at the Connswater Road pumping station to help prevent sewage related debris from this source.

In addition, the Water Service, in conjunction with Department of the Environment's Environment and Heritage Service, is at present undertaking a detailed Urban Pollution Management Study of the area associated with the Connswater River, based on a previously completed Drainage Area Plan. This work is examining the sewage collection system in the Connswater area, as well as how sewage is treated, and

will identify potential solutions to control discharges of storm sewage and related litter into the Connswater River. The study is due to be completed in early 2004.

Conservation Areas

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who has responsibility for the designation of conservation areas in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [125948]

Angela Smith: The Department of the Environment's Planning Service is responsible for the designation of conservation areas in Northern Ireland, and is empowered to do so under Article 50(1) of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991.

Disabled Children

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the recommendations of the Review Group set up in Northern Ireland to look into the test of resources for the Disabled Facilities Grant in relation to disabled children are; and if he will make a statement. [126302]

Mr. Spellar: The Review Group that was set up to look at the issue hopes to report to me at the end of July/early August. I will provide a fuller reply when I have had the opportunity to consider its recommendations.

Disabled Home Adaptations

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the average length of time taken was to carry out home adaptations after a recommendation by an occupational therapist in the last year for which figures are available. [125838]

Mr. Spellar: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive measures the time taken from receipt of an Occupational Therapist (OT) recommendation to the commencement of works against agreed standards. Each adaptation is tailored to the specific needs of the individual person concerned. The length of time taken by a contractor to then complete a job is variable and can range from a few days, to a few months for extensions.

From the receipt of OT recommendation to work starting, in the Public Sector, figures for the year 2002–03 are as follows:

Lifts

(93 per cent. within 22 weeks)

While precise figures are not readily available against intermediate timescales it is considered that the bulk of cases are in fact started within 12 weeks.

Extensions

13 per cent. started within 30 weeks
48 per cent. started within 46 weeks
68 per cent. started within 60 weeks

This type of work requires building control and planning approval.

The Housing Executive is continuing to implement the recommendations of the Joint Fundamental review the aim of which was to improve all aspects of the adaptations service including the reduction of times. Specific actions include moving to a new system of contracting with a single tender covering multiple adaptations, which will allow a greater percentage of adaptations to be carried out within 60 weeks and agreement has been reached with Planning and Building control to streamline applications in respect of adaptations. The Housing Executive will keep the timescales under review and implement further improvements where possible.

Where small scale works such as change of heating systems, handrails and lowering cooker mains switches etc. are required the Northern Ireland Housing Executive is able to undertake this work without referral to an OT.

In the private sector adaptations are through Disabled Facility Grants and in 2002–2003, the average time taken between the receipt of, and completion of work following, an OT recommendation was 2 years.

Much of this period is outside the control of the Housing Executive and includes the time—

i. taken by the applicant to complete his/her formal application, including getting building control and planning approval, to enable the Housing Executive to approve a grant (the applicant is normally allowed 6 months at this stage);

ii. post approval, when it is up to the applicant to engage a contractor to undertake and complete the works (for which up to a further 12 months is normally allowed).

With the introduction of the new legislation, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive will have the power to agree with the Occupational Therapy Service a range of smallscale works that it can carry out without having to consult the OT service. This will be in line with the works it undertakes for its own tenants.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what efforts are being made to reduce the waiting lists for assessments by occupational therapists in respect of disabled housing adaptations in *(a)* the Down Lisburn Trust, *(b)* the Banbridge Craigavon Trust and *(c)* the Newry and Mourne Trust; and if he will make a statement. [126051]

Angela Smith: Down Lisburn HSS Trust has already recruited additional staff but is seeking further staff to reduce waiting lists. Interviews are scheduled for 24 July. A pilot scheme whereby an occupational therapist is locally based to ensure an earlier assessment is being evaluated and will be rolled out in the trust this year.

Craigavon and Banbridge HSS Trust has set up two clinics at Lurgan Hospital and Copperfields (Banbridge). Evening assessments have also been introduced to ensure reduced waiting times.

Newry and Mourne HSS Trust has recruited two additional occupational therapists to commence employment on 16 July to address the waiting lists.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are waiting for assessments by occupational therapists in respect of disabled housing adaptations in each of the health and social services trusts in Northern Ireland. [126053]

Angela Smith: Information is not available on the number of persons awaiting occupational therapy assessment in respect of disabled housing adaptations, as an assessment for housing adaptation can only be designated as such when the assessment is completed. The total number of persons in each health and social services trust awaiting assessment by a community occupational therapist is shown in the table in respect of the position at 31 March 2003, the latest date for which such information is available.

Persons awaiting assessment by community occupational therapists, by trust, 31 March 2003

Trust	*Persons awaiting assessment*
Down Lisburn	1,031
North and West Belfast	1,086
South and East Belfast	205
Ulster	362
Causeway	670
Homefirst	1,698
Armagh and Dungannon	277
Craigavon and Banbridge	627
Newry and Mourne	200
Foyle	764
Sperrin Lakeland	1,182
Northern Ireland Total	8,102

Dog Attacks

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* dog attacks have been reported and *(b)* complaints have been received by the Department of Environment regarding dogs in and around the grounds of Kirkistown Castle in the last 12 months; whether the land, lane leading to, and the grounds in which Kirkistown Castle lies are the property of the Department of Environment; and what action has been taken to prevent dogs from adjoining properties roaming in and around the grounds of the Castle. [126256]

Angela Smith: Kirkistown Castle, and the land on which it is sited, was acquired by the government in 1968. The site is now owned by the Department of the Environment and managed by the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS). To allow public access to the Castle, a legal right of way over the lane leading to the site was established when it was acquired. The lane also provides access to a privately owned house, adjacent to the Castle site. The boundary of the site owned by the Department has been fenced in accordance with the terms set out in the acquisition documents. This fencing is believed to be dog-proof.

EHS has no record of receiving from the public any reported incidents of attacks or other complaints about dogs in or around the Castle grounds in the last 12 months. Its own tour guide reported an incident involving herself on 17 July 2003 and this is now under investigation

The Castle is open to the public on a limited basis during July and August each year, when a tour guide is on site. Outside these months, signage identifies the Castle as being managed by EHS and provides a telephone number so that visitors can contact the local warden, (based at Scrabo Country Park), should they encounter any problems relating to the site.

Education and Library Board Staff

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether it is the policy of the Department of Education to keep its *(a)* canteen workers and *(b)* cleaners within the employment of Education and Library Boards. [125908]

Jane Kennedy: Responsibility for the terms and conditions of employment of canteen workers and cleaning staff lies with each of the Education and Library Boards, which are the employers of such staff. It will be a matter for boards, in consultation with the Department, to decide how best to handle the employment arrangements for such staff on a case-by-case basis.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures have been put in place in each Government Department to promote energy efficiency in each year since 1997. [125311]

Mr. Pearson: The energy efficiency targets embodied in the Climate Change Programme of November 2000 were included in the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government and were also adopted by the Northern Ireland Office for the areas within its control. While it is impossible to list all specific measures taken to achieve these targets, they include programmes of training in energy awareness for key staff, regular monitoring of buildings' energy performance, and investment in energy efficiency measures.

These measures have resulted in the following year on year savings since 1997:

1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
723,000	921,000	846,000	761,000	895,000	1,042,000

The Office Estate occupied by Northern Ireland government departments is currently purchasing 16.2 per cent. of its electricity requirements from non-fossil fuels, well ahead of the Climate Change target of 10 per cent. by 2008.

Equality Commission

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are employed in the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. [127428]

Mr. Spellar: At 30 June 2003 the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland employed 118 people.

Fishing Permits (Strangford)

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will amend the relevant legislation in order to permit the purchasing of fishing permits for Strangford Lough as part of the ADSEA project. [126255]

Angela Smith: Legal advice to the Department indicates that the proposed legislative amendment is outside the legislative competence of an Order in Council under the Northern Ireland Act 2001 as it

would make provision which is contrary to Community Law and/or contravenes a right granted under the European Convention on Human Rights.

Accordingly, it is not proposed to amend the legislation.

Gap Funding

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much gap funding has been awarded, broken down by district council area; and what the purpose of each award was. [123796]

Mr. Pearson: A list detailing the amount of gap funding awarded by district council area, and a list of projects awarded gap funding by district council area have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

The purpose of each gap funding award was to ensure that projects funded under the 1994–99 round of Structural Funds (PEACE I and The Northern Ireland Single Programme) which were considered likely to be eligible for support under the new round, 2000–06, were sustained during the negotiation of the PEACE II and Building Sustainable Prosperity Programmes.

Table 1: List of the amounts of gap funding awarded by district council area

£

District council area	*Amount of gap funding awarded (PEACE II)*	*Amount of gap funding awarded (BSP)*
Antrim	89,301	—
Ards	245,900	87,934
Armagh	594,875	—
Ballymena	151,751	58,918
Ballymoney	73,669	—
Banbridge	104,198	—
Belfast	8,671,977	483,891
Carrickfergus	119,888	—
Castlereagh	53,456	—
Coleraine	76,445	46,105
Cookstown	294,243	—
Craigavon	488,620	153,948
Derry	1,938,126	684,987
Down	178,633	—
Dungannon	590,515	—
Fermanagh	401,295	35,508
Larne	183,286	—
Limavady	285,284	77,918
Lisburn	570,509	—
Magherafelt	128,190	142,750
Moyle	181,422	—
Newry and Mourne	580,326	51,309
Newtownabbey	108,341	99,466
North Down	119,293	—
Omagh	451,493	—
Strabane	544,305	—
Unclassified	476,782	15,442,818
Total	17,702,123	17,365,552

Note:

Unclassified successful gap funding applications are those that either clearly benefited two or more district councils or that don't contain sufficient address information and therefore cannot be classified within any specific district council.

Table 2: List of projects awarded gap funding by district council area

	Antrim district council
BSP	N/a
Peace	Harps project
	Just Kids Afterschools Club
	Youth Sport North East

Hare Imports

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if there is a requirement to notify a local divisionary veterinary manager of an intention to import hares from the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland; and how many notifications relating to hares were received during 2002. [128194]

Mr. Pearson: There is no requirement to notify a divisional veterinary officer of an intention to import hares from the Republic of Ireland unless:

(i) the import is of a hare from the Republic of Ireland which has previously been brought to the Republic of Ireland from a country other than GB, the Channel Islands, Isle of Man or Northern Ireland and has not been detained and isolated in quarantine for a period of at least six months before entering Northern Ireland; or

(ii) my Department has reason to believe that there is an outbreak of rabies in the Republic of Ireland.

In both cases, the importation of a hare is prohibited except under and in accordance with the conditions of a licence granted by the Department for which the importer has to apply. No applications for such licences were received during 2002.

Health Trusts (Equality Implications and Market Testing)

Mr. Seamus Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make an assessment of compliance by each health trust with the directive on assessment of equality implications and market testing of 19 June 2001. [125904]

Angela Smith: A recent review of HSS trusts, showed that a broad range of approaches have been or are being developed to ensure compliance with the policy in the Department's Circular HSS (F) 27/2001, dated 29 June 2001, and entitled "Market Testing: Assessment of Equality Implications and other Related Matters". It is felt that trusts have taken forward their obligations under this policy in a correct and meaningful manner.

Mr. Seamus Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the directive to health trusts regarding assessment of equality implications and market testing of 19 June 2001 remains in force. [125906]

Angela Smith: The policy contained in the Departmental Circular HSS (F) 27/2001, dated 29 June 2001, entitled "Market Testing: Assessment of Equality Implications and Other Related Matters" remains in force.

Mr. Seamus Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what alterations and revocations there have been of the directive to health trusts of 19 June 2001, regarding assessment of equality implications and market testing, since 14 October 2002. [125907]

Angela Smith: Since 14 October 2002, there have been no alterations or revocations to the policy contained in the Departmental Circular HSS (F) 27/2001, dated 29 June 2001, and entitled "Market Testing: Equality Implications and Other Related Matters".

Home Helps

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many home helps are employed within each health and social services board area. [125840]

Angela Smith: The number of home helps employed within each health and social services board area as at 30 June 2003 is shown in the table.

HSS board	*Headcount*
Eastern	1,800
Northern	1,401
Southern	1,641
Western	1,087
Total	5,929

Hospital Waiting Lists/Times

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are on the waiting list for neurosurgery in Northern Ireland; how many were on the waiting list on *(a)* 16 July 2002 and *(b)* 16 July 1998; what assessment he has made for the length of such waiting lists; and if he will make a statement. [127053]

Angela Smith: The number of people waiting for in-patient admission to the neurosurgery specialty is returned to the Department on a quarterly basis by Trusts. The return provides information about the number of people waiting for in-patient admission on the last day of each quarter. The information in this answer relates to the position at 31 March 2003 (the most recent information available), *(a)* 30 June 2002 and *(b)* 30 June 1998.

At 31 March 2003 there were 700 people waiting for in-patient admission to the neurosurgery specialty.

(a) There were 850 people waiting for in-patient admission to the neurosurgery specialty on 30 June 2002.

(b) There were 425 people waiting for in-patient admission to the neurosurgery specialty on 30 June 1998.

The Royal Group of Hospitals, in liaison with the four Boards, has been working hard to improve the situation, both in the short-term and with regard to the longer-term development of the service. In particular:

A task force was established by the Royal to lead the effort in addressing the problems faced by the service;

Extra theatre lists have been introduced;

Proposals to enhance the recruitment and retention of nurses have been implemented to restore nursing levels and allow the phased opening of beds, with all beds re-opening by January 2004;

A clinical careers framework for nurses has also been launched to improve opportunities for personal development and career pathways;

In addition, treatment has been provided for some suitable patients in units outside Northern Ireland.

These measures should make a significant contribution to reducing the number of people waiting for in-patient admission to neurosurgery.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are on the waiting list for *(a)* orthopaedic and *(b)* cardiological procedures in Northern Ireland; and how many were on the waiting list on (i) 16 July 2002 and (ii) 16 July 1998. [127054]

Angela Smith: The number of people waiting for in-patient admission by specialty is returned to the Department on a quarterly basis by Trusts. The return provides information about the number of people waiting for in-patient admission on the last day of each quarter. Information in this answer is provided for the Trauma and Orthopaedic, Cardiac Surgery and Cardiology specialties. The information in this answer relates to the position at 31 March 2003 (the most recent information available), *(a)* 30 June 2002 and *(b)* 30 June 1998. The following table shows the number of people waiting for in-patient admission to the Trauma and Orthopaedic, Cardiac Surgery and cardiology specialties on the 31 March 2003.

Specialty	*Number of people waiting*
Trauma and Orthopaedics	5,528
Cardiac Surgery	436
Cardiology	1,345

(a) The following table shows the number of people waiting for in-patient admission to the Trauma and Orthopaedic, Cardiac Surgery and Cardiology specialties on the 30 June 2002.

Specialty	*Number of people waiting*
Trauma and Orthopaedics	6,064
Cardiac Surgery	644
Cardiology	1,339

(b) The following table shows the number of people waiting for in-patient admission to the Trauma and Orthopaedic, Cardiac Surgery and Cardiology specialties on 30 June 1998.

Specialty	*Number of people waiting*
Trauma and Orthopaedics	4,939
Cardiac Surgery	463
Cardiology	1,026

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to reduce waiting lists for *(a)* orthopaedic and *(b)* cardiological surgical procedures in Northern Ireland. [127055]

Angela Smith: Within the orthopaedic surgery specialty a number of steps have been taken to address waiting times. These steps include:

An increase in the number of trainees in the orthopaedic specialty.

The establishment of a pilot initiative involving orthopaedic surgeons, general practitioners and physiotherapists, aimed at treating people in the community, and reducing the need for consultant appointments and subsequent surgery.

The undertaking of a review of acute trauma services, which is expected to make recommendations for improvement on the delivery of trauma services and will provide strategic direction on the future development of the orthopaedic/fracture service.

In addition, waiting times for orthopaedic surgery will be further addressed by the planned increase in theatre capacity this year. The Regional Spinal Surgery Unit is expected to be fully operational by September 2003, and two new modular operating theatres are currently under construction at the Musgrave Park Hospital site. The provision of these new theatres will increase theatre capacity, increase capacity for fracture services, stabilise and reduce waiting lists, and facilitate the mix of elective, trauma and outpatient work of consultant orthopaedic surgeons.

To reduce waiting times for cardiac surgery, my Department has developed a joint action plan for the implementation of the recommendations made by the Cardiac Surgery review and the Review of Cardiology Services. In line with the Joint Action Plan, my Department is continuing to invest in additional staff and equipment at the regional cardiac surgery unit in the Royal Hospitals. This investment will facilitate an increase in the number of cardiac surgery procedures undertaken at the regional unit to the target level of 1,100 per year. Until capacity at the Royal is increased to the target level, additional cardiac surgery procedures are being purchased outside the HPSS for patients who are able and willing to travel.

Insurance Premiums

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to his answer of 24 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 710W, on insurance premiums, what steps his Department is taking to alleviate the effects of increases in business insurance premiums in Northern Ireland in the last three years. [125793]

Mr. Pearson: At national level Government are taking forward the recommendations of the review of Employers' Liability Insurance and my officials are closely involved in that work.

I have met recently with key stakeholders from NI industry and the local insurance industry. The Health and Safety Executive (NI) and Invest NI are providing practical support and advice to improve the insurability of NI businesses. Furthermore, I plan to meet shortly with a number of representatives from the GB insurance industry to discuss ways of increasing their engagement with the NI market.

Landfill Site, Mallusk

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will set up a public inquiry into the proposed superdump landfill site at Mallusk. [127399]

Angela Smith: The planning application for the proposed landfill site at Cottonmount, Mallusk was received by the Department of the Environment's Planning Service in February 1995. Whilst a Public Inquiry was considered it was decided that there was sufficient information to reach a decision without the need for an Inquiry. In June 1997 Planning Service proceeded by way of Notice of Opinion in accordance with Article 31(3) of the Planning (Northern Ireland) 1991. Having taken this route the only options now available to Planning Service are either to issue a Notice of Opinion to Approve or a Notice of Opinion to Refuse. The only available provision for a Public Hearing would be if the applicant appeals either a future Notice of Opinion to Approve or a Notice of Opinion to Refuse.

Languages

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what funding was provided for the promotion of the *(a)* Irish language and *(b)* Ulster-Scots language in each year since 1998. [126502]

Angela Smith: The promotion of the Irish and the Ulster-Scots languages is the responsibility of the North/South Language Body and its two Agencies Foras na Gaeilge (the Irish Language Agency) and Tha Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch (the Ulster-Scots Agency).

The North/South Language Body is jointly funded by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DCRGA). The funding provided by the North/South Language Body for the promotion of the Irish and Ulster-Scots languages is shown as follows.

£

	Foras na Gaeilge—funding for Irish language promotion	*Tha Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch—funding for Ulster-Scots language promotion*
1998	Nil	Nil
1999	Nil	Nil
2000	1,837,000.00	4,000.00
2001	2,000,000.00	3,000.00
2002	2,640,000.00	14,000.00
2003 to date	1,405,000.00	24,000.00

Funding is available from departmental mainstream programmes for projects which may have an Irish or Ulster-Scots language dimension which cannot be separated from the primary funding objectives.

Murdered RUC Officers

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make further resources available to the Police Service of Northern Ireland Chief Constable to investigate the unsolved murders of RUC officers; and if he will make a statement. [124798]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I am very conscious of the feelings surrounding such an emotive issue as unsolved murders, and I have the deepest sympathy for the relatives of police officers who have suffered in this way.

Government has made available over £2.1 billion for policing over the next three years. It is for the Chief Constable to manage those considerable resources in the delivery of a day to day policing service including the conduct of criminal investigations. I know he is currently reviewing a variety of murder cases where there is a realistic prospect of securing a conviction.

North-South Ministerial Council

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many meetings of the North and South Ministerial Council have been held since the suspension of devolved government in Northern Ireland. [125552]

Mr. Spellar: None.

Older People's Rights Commissioner

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his policy is on the establishment of an Older People's Rights Commissioner for Northern Ireland. [126497]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the honourable Gentleman to the previous answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on 3 July 2003 (122352).

Parades Commission

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what costs have been associated with the operational running of the Parades Commission in each of the last three financial years. [122554]

Jane Kennedy: The breakdown of the Parades Commission's operating costs is available in its Annual Reports which are laid before Parliament.

Peace II Programme

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what impact the N + 2 requirement of the funding process for the Peace II programme will have upon the allocation of the total funds made available under this programme; and if he will make a statement. [126119]

Mr. Pearson: For all Structural Funds Programmes the N + 2 requirement means that any part of an annual commitment not properly claimed from the European Commission by the end of the second year following the year of commitment will automatically be withdrawn. For the PEACE II Programme monies committed for 2000 and 2001 must be spent and claimed from the European Commission by the end of 2003, otherwise the monies will be lost to the Peace II Programme.

As regards the current position the PEACE II Monitoring Committee on 24 June 2003 adopted a strategy to ensure that funds are fully utilised. This strategy has three key components. The first is to maximise spend up to 31 December 2003 and this can be achieved by all Implementing Bodies and project sponsors continuing to approve and implement projects on the ground in line with the Priorities and Measures specified in the Programme. The second component involves working closely with the SEUPB and the European Commission to ensure that the N + 2 target for the Programme at the end of the year is set with due regard to the full and proper application of the various Regulatory provisions involved. I anticipate this work will involve a reduction in the expenditure targets for this year. However, while both the above are producing results, they alone will not be sufficient to avoid a loss of funding. Therefore the third component is to increase spend through the inclusion of projects which were not originally intended to be funded through the PEACE II Programme, but which nonetheless meet the distinctiveness and other requirements of the Programme. This will mean that some existing Departmental spend would be scored against the Programme in the remainder of this year.

However, since this will release the same quantum of resources from Departmental expenditure, I intend to use these resources to rebalance the Programme early in 2004 and thereby ensure that activities originally intended can go ahead as planned.

I have also commissioned a review of the PEACE II Programmes Implementing systems and processes.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how long it has taken on average to process an application form and the issuing of payments in respect of the Peace II programme; and if he will make a statement. [126120]

Mr. Pearson: The average time to process an application form in respect of the Peace II Programme is 79 working days, including unsuccessful applications. In the vast majority of cases payments have been made to projects within 10 working days of receipt of a request for payment by the Special EU Programmes Body.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the projects funded under the Peace II European Initiative in North Belfast in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003. [125314]

Mr. Pearson: The information requested will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Personal Security

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been notified by the police in the past two years that private information about them had been found in the possession of republicans; and what the associated costs of upgrading their personal security was. [123699]

Mr. Paul Murphy: For the two year period to 30 June 2003, a total of 3,558 persons have been notified. These figures are not held centrally and so may be subject to adjustment.

There are a number of schemes to which individuals may apply to upgrade their personal security. Obtaining the relevant information would only be possible by searching on a case by case basis. Therefore the associated costs of upgrading the personal security of these individuals could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Planning

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many officials are employed in the Planning Appeals Commission, broken down by grade. [127413]

Mr. Spellar: The Planning Appeals Commission consists of 15 commissioners and four call-off panel commissioners, who are all statutory officeholders. There are also 18 administrative support staff who are

civil servants provided by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. The breakdown by grade is as follows:

1 Chief Administrative Officer (Deputy Principal)

1 Executive Officer I

3 Executive Office II

7 Administrative Officers

2 Administrative Assistants

1 Personal

3 Typists

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the average length of time taken by the Planning Service in Northern Ireland to issue a final decision in respect of planning applications in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* Belfast over the last three years. [125553]

Angela Smith: The average time taken by the Department of the Environment's Planning Service to issue a final decision in respect of planning applications in Northern Ireland, and in Belfast over the last three years is as follows:

	2000–01	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Average time in Northern Ireland			
Total average days	139	134	137
Total average weeks	20	19	20
Average time in Belfast			
Total average days	143	134	134
Total average weeks	20	19	19

Prescriptions

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prescriptions were issued in Northern Ireland in the year 2002–03; what the total cost of such prescriptions was; and what percentage of such prescriptions was paid for by the Government. [126504]

Angela Smith: The number of prescriptions issued is not known; however, the number of prescriptions submitted for payment in 2002–03 was 14,622,156 covering some 25,501,388 items.

The cost in 2002–03 of prescriptions, before deduction of patient contributions, was £322.8m. In 2002–03 patient contributions totalled £12.7m leaving the percentage paid for by Government at 96.1 per cent. (£310.1m).

Of the 25,501,388 items that were dispensed 6.1 per cent. were paid for at the point of dispensing. The remaining 93.9 per cent. of items did not have the £6.20 charge paid at the point of dispensing because either the patient had a pre-payment certificate and therefore did not have to pay or the patient was exempt from payment due to age, benefit status or other reason given on the back of the prescription form.

Primary Schools

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will introduce a system of funding for primary schools in Northern Ireland which is on the same basis as the arrangements in England. [125848]

Jane Kennedy: The system for funding primary schools in Northern Ireland is very similar to that of England in that delegated budgets are determined by means of a formula developed and operated by the Education and Library Board (in England the LEA has this responsibility).

The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 provides for the introduction of a Common Funding Scheme which will include a single common formula for the calculation of the delegated budgets of all schools, except special schools. This will ensure that schools of similar size and characteristics receive similar levels of funding.

Public Administration Review

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost of *(a)* establishing and *(b)* operating the review of public administration in Northern Ireland has been. [123717]

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much has been spent on the Review of Public Administration. [125306]

Mr. Pearson: Expenditure on the Review of Public Administration (RPA) since April 2002 totals £1.06 million, of which £0.15 million has been attributed to the establishment of the Review and £0.91 million to its subsequent operation.

Public Bodies

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many public bodies operated in Northern Ireland in the last year for which figures are available; [123786]

(2) how many people on each of the public bodies in Northern Ireland are members of the *(a)* DUP, *(b)* UUP, *(c)* SF, *(d)* AP and *(e)* SDLP. [123787]

Mr. Pearson: Information on quangos is available in "Public Bodies", a publication produced annually by the Cabinet Office. This publication provides information on the size, spend and membership of public bodies in the UK and includes non-departmental public bodies attached to the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments. The current edition of the publication, "Public Bodies 2002" is available in the House of Commons Library.

Information on the political affiliation of those appointed to serve on quangos is not available. However, the Public Appointments Annual Report provides an analysis of all appointments made by Northern Ireland Departments and includes statistics on applicants and appointees who have declared political activity within the past five years. A copy of the latest report (covering the period April 2001 to March 2002) was placed in the Library of the House in January 2002.

Refrigerator and Freezer Disposal

Mr. Nigel Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his policy for the disposal of refrigerators and freezers in Northern Ireland. [125841]

Angela Smith: European Commission Regulation 2037/2000 on Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS), which came into effect on 1 October 2000, requires the removal of controlled ODS from refrigeration equipment before these appliances are scrapped. Recovery, recycling, reclamation and destruction of such substances may be undertaken using only approved technologies. The necessary technology is not yet available anywhere in Ireland; a few facilities are now available in Great Britain.

Currently, responsibility for collection, storage and disposal of waste fridges lies with district councils. The Department of the Environment, through the waste management grant scheme, is fully funding district councils in taking forward this responsibility. The Department has also taken a proactive role in assisting councils to seek to achieve a cost-effective, environmentally-sound approach to the disposal of fridges. To this end a collective contract for the disposal of fridges on an all-island basis is currently under negotiation aided by the Central Procurement Directorate (Department of Finance and Personnel).

In August 2005 ultimate responsibility for collection and disposal of fridges will transfer from district councils to producers under the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive (WEEE) 2002/96/EC. The Department will, after that date, continue to have a role in ensuring the availability and accessibility of the necessary collection facilities in accordance with the requirements of the WEEE Directive. The detailed out-workings of the directive continue, however, to be the subject of discussion between officials in my Department, the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department of Trade and Industry. Public consultations with stakeholders are also on-going.

Regulatory Bodies

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the *(a)* number of staff employed by and *(b)* budget of each regulatory body for which his Department is responsible in each year since 1997. [117782]

Mr. Pearson: Information on regulatory bodies is available in "Public Bodies", a publication produced annually by the Cabinet Office. This publication provides information on the size, spend and membership of public bodies in the UK and includes non-departmental public bodies attached to the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments. The current edition of the publication, "Public Bodies 2002" is available in the House of Commons Library.

Reinvestment and Reform Initiative

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland under what terms the borrowing facility under the Reinvestment and Reform Initiative can be accessed; what constitutes revenues in Northern Ireland for the purposes of accessing borrowing; and whether movement towards convergence must occur between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. [123706]

Mr. Pearson: The borrowing facility provided under the Reinvestment and Reform Initiative (RRI) will operate under the standard terms for borrowing from the National Loans Fund as determined by the Treasury. Access to the borrowing facility will be contingent upon the generation of additional rates revenue, and revenue from domestic water charges once introduced. Only revenue above the level needed to match average increases in England will count as qualifying revenue for borrowing purposes.

Road Safety

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* fatal and *(b)* non-fatal accidents, broken down by their road classification, there were in each of the past three years. [122539]

Angela Smith: The table outlines the number of fatal and non-fatal accidents in Northern Ireland in each of the past three years. It should be noted that the information on road classification is not available, a breakdown is however provided by rural and urban areas based on speed limits.

Road Traffic Injury Collisions by Road Type: NI 2000—2002

	Fatal Collisions	*Serious Collisions*	*Slight Collisions*	*Total Collisions*
2000				
Roads in Urban Areas	46	639	4532	5217
Roads in Rural Areas	103	636	2432	3171
Total	149	1275	6964	8388
2001				
Roads in Urban Areas	36	602	3847	4485
Roads in Rural Areas	101	639	2222	2962
Total	137	1241	6069	7447
2002				
Roads in Urban Areas	37	506	3492	4035
Roads in Rural Areas	99	599	2051	2749
Total	136	1105	5543	6784

Schools

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many incidents of vandalism against school property occurred in *(a)* North Belfast, *(b)* Belfast and *(c)* Ireland; and what the total cost was in each area, in each year since 2000. [127422]

Jane Kennedy: The cost of vandalism met by each Education and Library Board in controlled and maintained schools in each financial year since 2000 is as follows:

£

Education and Library Board	*2000-01*	*2001-02*	*2002-03*
Belfast	356,250	485,000	292,000
Western	62,958	42,263	53,623
North-Eastern	272,036	286,121	226,994
South-Eastern	189,741	248,122	69,449
Southern	78,286	133,708	140,713
Total	959,271	1,195,214	782,729

The computerised system currently operated by the 5 Education and Library Boards is being upgraded at this time and information on the number of incidents of vandalism in schools and on the cost of such incidents is not available at present. The information on North

Belfast schools is also not available at this time. I will write to the honourable member when this information becomes available.

Secondments

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his Department's policy is on employing secondees from the private sector; how many secondees from the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sectors his Department employed in each year since 1997; from which companies and organisations they were seconded; at what level they were employed; and if he will make a statement. [127061]

Mr. Pearson: This response covers both the Northern Ireland civil service and the Northern Ireland Office.

Policy on inward secondments is set out both in the Northern Ireland Civil Service Commissioners' Recruitment Code and in the GB equivalent. Inward secondments are generally used to meet particular business needs, for example where there is a shortage of skills or expertise to undertake particular work.

In addition, both the Northern Ireland civil service and Northern Ireland Office participate in interchange schemes. These recognise the value of interchange for skills transfer and staff development, and facilitate staff exchanges with the private, voluntary and wider public sectors.

Since 1997 there have been 37 secondments from the private sector and 185 from the public sector to the Northern Ireland civil service. There were no secondments from the private sector and 38 from the public sector to the Northern Ireland Office during the same period. A breakdown is provided in the tables which have been placed in the Library.

Sick Leave (Health Professionals)

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many days of sick leave was taken in the last 12 months by *(a)* doctors, *(b)* nurses, *(c)* other health care professionals and *(d)* other employees in each health trust. [124520]

Angela Smith: The number of sick leave days taken in the last 12 months up to and including 30 June 2003 by *(a)* doctors, *(b)* nurses *(c)* other health care professionals and *(d)* other employees in each health trust is as follows:

Health and social services trusts	*Doctors*	*Nurses*	*Other health care professionals*	*Other employees*
Altnagelvin Hospitals Trust	1,100	10,867	2,171	17,430
Armagh and Dungannon Trust	297	8,581	1,824	10,871
Belfast City Hospital Trust	997	23,297	7,976	18,883
Causeway Trust	70	16,678	3,197	24,684.5
Craigavon Area Hospital Trust	733.4	9,018.4	2,546.1	9,788.1
Craigavon and Banbridge Community Trust	143.8	3,505.7	977.6	11,368.3
Down and Lisburn Trust	352	14,712	3,281	29,254
Foyle Trust	80.8	8,886.2	1,620.7	19,244.2
Greenpark Trust	86	12,291.9	2,639.9	3,385.7
Homefirst Community Trust	532	15,464	3,202	40,991
Mater Infirmorum Trust[1]	310	4,771.8	941.21	6,532.94
Newry and Mourne Trust	158	10,326	4,470	[2]9,937
North and West Belfast Trust	183	8,698.1	5,953.9	37,160
Royal Group of Hospitals Trust	951.5	25,905.4	8,341.4	47,270.4
South and East Belfast Trust	230.8	13,509.6	6,786.5	19,068.4
Sperrin Lakeland Trust	324.9	20,804.5	2,359.5	19,767.7
Ulster Community and Hospitals	511.1	21,468.2	12,498.9	26,176.4
United Hospitals Trust	770	19,111	4,189	23,107
Northern Ireland Ambulance Service[3]	n/a	n/a	9,047.38 (hours)	701. 88 (hours)

[1] Period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003.
[2] This figure does not include community care assistants.
[3] The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service was only able to provide information in hours due to the shift pattern worked by employees. The figures provided are for year ending May 2003.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many general practitioners in Northern Ireland are on sick leave from work. [124521]

Angela Smith: Not all GPs report when they are unable to attend work due to sickness. The total number of GPs on sick absence is therefore not known. As at 30 June 2003, the Central Services Agency is aware of 18 general practitioners absent from their practice due to sickness and is paying for the employment of locums.

Smoking

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many smoking rooms the Northern Ireland Civil Service maintains; how frequently staff are permitted to attend to smoke; for what length of time; at what cost; and if he will make a statement. [126161]

Mr. Pearson: There are some 158 smoking rooms currently in operation in the Northern Ireland Civil Service and NIO within the general office estate.

Although no central guidance has been issued on the frequency or length of absences permitted in order to use smoking rooms, line managers are required to ensure that any individual cases of abuse of the facility are identified and dealt with quickly.

As use of smoking facilities is at management discretion and the cost of providing and maintaining the smoking rooms is not identified separately from other accommodation costs the cost of this facility could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

The NICS has been trying to encourage staff to give up smoking through its Workplace health Improvement Programme. This programme is designed to raise awareness of a range of health issues, including smoking, and offers practical advice to encourage staff to adopt/maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Car Parking (Stormont)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Stormont estate car parking spaces there are; how many such spaces have been built since 1995; how much parkland he plans to use for car parking spaces; and what his policy is on the growth of car parking provision on the estate. [126162]

Mr. Pearson: There are approximately 2500 car parking spaces within the Stormont Estate. Around 400 of these are adjacent to Parliament Buildings and are for the use of Assembly members, staff and visitors. The remaining 2100 are used by civil servants working on the Estate, together with visitors and contractors. This total includes spaces designated for use by people with disabilities and for visitors. No extra spaces have been created since 1995 apart from 25 temporary spaces provided recently but the opportunity is currently being taken to upgrade a redundant builder's compound to provide an additional 70 parking spaces. Any further development for parking will be dependent upon decisions on the implementation of the recommendations in the recently completed Accommodation Review.

Social Housing

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many new homes for social renting have been completed in North Belfast in each of the last five years and what their locations are. [125837]

Mr. Spellar: House completions, for the last five years in the Belfast North constituency, totalled 889, as follows:

	Number of houses completed
1998–99	181
1999–2000	190
2000–01	192
2001–02	196
2002–03	130
Total	889

A list of locations is provided in the table.

Houses completed in Belfast North constituency

Provider	*Location*	*Units*
1998–99		
BIH	Glencairn	33
BIH	159–161 Cavehill Road	8
Flax	Rosebank Mill, Flax Street	38
Flax	Ardoyne Bus Depot, Ph1	40
Flax	Thorndale, Duncairn Avenue	11
Oaklee	21 Skegoneill Avenue	5
Triangle	Squireshill Crescent, Ligoneill	12
Woodvale and Shankill	57 Glencairn Crescent	1
NIHE	Carrick Hill	9
NIHE	Downview Gardens	14
NIHE	Lower Regent Street	4
NIHE	Plunkett Court	4
NIHE	Squireshill Park	2
Total		181
1999–2000		
Clanmil	30 Cairnshill Park	4
Filor	Lawnbrook, Ph2	26
Filor	Lawnbrook, Ph2b	1
Newington	171 Limestone Road	48
Oaklee	Buncrana Gardens	24
Ulidia	Salisbury Avenue	10
Woodvale and Shankill	Broom/Bracken, Ph2	26
NIHE	Downview Gardens	12
NIHE	Plunkett Court	4
NIHE	Carlisle Road	8
NIHE	Hillman Close	8
NIHE	Hillman Street	3
NIHE	North Queen Street	9
NIHE	Spamount Street	6
NIHE	Wall Street	1
Total		190
2000–01		
BIH	Centenary House, Waring Street	40
BIH	Dover Street	8
Clanmil	13 Harcourt, Cliftonville	1
Clanmil	109 Skegoneill Avenue	1
Clanmil	13 Newington Avenue	1
Filor	Lawnbrook, Ph3	30
Flax	Ardoyne Bus Depot, Ph2	14
Fold	Crumlin Road	21
Fold	Torrens, Ph1	18
Habinteg	3 1 Cliftonville Avenue	7
Oaklee	Clifton Park Avenue	33
NIHE	Hillman Court	9
NIHE	Pepperhill Street	5
NIHE	Stanhope Street	4
Total		192
2001–02		
Filor	Lanark Way/Kirk Street	26
Fold	Rosewood/Crumlin, Ph2	22
Fold	Alliance, Ph3	32
Newington	Newington Rehabs	10
Newington	Community Gardens, Limestone Road	8
Newington	New Lodge, HAA, Ph2	26
Oaklee	62–76 Cliftonville Road	8
Oaklee	Roe Street/BCC Depot	36
Oaklee	Black's Court, Ph2	8
Oaklee	Dumbarton, Ph2	2
Ulidia	Antrim Road	16
Woodvale and Shankill	20 Mayo Park	1
Woodvale and Shankill	35 Woodvale Parade	1
Total		196
2002–03		
BIH	Clifton House, North Queen Street	83
Filor	3 Northwood Drive	6
Flax	211 Old Park Road	1
Fold	Wheatfield, Ph1	13
Newington	Newington, Ph2A	8
Newington	Newington, Ph2B	2
Oaklee	The Maples, Chief Street	12
Triangle	Squireshill Crescent	3
Woodvale and Shankill	8 Crumlin Gardens	1
Woodvale and Shankill	15 Crumlin Gardens	1
Total		130

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many teachers are employed in North Belfast to cater for children with special educational needs. [127423]

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Jane Kennedy: Under Special Educational Needs Legislation, Education and Library Boards have a qualified duty to secure education for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in a mainstream placement. Therefore the majority of children identified as having SEN will have their needs met by mainstream teachers with, where required, support from a classroom assistant or outside specialist support, such as outreach from special schools, assistance from a behaviour support team, or speech and language therapy help from outside the school. In this sense, all teachers may have a role in providing educational help for children with SEN.

Under Local Management of Schools (LMS) arrangements, mainstream schools have the majority of funding for special needs within their delegated budgets. Schools have discretion as to how the money is spent, e.g. to employ additional teachers for children with SEN. It is therefore not possible to provide specific teacher numbers in primary and post primary schools within the timescale for the question. However, with regard to specialist support services the Belfast ELB provides additional teaching time to assessed pupils within all schools in Belfast for special needs in the areas of learning, dyslexia, behaviour, autism and physical and sensory disability. These services employ an additional 55 teachers.

In all mainstream schools a designated teacher known as the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) will be responsible for the day to day operation of the school's SEN policy, liaison with outsiqe agencies etc. This will be in addition to the SENCO's teaching duties. The number of teachers employed in Special Schools or Special Units in the North Belfast Constituency area is:

Special School Teachers—27

Special Unit Teachers —2

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much funding was allocated to meet the special education needs of children in *(a)* primary and *(b)* post primary schools in North Belfast in each year since 1997. [127424]

Jane Kennedy: The funding made available to the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) by the Department of Education for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) has two components:

the SEN element, managed centrally by each board, which is used to provide classroom assistance, special equipment, disabled access and outreach support services for mainstream pupils as well as to maintain Special Schools and Units. These resources are allocated on an individual basis following the assessment procedures as set out in the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs. It is not possible to provide details of such resources specifically for the North Belfast Constituency area within the timescale of the question. However, it is known that there are 70 classroom assistants funded by the Belfast ELB in North Belfast schools for individual pupils with SEN at an approximate cost of £500,000 per annum; and

the Local Management of Schools (LMS) component, managed by mainstream schools to assist pupils with SEN who do not require a Statement. Annual expenditure on the LMS Special Needs budgets for schools in the North Belfast constituency area is as follows:

£

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Primary Schools	537,098	509,494	532,226	538,865	528,00
Secondary Schools	409,850	425,124	450,748	472,005	481,000
Total	946,948	934,618	982,874	1,010,870	1,009,000

In addition, since 1998, around £38 million has been provided to support the introduction of the Code of Practice in Northern Ireland. As well as providing SEN training for teachers and school governors, these funds have helped meet the additional costs of strengthening mainstream provision for pupils with SEN, by expanding outreach and peripatetic teaching support and by providing more classroom assistants. Specific allocations to schools in the North Belfast Constituency area are not readily identifiable in the timescale, but it is estimated that in 2002–03 these totalled approximately £70,000 for primary schools and £50,000 for post-primary schools.

Sports and Recreational Facilities

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money has been provided to district councils in Northern Ireland for the development of sports and recreational facilities in each year since 1997. [125844]

Angela Smith: Since 1999 the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL) has had overall responsibility for sports and recreational development in Northern Ireland. The amount of money both Exchequer and Lottery, provided to district councils in Northern Ireland, via DCAL funding sources, for the development of sports and recreational facilities in each year since 1997 is as follows:

Year	*£*
1997[1]	2,845,074
1998[1]	1,272,110
1999	1,177,500
2000	230,000
2001	173,000
2002	380,000
2003	[2]0

[1] Prior to 1999 overall responsibility for sporting and recreational development in Northern Ireland rested with the Department of Education for Northern Ireland while Inland Waterways and Waterway recreations functions rested with the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland.

[2] To date.

Staff Costs

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many staff the Department and each

agency and non-departmental public body for which the Department is responsible had in each year since 1997; and what the cost of those staff was in each of those years. [122257]

Mr. Pearson: The information is as follows:

Staffing

The staffing figures to reflect both NI Civil Servants and Home Civil Servants, in each year since 1997, for the Northern Ireland Office, the Northern Ireland Departments and their respective Agencies, are set out in Tables A and B.

The staffing figures for associated NDPBs are available from the Cabinet Office in its annual publication "Public Bodies". The information includes details of the number of staff employed by each NDPB at 31 March each year. "Public Bodies 2002" was published in January 2003. Copies of "Public Bodies" published each year since 1997 are available in the Libraries of both Houses.

Staff costs

With the introduction of Devolution in Northern Ireland in December 1999, Northern Ireland Departments restructured and increased in number from six to 11. In addition, as a consequence of the transitions to resource accounting, outturn information from 2000–01 onwards is held on a resource basis, prior to this only cash based information is available. For these reasons, the only years for which comparable outturn information is available is for 2000–01 onwards. However, the outturn information provided for 2002–03 is based on provisional outturn and therefore is not directly comparable to 2000–01 or 2001–02, which are based on final outturn.

Staffing costs for the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments and their respective Agencies are set out in Table C.

The staffing costs for associated NDPBs of the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments are available from the annual accounts of each body.

Table A: Staffing—Northern Ireland Office and Agencies

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03
Core Department	992	964	961	935	930	1,003
Agencies:						
Compensation Agency	120	131	120	130	132	139
Forensic Science NI	122	120	118	122	130	132
NI Prison Service	3,212	3,017	2,730	2,119	2,124	1,989
Total	4,446	4,232	3,929	3,306	3,316	3,263

Table B: Staffing—Northern Ireland Departments and Agencies

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03
Core NI Departments	6,312	5,941	5,866	7,529	7,896	8,937
Agencies:						
Business Development Service	227	238	278	268	266	246
Child Support Agency	294	306	321	319	394	426
Construction Service	576	557	516	509	507	[1]
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	275	297	320	351	398	414
Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency	318	326	319	348	391	445
Environment and Heritage Service	352	360	354	372	410	522
Forest Service	—	412	395	387	372	360
Government Purchasing Agency	72	91	100	79	89	[1]
Industrial Research and Technology Unit	143	141	148	154	171	[2]
Land Registers for NI	205	199	195	194	201	232
NI Health and Social Services Estates Agency[1]	120	117	114	119	119	122
NI Statistics and Research Agency	177	219	255	290	301	318
Ordnance Survey NI	177	178	175	176	179	197
Planning Service	386	420	452	484	529	592
Public Record Office NI	62	67	68	70	69	73
Rate Collection Agency	256	250	233	238	234	261
Rivers Agency	460	431	420	402	408	441
Roads Service	2,207	2,163	2,162	2,175	2,230	2,214
Social Security Agency	5,555	5,582	5,526	5,732	6,091	6,194
Training and Employment Agency	1,318	1,365	1,269	[1]	[1]	[1]
Valuation and Lands Agency	270	222	267	268	279	261
Water Service	2,278	2,228	2,216	2,176	2,202	2,147
Sub-total	15,728	16,169	16,103	15,111	15,840	15,465
Total[4]	22,040	22,110	21,969	22,640	23,736	24,402

[1] Part of NI Departmental Core in that year.
[2] Part of Invest NI (NDPB) in that year.
[3] Average figures provided.
[4] Excludes NI civil servants working in NDPBs.

Table C: Staffing cost for Departments and their Agencies

£000

Department	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Northern Ireland Office	115,000	115,000	119,000
of which:			
Compensation Agency	2,470	2,605	2,915
Forensic Science Northern Ireland	3,549	3,743	4,092
Compensation Agency	82,256	70,867	75,069
DARD	76,575	86,320	83,804
of which:			
Forest Service Agency	6,989	6,479	5,890
Rivers Agency	8,606	10,219	9,064
DCAL	8,642	9,609	12,388
of which:			
Ordnance Survey (NI)	4,625	4,801	5,693
Public Records Office (NI)	1,493	1,509	1,784
DE	14,767	16,443	16,893
DEL	30,698	28,543	33,731
DETI	27,774	29,623	16,548
of which:			
Industrial Research and Technology Unit	4,023	4,573	[1]
DFP	54,121	65,429	64,944
of which:			
Business Development Service	5,880	5,905	5,755
Rates Collection Agency	4,273	4,106	4,817
Valuation and Lands Agency	7,292	7,910	7,430
NI Statistics and Research Agency	6,438	8,743	7,011
Central Procurement Directorate	2,104	2,069	2,238
Construction Service	15,005	14,565	14,194
DHSSPS	24,682	26,659	28,584
of which:			
Health Estates Agency	4,028	4,120	4,309
DOE	33,074	32,800	44,619
of which:			
Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency	0	617	622
Driver and Vehicle Licensing NI	9,081	7,338	11,253
Planning Service	11,166	12,090	14,022
Environment and Heritage Service	8,329	9,005	12,287
DRD	115,317	108,368	112,534
of which:			
Roads Service	50,334	46,420	48,900
Water Service	52,713	49,815	51,046
DSD	131,596	144,027	154,792
of which:			
Child Support Agency	5,767	7,278	8,104
Social Security Agency	82,954	91,510	98,390
OFMDFM	7,766	9,675	11,475
Total	525,012	557,496	580,312

[1] IRTU became part of Invest NI from 2002–03 and is included in DETI composite figure for that year.

Notes:

1. Figure work for 2000–01 and 2001–02 based on Final Outturn.
2. Figure work for 2002–03 based on Provisional Outturn.

Strategic Investment Body

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will appoint representatives from *(a)* the trade union movement and *(b)* the community and voluntary sector to the Strategic Investment Body. [123280]

Mr. Pearson: An Advisory Council on Strategic Investment will be established to advise the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and the Department of Finance and Personnel on the Strategic Investment Board's strategy and direction, and public private investment issues. Political representatives and social partners will shortly be invited to provide nominations to the Advisory Council. I can confirm that the trade union movement and the community and voluntary sector will each be allocated four seats on the Council.

Teachers

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many teachers have left the teaching profession in Northern Ireland in each year since 1997; and how many have been recruited. [126499]

Jane Kennedy: *(a)* The number of permanent teachers who ceased teaching in a permanent capacity in each academic year since 1997 is as follows:

1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
942	885	869	1089	1114

(b) The number of teachers who obtained employment as a teacher in any capacity in each academic year since 1997 is as follows:

1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
1066	1132	1123	1289	1380

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications for planning for telecommunication masts have been approved in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* North Belfast in each year since 1997. [125843]

Angela Smith: It is not possible from planning service's records to distinguish between applications solely for telecommunications masts and applications for all other telecommunications equipment. The number of planning approvals for telecommunications equipment since 1997, in Northern Ireland and in North Belfast, is as follows:

Applications approved in Northern Ireland since 1997

Year	*Total number of telecommunications equipment*
1997–98	152
1998–99	96
1999–2000	169
2000–01	424
2001–02	324
2002–03	232
1 April 2003 to 30 June 2003	27
Total	1,099

Applications approved in North Belfast since 1997:

Year	*Total number of telecommunications equipment*
1997–98	0
1998–99	3
1999–2000	5
2000–01	10
2001–02	11
2002–03	3
1 Apr 2003 to 30 June 2003	0
Total	32

Ulster-Scots

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much public expenditure has been awarded to groups and individuals involved in the Ulster Scots cultural outlook in each of the last five years. [125539]

Angela Smith: It is not possible to identify all public expenditure which has been awarded to groups and individuals involved in the Ulster Scots cultural outlook. Many projects which have received public funding may have an Ulster Scots aspect or element, but it would not be possible to identify all of these projects and groups except at disproportionate cost.

However, the main conduit for the promotion of Ulster Scots culture is through the Ulster Scots Agency, which has a statutory remit to promote Ulster-Scots language and culture. Total funding provided for the promotion of Ulster-Scots culture by the Agency since its formation is as follows:

Year	*£*
2000	38,020.40
2001	369,002.35
2002	331,254.71
2003	(to date) 133,396.73

Unemployment Pilot Schemes

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pilot schemes the Department of *(a)* Health, Social Services and Public Safety, *(b)* Social Development, *(c)* Enterprise, Trade and Investment, *(d)* Environment, *(e)* Culture, Arts and Leisure, *(f)* Agriculture and Rural Development, *(g)* Employment and Learning, *(h)* Finance and Personnel, *(i)* Regional Development and *(j)* Education have for the recruitment of the unemployed, pursuant to recommendations of the procurement review. [125910]

Mr. Pearson: To date a total of 12 schemes have been nominated for inclusion in the Pilot Project. These, split by Departments are:

(a) Health, Social Services and Public Safety: 3
(b) Social Development: 0
(c) Enterprise, Trade and Investment: 0
(d) Environment: 0
(e) Culture, Arts and Leisure: 0
(f) Agriculture and Rural Development: 1
(g) Employment and Learning: 0
(h) Finance and Personnel: 4
(i) Regional Development: 3
(j) Education: 0
(k) Office of The First and Deputy First Minister: 1

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pilot schemes for the recruitment of the unemployed he estimates the Department of *(a)* Health, Social Services and Public Safety, *(b)* Social Development, *(c)* Enterprise, Trade and Investment, *(d)* Environment, *(e)* Culture, Arts and Leisure, *(f)* Agriculture and Rural Development, *(g)* Employment and Learning Needs, *(h)* Finance and Personnel, *(i)* Regional Development and *(j)* Education need to implement to meet relevant recommendations of the procurement review. [125911]

Mr. Pearson: The Review of the Public Procurement recommended that at least 20 projects are required for the pilot to provide sufficient information on which to judge the success, or otherwise of this approach. The review recommends that at least one project should be contributed by each Department.

Victims (Funds)

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much was paid to victims through funds made available by the Assembly of Northern Ireland in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [123790]

Mr. Spellar: Up to the end of July 2003 the following amounts have been paid to victims through funds made available by the Assembly of Northern Ireland:

2001–02: £518,897
2002–03: £622,814

These funds include the Assembly's contribution to Peace II funding. Under resource accounting arrangements, groups (may) continue to claim for expenditure incurred during these years.

Wheelchair Access (Ambulances)

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the law regarding wheelchair access in ambulances was changed; and if he will make a statement. [125294]

Angela Smith: There is no legislation in respect of wheelchair access in ambulances. However, it is standard procedure for A&E ambulance staff to place a wheelchair user on the ambulance stretcher so that any treatment which may be needed can be administered safely. As space does not allow wheelchairs to be safely transported in A&E ambulances, they must be left behind. Hospitals have wheelchairs available for use by patients. However, if wheelchair users wish to have their own chairs, a relative or carer would normally be asked to arrange for the wheelchair to be brought to the hospital.

Written Ministerial Statements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many written ministerial statements have been made by the Department since 29 October 2002. [126610]

Jane Kennedy: Since 29 October 2002 the Northern Ireland Office has made 79 written ministerial statements to Parliament.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 15 September 2003

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Child Abuse

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what percentage of the care home abuse cases have been rejected by the Crown Prosecution Service since 1997. [128390]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service does not maintain a central database of cases, and 'care home abuse cases' do not form a separate category of offence. The information requested could be obtained only by examining every case file and would therefore incur disproportionate costs.

Recently, ACPO undertook a study that concluded that between 1997 and 2000 the CPS rejected 79 per cent. of cases of institutional child abuse referred to it. Of the cases that were prosecuted, convictions were achieved in 83 per cent. of cases.

Fraud (Small Businesses)

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Solicitor-General what guidance she has issued to the Crown Prosecution Service on the prosecution of crimes involving fraud against small businesses. [128965]

The Solicitor-General: In March this year, I arranged and attended a meeting between the CPS, the SFO and the Federation of Small Businesses.

I have had discussions with colleagues in the DTI about the importance of tackling fraud against small business.

In July of this year, the Home Office published their report on responses to their consultation on business crime.

Victims/Witnesses

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what targets were set by the CPS in 2002–03 on meeting the needs of victims and witnesses in the criminal justice system, in co-operation with other criminal justice agencies; and what the performance results are of these targets. [128719]

The Solicitor-General: Meeting the needs of victims and witnesses in the criminal justice system, in co-operation with other criminal justice agencies was a specific Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) objective in 2002–03 and is set out in the 2002–03 CPS Annual Report.

Two targets were set: firstly, to pay 100 per cent. of correctly completed witness expense claims within 10 days; and secondly, to increase to 94 per cent. the proportion of replies to complaints within 10 days.

In respect of the first target, CPS performance improved compared with 2001–02. During 2002–03, 99.8 per cent. of witness expenses were paid within agreed timescales compared with 98.2 per cent. in 2001–02.

The second target was not met, although CPS performance improved considerably compared with 2001–02. Timely replies were made in 89.2 per cent. of cases in 2002–03, compared with 81.9 per cent. of cases in 2001–02.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what steps the Crown Prosection Service has taken to improve the service to *(a)* victims and *(b)* witnesses of crime. [128858]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) is working to improve the service that victims and witnesses of crime receive. This includes working with the Home Office and other criminal justice system agencies in developing the Government's recently published national strategy to deliver improved services to victims and witnesses.

The CPS has fully implemented the direct communication with victims initiative, whereby prosecutors provide reasons to victims for decisions to drop or substantially alter charges. A meeting to provide a further explanation should also be offered in cases involving death, child abuse, sexual offences, racial offences or offences with a homophobic element.

In relation to vulnerable or intimidated witnesses, the CPS is continuing to work closely with the Home Office and others to implement measures recommended in the report Speaking up for Justice, given statutory force by the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999. In July 2002, video recorded statements became admissible as evidence in chief in crown court proceedings for children under 17 and for vulnerable adults. In the crown court, the provision to give evidence by way of TV link is also available to children, vulnerable adults and intimidated witnesses. The CPS undertook a comprehensive training programme to ensure that staff were fully aware of the issues raised by the new measures. By March 2003, over 1000 CPS staff had been trained.

In relation to general victim and witness care, the CPS is working with ACPO and the Office for Public Service Reform on piloting a Victim and Witness Care Project that builds on the developing working relationship between the police and the CPS. Five pilot Areas (Gwent, North Wales, West Midlands, Essex and South Yorkshire) were established in July 2003. The pilot will run until March 2004.

In all pilot Areas, police officers will undertake a needs assessment for all victims and witnesses. If criminal proceedings are commenced, dedicated witness care staff will manage delivery of information and support to witnesses throughout the life of a case.

The CPS has also been conducting a public consultation on whether prosecutors should be permitted to conduct pre-trial interviews with prosecution witnesses in order to assess their reliability.

The consultation period ended on 2 1 July 2003 and the report is due to be placed before the Attorney-General in the autumn of 2003.

Street Crime

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what steps are being taken by the CPS to target street crime in each hot spot street crime area. [128723]

The Solicitor-General: Since April 2002, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has worked in partnership with the police and the courts to target street crime in the 10 areas with the biggest robbery problem.

As a result, levels of street crime in these 10 areas have been reduced by 17 per cent. and conviction rates have been improved.

The CPS has played a central role by developing a premium service for street crime cases whereby experienced prosecutors get 'in early and stay late'. The elements of the premium service are:

pre-charge advice to police to get the charge right first time;

close working with police to improve file quality and timeliness;

reduce the discontinuance rate of street crime cases;

improve case progression in partnership with courts;

monitoring ineffective and cracked trials; and

provide extra care and attention to victims and witnesses.

Crown Prosecution Service

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what percentage of the CPS's area business managers were new appointments in 2002–03. [128837]

The Solicitor-General: During the financial year 2002–03, 71 per cent. of Area Business Managers were new appointments.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General how many cases were dealt with by the Crown Prosecution Service in *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2001–02. [128853]

The Solicitor-General: In 2002–03 the Crown Prosecution Service dealt with cases in respect of 1,435,763 defendants in magistrates courts of which 125,709 proceeded to the Crown court. In 2001–02 the figures were 1,359,205 in magistrates courts, of which 115,014 proceeded to the Crown court.

The magistrates court figures include some non-criminal proceedings and advice cases that may not have resulted in prosecution. Crown court figures include appeals and committals for sentence.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General how many defendants were prosecuted by the Crown Prosecution Service in *(a)* magistrates courts and *(b)* the Crown Court in (i) 2002–03 and (ii) 2001–02. [128854]

The Solicitor-General: In 2002–03 the Crown Prosecution Service prosecuted 1,362,312 defendants in magistrates courts, of which 94,546 proceeded to the Crown Court. The comparable figures for 2001–02 were 1,304,185 defendants prosecuted in magistrates courts, of which 84,335 proceeded to the Crown Court. These figures exclude non-criminal proceedings and advice cases, appeals and committals for sentence.

The number of defendants prosecuted by the CPS rose over the two year period. In magistrates courts there was an increase of 58,127, or 4.5 per cent. In the Crown Court there was an increase of 10,211 defendants, or 12.1 per cent.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General how many *(a)* summary cases and *(b)* indictable or either way cases were received by the Crown Prosecution Service in 2002–03. [128859]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service holds no central records showing the type of charge in cases received: rather the information is recorded when the case is eventually completed.

In 2002–03 the Service dealt with 796,742 defendants in summary proceedings in magistrates courts, and 565,570 in either way and indictable only proceedings in the magistrates courts and the Crown court.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what change there has been in the volume of pre-charge advices provided to the police by the Crown Prosection Service since 2001–02. [128860]

The Solicitor-General: Pending the implementation of the charging scheme in the Criminal Justice Bill, the police and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) are establishing non-statutory arrangements (based on those which were piloted in 2002) which involve their working together more closely pre-charge. One element is the provision of early CPS advice through a duty prosecutor routinely stationed at busy police stations or charging centres. These arrangements, which in some Areas are still at the planning stage, should be in operation in all Areas by the end of the year. Prior to the charging pilot, advices sought by the police from most forces were usually limited to a few cases involving substantial legal difficulty. Frequently, advice was sought after charge when many of the issues were already decided and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) intervention would often involve a reversal of previous police decisions. In the charging pilot last year over 6,100 advices were sought by the police during the period of CPS attendance.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what the Crown Prosecution Service budget was for *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2001–02. [128862]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service resource budget was *(a)* £464 million for 2002–03 and *(b)* £402 million for 2001–02.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General how many additional lawyers the CPS employed in 2002–03 [128873]

The Solicitor-General: The number of lawyers in post has increased by 237 during the period from 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003, when the total stood at 2,267.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what percentage of CPS staff work in areas prosecuting or supporting the prosecution of offenders. [128874]

The Solicitor-General: All staff in the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) are employed to ensure that the CPS can fulfil its statutory functions, namely prosecuting offenders. A table showing the percentage of staff working in different functional areas follows.

Functional area	Percentage
Areas	88.1
HQ casework	2.6
HQ policy	1.2
Headquarters	4.3
Service centres	3.8
Total	100

Domestic Violence

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on guidance issued to the Crown Prosecution Service on the conduct of cases involving domestic violence. [129395]

The Solicitor-General: Cases involving domestic violence are conducted in accordance with the Crown Prosecution Service revised policy on prosecution of cases of domestic violence issued in November 2001. The policy focuses on the safety of the victim and children, while holding abusers accountable for their actions. The CPS is committed to supporting victims by, where appropriate, the use of special measures and, wherever possible, by constructing cases on the basis of evidence other than that of the victim.

The CPS network of domestic violence co-ordinators facilitates implementation of the revised policy, assists in providing training and shares and promotes good practice and a consistency of approach across the 42 areas.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Solicitor-General how many people in the Law Officers' department had a role in advice given on the legality of the continued occupation of Iraq. [128964]

The Solicitor-General: There are two officials in the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers who assist in dealing with any questions of international law relating to Iraq. There is a longstanding convention, followed by successive governments, that neither the substance of Law Officers' advice, nor the fact that they have been consulted, is publicly disclosed. This is consistent with paragraphs 2 and 4*(d)* of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Criminal Justice Reform

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what new structures have been developed to manage delivery and reform of the CJS at national and local levels. [128724]

The Solicitor-General: The Government established a National Criminal Justice Board and 42 Local Criminal Justice Boards following recommendations made by Lord Justice Auld in his review of the Criminal Courts and as part of a wider package of Criminal Justice reform announced in the White Paper "Justice for All".

At a national level, a National Criminal Justice Board comprising CJS Ministers, senior officials from the Home Office, the CPS, the Department for Constitutional Affairs and senior representatives from the police and the judiciary, is responsible for supporting Local Boards in delivery of the PSA targets and for managing the Government's overall CJS reform programme.

Through the Local Boards, chief officers from the police, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), the Probation Service, Prisons, Youth Offender Teams and the courts are working together locally to bring more offenders to justice and to improve public confidence in the Criminal Justice System (CJS).

Criminal Trials

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General how many criminal trials collapsed as a result of witnesses receiving payment from media organisations in each of the last 10 years. [127660]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) keeps a wide range of statistical information on matters pertaining to the prosecution of cases, as do the courts and other criminal justice agencies. Data is gathered by CPS on generic reasons leading to unsuccessful case outcomes but this does not extend to specific and unusual acts, such as a witness receiving payment from a media organisation.

Crown Court Cases

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what percentage of cases in the Crown court resulted in a conviction in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [128856]

The Solicitor-General: In 2001–02 the Crown Prosecution secured convictions in 73.3 per cent. of Crown court cases. This rose to 74.5 per cent. in 2002–03.

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what percentage of defendants who pleaded not guilty in the Crown court were convicted in 2002–03. [128857]

The Solicitor-General: In 2002–03, the Crown Prosecution Service secured convictions in respect of 61.9 per cent. of all defendants who pleaded not guilty and whose cases proceeded to a contested hearing in the Crown court.

Magistrates Courts

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what the discontinuance rate was in magistrates court cases in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [128861]

The Solicitor-General: Discontinuances—those cases in which a decision is made not to proceed before evidence is heard by the court—fell from 16.2 per cent. of all magistrates court cases prosecuted by the Crown Prosecution Service in magistrates courts in 2001–02 to 15.5 per cent. in 2002–03. These figures include cases in which the defendant was bound over without a trial being held.

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what percentage of prosecutions in the magistrates courts secured a conviction in 2002–03; and how many defendants pleaded or were found guilty. [128855]

The Solicitor-General: In 2002 03 the Crown Prosecution Service secured convictions in 76.8 per cent. of all prosecutions in the magistrates courts. This figure comprised 811,583 guilty pleas and 166,909 verdicts of guilty after trial.

Vulnerable Adults (Video Evidence)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what definition is used of a vulnerable adult as it relates to the admissibility of video recorded statements as evidence in chief in Crown Court proceedings. [128726]

The Solicitor-General: Chapter 1 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 provides for a witness to be eligible as a vulnerable adult for assistance by the use of video recorded evidence if the court considers that the quality of the evidence given by the witness is likely to be diminished by reason of any of the following circumstances:

(i) the witness suffers from a mental disorder within the meaning of the Mental Health Act 1983; or

(ii) otherwise has a significant impairment of intelligence and social functioning; or

(iii) that the witness has a physical disability or is suffering from a physical disorder.

The court will consider any views expressed by the witness pursuant to section 16 (4) of the Act.

Once a witness is deemed eligible, then in relation to adult vulnerable witnesses, the court needs to be satisfied that the video will maximise the quality of their evidence.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Building Works

Dr. Cable: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission what work is outstanding on *(a)* Norman Shaw North, *(b)* Norman Shaw South and *(c)* Portcullis House; and what the estimated completion date is. [128789]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: No work is outstanding in Norman Shaw North other than routine maintenance.

In Norman Shaw South the refurbishment contractor has defects liability until February 2004 and he will attend to any items as necessary. The design consultant has liability to resolve window closure details and an issue in connection with air conditioning design. Also, some minor alterations were requested by the Accommodation and Works Committee for execution this summer.

In Portcullis House the water feature contractor is currently fulfilling his defects liability and the fenestration contractor has one item remaining from his defects schedule which is to be dealt with in September.

Parliamentary Ticket Office

Mr. Evans: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, how much the Houses of Parliament ticket office has cost in each year since its construction. [127949]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: During the period of the trial opening (2000 and 2001) of the summer line of route, tickets were on sale in Westminster Hall. Following the Houses' decision to put the arrangement on a permanent footing, and pending the outcome of discussions with Westminster City Council as the local planning authority and with English Heritage, a temporary facility on Abingdon Green was used as a ticket office in 2002. The cost was £53,500, of which the House of Commons share was £32,100.

The permanent ticket office used this year for the first time has an estimated cost of £155,000 (the House of Commons share is £93,000). It will be dismantled and put into store during the winter and with due maintenance it is expected to be used each summer for at least 10 years. The annual cost will therefore be £15,500, of which the House of Commons' share will be £9,300.

Dr. Cable: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission what the cost of constructing the Houses of Parliament ticket office was; what the cost of storing the ticket office until 2004 will be; which company has been selected to store the ticket office until 2004; and if he will make a statement. [128788]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: The permanent ticket office used this year for the first time has an estimated cost of £155,000 (the House of Commons share is £93,000). It will be dismantled and put into store during the winter and with due maintenance it is expected to be used each summer for at least 10 years. The annual cost will therefore be £15,500, of which the House of Commons' share will be £9,300.

Tenders are to be invited shortly for the dismantling, storage, maintenance and re-erection of the building for the next four years.

Recycling

Norman Baker: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission (1) what percentage of the paper collected for recycling was *(a)* recycled within the UK and *(b)* exported for recycling in each of the last three years; [127225]

(2) what percentage of paper collected for recycling was recycled in each of the last three years: and what steps he takes to ensure this happens. [127226]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: The parliamentary waste management contractor mixes waste paper from all sources at his recycling plant and is not able separately to measure the weight from any one source which has gone to UK or overseas paper makers.

All the paper collected for recycling in the Palace and the northern outbuildings has been recycled, unless there were any isolated incidents where the staff of the cleaning contractor misdirected sacks intended for recycling.

Dr. Cable: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission what items can be recycled by hon. and right hon. Members and their staff; and if he will make a statement. [128786]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: Waste paper from Members' offices may be recycled by using the special bins provided and metals may be recycled by using the general office waste bins. Glass may be recycled by leaving it at the waste centres at Peers' Inner Court in the Palace and at 1 Canon Row.

CABINET OFFICE

Civil Contingencies

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans there are for civil emergency exercises *(a)* in London and *(b)* elsewhere in the next 12 months. [128657]

Mr. Alexander: In London, the London Resilience Partnership of the emergency services, health services, local authorities, utilities and transport agencies have a continuous programme of training and exercises. These comprise tabletop exercises, live exercises and training events.

Elsewhere, a nationwide rolling programme of exercises ensures that we have robust and well-practised contingency plans in place to respond to a whole range of civil emergency incidents. The main activity is carried out at the local and regional level by local authorities and the emergency services. These exercises are based on risk assessments which include natural, technological or man-made crises; for example, exercises cover key facilities such as airports, nuclear power stations and chemical complexes. It is complemented by a cross-governmental programme.

Under the broader cross-governmental programme, on the counter-terrorist side, the Home Office carries out three major exercises per annum plus a number of smaller scale exercises. Other exercises cover the health service response and consequence management of CBRN-related emergencies.

On non-terrorist disruptive challenges, future exercises include the testing of the response to oil pollution, civil nuclear emergency response, foot-and-mouth contingency testing, chemical spills, flood management and a fuel shortage and its impact on the food supply chain.

The UK also plans to participate in exercises with international partners and fora.

Government Vehicles

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) what arrangements there are for the disposal of *(a)* ministerial and *(b)* departmental vehicles; and if he will make a statement; [128796]

(2) what the average time is that ministerial cars have been kept in operational service; and if he will make a statement. [128799]

Mr. Alexander: The responsibility for the provision of ministerial cars and drivers has been delegated under the terms of the Framework Document to the Government Car Despatch Agency. I have asked its Chief Executive Mr Nick Matheson to write to the hon. Member. Copies of his letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Public Appointments

Mr. Mike Hall: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what percentage of appointees to UK Government sponsored public bodies are *(a)* disabled people and *(b)* people with minority ethnic backgrounds. [128059]

Mr. Alexander: Further to my written statement on 16 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 49WS, I would like to correct the figure given for the percentages of disabled public appointees to public bodies and those with a minority ethnic background. As at 31 March 2003, 5.3 per cent. of public appointments are held by people with a minority ethnic background and 3.1 per cent. by disabled people. Information about the public bodies sponsored by UK Government Departments, and those appointed to serve on them, is available in Public Bodies 2003, revised copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what progress has been made by the Department in increasing the number of women seeking public appointments since May 2001. [129457]

Mr. Alexander: Each Government Department handles the public appointments process for the non-departmental public bodies for which it is responsible.

I will shortly be publishing the annual report on increasing diversity in public appointments, which will contain a section for each department, on their activity, including progress to date against their individual targets for increasing diversity on the boards of the public bodies for which they are responsible. Copies of the report will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Wherever possible, my Department encourages individuals from under-represented groups to apply for appointments by clear job descriptions and person specifications, which do not contain unnecessary requirements which might discourage or eliminate their applications.

In addition, my Department actively seeks to identify suitable women candidates through approaches to the Women and Equality Unit at the Department of Trade and Industry and the Women's National Commission.

The progress made by my department is shown in the table.

	Total number of appointments	*Women (percentage)*
2001[1,2]	103	32
2002[1,2]	101	34
2003[2]	94	35

[1] For comparison excludes the Women's National Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission, which transferred to the Department of Trade and Industry in May 2002.
[2] Information is collected as at 31 March.

E-Envoy

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans he has to retain the post of e-Envoy after the termination of the contract of the present office holder. [129127]

Mr. Alexander: The e-Envoy's contract has not been terminated. The current contract runs to April 2004, and succession planning decisions will not be made until closer to that date.

TRANSPORT

Road Haulage Industry (Compensation Claims)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many claims for compensation were submitted to the French authorities after 1 January 1995 in respect of lorry blockades; and how many have been *(a)* paid in full, *(b)* paid in part and *(c)* not paid. [129259]

Mr. Jamieson: Following the lengthy disruption in France in November 1996, the Department offered hauliers assistance in submitting compensation claims to the relevant French authorities. Some 1,200 claims were handled in this way. All claims arising from these lorry blockades have been processed by the French authorities, and payment agreed in the case of all claims eligible under French law. The French authorities dealt directly with the cases and claimants were under no obligation to inform the Department of the outcome of their cases. We are, therefore, unable to provide information about amounts of compensation paid or refused.

A12

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the *(a)* dates and *(b)* areas over the last 10 years, that roadworks have taken place for more than two weeks' duration on the A12 between the M25 turnoff and Wivenhoe, Essex. [128824]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Acting Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Stephen Hickey, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Hilary Chipping to Mr. Simon Burns, dated 15 September 2003:

I have been asked by David Jamieson, on behalf of our Acting Chief Executive Stephen Hickey, to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about road works that have taken place on the A12 between the M25 turnoff and Wivenhoe, Essex.

The table below provides information on road works since 1997 that have lasted longer than two weeks. I regret that we do not have details prior to 1997.

A12 section	*Timing*
Chelmsford Bypass	October 1997 to February 1998
Mountnessing Bypass	January 1999 to February 1999
Boreham Bypass	December 1999 to March 2000
Brentwood Bypass Phase 1	January 2001 to May 2001
Hatfield Peverel Bypass	October 2001 to February 2002
Brentwood Bypass Phase 2	October 2002 to March 2003
Witham Bypass	August 2003 to December 2003

I hope this is helpful.

A27

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the A27 through Worthing will have been improved or replaced. [129416]

Mr. Jamieson: A number of small-scale improvements to ease congestion and improve safety are planned to be implemented by late 2004. In the longer term, following the Secretary of State's announcement on 9 July 2003, the Highways Agency has been asked to work with local authorities and statutory environmental bodies to identify schemes that are less damaging than those recommended by the South Coast Multi-Modal Study and reduce the need for major road construction. The Highways Agency are expected to report back in the middle of 2004, which will enable a decision on the way forward.

A38

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many fatal accidents have occurred on the A38 in Devon between Marsh Mills roundabout, Plymouth and Ivybridge in the past five years. [129704]

Mr. Jamieson: There have been a total of five fatal accidents on the A38 in Devon between Marsh Mills roundabout, Plymouth and Ivybridge, in the past five years. There were two fatal accidents in 2001 and three fatal accidents in 2002.

Air Transport

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to prevent airlines from intentionally overbooking flights; if he will issue guidance to airline companies on appropriate *(a)* levels of compensation and *(b)* alternative arrangements for passengers unable to board flights they booked; and if he will make a statement. [129217]

Mr. McNulty: Overbooking is an accepted practice among full-service scheduled airlines. On any particular flight there is likely to be a proportion of passengers, mainly from those holding flexible tickets, who do not check in. On the basis of statistical evidence from previous flights, airlines estimate the probable number of no-shows and overbook accordingly. On the great majority of flights no passengers are denied boarding, and by reducing the number of empty seats overbooking keeps fares lower than they would otherwise be. This practice is widely accepted by passenger organisations and by regulators as being in the best interests of consumers generally.

In the comparatively small proportion of cases where denied boarding occurs, existing Community legislation requires Community air carriers to provide prescribed minimum levels of financial compensation, in addition to offering passengers a choice between re-routing and reimbursement. In December 2001 the European Commission presented a proposal for a regulation to increase levels of compensation to passengers denied boarding, as well as to require the provision of assistance to travellers affected by cancellations for commercial reasons or delays. Political agreement on this proposal was reached at Transport Council in December 2002, and it is currently subject to conciliation procedures involving the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to require signs at airports which are in English to carry equivalent information in other major European languages. [129250]

Mr. McNulty: The International Civil Aviation Organisation recommend that, as far as possible, symbols alone should be used without words and that, where words are found to be essential, the choice of languages should be determined having regard to the particular needs of air travellers and the general public. We consider that airport operators are best placed to judge whether any language other than English would be beneficial in conjunction with particular signs, and that it is not necessary or desirable to impose requirements on them in this respect.

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of the revenues of airports at *(a)* Luton, *(b)* Heathrow, *(c)* Gatwick and *(d)* Stansted derive from parking charges. [128936]

Dr. Howells: In the case of Luton Airport, in the fiscal year to 31 March 2003 the proportion of car park revenue to total revenue was 21 per cent. For Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted, the proportions were, respectively, 6 per cent., 9 per cent., and 20 per cent.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* pilots and *(b)* cabin crew have been diagnosed with deep vein thrombosis in each year since 1997. [129797]

Mr. McNulty: Based on an analysis of cases of venous thromboembolism (deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism) between 1990 and 2000, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) estimates that there is an incidence in pilots of 0.2 per 1,000 per year. The annual incidence for the northern European population as a whole is 1.6–1.8 per 1,000 per year. Records are not kept by the CAA on the health of cabin crew as this group, unlike professional pilots, are not required to have routine regulatory medical examinations.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans he has to implement a public awareness campaign on the risks of travel-related deep vein thrombosis; [129798]

(2) what advice is available to British air travellers on travel health, with particular reference to measures to prevent travel-related deep vein thrombosis; and if he will make a statement. [129799]

Mr. McNulty: Advice on health and travel is widely available to the public in the Department of Health's 'Health advice for Travellers' booklet. The Government issued specific advice on travel-related deep vein thrombosis (DVT) in 2001, which has been made available to the public through NHS Direct, the internet, the airlines and health services. All UK long-haul carriers have produced information for their passengers, in pamphlets, videos or announcements, incorporating material contained in the Government's advice.

The Department of Health has commissioned research, jointly funded with UK airlines, to evaluate the public perception of the risk of DVT and the awareness and use of information sources relating to DVT. One of the tasks of the new Aviation Health Unit that my Department is setting up within the Civil Aviation Authority will be to consider the results of this research as part of its remit to recommend and offer advice to air passengers and crew on aviation health issues.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the possible effects on the health of airport workers if an additional runway were to be built at Gatwick. [128998]

Dr. Howells: Analysis of air quality impact of options included in the consultation "The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom" is related to community exposure to ambient emission levels. This comparative analysis for strategic purposes is not intended to be exhaustive and no formal assessment has been made for the purposes of the White Paper. Airports, like other employers, are subject to Health and Safety requirements.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made of *(a)* aircraft crossing runways, *(b)* wake vortices, *(c)* high ground, *(d)* turbulance from flying through a cutting and *(e)* proximity of the main railway line from building (i) one and (ii) two additional runways at Gatwick; [129000]

(2) what assessment he has made of the risk of wake vortices from the building of a close parallel runway at Gatwick. [129005]

Dr. Howells: All the factors you have mentioned have been appropriately taken into account in the development of the options presented in the consultation. The constraints imposed by each factor vary in relation to each option. For instance, wake vortices are less of a problem where there is greater distance between two runways (i.e. the wide spaced two runway option). In the close parallel option, their potential effects can restrict operations to the dependent segregated mode (resulting in reduced movement capacity).

Further information is contained in the Optioneering report for Gatwick, Stansted and Southampton airports, which was included in the package of SERAS documents made available as part of the consultation (document reference numbers 51 and 66). Although this information relates to options which differ somewhat from those presented in the consultation document, the differences between the options are small in this respect. The information therefore remains valid.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of aircraft using the proposed new wide spaced runway at Gatwick would need to cross the existing runway to reach the terminal buildings. [129001]

Dr. Howells: This information is not available. It would depend on the precise way in which the runways would be operated and the balance of aircraft parking space between and north of the runways.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what impact to the public safety zone related to the proposed new wide spaced runway at Gatwick would have on use of the main London to Brighton railway line. [129002]

Dr. Howells: The impact of the Public Safety Zone (PSZ) for the proposed wide-spaced runway on the use of the London to Brighton railway line is likely to be small. The focus of PSZs is on the risks associated with residential property and places where people congregate for significant time. These risks are greater than for road and rail traffic passing through the zones as the time spent stationery is relatively short.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport by how much the high ground to the west would reduce the runway length available for take-offs in relation to the proposed new wide spaced runway at Gatwick. [129003]

Dr. Howells: Information on how the high ground to the west of the airport would reduce the runway length for take-offs is given in the Optioneering report for Gatwick, Stansted and Southampton airports, and included in the package of SERAS documents made available as part of the consultation (document reference number 51). Page 25 of the report states that the TODA (take-off distance available) would be reduced to about 2,550m. Although this information relates to a slightly different runway location it should be regarded only as an estimate and, therefore, remains broadly valid.

Mr. Ma[illegible] To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies he has made of the alternative plans produced by BAA for a close parallel runway at Gatwick; and what asessment he has made of the additional environmental impact of these plans. [129004]

Dr. Howells: As with all alternative options put forward during the consultation, we are considering these carefully.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much earth would need to be removed to make the proposed new north runway at Gatwick level with the rest of the existing airport. [129102]

Dr. Howells: This information is contained in the Optioneering report for Gatwick, Stansted and Southampton airports, and included in the package of SERAS documents made available as part of the consultation (document reference number 51). Page 28 of the report states that an estimated 18 million cubic metres of material would need to be removed to create a platform 1100 million wide. The corresponding draft layout plan for Gatwick with a possible new northern runway is shown in the associated document of figures, also available (document reference number 66, figure 4.4).

Freight Transport

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the rail lines operated for freight purposes only, giving the mileage length of each line identified; and what assessment has been made of the potential use of each line for passenger traffic. [129251]

Mr. McNulty: The information on the first two points is contained in Appendix D of the "Review of Freight Charging Policy: Consultation on Costs", published by the Office of the Rail Regulator in November 2000. A copy of this document is obtainable from the Office of the Rail Regulator.

There is no systematic assessment of the potential use of freight only lines for passenger traffic. Proposals submitted by local stakeholders to the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) are considered on a case by case basis, with each case being reviewed on its individual merits and against the SRA's planning criteria.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list in percentage terms the movement of freight within the United Kingdom by *(a)* road, *(b)* rail and *(c)* water for each year from 1996 to date. [129262]

Mr. Jamieson: The information is in the following table.

Percentage share of goods moved (tonne kilometres): United Kingdom

	Road	*Rail*[1]	*Water*	*Pipeline*	*All modes*[2]
1996	66	6	23	5	100
1997	68	7	20	5	100
1998	65	7	23	5	100
1999	64	7	24	5	100
2000	62	7	26	4	100
2001	64	8	24	5	100

[1] Financial year figures.
[2] Figures for some years may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Harbour Revision Orders

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the laws regarding harbour revision orders; if he proposes to change them; and if he will make a statement. [130210]

Mr. Jamieson: We have no current plans to change the legislation governing harbour revision orders although we are always willing to consider changes either suggested to us or that stem from our own experiences in processing them.

Public Transport

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he is making on the integration of public transport *(a)* timetables and *(b)* ticketing. [129455]

Mr. McNulty: My Department continues to support the traveline service, which offers integrated, multi-modal public transport route and timetable information through a single national telephone number. The service is now also available on the internet.

The Transport Direct service will launch in early 2004. It will provide route, timetable and fare information for all modes of public and private transport and provide for the purchase of tickets. Transport Direct will initially be provided through an internet portal and, ultimately, it is hoped that access will also be possible via digital TV, mobile and WAP phones, other handheld devices and high street kiosks.

Work is also continuing to encourage the PlusBus ticketing scheme that allows the addition of bus validity to national rail tickets. There are currently 102 stations participating in the PlusBus scheme, with a further 33 expected by the end of September 2003. A significant number of additions are expected next year.

Road Deaths

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many traffic accidents resulted in a fatality in Crosby in each of the last five years. [129456]

Mr. Jamieson: Information is not available on the number of fatal traffic accidents in Crosby.

The number of traffic accidents that have resulted in one or more fatalities in the local authority district of Sefton, which includes Crosby, are given in the table.

	Fatal Accidents
1998	7
1999	5
2000	8
2001	6
2002	9

Shipping (Oil and Chemical Transfers)

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what regulations apply *(a)* within UK waters and *(b)* beyond the 12 mile limit, for the ship to ship transfer of oil and other chemicals. [129160]

Mr. Jamieson: Regulations specific to ship to ship transfer operations within UK waters, remain in draft form as a Statutory Instrument and Merchant Shipping Notice at this time. No specific regulations apply beyond the 12 mile limit.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what contingency plans are in place for dealing with spillages within and beyond the 12 mile limit from ship to ship oil and chemical transfers in Lyme Bay; and if he will make a statement. [129161]

Mr. Jamieson: Within the 12 mile limit of UK waters, transfers comply with draft legislation and include contingency planning for oil spills, mainly through the mechanism of Ship's Oil Pollution Emergency Plans (SOPEPS). Where cargoes being transferred are of a particularly persistent nature, appropriate oil recovery, collection and containment measures are also required in the form of a recovery vessel on stand-by throughout the operations.

Beyond the 12 mile limit, but within the UK's Pollution Control Zone, which can stretch up to 200 miles off shore, pollution resulting from ship to ship transfers would be treated in the same way as marine pollution from any other source.

Any Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) response would follow the National Contingency Plan for Marine Pollution from Shipping and Offshore Installations and would be tailored to the circumstances of the incident.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many incidents of oil and chemical spillage have been reported as a consequence of ship to ship transfers of oil and chemicals off the UK coast in each of the past five years. [129162]

Mr. Jamieson: There have been no incidents of oil and chemical spills as a consequence of ship to ship transfer operations off the UK coastline in any of the past five years.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many ship to ship transfers of oil and chemicals took place off the UK coastline in each of the last five years *(a)* in total and *(b)* broken down by Government office region. [129163]

Mr. Jamieson: A break down of the number of ship to ship transfers off the UK coastline in the last five years is given in the table:

Year	*Total*	*Broken down by Government office region*
1999	1	Scottish waters
2000	1	South west
2001	5	4 South west
		1 East
2002	3	2 East
		1 South west
2003 to date	5	3 South west
		2 East

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how his Department monitors the ship to ship transfer of oil and chemicals off the UK coast. [129164]

Mr. Jamieson: There are only two locations outside harbour limits and within UK waters where ship to ship transfers are allowed to take place, namely off Lyme Bay, Dorset and Southwold, Suffolk. The industry has accepted current draft regulations governing these transfers as a common standard.

Agents for ship to ship transfers have to make an application to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's (MCA) counter pollution branch at least 72 hours prior to the proposed transfer taking place. Permission for the transfer to proceed is only given after thorough assessment and may include limitations or specific requirements. Copies of the draft Statutory Instrument and Merchant Shipping Notice are supplied to the applicant for reference.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how his Department enforces regulations covering the ship to ship transfer of oil and chemicals off the UK coast *(a)* within the 12 mile limit and *(b)* beyond the 12 mile limit. [129165]

Mr. Jamieson: The regulations governing ship to ship transfers are currently in draft form through Statutory Instrument, The Merchant Shipping (Ship to Ship Transfers) Regulations 1999 and Merchant Shipping Notice 1739, Ship to Ship Transfers of Dangerous or Polluting Cargoes at Sea. Although these regulations remain in draft form, industry has accepted them as good working practice and their contents are applied when assessing and vetting applications for ship to ship transfers within UK water.

There are no regulations controlling ship to ship transfer activities beyond the 12 mile limit.

Thameslink 2000

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the future of the Thameslink 2000 project. [129320]

Mr. McNulty: Progress on Thameslink 2000 is dependent on securing approval of the necessary planning and other powers under the Transport and Works Act. The Strategic Rail Authority and Network Rail are currently working to address design deficiencies identified at public inquiry. If a viable and economic solution can be found, a revised proposal will be submitted for consideration in the TWA process.

Traffic Calming

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions his Department has held with each of the emergency services regarding traffic calming schemes; and if he will make a statement. [128793]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department wrote to all local field operatives in the emergency services on 2 September 2003 encouraging them to work with local authorities whenever new traffic calming schemes are proposed. Similar letters were also sent to every local authority reminding them of the legal requirement to consult the emergency services wherever road humps are introduced. This letter also strongly urged local authorities to consult the emergency services when all other traffic calming measures are proposed.

Rail Performance Statistics

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the most recent rail performance indicators from train operating companies. [129068]

Mr. McNulty: The Strategic Rail Authority publishes rail performance statistics in the quarterly National Rail Trends (NRT) and six-monthly On Track publications. Copies of both publications are placed in the Library of the House. The next edition of NRT will be published on 19 September 2003 and provide performance data for the quarter April to June 2003.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on NATO's leadership of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. [129034]

Mr. Hoon: Since 11 August 2003, NATO has given enhanced support to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Kabul, including providing the Headquarters for the Force. NATO has made an excellent start in its new role and the Alliance is now looking at ways to make the ISAF still more effective.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on security operations in Afghanistan. [129067]

Mr. Ingram: Coalition operations against remnants of the Taliban and their terrorist supporters continue, especially in the South and East of Afghanistan.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on military support for the government of Afghanistan. [129069]

Mr. Ingram: I have nothing to add to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 8 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 10.

Aircraft Carriers

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which aircraft will be used on the new aircraft carriers. [128534]

Mr. Ingram: The primary aircraft for the Future Aircraft Carrier (CVF) will be the Short Take Off Vertical Landing (STOVL) variant of the Lockheed Martin F35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF). CVF will have the capacity to operate a wide range of aircraft including that selected to provide maritime airborne surveillance and control and helicopters in a wide variety of roles that could include anti-submarine warfare, attack, surveillance and support. As CVF will be built to an innovative and adaptable design, it will be capable of modification to operate future generations of air platforms, such as aircraft requiring a catapult launch and arrested recovery.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the estimated conversion cost is for the Eurofighter Typhoon to operate from the new aircraft carriers. [128536]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 20 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 678W.

British Army Training Unit Suffield

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the importance of the Canadian BATSU facility for the British Army. [129491]

Mr. Ingram: The British Army Training Unit Suffield (BATUS) facility fulfils a valuable role in the training of units and formations to bring them to the required readiness state.

Campaign Medals

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the medal for those who served in the Suez Canal Zone between 1951 and 1954 will be available; and what arrangements have been made for its presentation. [129305]

Mr. Caplin: The four medal offices are preparing to issue medals to eligible veterans pending final agreement of the qualifying criteria. Stocks of the Naval General Service Medal 1915–62 and the General Service Medal 1918–62, their associated ribbons and the new clasp are being prepared by the medal offices in anticipation of that approval by Her Majesty. Once eligibility has been confirmed, the medal will be posted to the recipient.

Chatham Dockyard (Radiation Records)

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many former Chatham Dockyard workers have received their radiation dose records. [129735]

Mr. Caplin: 241 workers have received radiation dose record summaries under the Ministry of Defence Radiation Workers Counselling Scheme.

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many former Chatham Dockyard workers have been given estimated radiation dose records. [129736]

Mr. Caplin: It was necessary to enter estimated external doses into the statutory records of those radiation workers likely to receive higher radiation doses (called classified persons) when the film badge issued to these workers was lost or damaged. In such circumstances an estimated dose was entered onto an individual's dose record by entering doses from direct reading dosimeters worn by the individual. On the rare occasions when no dosimeter information was available, a calculation was made based upon time of exposure and radiation dose rates in areas where the individual worked. Since these details were entered onto individual records and there was no requirement to record the number of such events centrally, the numbers could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Compensation (Asbestosis)

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the average compensation per person paid by his Department to claimants suffering from asbestosis was in each of the last three years. [129706]

Mr. Caplin: The amount paid in compensation and the associated legal costs of cases brought against the Ministry of Defence are not in general recorded separately and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost. The average amount paid in compensation and legal costs by the MOD to claimants suffering from asbestos related disease for the last three years was as follows:

	£
2000–01	35,556
2002–02	26,644
2002–03	36,233

Contracts

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many contracts issued by his Department in the last five years have included no UK build. [128538]

Mr. Ingram: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will ensure that all contracts awarded by his Department include a provision that a minimum of 50 per cent. of the work will be carried out in the UK. [128539]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 13 January 2003, *Official Report*, columns 405–06W.

Service Personnel (Religious Faith)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the armed forces profess *(a)* Christianity, *(b)* Judaism, *(c)* Islam, *(d)* Hinduism and *(e)* other faiths; how many chaplains from each faith are attached to the forces; and if he will make a statement. [129322]

Mr. Caplin: The numbers of armed forces personnel with the following recorded religion are:

Religion	*Number*
Christianity	191,985
Judaism	65
Islam	280
Hinduism	140
Other	925

Note:
Figures have been rounded to prevent disclosure of sensitive personal data and exclude those with no recorded or declared religion.

There are 295 full-time commissioned chaplains in the armed forces, drawn from the main Christian denominations to which the majority of Service personnel belong. They have a responsibility to offer spiritual, moral and pastoral care to all Service personnel and their families, irrespective of religion or belief. The relatively small number of personnel from faiths other than Christianity, serving in a wide range of units and locations in the United Kingdom and overseas, does not at present justify the appointment of dedicated clergy from those faiths, but the position is kept under review. Leading members of the Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh faiths have been appointed to act as religious advisers to the armed forces.

Iraq

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate the Department has made of *(a)* the number of Iraqi ammunition dumps and *(b)* the quantity of munitions in the British sector. [125699]

Mr. Ingram: As of the 3 September, the following caches of munitions have been found in the United Kingdom Area of Operations:

Number of caches	*Size*	*Estimated quantity unexploded ordnance*	*Types*
111	Small	500–1,000	Various
61	ISO Container	1,000–5,000	Various
8	Multiple ISO Container	5,000–10,000	Various
9	Small Compound	Over 10,000	Various
8	Large Compound	Over 100,000	Various

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British casualties there were *(a)* during the conflict and *(b)* since the conflict in Iraq. [127391]

Mr. Ingram: As of 9 September United Kingdom Forces had suffered 49 fatalities, 33 during the conflict and 16 since. One member of the Defence Fire Services had also died after the conflict ended.

Fifty-three personnel had been wounded, 40 during the conflict and 13 since. We only record centrally the number of wounded who received hospital treatment. Those that received local treatment and then returned to duty are not recorded.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his Answer of 17 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 484W, on Iraq (friendly fire incidents), if he will make the reports and recommendations of these investigations available to hon. Members and the public when inquiries are completed; and if he will make a statement. [128520]

Mr. Ingram: The purpose of the internal Service inquiries being carried out into these incidents is to establish the facts; to discover whether any shortcomings in Service equipment or procedures caused or contributed to the incident; and, where necessary, to make recommendations to prevent a recurrence. To encourage witnesses to come forward freely and speak with the utmost candour, we do not publish reports in their entirety; this has been the policy of successive governments. The reports are, however, made available to HM Coroners to help them determine the cause and circumstances of death.

I am prepared, however, to make a summary of the report's conclusions available to the House in this instance, but only after all other related proceedings such as disciplinary action are entirely complete. To do otherwise would be to risk prejudicing those other proceedings.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to retrieve and render safe cluster bombs and other munitions used by allied forces during the recent military action in Iraq; how much of this work will be carried out by non-governmental organisations; and if he will make a statement. [128527]

Mr. Ingram: The United Kingdom and other Coalition Armed Forces and Non-Governmental Organisation teams have been engaged in Explosive Ordnance Disposal tasks since before the end of the conflict in Iraq. This Unexploded Ordnance includes not only that fired or dropped by Coalition Forces, but also much from the Iraq-Iran war, as well as mines laid, ordnance fired or dropped, and stores of ammunition and other ordnance left by Iraqi military and paramilitary forces.

In the UK's Area of Responsibility, 1,500 tasks involving the destruction of over 146,000 munitions have been completed.

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many coalition forces *(a)* were killed in the Iraq conflict and *(b)* were injured in the conflict and are still receiving treatment; and how many of these were from friendly fire. [128942]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 September 2003]*: As of 9 September 2003, 49 United Kingdom armed forces personnel and one member of the Defence Fire Service had died since the start of coalition military operations against Iraq. 39, all from the armed forces, were killed in action or subsequently died of wounds received and 11 died in non-battle accidents or from natural causes.

Of the fatalities, three have been confirmed as being caused by 'friendly fire' and three others remain under investigation.

We only record centrally the number of wounded who received hospital treatment. Those that received local treatment and returned to duty are not recorded. As of 9 September 2003, UK forces had suffered 53 wounded. We do not hold central records of how many remain under treatment.

We do not hold data on the numbers of fatalities and casualties suffered by coalition partners.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent requests he has received from the United States Government for the use of British military facilities in respect of the military action in Iraq. [129070]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence received a formal request on 18 November 2002 from the United States Government for assistance in any potential military action against the regime in Iraq. This was one of some 50 requests made by the US to a range of potential coalition partners. Subsequently, the Government have set out to Parliament the nature of their contribution to military action in Iraq on a number of occasions.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many reservists are deployed on operations in Iraq. [129071]

Mr. Caplin: As at 1 September 2003 there were 2,453 reservists deployed on operations in Iraq.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much finance has been allocated to UK-funded operators responsible for cleaning UK unexploded ordnance used in the recent invasion of Iraq. [118021]

Mr. Ingram: Providing a safe, secure and risk free environment for the Iraqi people is a key aspect of restoration activity for the coalition. The responsibility for developing a programme for the removal of landmines rests with the Iraq Mine Action Centre (IMAC) and not the UK military. While the Ministry of Defence has not therefore allocated Defence funds to demining operators for the cleaning of UK unexploded ordnance, we have provided personnel to help the process. The UK and the Iraq Mine Action Centre are in the process of marking and documenting around 400 unexploded ordnance sites.

The UK has made a significant effort to educate the local population in its area of operations about the dangers of mines and unexploded ordnance. We have, with the support of UNICEF and the ICRC, developed a Theatre Mine Risk Education Programme.

A poster and leaflet campaign continues and head teachers in Basrah have been briefed so that they can educate the children. In addition to this, local radio stations are informing the local population about unexploded ordnance and encouraging them not to tamper with anything that has either been marked as or may look like unexploded ordnance.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of recovering unexploded ordnance in Iraq. [118325]

Mr. Ingram: The United Kingdom and other coalition explosive ordnance disposal teams in the UK's area of responsibility have completed over 1,500 tasks and destroyed over 146,000 individual munitions. We do not record types of munitions destroyed. 197 caches or storage sites of unexploded ordnance (UXO) have already been identified:

Number of caches	*Size*	*Estimated quantity of unexploded ordnance*	*Types*
111	Small	500–1,000	Various
61	ISO container	1,000–5,000	Various
8	Multiple ISO container	5,000–10,000	Various
9	Small compound	Over 10,000	Various
8	Large compound	Over 100,000	Various

A full survey of sites contaminated with unexploded munitions has been underway since June. The survey has been conducted in concert with other coalition forces, demining companies and with non-Government organisations.

Joint Intelligence Committee

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether *(a)* secret and *(b)* top secret material produced by the Joint Intelligence Committee has been shown to any official in his Department who has not been cleared to see material at these levels of classification since 1997. [129649]

Mr. Hoon: The Ministry of Defence controls protectively marked material, including Top Secret and Secret material produced by the Joint Intelligence Committee: material is made available only to individuals who have been appropriately cleared and have a need to know the information. No incidents of unauthorised access to protectively marked Joint Intelligence Committee material by Ministry of Defence officials have been reported.

Military Personnel

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his Department's policy is on releasing names of military service personnel to marketing companies. [129526]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence does not release names of military, or civilian personnel, to marketing companies.

NATO Scientific Programme

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from the Master of St. Edmund's College, Cambridge, on NATO's scientific programme; and if he will make a statement. [128268]

Mr. Ingram: Defence Ministers have not received representations from Professor Sir Brian Heap, Master of St. Edmund's College, Cambridge. Professor Heap has, however, corresponded with my colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with regard to NATO's scientific programme.

Overseas Deployments

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list current overseas deployments of Navy, Army and Air Force Institution (NAAFI) units; and how many staff are involved in each. [120738]

Mr. Caplin: Current Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes (NAAFI) locations, and associated personnel numbers, outside the United Kingdom are as follows:

Country	*Staff numbers*
Germany	980
Kuwait/Iraq	39
Afghanistan	4
Cyprus	3
Kosovo	3
Bosnia	3
Saudi Arabia	2
Kenya	2
Falkland Islands	2
Gibraltar	2
Belize	1
Brunei	1
Ascension Island	1

The list covers permanent NAAFI undertakings in overseas garrisons as well as Expeditionary Forces Institute (EFI) deployments in support of military operations. The personnel figures shown for each location relate to the number of United Kingdom or United Kingdom Based Contract (UKBC) personnel in post and exclude locally paid staff. The figures for Germany exclude 45 UKBC personnel working for NAAFI financial services and 505 with NAAFI support services.

In addition, some 60 NAAFI personnel serve with the Naval Canteen Service (NCS). NCS personnel serve on ships deployed in a range of locations around the United Kingdom as well as elsewhere, including the Gulf.

Army Equipment Purchases

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of Army personnel he estimates purchase their own *(a)* boots, *(b)* shirts, *(c)* vests, *(d)* jackets, *(e)* bergens and *(f)* trousers. [129493]

Mr. Ingram: In common with many individuals, and as a matter of personal choice, some soldiers will purchase work-related items of clothing or equipment but none are advised to do so. Specific records are not maintained, but the subject features in the Army's Continuous Attitude Survey (CAS). The latest CAS indicates the following percentages for Army personnel who purchase their own items of clothing.

Clothing	Percentage
(a) boots	3
(b) shirts	[1]
(c) vests (T-shirts)	1.5
(d) jackets	8.0
(e) bergens	2.3
(f) trousers	1.3

[1] No statistics.

Relocations

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the investment appraisal of the possible relocation sites for *(a)* the Joint Services Adventurous Training (Gliding) and *(b)* the RAF Gliding and Soaring Association Centres. [129300]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Ro-ro Vessels

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what status the six ro-ro ships are accorded within the Royal Navy; and if he will make a statement. [128340]

Mr. Ingram: The six Joint Rapid Reaction Force ro-ro are not part of the Royal Navy. They are commercial vessels, sponsored by the Ministry of Defence. They were built and are owned and operated, under a Private Finance Initiative, by AWSR Shipping, a commercial consortium. They are manned by Merchant Navy seafarers, who are members of the Sponsored Reserves List of the Royal Naval Reserve, and are therefore liable for call-up when the situation dictates.

In the same way as for Royal Navy ships, threat assessments are carried out and the appropriate level of protection is provided to the ro-ro, when considered necessary. Such protection may include a United Kingdom Service escort party on-board or accompanying Royal Navy ships.

Rosyth

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what classification is given to the MOD estate at Rosyth; what this estate consists of in respect of the dockyard and the former naval base; and what plans there are to reclassify the defence estate at Rosyth. [111152]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 6 May 2003]:* The Rosyth estate consists of:

The HMS Caledonia Site

Married quarters (retained by the Defence Housing Executive (DHE))

Storage/warehousing properties within the former dockyard port, South Arm Jetty (currently occupied by QinetiQ)

Forthview House complex housing Defence estates and the Pricing and Forecasting Group.

The Rosyth site was classified as a core site in the review that concluded in March. However, core sites classification is not static and therefore subject to change in response to evolving Defence needs. Subject to this, there are currently no plans to reclassify the defence estate at Rosyth.

Security Clearance

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the levels of security clearance to which officials of his Department are subjected before they are allowed to see the different categories of classified material. [129648]

Mr. Hoon: The levels of security clearance that Ministry of Defence officials need in order to be granted access to classified material are those which apply across Government. They are set out in HM Government's statement of vetting policy, as announced to the House on 15 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns 764–66W.

Women (Front-line Deployment)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the deployment of women into front line positions. [129492]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made on 22 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 363W, by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. Women are not restricted from deployment into front line positions but, for reasons of combat effectiveness, they are excluded from close combat posts. Further information may be found in the report, "Women in the Armed Forces", which may be found on the Ministry of Defence website at: www.mod.uk/issues/women

PRIME MINISTER

Alastair Campbell

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Prime Minister whether Mr. Alastair Campbell was the subject of the developed vetting procedure. [129774]

The Prime Minister: Information relating to personnel records, including those relating to recruitment, promotion and security vetting, are not disclosed under part 2, exemption 8 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had regarding the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands with President Kirchner; what the outcome of those discussions has been; and if he will make a statement. [129907]

The Prime Minister: I last met President Kirchner at the Progressive Governance Summit on 13 to 14 July 2003. We did not enter into discussions concerning the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands. The United Kingdom position on this is well known and remains unchanged; the Falklands will remain British for as long as that is the wish of the Islanders.

Hutton Inquiry

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those categories of information that have been provided to the Hutton Inquiry which are not normally made available *(a)* to Parliamentary Select Committees and *(b)* in response to Parliamentary Questions; and if he will make a statement on the reasons for the different approaches to information disclosure. [128596]

The Prime Minister: The Government are committed to co-operating fully with the Hutton Inquiry. Relevant papers are being provided to the Inquiry. The decision on which papers to make public is a matter for the Inquiry. In respect of a small number of papers, there

may be issues about the need to keep certain information confidential, for instance, because of national security. Where necessary, the papers are provided to the Inquiry on the understanding that certain text will be suitably redacted before being made public.

Information provided in response to PQs and Select Committees will continue to be decided as appropriate in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information and Information and Departmental Evidence to Select Committees.

Iraq

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Prime Minister on what dates prior to the recent conflict with Iraq he met the heads of each of the armed forces to discuss the proposed conflict. [129222]

The Prime Minister: I discussed the situation in Iraq with the heads of the armed forces at a meeting on 15 January 2003; the Defence Secretary and the Chief of the Defence staff were also present. Subsequently, the views of the Chiefs of Staff were represented to me by the Chief of the Defence Staff, whom I met regularly prior to the conflict.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Prime Minister which weapons the Prime Minister was referring to in his foreword to the Government's Iraq dossier when he made the statement that military planning allows for some of the weapons of mass destruction to be ready within 45 minutes of an order to use them. [129840]

The Prime Minister: It was judged that the chemical and biological munitions concerned would be deployed with battlefield systems such as artillery, multiple-launch rockets and mortars.

Ministerial Code of Conduct

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what procedure is in place to handle complaints about the failure of a Prime Minister to adhere to the Ministerial Code of Conduct. [129258]

The Prime Minister: It is for individual Ministers—including the Prime Minister—to account to Parliament for their actions and decisions.

Multi-national Chairman's Group

Dr. Cable: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his recent meeting with the Multi-National Chairman's Group; and if he will place in the Library the minutes and the agenda of the meeting. [129930]

The Prime Minister: I met with the Multi-National Chairman's Group on 2 September 2003 and discussed a range of economic and business environment issues.

Public Inquiries

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Prime Minister what the total cost to the public purse has been of each public inquiry which has exceeded £1 million since 1997. [129712]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) on 12 June 2003, *Official Report*, columns 987–88W.

Security Service Advice

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister under what circumstances the security services provide advice to him on ministerial *(a)* appointments and *(b)* conduct. [129256]

The Prime Minister: Advice provided by the security services in relation to ministerial appointments and conduct is exempt from disclosure under exemptions 1(a), 2 and 8(a) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

World Trade Talks (Cancun)

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with leading British businesses ahead of the Cancun trade negotiations; and if he will make a statement. [129389]

The Prime Minister: In preparing for the 5th World Trade Organisation Ministerial conference in Cancun, my ministerial colleagues have had regular and extensive discussions with British businesses from those industry and service sectors who have an interest in the Doha Development Agenda.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will make a statement to the House on the conference on her return from Cancun.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Cathedrals (Financial Support)

26. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners what representations the Church Commissioners have made to the Government about the public financial support available to cathedrals. [129577]

Mr. Bell: The Church Heritage Forum, on which the Church Commissioners are represented, aims to forge new partnerships with local, central and regional Government and press the case for greater financial support for the Church's built heritage. Discussions are in hand and the Forum aims to report next summer.

Church Income

27. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners what proportion of the Church's income came from collections in the last five financial years. [129578]

Mr. Bell: I understand from the Archbishops' Council that total giving through standing order, payroll giving and cash, amounting to £282 million in 2001, accounts for roughly one-third of the Church's overall income. This proportion has not changed significantly over the last five years.

Bishops' Emoluments

Norman Baker: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners what percentage of the Church Commissioners' total expenditure was spent on bishops' emoluments in each year from 1999. [127220]

Mr. Bell: The Commissioners are responsible for funding the emoluments of all diocesan, suffragan and full-time assistant bishops as part of their support for bishops. Emoluments include the stipend paid to each bishop, employer's national insurance contributions and pension contributions.

The Commissioners' annual spending on bishops' emoluments from 1999 is shown in the table in monetary values and as a proportion of their total expenditure. The Commissioners also fund bishops' office and working costs, and housing and office premises costs for diocesan bishops.

Bishops' emoluments	*£ million*	*As a percentage of Commissioners' total expenditure*
1999	3.5	2.2
2000	3.5	2.2
2001	3.8	2.4
2002	4.0	2.4

Norman Baker: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners how many and what percentage of bishops had the use of a chauffeur in May *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001, *(c)* 2002 and *(d)* 2003; what the total cost was in current prices in each year; and how many chauffeurs in each year were (i) part-time and (ii) full-time. [127217]

Mr. Bell: The position is as follows:

	Number of bishops with use of a driver	*Percentage of bishops*	*Total cost (calendar years) (£)*	*Equivalent at May 2003 prices (£)*	*Number of part-time drivers*	*Number of full-time drivers*
2000	32	28	306,318	325,698	23	9
2001	35	30	336,595	350,700	27	8
2002	34	30	324,145	333,895	27	7
2003	32	28	not yet available	n/a	25	7

Genetically Modified Crops

Norman Baker: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners what the Commissioners' policy is in respect of genetically modified crops. [127227]

Mr. Bell: The Church Commissioners do not permit the growing of genetically modified crops on their land. This policy reflects advice offered by the Church of England's Ethical Investment Advisory Group in 2000, endorsed by the Commissioners and available in full on the Church of England's website at http://www.cofe.anglican.org/view/gmos.rtf. The House of Commons Library holds a copy.

The group will keep its advice to the Church Commissioners under review in the light of any new evidence, and scientific peer group commentary upon it, arising from the three-year programme of farm scale trials. The Church Commissioners will consider any new advice offered by the group in due course.

Norman Baker: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners what the total annual expenditure on bishops' residences was in each year from 1998. [127221]

Mr. Bell: The Church Commissioners' expenditure on bishops' housing and office premises in each year from 1999 is as follows:

	£ million
1998	3.0
1999	3.3
2000	3.0
2001	3.3
2002	3.4

As is indicated in note 13 to the Commissioners' annual financial statements, these costs cover building maintenance and repairs, external property management costs, staff costs including salaries and pensions, council tax, insurance and other running costs, Lambeth Palace Library running costs, support services, depreciation, rent paid and rental income. Capital expenditure on existing houses or on acquiring replacement houses is not included.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION

Sunday Elections

28. **Bob Russell:** To ask the hon. Member for Gosport, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission if the commission will evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of holding local and national elections on a Sunday. [129579]

Mr. Viggers: The commission has evaluated a number of local election pilot schemes which featured voting over a period of days—including, in some instances, Sundays. The commission has no plans at present to undertake a wider review of the issues involved.

Disabled Voters

29. **Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the hon. Member for Gosport, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission if he will make a statement on the rights of disabled voters to vote by proxy. [129580]

Mr. Viggers: This is not a matter for the Speaker's Committee, but I understand that a person who by reason of blindness or other physical incapacity cannot reasonably be expected to go in person to the allotted polling station or to vote unaided there, has a statutory right to vote by proxy for an indefinite or particular period.

The hon. Member will be aware that all voters, disabled or not, are entitled to request a postal vote.

Electronic Voting

30. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the hon. Member for Gosport, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission what assessment the commission has made of the privacy of data concerning votes cast electronically in elections; and if he will make a statement. [129581]

Mr. Viggers: In its evaluation of the May 2003 electoral pilot schemes, the commission highlighted the importance of ensuring the confidentiality of vote data in electronic voting. The commission concluded that the level of security in the 2003 pilot schemes was sufficient, but recommended further data encryption requirements for future pilot schemes.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Mesopotamia (Antiquities)

13. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assistance has been provided by her Department in protecting the antiquities of Mesopotamia. [129564]

Tessa Jowell: Officials from my Department were among the first civilians sent to Iraq after the war. They worked within the Coalition Provisional Authority to re-establish the Iraqi Culture Ministry. They also worked on clarifying numbers of items missing from the Iraq museum and on implementing measures, to help prevent on-going looting from archaeological sites.

We have also implemented UNSCR 1483 in reaction to the prohibition of the import of trade in unlawfully removed Iraq cultural property.

Subtitled Films

14. **Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to increase the number of subtitled films screened in the UK. [129565]

Estelle Morris: The UK Film Council, charged by the Government to create a sustainable British film industry, has announced a cinema access programme to improve access to cinemas by people with hearing and sight impairments. £500,000 of lottery money has been allocated to this programme, of which £350,000 will be used to supply up to 75 local cinemas across England with subtitling and audio-description equipment, and £60,000 will be used to provide sub-titled and audio-described film prints for use in cinemas.

Olympic Bid

15. **Mr. Wyatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she expects to announce the name of the chief executive officer of the 2012 London Olympic bid; and if she will make a statement. [129566]

Tessa Jowell: The appointment of the chief executive officer of London 2012 Ltd., the company established to take forward the bid to host the Olympic Games in London in 2012, is a matter for the company itself.

I understand that Barbara Cassani, chair of London 2012, is currently considering candidates for the post.

18. **Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the committee structure for London's 2012 Olympic bid. [129569]

Tessa Jowell: The Board of London 2012 Ltd. has been tasked as the bid committee to prepare the bid to host the 2012 Olympics in London. While a number of executive posts to the board remain to be filled, the board members recently announced by London 2012 Ltd. are as follows:

Barbara Cassani—Chairman
Mike Power—Chief Operating Officer
Neale Coleman
Simon Clegg OBE
Mike Brace
Matthew Pinsent CBE
Craig Reedie CBE
Sir Steve Redgrave
HRH The Princess Royal
Mary Reilly
Derrick Anderson
Patrick Carter
Charles Allen
Sir Howard Bernstein
Lord Paul of Marylebone
Dalton Grant

A stakeholder's panel of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Mayor of London and Chair of the British Olympic Association has also been established. The stakeholder's panel will have the final right of approval over London's applicant city questionnaire and candidature file.

London 2012 Ltd. will also be establishing a Bid Forum which will allow London 2012 to consult and seek advice from a wider constituency of interested parties from across London and the country.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the extent to which the Olympic bid will enhance regional sports facilities. [128654]

Tessa Jowell: My Department has assessed that should the UK win the right to host the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games they will provide the opportunity for a lasting legacy for communities

through the investment by visiting teams in enhanced sporting facilities for training and preparing for the Games.

In addition I announced in July that during the bidding phase, community facilities across the UK will be improved through further funding of £100 million from the New Opportunities Fund. In England this will be joined with £31 million from Sport England to provide a fund for community sports facilities in each region.

This investment will be used together with the Olympic Bid to galvanise enthusiasm and encourage and sustain increased participation in sport in our communities.

Mr. John Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how the statement in the Government's response to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee report on A London Olympic Bid, Cm 5867, that special funding streams to meet Olympic costs should be closed by 2013–14, accords with her statement on 15th May, *Official Report*, column 481, on the length of time that the special London council tax precept will run; [128084]

(2) how long the London council tax precept to contribute to the cost of a London Olympic Games will last; at what level it will be set each year; and what the proceeds will be. [128085]

Tessa Jowell: The Memorandum of Understanding between the Government and the Mayor of London, as published in the response to the Select committee, makes clear that "the Government and Mayor's expectation I that special funding streams to meet Olympic costs should be closed, having provided the necessary amounts, by 2013–14, except that where the Greater London Authority has borrowed to meet capital costs of the Olympics it may be necessary to extend the period during which the Olympic precept is levied to reflect the requirements of the prudential framework for capital finance."

Within that Memorandum, London is required to contribute up to £550 million towards the cost of the staging of the Games, with provision for a further £75 million if needed. The Mayor has said that he will raise this from the London Council Tax from an additional £20 a year charge, or 38p a week, on Council Tax for a band D property, likely to begin in 2006–07 if the bid is successful. On the current tax base it is estimated that this would arise the required £550 million in ten years and a further £75 million within another two years if necessary. However, the Mayor has also advised that during the period from 2006–07 the tax base will increase and so that time period may reduce. In addition, the funding package for the Games allows a £1.2 billion contingency over and above Arup's estimates of required public subsidy for staging the Olympics. The time period for collection of Council Tax would also reduce if all contingencies were not required, and it is the Mayor's expectation that special funding streams should have closed, having provided the necessary amount by 2013–14. In the unlikely event that the full funding package is required, and the GLA has to borrow to meet capital costs of staging the Olympics then the period of special funding may extend beyond that dated as allowed for in the Memorandum.

My statement to the House on 15 May on the length of the time that the special London council tax precept would run presented the Government's assessment of a possible worst-case scenario. The Memorandum of Understanding, as I have explained, makes provision for such an eventuality. However, current expectations are that this will not be the se and that special funding streams should be capable of being closed by 2013–14. The Mayor has also advised that current expectations are that in the unlikely event that the full London contribution were required this could be raised in less than 12 years.

Tourism

16. **Diana Organ:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment has been made of the number of *(a)* domestic and *(b)* overseas tourists in England this summer. [129567]

Mr. Caborn: The latest figures show that the number of domestic tourist trips in England which include an overnight stay were 31.4 million between April and June 2003.

Figures for overseas tourists visiting England this summer will be available in January 2004. The latest figures for Britain show that, in the three months from May to July 2003, there were 6.9 million visits by overseas residents.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of Stat for Culture, Media and Sport, what arrangements are in place to promote *(a)* England and *(b)* Britain overseas as tourist destinations. [129558]

Mr. Caborn: VisitBritain promotes the whole of Britain overseas, including England, as a tourist destination with £35.5 million Government funding this year and additional partnership funding from the industry. Their current campaigns include a campaign in the United States worth approximately £2 million and a £4 million "City Breaks" campaign in Europe launched last week.

19. **Mr. Best:** To ask the Minister for State and Culture, Media and Sport what discussions her Department has had with regional development agencies on their progress in co-ordinating regional tourism strategies. [129570]

Mr. Caborn: I recently met the new Chair of the South West Regional Development Agency (who leads for the RDAs on tourism) and discussed the strategic role which the RDAs have been given in the reformed arrangements for tourism. I am looking forward to a forthcoming meeting with all the RDA Chairs to discuss progress. We have issued guidance to the RDAs on how tourism should be covered in their Corporate Plans and Regional Economic Strategies, which includes working together with each other within the new national framework for tourism strategy and marketing and have commented on draft Corporate Plans and related strategies in the light of this.

Analogue Television

17. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her estimate is of the switch-off date for analogue television; and if she will make a statement. [129568]

Tessa Jowell: The criteria set for switchover are that: everyone who can currently get the main public service broadcasting channels in analogue form must be able to receive them on digital systems; switching to digital is an affordable option for the vast majority of people; and as a target indicator of affordability, 95 per cent. of consumers must have access to digital equipment. The objective of the Digital Television Action Plan Project is to ensure these criteria are met so that we can, if we choose, take the decision to proceed to full switchover by ordering the switching off by 2010 of analogue terrestrial transmissions.

Horseracing Industry

20. **Mr. Laurence Robertson**: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make a statement on the Office of Fair Trading's proposals on the British horseracing industry. [129571]

Mr. Caborn: The OFT has made no proposals for the racing industry. It is conducting an enquiry into racing's rules and regulations and has issued a Rule 14 notice. That notice points to those areas that appear to restrict or distort competition. The British Horseracing Board and the Jockey Club have now responded and the process will continue until the OFT hands down a final ruling.

BBC Charter

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the process for renewal of the BBC's charter. [128891]

Tessa Jowell: The Government will announce how it intends to conduct the Charter Review before the end of the year. I can give a commitment now, however, that the process will be both wide-ranging and thorough, that public debate will form a critical element of the review, and that there will be opportunities for parliamentary scrutiny.

Food Expenditure

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much was spent on food by her Department and by each agency for which it is responsible in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03; what proportion of that food by value was produced in the United Kingdom; what guidance she has issued to encourage the procurement of home-grown food; and if she will make a statement. [129383]

Mr. Caborn: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) does not directly buy food substances. DCMS opened a staff restaurant on 2 April 2001 and employs a catering organisation to provide the required service. The service provider is encouraged by the Department to purchase ethically and environmentally sound goods where this is practical.

Additionally, the Royal Parks Agency does not operate a system of buying food directly.

Television (Foul Language)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will take powers to prevent the use of obscene, abusive and insulting language on television; and if she will make a statement. [129440]

Estelle Morris *[holding answer 11 September 2003]:* Responsibility for what is broadcast on television rests with the broadcasters and the organisations which regulate broadcasting—the Governors of the BBC, the Independent Television Commission and the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority. They are independent of the Government and responsible for safeguarding the public interest in broadcasting. In carrying out their responsibilities, these authorities have a duty to ensure that programmes contain nothing which offends against good taste and decency or is likely to be offensive to public feeling. They also maintain guidelines for programme-makers on the standards which should be observed. This guidance includes advice on the use of language and timing of programmes and recommends when warning announcements about programmes should be made. In addition, the Broadcasting Standards Commission acts as a forum for public concern.

The Communications Act 2003 establishes a new regulatory framework for broadcasting and the communications industries, including the creation of a single regulatory body for the communications industries, the Office of Communications, which will have similar responsibilities for broadcast content. Viewers who are offended by television programmes should complain to the relevant broadcaster and, in the case of serious breaches of the regulatory codes, to the regulator.

Gatwick Airport Expansion (Listed Buildings)

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many Grade I, II, and II* listed buildings would *(a)* be left without public access and *(b)* need to be demolished under each of the different proposals to expand runway capacity at Gatwick airport. [129007]

Mr. Caborn: If a close parallel runway were built three Grade II* and four Grade II buildings would be demolished, rising to five Grade II* and 12 Grade II buildings under the wide-spaced option and 6 Grade II* and 18 Grade II under the two runway option. No Grade I buildings would be affected under any proposed option. We do not hold information about the number of buildings likely to be left without public access.

Private Museums

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what financial support she provides for private museums; and if she will make a statement. [129727]

Estelle Morris: Independent museums with charitable status are eligible to apply for status as a Registered Museum, under Resource's Registration Scheme. This makes them eligible for support under a wide range of

initiatives, including the Renaissance in the Regions programme, the Museum Development Fund, and, if its collections are designated as being of 'outstanding importance', the Designation Challenge Fund.

Privately owned collections, however, are not eligible for Registered status and do not receive such financial support.

National Lottery

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on her policy on linking the value and number of National Lottery constituency awards and constituency deprivation. [129830]

Estelle Morris: All parts of the country should have access to Lottery funds. Many areas suffering wider social and economic deprivation need extra support to develop and put in good applications which are more likely to be successful. The fairshare initiative, bringing together funding from the New Opportunities Fund and Community Fund, specifically seeks to target areas of the UK which were most deprived, and which have not received their 'fair share' of Lottery funding. In addition, the Lottery Funding Decision Document, published in July, contains a number of proposals to make it easier for people to apply for Lottery funding, particularly those in disadvantaged communities. These include the creation of a new distributor, which will focus on improving the quality of life in communities by tackling disadvantage and social exclusion.

Sport England

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what criteria Sport England Exchequer uses to allocate grant aid to national governing bodies; and if she will make a statement. [128778]

Mr. Caborn: The process for Exchequer grant allocations to National Governing Bodies of Sport from Sport England is currently under review, the outcome of which is expected towards the end of October.

To date Sport England Exchequer grants are made available to those National Governing Bodies of Sport that are recognised as leading the development of their sport in England. Sport England investment in National Governing Bodies is based on the ability of the National Governing Body to deliver increased numbers of participants in the sport, to retain involvement in the sport either as participant, coach, official or volunteer, and to achieve publicly recognised levels of success.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the additional level of Exchequer Funds is that has been made available to support the World Class Performance Programme contained in the recommendations of the Cunningham Review for Elite Sports. [130364]

Mr. Caborn: Following the Spending Review 2002, this Department has made available to UK Sport an additional exchequer allocation of £4.7 million in 2004–05 and £4.7 million in 2005–06, to enable them to take forward some of the recommendations of the Elite Sports Funding Review.

Government Art Collection

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much has been spent by the Government in each year since May 1997 on acquiring works of art; and where each work acquired is held. [129281]

Estelle Morris *[holding answer 11 September 2003]*: In the seven Financial Years since 2 May 1997 the Government Art Collection has spent a total of £1,111,500 from its Programme Vote on the purchase of works of art. This breaks down as follows:

	£
2 May 1997 to 1998	137,000
1998–99	127,000
1999–2000	179,000
2000–01	130,500
2001–02	158,000
2002–03	241,000
1 April to 11 September 2003	139,000

These works of art are currently located in some 55 Government buildings in the UK and around the world, as part of the Collection's remit in promoting British art and culture to visitors to these buildings.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much has been realised by the Government through the sales of works of art in each year since May 1997. [129280]

Estelle Morris *[holding answer 11 September 2003]*: The Government Art Collection has sold no works of art from its holdings since May 1997.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Meat Imports

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of EU import controls in preventing the import of meat from areas of high risk into the United Kingdom. [128060]

Mr. Bradshaw: European Community law sets out the import conditions which must be met by all meat imported into the community from third countries. These conditions do not permit meat to be imported from areas where veterinary controls cannot guarantee that the meat poses negligible disease risk to human or animal health. Defra veterinary experts and the Food Standards Agency are fully engaged in negotiations to develop Community import conditions. Should the disease situation in an exporting country change, for example if a new outbreak of disease is notified, the European Commission will introduce safeguard measures to control imports so that there is no increased risk of disease as a result. Pending these changes to community rules, in such a situation individual member states are permitted to introduce unilateral provisions to control imports. The Government take such unilateral action whenever the situation demands it.

Community import rules require all meat imported from third countries to enter the community via specified Border Inspection Posts where it is subject to veterinary examination to ensure the import conditions are being observed. The system of veterinary examination is operated by local authorities and is monitored by Defra and the European Commission to ensure effective controls are in place.

The Government have produced an Annual Review of Controls on Imports of Animal Products April 2002–March 2003 which concentrates on the action against illegal imports. This has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Gatwick Airport (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty)

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty lie within 15 miles of Gatwick airport; and what assessment she has made of the impact on these AONB's from new flight paths to the proposed new runways at Gatwick. [129008]

Alun Michael: Parts of four Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty lie within 15 miles of Gatwick airport. The Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty concerned are the Kent Downs, Sussex Downs, High Weald and Surrey Hills. We have worked closely with the Department for Transport to ensure that the noise impact of the proposed new airport developments is given full consideration. Taking the 57dB contour as the onset of significant community annoyance, the options for a single close parallel or wide parallel runway are likely to have a minimal impact on the surrounding Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The option of building two additional runways at Gatwick would have a greater impact on the Surrey Hills and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Cattle Passport Scheme

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the operation of the cattle passport scheme. [129065]

Alun Michael: The cattle passport scheme is operated by the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS) and became part of the Rural Payments Agency on 1 April 2003. The cattle passport scheme has been in operation for over six years and the national cattle database contains the details of the 9.7 million animals that make up the national herd. We are currently investing a further £12 million to upgrade the system and improve its performance.

BCMS operates to ISO 9001:2000 standards, is registered with the British Standards Institute and its operating practices have received the Kite mark. In addition to paper reporting systems, we have provided online facilities via a website for cattle keepers to use. BCMS are constantly striving to improve their service and efficiency.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 13 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 142W, on the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, if she will set out the timetable for the implementation of regulations under Part I of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. [129973]

Alun Michael: The following table records the progress we have already made towards bringing the regulations into force and our timetable for completing the process. As I explained in my answer of 13 May, the precise timing may vary but we are firmly committed to ensuring the necessary regulations are made to allow the new right of public access under the Act to be rolled out as planned. Regulations enabling persons to dedicate land for access came into force on 1 September and I expect to lay regulations relating to the exclusion or restriction of access soon.

Regulation	Section	Consultation commenced (not later than)	Date regulations in force (not later than)
Regulations regarding mapping of access land and consultation on draft maps	Section 11	March 2001 (ended June 2001)	1 November 2001
Regulations regarding issue of provisional maps, appeals, and issue of conclusive maps	Section 11	November 2001 (ended 8 February 2002)	29 July 2002
Regulations regarding the establishment of LAFs and the appointment of members	Section 94 (Part V)	July 2001 (ended October 2001)	7 August 2002
Regulations on correcting minor errors and omissions in provisional and conclusive maps	Section 11(2)(1)	October 2002 (ended 7 November 2002)	21 July 2003
Regulations regarding dedication of land for access	Section 16	January 2002 (ended 15 April 2002)	1 September 2003
Regulations relating to exclusion or restriction of access under Chapter II, including appeals (but not emergencies)	Section 32	December 2001 (ended 22 March 2002)	October 2003
Regulations on removal or relaxation of restrictions on access land	Paragraph 7, Schedule 2	July 2003 (ends October 2003)	December 2003
Regulations to exclude access in emergencies	Section 31	October 2003	February 2004
Regulations on appeals relating to notices	Section 38	October 2003	February 2004
Regulations on references to public places in existing enactments	Section 42	October 2003	February 2004
Regulations regarding review of conclusive maps	Section 11	February 2004	August 2004

Departmental Staff

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* press officers, *(c)* civil servants, *(d)* advisers to civil servants and *(e)* permanent staff were working for her Department in each year since 1996. [126481]

Alun Michael: Defra came into being in June 2001 and the following information relates to the period since then.

(a) The Secretary of State has two Special Advisors.

The Department employs an Environmental Advisor, who reports to the Director for Environment Protection Strategy.

Ewen Cameron, who is also Chair of the Countryside Agency, is the Rural Advocate, arguing the case on countryside issues and for rural people at the highest levels in Government and outside. While this role has no formal line of accountability, Sir Ewen works closely with me as Minister of State for Rural Affairs on a range of issues of rural proofing and also has access to the Secretary of State and other senior members of Government.

Dr. Chris Fay holds the title Emissions Trading Champion. Reporting to the Director for Climate, Energy and Environmental Risk, he assisted the Government in recruiting participants to the UK's voluntary Emissions Trading Scheme launched in April 2002, and plays a role in communicating with business on emissions trading issues.

Lord Haskins acted as Rural Recovery Co-ordinator during the latter part of the foot and mouth disease outbreak in 2001. His role was to help local authorities and other agencies plan for the economic recovery of Cumbria, and to consider what lessons were also applicable to other areas affected by the outbreak. Lord Haskins began work on 14 August 2001 and reported to me in October 2001.

(b) When Defra was established in June 2001 there were 19 press officer posts. In March 2002 there were 20, in May 2002 there were 22 and as at September 2003 there are 20 press officer posts. These figures include the post of Head of News but not that of Director of Communications.

(c) and *(e)* This information is available in Table C of the annual publication Civil Service Statistics, which covers permanent staff numbers in each department and agency from 1996 to 2002. Copies of the publication are laid in the Libraries of both Houses. The latest edition, based on April 2002 data, was published on 24 July 2003. The figures will include press officers, although they are not separately identified. The total number of permanent and casual civil servants on both a head-count and a full-time equivalent basis at 1 April 2002 is available in Table A of Civil Service Statistics. Full-time equivalents are preferred to head-counts when examining trends over time. Also, the number of permanent staff is preferred as a basis when looking at trends as casual staff numbers reflect short-term responses to changes in workloads.

Alternatively, this information is available at the following address on the Cabinet Office's website: http://www.civil-service.gov.uk/statistics/css.htm.

(d) The term "advisers to civil servants" is not one that is recognised.

Export Refunds

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the most recent annual amounts of export refund provided through the EU for the export of *(a)* fruit, *(b)* vegetables and *(c)* sugar; and if she will list the amounts in sterling per pound weight. [128819]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 10 September 2003]*: EU expenditure on export refunds in 2001, the latest year for which full information is available, was as follows:

Fresh fruit and vegetables—36.1 million euros

Processed fruit and vegetables—14.8 million euros

The rates of export refund vary by product and over time and the cost per pound weight is not readily available.

Fallen Stock

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effect of a ban on the disposal of fallen stock. [129113]

Alun Michael: The Animal By-Products Regulations 2003 permit hunt kennels to continue collecting fallen stock; however they will be required to upgrade to knackers' yard standards if they wish to collect fallen stock for the purposes of feeding to hounds. The effect of a ban on hunting would depend on decisions made by those who currently offer a service and on choices made by farmers leading to takeup of the national scheme. Most hunts already make a charge and there is no reason why such a service should not continue as a business opportunity when hunting wild mammals with dogs is banned.

Departmental Staff

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many jobs under the remit of her Department in *(a)* the core department and *(b)* executive agencies are in (i) Scotland, (ii) England, excluding Greater London, (iii) Greater London, (iv) Wales, (v) Northern Ireland and (vi) overseas, broken down by (A) whole-time equivalent jobs and (B) the percentage per individual department, body or organisation; if she will break down the figures in terms of responsibilities which apply to (1) England, (2) England and Wales and (3) the UK as a whole; and if she will list the non-departmental public bodies and independent statutory bodies for which information is not held centrally. [127308]

Alun Michael: The following table shows the number of permanent staff in Defra and its executive agencies that are located in the regions specified as at 1 April 2003.

	DEFRA		*CEFAS*		*CSL*		*PSD*	
	FTE	*%*	*FTE*	*%*	*FTE*	*%*	*FTE*	*%*
Scotland	77.6	1.17	0.0	0.00	11.0	1.70	0.0	0.00
England, excluding G London	3,707.4	56.14	524.7	100.00	636.9	98.30	174.2	100.00
Greater London	2,680.8	40.59	0.0	0.00	0.0	0.00	0.0	0.00
Wales	135.2	2.05	0.0	0.00	0.0	0.00	0.0	0.00
Northern Ireland	0.0	0.00	0.0	0.00	0.0	0.00	0.0	0.00
Overseas	3.0	0.05	0.0	0.00	0.0	0.00	0.0	0.00
Total	6,603.9	100.00	524.7	100.00	647.9	100.00	174.2	100.00

	RPA		*VLA*		*VMD*	
	FTE	*%*	*FTE*	*%*	*FTE*	*%*
Scotland	0.0	0.00	44.0	3.40	0.0	0.00
England, excluding G London	3,370.9	99.94	1,218.3	94.15	119.3	100.00
Greater London	0.0	0.00	0.0	0.00	0.0	0.00
Wales	0.0	0.00	31.7	2.45	0.0	0.00
Northern Ireland	2.0	0.06	0.0	0.00	0.0	0.00
Overseas	0.0	0.00	0.0	0.00	0.0	0.00
Total	3,372.9	100.00	1,294.0	100.00	119.3	100.00

Due to the complexity of the department and the wide range of business areas that it covers, a break down of these figures in terms of responsibilities that apply to geographical areas could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The following non-departmental public bodies and independent statutory bodies are under the remit of Defra:

Executive

Agricultural Wages Board for England & Wales
Agricultural Wages Committee
Apple and Pear Research Council
British Potato Council
Countryside Agency
English Nature
Environment Agency
Food From Britain Council
Home Grown Cereals Authority
Horticulture Development Council
Horticulture Research International
Joint Nature Conservation Committee
Meat and Livestock Commission
Milk Development Council
National Forest Company
Regional Flood Defence Committee
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
Sea Fish Industry Authority
UK Register of Organic Food Standards
Wine Standards Board

Advisory

Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment
Advisory Committee on Consumer Products and the Environment
Advisory Committee on Hazardous Substances
Advisory Committee on Packaging
Advisory Committee on Pesticides
Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment
Agricultural Dwelling House Advisory Committee
Air Quality Expert Group
Committee of Investigation for Great Britain
Committee on Agricultural Valuation
Committee on Products and Processes for use in Public Water Supply

Committee on Radioactive Waste Management
Consumers Committee for Great Britain
Darwin Advisory Committee (the Darwin Initiative)
Expert Group on Cryptosporidium in Water Supplies
Expert Panel on Air Quality Standards
Farm Animal Welfare Council
Government-Industry Forum on non-food uses of crops
Hill Farming Advisory Committee
Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS) Appeals Panel
Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB
Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council
Pesticide Residues Committee
Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee
Royal Commission on Environment Pollution
Science Advisory Council
Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC)
Sustainable Development Commission
Sustainable Development Education Panel
Veterinary Products Committee
Veterinary Residues Committee
Water Regulations Advisory Committee
Zoos Forum

Tribunals

Agricultural Land Tribunal
Dairy Produce Quota Tribunal
Plant Varieties and Seeds Tribunal
Commons Commissioners

Public corporation

British Waterways Board
Covent Garden Market Authority

Lantra

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with representatives from Lantra on the delivery of its strategic plan. [130541]

Alun Michael: I have met the Chairman and senior directors of Lantra on several occasions to discuss a range of matters relating to Lantra's activities, including progress towards meeting the organisation's strategic objectives, and I will continue to do so.

Levies

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the levies, expressed in sterling per pound weight, are for *(a)* fruit, *(b)* vegetables and *(c)* sugar. [128821]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 10 September 2003]:* EU import duties on fresh fruit and vegetables are set for a range of products on an ad valorem basis. For some products, an additional or minimum sum based on an amount per kilo is payable. The relevant duty rate is applied to the customs value which is normally based on the price actually paid or payable for the goods. However, for certain products, simplified rules are in place which allow a standard unit value to be used as the customs value; these are updated fortnightly. The simplified procedure values in force from 29 August to 11 September are as follows:

Simplified procedure GIF values for certain perishable goods in pounds sterling per 100kg net
Effective period 29/08/2003 to 11/09/2003

SPV Code	*Description*	*Value/ 100kgs (£s)*	*Value/pence per pound*
1.10	New potatoes	0.00	0
1.30	Onions (other than seed)	15.00	6.8
1.40	Garlic	75.25	34.14
1.50	Leeks	28.35	12.86
1.60	Cauliflowers	0.00	0.0
1.70	Brussels sprouts	0.00	0.0
1.80	White cabbages and red cabbages	36.21	16.42
1.90	Sprouting broccoli or calabrese (Brassica oleracea L. convar.botrytis (L) Alef. Var. italica	42.50	19.28
1.100	Chinese cabbage	37.55	17.03
1.110	Cabbage lettuce (head lettuce)	0.00	0.0
1.120	Endives	0.00	0.0
1.130	Carrots	12.56	5.70
1.140	Radishes	63.91	28.99
1.160	Peas (Pisum sativum)	222.41	100.88
1.170	Beans:		
1.170.1	Beans (Vigna Spp. Phaseolus spp.)	65.88	29.88
1.170.2	Beans (Phaseolus ssp. Vulgaris var. Compressus Savi)	64.90	29.44
1.180	Broad beans	0.00	0.0
1.190	Globe artichokes	0.00	0.0
1.200	Asparagus		
1.200.1	-green	174.04	78.94
1.200.2	-other	150.99	68.49
1.210	Aubergines (eggplants)	54.99	24.94
1.220	Ribbed celery (Apium graveolens L. var dulce (Mill) Pers.)	54.76	24.84
1.230	Chantarelles	503.43	228.35
1.240	Sweet peppers	73.05	33.14
1.250	Fennel	0.00	0.0
1.270	Sweet potatoes, whole, fresh (intended for human consumption)	66.01	29.94
2.10	Chestnuts (Castanea spp.), fresh	0.00	0.0
2.30	Pineapples, fresh	69.60	31.57
2.40	Avocados, fresh	116.74	52.95

Simplified procedure GIF values for certain perishable goods in pounds sterling per 100kg net
Effective period 29/08/2003 to 11/09/2003

SPV Code	*Description*	*Value/ 100kgs (£s)*	*Value/pence per pound*
2.50	Guavas and mangoes, fresh	103.37	46.89
2.60	Sweet oranges, fresh		
2.60.1	-Sanguines and semi-sangunes	29.89	13.56
2.60.2	-Navels, Navelines, Navelates, Salustianas, Vernas, Valencia lates, Maltese, Shamoutis, Ovalis, Trovita and Hamlins	32.33	14.66
2.60.3	-Others	29.94	13.58
2.70	Mandarins (including tangerines and satsumas), fresh; clementines, wilkings and similar citrus nybrids, fresh:		
2.70.1	-Clementines	57.05	25.88
2.70.2	-Monreales and Satsumas	46.00	20.87
2.70.3	-Mandarins and wilkings	52.41	23.77
2.70.4	-Tangerines and others	47.05	21.34
2.85	Limes (Citrus aurantifolia), fresh	49.40	22.41
2.90	Grapefruit, fresh:		
2.90.1	-white	35.49	16.10
2.90.2	-pink	62.00	21.12
2.100	Table grapes	0.00	0.0
2.100	Water melons	16.51	7.49
2.120	Melons (other than water melons):		
2.120.1	-Amarillo, Cuper, Honey Dew (including Cantalene), Ontenient, Piel de Sapo (including Verde Liso), Rochet, Tendral, Futoro	85.16	38.63
2.120.2	-other	107.39	48.71
2.140	Pears		
2.140.1	Pears—Nashi (Pyrus pyrifolia)	0.00	0.0
2.140.2	Other	0.00	0.0
2.150	Apricots	146.89	66.63
2.160	Cherries	330.01	149.69
2.170	Peaches	0.00	0.0
2.180	Nectarines	0.00	0.0
2.190	Plums	0.00	0.0
2.200	Strawberries	272.15	123.45
2.205	Raspberries	210.99	95.70
2.210	Fruit of the species Vaccinium myrtillus (Bilberries)	285.76	129.62
2.220	Kiwi fruit (Actinidia chinensis Planch)	120.14	54.50
2.230	Pomegranates	216.14	98.04
2.240	Khakis (including Sharon fruit)	236.07	107.08
2.250	Lychees	128.96	58.50

The current import duty on (non-preferential) sugar imported into the EU is 419 euros per tonne. This equivalent to about 13p per pound.

Light Pollution

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps are being taken to deal with light pollution, with particular reference to domestic security equipment not requiring planning permission. [128413]

Mr. Bradshaw: Defra considered the control of nuisance caused by security lighting in its recent consultation "Living Places—Powers, Rights, Responsibilities".

The paper sought opinions as to whether the Government should introduce new regulations for the positioning of external lighting (including domestic or security lighting, but excluding street lights); and whether the remit of the statutory nuisance regime should be extended to include such lighting. The consultation period closed on 14 February. A summary of the comments received to this consultation exercise has now been published. Most respondents felt that the statutory nuisance regime would be the most effective option, but issues were highlighted regarding the need to identify a feasible means of assessing external light for enforcement purpose. Copies of the summary report have been placed in both houses, and it is also available at: www.defra.gov.uk/environment/consult/pubspace/index.htm.

The House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology recently held an inquiry into light pollution and astronomy. This focused on the effectiveness of measures taken to reduce the impact of light pollution on astronomy and considered what further steps, if any, are required. The outcome of the inquiry will be published in due course and will be made available on the House of Commons' website.

The Government will consider its future course of action taking into consideration any recommendations and conclusions emerging from the Select Committee's inquiry and from Defra's recent consultation exercise.

Sheep Dip

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the extent to which farmers use arable cypermethrin for sheep dip; what the implications of its inappropriate use are in terms of risk to *(a)* the environment, *(b)* animal health and *(c)* human health; and if she will make a statement. [129185]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 11 September 2003]*: Cypermethrin is included as an active ingredient in 12 products currently authorised for use as veterinary medicines, including a number of sheep dips. All of these products have been fully assessed against a number of statutory criteria designed to assure their safety, quality and efficacy for this use.

However my officials are currently investigating reports that suggest that a number of farmers may be purchasing an arable form of cypermethrin for use illegally to dip sheep. Although these investigations are at an early stage we have identified a number of sheep farmers in the Ceredigion region of South Wales who do not grow arable crops but who recently have purchased arable cypermethrin products.

The arable product has been assessed for use as a pesticide, not as a sheep dip. It is not possible accurately to quantify the risks to the environment, animal health or human health from the illegal use of arable cypermethrin products as sheep dips as more information is required on how the product has actually been used. We are trying to collect this information and will carry out a risk assessment as soon as we are able. However, from the limited information currently available, our main concern relates to the potential environmental damage that might be caused by the inappropriate use, and disposal, of such products.

Training Opportunities (Countryside)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what training opportunities are available for those working in the countryside. [130588]

Alun Michael: With the exception of schemes targeted at particular industry sectors, such as the Vocational Training Scheme provided under the England Rural Development Programme, people working in the countryside are entitled to the same wide and diverse range of training opportunities as people working elsewhere. The pattern of provision varies from place to place. Issues which are specific to the countryside, such as access to training for people living in remote rural areas, are being examined in the Department's Learning Skills and Knowledge Review.

Urban Commons

Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what types of development are permissible on land designated as urban common under the Law of Property Act 1925; and whether such development requires approval by the Secretary of State; [129436]

(2) under what circumstances the erection of fencing is permitted on land designated as registered urban common under the Law of Property Act 1925. [129437]

Alun Michael: Under the provisions of section 194 of the Law of Property Act 1925, the Secretary of State's consent is required for any works which prevent or impede access to any land which, on 1 January 1926, was subject to rights of common. Such consent is separate from any other consent that might be needed, for example, under planning legislation.

It is not possible to say what types of work might receive the Secretary of State's consent, or in what circumstances such consent might be granted. Each application is treated on its individual merits after full consideration of all relevant factors. Details of any proposed works would have to be advertised in the local press.

Varroa

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research her Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on chemical resistant varroa mites; and what plans she has to contain the spread of varroa mites. [113257]

Mr. Bradshaw: Controlling varroa is still the single most important challenge to UK beekeeping today. The pest is now endemic across much of the UK. Defra (and MAFF before it) has been funding a range of measures applied by the National Bee Unit under the Department's bee health programme, and R&D to better equip beekeepers to manage varroa infestations in their colonies ever since it was first detected in Devon in 1992. These measures include the provision of a free diagnostic and inspection service as well as training and education to enable beekeepers to become self-reliant in controlling the mite through improved bee husbandry.

The Department has not yet commissioned any R&D on resistant mites, although current research investigating biological control methods for varroa is extremely relevant given the presence in England and Wales of varroa mites resistant to Apistan and Bayvarol, until recently the only two varroacides authorised for use in the UK.

As has been demonstrated on the Continent, the varroa mite will develop resistance to most chemicals applied to control it; the spread of resistance is therefore inevitable. However, with foresight, the National Bee Unit began implementing a surveillance programme monitoring apiaries for signs of resistance in early 2000. As a result, the UK has been one of only a few countries that has been able to detect resistance before it has become fully established, thus enabling us to take action to help beekeepers treat affected colonies at an early stage. Although resistance is more widespread this year, the recent introduction on the UK market of a new treatment for varroa is welcome. Unlike Apistan and Bayvarol, the new product, Apiguard, is not based on a pyrethroid active ingredient and beekeepers will be able to use this, along with other controls, in particular Integrated Pest Management, which we are strongly advocating, to combat pyrethroid resistant mites.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Music Piracy

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment she has made of the effect of web music piracy on *(a)* music sales and *(b)* the cost of legally purchased music; [128132]

(2) what action she is taking to prevent web music piracy. [128133]

Mr. Timms: We have studied various and somewhat contradictory assessments that have been made by others considering the effect of music piracy on the internet on music sales and the cost of legally purchased music. These suggest that reliable evaluation of the relationship would be difficult. Moreover, my understanding is that much illegal file sharing on the internet is illegal private copying rather than piracy which further adds to the difficulty of an evaluation.

Although UK copyright law already provides strong protection for those who own rights in music, our implementation in the UK of the EU Copyright Directive will clarify these rights and introduce criminal offences for internet music piracy, that is wilful illegal transmission of music on the internet when conducted at least on a commercial scale. The increasing availability of legitimate music tracks on the internet should also assist in encouraging those engaged in illegal private copying to desist and the clarification of the law resulting from the Copyright Directive should enable the music industry to trade online with even greater confidence.

Civil Relationships Registration Scheme

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the rights which a married couple have, but a couple under the proposed civil relationships registration scheme would not have. [129235]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 September 2003]:* The consultation paper on civil partnership explains the main proposed rights and responsibilities that the Government has identified as important for same-sex couples who choose to register their partnerships. We are currently consulting on whether there are any significant rights and responsibilities not mentioned in the paper that should be addressed.

Coal Investment Aid

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many applications have been received in respect of coal investment aid; from which companies the applications were received; how many applicants have been successful; and what aid was awarded in respect of each application. [129214]

Mr. Timms: 14 applications were received by 31 July 2003. Details are on the DTI website at: www.dt.gov.uk/energy/coal/invest_aid/index They are still being assessed and no aid has yet been awarded.

Corporate Responsibility Bill

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultation her Department is holding on the Corporate Responsibility Bill; which companies have been informed of this consultation; and which other stakeholders have been asked for their views. [127967]

Jacqui Smith: The Department is not holding or planning any consultation on the Corporate Responsibility Bill though we have received views from MPs and the public.

Illegal Imports

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the import of products produced in illegal ways in the United Kingdom. [127596]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 8 September 2003]:* All imports to the United Kingdom must be in compliance with the controls and conditions laid down in national or European Community legislation.

Langage Power Station

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the time period for commencement of the construction of the gas fired power station at Langage, Plymouth expires; and if she will make a statement. [129705]

Mr. Timms: 14 November 2005. The consent and associated planning permission of 15 November 2000 make clear that development must begin within five years for the permissions to remain valid.

Mineworkers' Compensation

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much money the Government paid to the Union of Democratic Mineworkers for processing vibration white finger and respiratory coal health claims. [129201]

Nigel Griffiths: None.

Ministerial Visits

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the occasions since 1997 when ministers from her Department have accompanied British firms on visits overseas to promote export marketing and sales, indicating the name of the minister and the country visited in each case. [128406]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 9 September 2003]:* Ministers take every opportunity to accompany British firms on visits overseas in order to help increase trade and investment opportunities, and boost British exports.

For example, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry led a senior business delegation to India in January 2003. I and my hon Friend, the Under-secretary of State for Small Business also led trade missions to India in November 2002 and February 2003 respectively.

My hon. Friend, the Minister for Trade and Investment, led a senior business delegation to China as part of the Prime Minister's visit in July 2003. His predecessor, my noble Friend Baroness Symons, now the Minister for State for the Middle East led a business delegation to Brazil in March 2002.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame North the then Minister of State for Energy and Construction, supported the UK presence at the Caspian Oil and Gas show in Azerbaijan in June 2003. He also went to Houston, USA in May 2003 for the Offshore Technology Conference (where over 100 UK companies were exhibiting); to Brazil in September 2002 for the Rio

de Janeiro Oil and Gas Show; and to Stavanger, Norway, in August 2002 for the Offshore Northern Seas Exhibition. Full information on all visits is not, however, recorded centrally in the form requested and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Nuclear Safety

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will undertake an assessment of safety at nuclear power stations following the recent heatwave; and if she will make a statement. [128769]

Mr. Timms: No. Assessment of safety of UK nuclear installations is for the operators licensed by the safety regulator, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Since all the UK nuclear stations that were operating during the heatwave depend on sea water, not river water for their cooling, the rise in the temperature of the cooling water remained well within the limits allowed by the various plant safety cases. HSE maintained regulatory vigilance during this period and was satisfied that safety case limits were not threatened by the hot weather.

Royal Mail

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions have taken place with Royal Mail representatives regarding the use of railways to transport mail; and what measures have been taken to reduce redundancies. [128243]

Mr. Timms: The Department meets Royal Mail on a regular basis to discuss a range of issues, including progress on the transport review.

Royal Mail envisage that the implementation of the whole transport review will impact on around 2,500 jobs across various parts of its distribution operation, including around 150 in rail.

Royal Mail will seek to achieve any job losses through natural wastage and redeployment of staff within other parts of Royal Mail.

Royal Mail has advised that it has not ruled out the use of rail in the future, and is still talking to a number of rail freight operators who believe they can offer a commercially viable rail solution.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) (what funding the Government provided for the development of partnership working between Royal Mail and trades unions representing employees in its United Kingdom Mails division in *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04; [128530]

(2) what representations her Department has made to the management of Royal Mail on the development of partnership working in Royal Mail; [128531]

(3) what asessment she has made of progress in developing partnership working between the management and trades unions in Royal Mail. [128532]

Mr. Timms: Royal Mail were awarded £50,000 under the Partnership at Work Fund in 2002–03 to introduce partnership working at regional, national and area level with the Communication Workers Union and the Communication Managers' Association.

The Department meets Royal Mail on a regular basis to discuss a range of issues including progress on developing partnership working. Good progress has been made in setting up a Partnership framework since Lord Sawyer's review in 2001, but there is still some way to go and the current process has stalled. The Department, wherever possible, continues to encourage the management and unions to take forward the Partnership approach set out by Lord Sawyer.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the expenditure by Royal Mail on external consultancy services was in *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03. [128533]

Mr. Timms: Expenditure by Royal Mail on external consultancy services is an operational matter for the company. I have, therefore, asked the Chief Executive of Royal Mail to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions has she had with industry stakeholders with regard to Postcomm's proposed terms of access to Royal Mail services. [129195]

Mr. Timms: Ministers regularly receive representations on a range of postal issues. Access pricing policy is, however, a matter for the regulator. The regulator is currently examining the results of its public consultation on this issue, to which a number of industry stakeholders have commented. A full list of respondents and details of representations received are shown on their website: http://www.postcomm.gov.uk

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many lorry movements in and out of Royal Mail terminals have taken place in each of the last three years. [129690]

Mr. Timms: This is an operational matter for Royal Mail Group plc. I have therefore asked the Deputy Chairman of Royal Mail to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Science and Engineering (Women Employees)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many women work in the science, engineering and technology industries in the UK and what percentage of all workers in those industries were women in each of the last 10 years. [127658]

Mr. Timms: Data are only available for spring 2001, 2002 and 2003. The information requested is not available in a consistent basis prior to spring 2001, due to a change in the occupation classification used in the Labour Force Survey, from SOC90 to SOC2000.

Women employed in science, engineering and technology occupations—United Kingdom, springs (March to May) 2001, 2002 and 2003

Not seasonally adjusted

March to May	*Thousand*	*Percentage*[1]
2001	335	14.1
2002	337	14.6
2003	302	12.8

[1] Women as a percentage of all employed in science, engineering and technology occupations.

Source:
ONS Labour Force Survey.

Telecommunications

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment her Department has made of the number of telecommunications-related jobs that have been lost to overseas competition in the last six years; and if she will make a statement. [129388]

Mr. Timms: The Department of Trade and Industry has not made an assessment of whether any telecoms related jobs have been lost to overseas competition in the last six years. Despite a severe global downturn in the telecoms industry that has resulted in the loss of a number of telecoms related jobs world-wide, official statistics suggest that employment in telecoms in Great Britain has been relatively stable.

Employment in the GB[1] telecommunications industry

	Employment (thousand)
1998	194
1999	209
2000	236
2001	248
2002	[2]236
2003	[3]238

[1] Data for GB do not include Northern Ireland.
[2] Data as at December 2002.
[3] Data as at March 2003.
Sources:
1998 to 2001 figures: Annual Business Inquiry Data, Industry 64.2. Telecommunications 2002 to 2003 Labour Market Trends (Monthly Report) July 2003.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Modern Apprenticeships

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the percentage of young people in modern apprenticeships who are from *(a)* one parent families and *(b)* households in receipt of housing benefit. [129120]

Alan Johnson: The Youth Cohort Study (YCS) for England and Wales provides information on the activities of young people who have completed compulsory education. For the cohort of 16 and 17-year-olds who completed their compulsory education in 2001, the YCS estimates that 20 per cent. of those on Modern Apprenticeships were from lone parent families. The proportion of young people from lone parent families for the cohort as a whole was 22 per cent. The YCS does not collect information about the receipt of housing benefit.

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average pay of young people on Modern Apprenticeships was in the last year for which figures are available, broken down by job type. [129121]

Alan Johnson: The rate of pay for a Modern Apprentice is agreed by the employer and the individual apprentice. Modern Apprentices are either paid a wage by their employer or receive a training allowance. The minimum training allowance is £40 per week.

The Youth Cohort Study (YCS) for England and Wales provides information on the activities of young people who have completed compulsory education. According to the YCS, for the cohort who completed compulsory education in 2001, the average pay for 16 and 17-year-olds who were either waged or paid a training allowance was £88 per week. For the cohort who completed compulsory education in 1999, the corresponding rate of pay for 18 and 19-year-olds was £133 per week.

The YCS does not collect information by job type for Modern Apprenticeships.

Specialist Teaching (Sign Language)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools in the UK specialise in teaching those who are hard of hearing; what funding is afforded to them; where sign language is taught in state schools; and if he will make a statement. [128251]

Mr. Miliband: The Department does not hold this information for Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. In England, there are 1,088 maintained special schools, of which 13 have hearing impairment as their primary category of need, and three have hearing impairment as their secondary category of need. In addition, there are eight non-maintained special schools which specialise in hearing impairment.

According to a survey conducted by the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf (BATOD) in 2000, of the 25,019 children taught by teachers of the deaf, 67 per cent. were in mainstream schools, 14 per cent. in units attached to mainstream schools, and 19 per cent. in special schools.

In maintained special schools, funding is usually related to a set number of places, with the individual place cost determined by the complexity of learning needs that the school has to address. The average budget share for a pupil in a maintained special school is £10,800. Government support for non-maintained special schools comes primarily from the Devolved Capital Formula, the Standards Fund and School Standards Grant.

The Department does not hold records centrally indicating where sign bilingualism is taught in schools. However, the BATOD survey suggested that sign bilingualism was used by 6 per cent. of children (601 in schools for the deaf and 410 in units attached to mainstream schools).

Adult Non-vocational Courses

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the extent to which provision of adult non-vocational courses meets the needs of the community in West Herts; and what representations he will make on this issue. [129145]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 11 September 2003]:* The Learning and Skills Council has responsibility for planning and funding non-vocational adult education provided through local education authorities. The local LSC for Hertfordshire has recently commissioned a

Strategic Options Review of West Hertfordshire College, which is due to report at the end of September 2003. Nationally we recently reaffirmed our intention to safeguard such courses and opportunities for all adult learners, 21st Century Skills, Realising Our Potential, July 2003.

Animal Experiments

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he is taking to enable students studying for science degrees and doctorates to avoid taking part in animal experiments they do not wish to participate in. [129268]

Alan Johnson: Higher education institutions in the UK are independent, autonomous bodies and are responsible for the content and delivery of their own programmes. Students with particular concerns about aspects of course content would need to discuss this with their prospective university before deciding to enrol. However, independent bodies like the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare can offer advice and guidance to universities and individuals on the welfare and ethical use of animals in education and science.

Early Literacy Programme

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 25 Jun 2003, *Official Report*, column 777W, on the Early Literacy Programme, when the 'Go Karts' early literacy support video was withdrawn from use; and for what reasons the video was withdrawn. [128544]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The 'Go Karts' sequence was one of a number included in the Early Literacy Support (ELS) video made available to local authorities in September 2000, as part of the first national training of Reception and Year 1 teachers and teaching assistants. The specific purpose of this sequence was to provide training to Reception teachers about the ELS programme. Revisions were made to the video and training materials that were sent to schools in September 2001, specifically to support the implementation of the programme in Year 1.

Learning and Skills Council

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) whether the Learning and Skills Council National Contracting Service is required to take account of existing contractual agreements and relationships that a local Learning and Skills Council and local providers already have with industry when issuing contracts to national providers; [129417]

(2) at what stage of the process local Learning and Skills Councils and providers will be informed of the intention to issue a contract through the Learning and Skills Council National Contracting Service; [129418]

(3) if he will list by *(a)* value of contract and *(b)* region, the contracts that have been issued by the Learning and Skills Council National Contracting Service to fund, or part fund, employer-based learning; [129419]

(4) how many contracts have been issued by the Learning and Skills Council National Contracting Service to offer free training for a qualification; how many of these were in areas where an existing locally-based contract was already present; and if he will make a statement. [129420]

Alan Johnson: These are matters for the Learning and Skills Council. John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, will write to my hon. Friend with the information requested and place a copy of his reply in the Library.

Further Education

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for what reasons *(a)* further education tuition for adults to Level 2 will be free and *(b)* tuition to Level 3 will be charged for. [129698]

Alan Johnson: In making decisions about public funds we have to prioritise so that funding is targeted where it will make the most difference. Over 7 million adults in the workforce in England do not possess level 2 or equivalent qualifications. These individuals are more likely to lack the foundation of skills they need for employability, and are less likely to get a secure, well paid job. In contrast, the higher wages paid to people with qualifications above level 2 offer a greater incentive for both individuals and employers to invest in learning. The entitlement to free tuition for individuals studying for a first full level 2 qualification, to which the right hon. Gentleman refers, will enable individuals to achieve a level of educational attainment that will provide them with a with a platform of skills for employability, enable them to improve their position in the labour market and increase their chances of undertaking further learning.

This focus on using public funds to help people reach level 2 should be seen within a wider strategy which encourages up-skilling and re-skilling at all levels. To that end, the Government will provide increased support for individuals developing their skills and qualifications at level 3 in priority sectors and to meet specific regional skills needs. We believe that this is the fairest way to manage participation in further education, and make productivity gains with public investment.

Higher Education

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether, subject to access requirements, universities will be able to charge top-up fees for Foundation Degrees. [129730]

Alan Johnson: Foundation Degrees are, and will be subject to the same funding arrangements as other Higher Education qualifications.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the Office of Fair Access will be empowered to consider the adequacy of *(a)* financial and *(b)* pastoral support available to students at higher education institutions. [129763]

Alan Johnson: We said in "Widening Participation in Higher Education" that the role of the Office for Fair Access would be to consider and approve universities' access agreements, where an institution intended to charge variable fees in excess of the standard fee (currently £1,125) for any of their courses. Institutions

will draw up their own agreements, which must set out the fee levels they wish to charge and the courses to which higher fees will apply; the outreach work they plan to undertake; the bursaries and other financial support they will make available; and the milestones against which they intend to measure progress towards their widening participation ambitions. These are the features which OFFA will consider.

Student Income and Expenditure Survey

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he plans to publish the latest Student Income and Expenditure Survey. [129702]

Alan Johnson: The Department has received a draft report of the 2002/03 Student Income and Expenditure Survey from the contractor and is currently considering comments from the steering committee; including representation from the NUS and UUK. The Department will announce a date for publication once a finalised report has been received from the contractor.

Tuition Fees

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what account is taken when assessing levels of tuition fee payments of the number of children within a family intending to go to university that the student's parents will have to support. [129094]

Alan Johnson: Support for dependent students under 25 in higher education is based on a financial assessment of their parents' gross income in the previous financial year. In the academic year 2003/04, parents will not make any contribution to their children's support if their residual income is below £20,970 a year.

Where there is more than one child in higher education, the total parental contribution is limited to the amount that would be assessed if there were only one student child. The parental contribution is then apportioned between the number of children in the family studying a course of higher education. Therefore, where parents have more than one student child, there is no higher assessed parental contribution to make to their student support.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what controls are in place on the level of tuition fees for Masters Degree courses; and whether financial assistance is available for those unable to pay. [129095]

Alan Johnson: The Government do not regulate the levels of fee charged for Masters Degree courses: it is for Higher Education Institutions to decide what level of fee they will charge. The Government do not make available assistance in the form of grants for fees for students undertaking Masters Degrees. The research councils and the Arts and Humanities Research Board provide a number of studentships and research grants each year for postgraduate students, including some on Masters courses depending on the field of study. These are allocated on a competitive basis.

University Entry Criteria

Rob Marris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many United Kingdom universities accept *(a)* vocational and *(b)* work-based learning qualifications as entry criteria; and if he will make a statement. [129524]

Alan Johnson: Universities are taking into account an increasingly wide range of evidence when making decisions about a candidate's suitability. The extent to which vocational and work-based learning qualifications are taken into account varies from course to course, but they are particularly relevant for more vocationally orientated courses such as foundation degrees. However, this is a matter for universities and we have no figures on the number of courses for which vocational or work-based qualifications are taken into account in assessing a student's suitability.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Micro-finance

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what action he is taking to increase support for micro-finance through the World Bank. [129859]

Hilary Benn: The Department for International Development provides extensive financial and technical support for the development of microfinance globally. Much of this work involves collaboration with The World Bank. DFID is an active member of The Consultative Group to Assist the Poorest (CGAP), a 29-member organisation of donors and private foundations committed to the spread of best practice and the expansion of microfinance worldwide.

CGAP is based in Washington DC, and is supervised by the World Bank, its largest shareholder. DFID currently chairs CGAP's Executive Committee, and works with the organisation in many developing countries to help commercialise microfinance institutions, extend their outreach to more clients, and diversify the range of financial services they offer poor clients from credit to savings, insurance, leasing and remittances.

DFID also collaborates with World Bank officials in several of its country programmes including Uganda, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. This involves co-ordinating programmes to develop the financial sector, and to mainstream microfinance into the formal banking system. DFID also supports programmes of the International Finance Corporation (IFC) in the World Bank Group in the Balkans, Africa, South Asia China and the Mekong. These programmes improve the policy and regulatory environment for small enterprise development, and support the expansion of private banks and non-governmental organisations that provide microfinance services.

Afghanistan

Mrs. Liddell: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development (1) what improvements have been introduced in Afghanistan to ensure improved heath care for women and children in the last year; [129683]

(2) what assistance the Government have provided towards improved maternity and neonatal care in Afghanistan. [129691]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The Afghanistan Transitional Administration has asked donors to concentrate on a few key areas of the reconstruction effort where they can have most impact. In response to this the UK is concentrating on building the capacity of the Afghan Government, humanitarian aid and programmes to support the development of income generation.

We also fund Afghanistan's reconstruction effort through multi-lateral channels. The UK is the fourth largest donor to UNICEF and provided £44 million overall funding in 2002. We provide 19 per cent. of the European Union's £282 million package of reconstruction support for Afghanistan for 2003–04, of which £17.5 million is programmed for the health sector to help reduce infant and maternal mortality by providing a basic health care package. We are also contributing towards the World bank's Afghanistan Health Sector Emergency Reconstruction and Development Project, which aims to help expand delivery of basic health services and work to ensure equitable access, particularly for women and children.

Since April 2002 the European Commission has worked with the United States to rebuild 72 hospitals, clinics and women's health care centres, revise the national curriculum for midwives and vaccinate 4.3 million children against measles. Over 2003 and 2004, the EC will channel support through the Government to deliver health services to 3 million people and help to reduce the unacceptably high levels of child and maternal mortality.

UNICEF has supported Emergency Obstetric Care services in 20 districts and refurbished Malalai hospital, the largest maternity hospital in Kabul with 15,000 deliveries every year. UNICEF plans to launch other facilities in Kandahar, Herat and Jalalabad to build up the maternal health infrastructure.

Although health is not a key area of our bilateral support, we have funded consultants to the MoH to assist with policy and planning. One of these consultants played a major role in developing the country's interim health strategy.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what recent assessment he has made of the clearing of landmines in Afghanistan. [130298]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: At the end of 2002 an estimated 850 square kilometres of land in Afghanistan were still contaminated with anti-personnel and anti-tank landmines, as well as bombs dropped from aircraft and other explosive devices, such as mortars, which fail to detonate on impact but are still capable of exploding when they are touched or moved. As many as 300 people per month were injured or killed by landmines and unexploded ordnance last year.

The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) is responsible for co-ordinating 15 non-governmental organisations on behalf of the Government of Afghanistan for the clearing of mines and unexploded ordnance. We have provided £5.3 million funding to UNMAS over the last three years for their clearance operations in Afghanistan.

Since 1989, 754 square kilometres of minefields and former battle areas have been cleared or declared safe. In addition, the programme has overseen services that taught more than 2.4 million people how to identify and avoid mines and unexploded ordnance. In 2002 alone, the programme cleared mines and unexploded ordnance from about 111 square kilometres of land.

The Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan recently announced Afghanistan could be free from the threat of landmines and unexploded ordnance by 2012 if clearance operations continue at current levels and if international donor support is sustained.

Agricultural Produce (EU Reforms)

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment has been made of the impact of EU reform of the *(a)* sugar, *(b)* oil, *(c)* cotton, *(d)* tobacco and *(e)* olive oil regimes on trade exports to the United Kingdom from (i) least developed countries covered by the Everything but Arms agreement and (ii) non-least developed countries in sub-Saharan Africa. [128615]

Hilary Benn: The Commission is analysing a number of options for reform of the EU sugar regime although, to date, no formal proposals have been made. DFID has already undertaken its own analysis on the impact on developing countries of the four families of reform options suggested by the Commission earlier this year. In addition, DFID has commissioned a study to explore the potential need for adjustment assistance for ACP countries with preferential access to the EU sugar market that may lose out from a reform of this regime. This analysis includes both least developed and non-least developed countries in sub-Saharan Africa. This study will be presented to the Commission.

As agreed at the Luxembourg Council (June 2003), the Commission is expected to release a second round CAP reform proposal covering olive oil, tobacco and cotton in autumn 2003. The reforms will be based on the approach and objectives of the June 2003 CAP reform. On receipt of these reform proposals, DFID will consider the issue of assessing their implications for developing countries. There have not been any recent changes to the EU oil seeds regime nor are there expected to be.

International Conference on Population and Development

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development whether the Government intends to reaffirm its commitment to the International Conference on Population and Development's Programme of Action. [128388]

Hilary Benn: The Government remains firmly committed to the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)'s Programme of Action, including the target of achieving access to reproductive health for all by 2015. Reproductive Health continues to be a priority for DFID. We are convinced that reproductive health and rights are vital

to making progress to attaining the Millennium Development Goals to combat HIV/AIDS and reduce maternal and child mortality. We also consider it a basic right of women and men to exercise informed and responsible choice in matters relating to their sexual and reproductive health.

The Government will continue to work with the international community to ensure that reproductive health receives the priority it demands. We plan to produce a public policy statement on reproductive health before the end of the year.

Iraq

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what further steps will be taken *(a)* to provide ongoing development and humanitarian aid for the reconstruction of Iraq and *(b)* to address the needs of the communities there. [128273]

Hilary Benn: The Department for International Development has now committed £198 million towards humanitarian and reconstruction assistance in Iraq. This money is being used to support essential services such as health care, food supply, electricity, water and sanitation, and to undertake reconstruction and mine clearance work. The aim is to achieve real and rapid improvements to the lives of ordinary Iraqi citizens. Most of the funding is channelled through United Nations agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and NGOs, which have the capacity and experience to implement humanitarian and development programmes effectively on the ground. DFID is also financing projects managed by commercial companies. £20 million was recently approved for spare parts, equipment and rehabilitation work to improve service delivery in the power, fuel and water sectors in southern Iraq.

Future allocations will be considered in view of social and economic needs assessments under preparation by the UN, World Bank and IMF.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what measures the Department is taking to rebuild Iraq's seed supply. [128608]

Hilary Benn: The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) is focusing its current activities in Iraq on the procurement and distribution of seed and other inputs for the winter planting season, which is the immediate priority for Iraqi farmers. DFID has provided £1,500,000 to FAO to support agriculture in conflict-affected areas of southern Iraq, including the provision of seed. In the longer term, priorities may include the creation of grain banks.

Sierra Leone

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what progress is being made towards the alleviation of poverty in Sierra Leone. [129445]

Hilary Benn: There is insufficient data available since the end of the civil war to show trends in poverty reduction. In 2001, The Government of Sierra Leone published an Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy, focused on re-establishment of security and economic recovery. The Government hopes to complete a full Poverty Reduction Strategy by mid-2004. It will be the basis for targeting Government and donor resources on poverty reduction. The preparatory process includes a household expenditure survey and sector studies that will provide information on the extent and depth of poverty, a baseline for future monitoring and poverty reduction measures. We are providing extensive support to the preparation of the strategy.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefit Applications

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what estimate he has made of the average time taken to deal with an application made using the Pension Credit telephone application line; [128745]

(2) what targets he has set for dealing with applications made using the Pension Credit telephone application line. [128746]

Mr. Pond: The average time to complete a Pension Credit application for customers using the telephone application line is currently about 20 minutes. Reliable information on the time taken to process applications is not yet available. However, the Department's published Service Delivery Agreement includes a three-year target to ensure that Pension Credit applications are processed on average within 10 days once the necessary information and evidence has been obtained.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will require the Child Support Agency to provide evidence of its assessment of the financial status of *(a)* the parent in care and *(b)* the absent parent to either of the parties concerned if they request it. [127290]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Brian Jenkins, dated 15 September 2003:

The Secretary of State in replying to your recent Parliamentary question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You ask if he will require the Child Support Agency to provide evidence of its assessment of the financial status of *(a)* the parent in care and *(b)* the absent parent to the parties concerned if they request it.

The Agency is only concerned with the financial status of a parent with care and a non-resident parent to the extent to what this is relevant in meeting their statutory functions.

An award notification is sent to both parties following a new or fresh calculation of maintenance liability. This notice provides information to enable both parties to understand how the amount has been arrived at, including the relevant income information. If either party wants to know more about the decision or they disagree, the notification advises them to contact the Agency who will then explain the decision in detail and answer any questions the client may have.

International Labour Organisations

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans the Government have to ratify *(a)* the International Labour Organisation Seafarers' Welfare Convention 163 (1987) and *(b)* the International Labour Organisation Seafarers' Welfare Recommendation 173 (1987); and if he will make a statement; [128754]

(2) if he will list International Labour Organisation conventions which the United Kingdom has *(a)* declined to sign and *(b)* not yet signed; and if he will make a statement. [128756]

Mr. Pond: The Government have no plans to ratify ILO Convention 163 for the reasons given in the 1989 White Paper (Cm 658), and notes that only 12 member states of the ILO have so far ratified. There is no procedure for ratifying an ILO recommendation. The United Kingdom is addressing the issue of seafarers' welfare by participating actively in ILO discussions aimed at consolidating the existing body of ILO maritime instruments within a new single instrument.

A total of 65 ILO conventions, including all of the 'core' ILO conventions, which cover freedom of association and the right to organise and collective bargaining; the elimination of forced and child labour; and the ending of discrimination in employment, are in force in the UK. We also observe in principle many of the requirements of unratified conventions. The ILO has recognised the need to keep its instruments under review and recently withdrew or shelved 27 out of date conventions, while next year's conference will consider the withdrawal of 16 out of date recommendations. The ILO has also recognised the importance of a coherent approach to labour standards including through the proposed new consolidated maritime instrument and the general discussion at this year's International Labour Conference which for the first time was based on an integrated approach, taking account of all existing ILO instruments in the area of occupational safety and health.

The table shows the ILO conventions which the United Kingdom has not ratified or has ratified and subsequently denounced. In recent years a number of conventions have been denounced automatically due to ratification of new, more up-to-date conventions which subsume the requirements of earlier instruments. We will continue to review unratified conventions.

ILO conventions which UK has not ratified or has ratified and subsequently denounced

Convention number	*Date of adoption*	*Title*	*Denounced*
1	1919	Hours of Work (Industry)	
3	1919	Maternity Protection	
4	1919	Night Work (women)	25.01.1937
5	1919	Minimum Age (Industry)	07.06.2000
6	1919	Night Work Of Young Persons (Industry)	04.10.1947
7	1920	Minimum Age (Sea)	07.06.2000
9	1920	Placing of Seamen	
10	1921	Minimum Age (Agriculture)	07.06.2000
13	1921	White Lead (Painting)	
14	1921	Weekly Rest (Industry)	
15	1921	Minimum Age (Trimmers and Stokers)	07.06.2000
18	1925	Workmen's Compensation (Occupational Diseases)	29.04.1936
26	1928	Minimum Wage-Fixing Machinery	25.07.1985
27	1929	Marking of Weight (Packages Transported by Vessels)	
30	1930	Hours of Work (Commerce and Offices)	
33	1932	Minimum Age (Non-Industrial Employment)	
41	1934	Night Work (Women) (Revised)	04.10.1947
45	1935	Underground Work (Women)	26.05.1988
47	1935	Forty-Hour Week	
52	1936	Holidays with Pay	
53	1936	Officers' Competency Certificates	
54	1936	Holidays with Pay (Sea)	
55	1936	Shipowners' Liability (Sick and Injured Seamen)	
57	1936	Hours of Work and Manning (Sea)	
58	1936	Minimum Age (Sea) (Revised)	
59	1937	Minimum Age (Industry) (Revised)	
62	1937	Safety Provisions (Building)	
63	1938	Statistics of Wages and Hours of Work	27.05.1987
71	1946	Seafarers' Pensions	
72	1946	Paid Vacations (Seafarers)	
73	1946	Medical Examination (Seafarers)	
75	1946	Accommodation of Crews	
76	1946	Wages, Hours of Work and Manning (Sea)	
77	1946	Medical Examination of Young Persons (Industry)	
78	1946	Medical Examination of Young Persons (Non-Industrial Occupations)	
79	1946	Night Work of Young Persons (Non-Industrial Occupations)	
88	1948	Employment Service	06.08.1971
89	1948	Night Work (Women) (Revised)	
90	1948	Night Work of Young Persons (Industry) (Revised)	
93	1949	Wages, Hours of Work and Manning (Sea) (Revised)	
94	1949	Labour Clauses (Public Contracts)	20.09.1982

ILO conventions which UK has not ratified or has ratified and subsequently denounced

Convention number	*Date of adoption*	*Title*	*Denounced*
95	1949	Protection of Wages	16.09.1983
96	1949	Fee-Charging Employment Agencies (Revised)	
99	1951	Minimum Wage Fixing Machinery (Agriculture)	16.08.1994
101	1952	Holiday with Pay (Agriculture).	16.08.1994
103	1952	Maternity Protection (Revised)	
106	1957	Weekly Rest (Commerce and Offices)	
107	1957	Indigenous and Tribal Populations	
109	1958	Wages, Hours of Work and Manning (Sea) (Revised)	
110	1958	Plantations	
112	1959	Minimum Age (Fishermen)	
113	1959	Medical Examination (Fishermen)	
117	1962	Social Policy (Basic Aims and Standards)	
118	1962	Equality of Treatment (Social Security	
119	1963	Guarding of Machinery	
121	1964	Employment Injury Benefits	
123	1965	Minimum Age (Underground Work)	
125	1966	Fishermen's Competency Certificates	
127	1967	Maximum Weight	
128	1967	Invalidity, Old-Age and Survivors' Benefits	
129	1969	Labour Inspection (Agriculture)	
130	1969	Medical Care and Sickness Benefits	
131	1970	Minimum Wage Fixing	
132	1970	Holidays with Pay (Revised)	
134	1970	Prevention of Accidents (Seafarers)	
136	1971	Benzene	
137	1973	Dock Work	
139	1974	Occupational Cancer	
143	1975	Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions)	
145	1976	Continuity of Employment (Seafarers)	
146	1976	Seafarers' Annual Leave with Pay	
149	1977	Nursing Personnel	
152	1979	Occupational Safety and Health (Dock Work)	
153	1979	Hours of Work and Rest Periods (Road Transport)	
154	1981	Collective Bargaining	
155	1981	Occupational Safety and Health	
156	1981	Workers with Family Responsibilities	
157	1982	Maintenance of Social Security Rights	
158	1982	Termination of Employment	
159	1983	Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons)	
161	1985	Occupational Health Services	
162	1986	Asbestos Convention	
163	1987	Seafarers' Welfare	
164	1987	Health Protection and Medical Care (Seafarers)	
165	1987	Social Security (Seafarers) (Revised)	
166	1987	Repatriation of Seafarers (Revised)	
167	1988	Safety and Health in Construction.	
168	1988	Employment Promotion and Protection against Unemployment.	
169	1989	Indigenous and Tribal Peoples	
170	1990	Chemicals	
171	1990	Night Work	
172	1991	Working Conditions (Hotels and Restaurants)	
173	1992	Protection of Workers' Claims (Employer's Insolvency)	
174	1993	Prevention of Major Industrial Accidents	
175	1994	Part-Time Work	
176	1995	Safety and Health in Mines	
177	1996	Home Work	
179	1996	Recruitment and Placement of Seafarers	
181	1997	Private Employment Agencies	
183	2000	Maternity Protection	
184	2001	Safety and Health in Agriculture	
185	2003	Seafarers' Identity Documents	

Notes:

1. Conventions 5, 7, 10, and 15 were denounced as a result of ratification of the Minimum Age Convention 138 (1973).
2. Convention 63 was denounced as a result of ratification of the Labour Statistics Convention 160 (1985).
3. Convention 18 was denounced on ratification of the revised Workmen's Compensation (Occupational Diseases) Convention 42 (1934).

Employment (People with Learning Disabilities)

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many adults with a learning disability were in unpaid employment in England for each year since 1997; what percentage this represents of people with a learning disability known to social services; and if he will make a statement. [127125]

Maria Eagle: The information is not available.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the Government schemes intended to help adults with a learning disability move into paid employment; and if he will make a statement. [127126]

Maria Eagle: Adults with learning disabilities are able to access the full range of services provided by Jobcentre Plus. In addition Jobcentre Plus offers a range of programmes specifically tailored to the needs of disabled customers. These are, Access to Work, Work Preparation, Workstep and New Deal for Disabled People. These programmes are all aimed to help customers with disabilities, including learning disabilities, move into paid employment.

Access to these programmes is through Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs), who are based in Jobcentre and Jobcentre Plus offices. DEAs work closely with employers, employees and disabled people looking for work.

Workstep is the employment programme most suitable for many people with learning disabilities. Workstep provides tailored support for people with disabilities who have more complex barriers to finding and keeping work. It provides the support and opportunity for people to progress to unsupported employment where this is the right option for the individual. Of the 21,500 people accessing support through Workstep, 37 per cent. have a learning disability.

Pensioners (Means-tested Benefits)

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of pensioners were in receipt of means-tested benefits for each year between 1992 and 2002; and if he will make a statement. [128550]

Malcolm Wicks: The answer is in the table.

Pensioner beneficiaries of means-tested benefits[1] as a percentage of the population: Great Britain May 1992 to May 1999

	Beneficiaries aged 60 and over of means-tested benefits	*Percentage of the population aged 60 and over*
1992	Not available	Not available
1993	4,320,000	36.9
1994	4,180,000	35.8
1995	4,060,000	34.7
1996	3,940,000	33.6
1997	3,810,000	32.5
1998	3,670,000	31.1
1999	3,540,000	29.9
2000	3,420,000	28.7
2001	3,380,000	28.3
2002	3,290,000	27.6

Notes:

1. From 1993 to 1999 means-tested benefits included in the table are Income Support (IS), Jobseekers Allowance (Income Based) (JSA(IB)), Housing Benefit (HB), Community Charge Benefit (CCB)/Council Tax Benefit (CTB), Family Credit (FC) and Disability Working Allowance (DWA).
2. From 2000 to 2002 means-tested benefits included in the table are IS, JSA(IB), HB and CCB/CTB. FC and DWA were replaced by Working Families Tax Credit and Disabled Persons Tax Credit in October 1999 and are therefore not included in the figures for 2000, 2001 and 2002.
3. Overlaps between benefits have been removed.
4. Great Britain HB/CTB figures include estimates for local authorities that have not responded.
5. CTB data excludes Second Adult Rebate cases.
6. HB data excludes any Extended Payment cases.
7. Percentage for population has been calculated using the revised ONS population estimates for age group 60 and over, for 1993 to 2001.
8. Figures (except DWA) are based on 1 per cent. and 5 per cent. samples and therefore subject to sampling variation.
9. Beneficiaries of a benefit unit are the sum of claimants and their partners.

Source:

IAD Information Centre 5 per cent. and 1 per cent. samples

Pension Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what targets he has set for converting Minimum Income Guarantee claimants to Pension Credit. [128741]

Mr. Pond: The Department has a Service Delivery Agreement to maximise payments of Pension Credit from October 2003 by, among other measures, converting all existing Minimum Income Guarantee recipients automatically to Pension Credit. The process of conversion is on course to be completed by October 2003.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many operators work on the Pension Credit telephone application line; and what plans he has to increase this number; [128738]

(2) how many call centres deal with Pension Credit telephone applications; and what their locations are; [128739]

(3) whether calls to the Pension Credit telephone application line will be handled by private contractors. [128750]

Mr. Pond: The Pension Credit application line currently has just over 1,100 whole-time equivalent staff, rising to around 1,500 when Pension Credit is implemented in October 2003. The application line is based at four sites in Cardiff, Dearne Valley, Derby and Newcastle. The Pension Service is working in partnership with Ventura, an experienced provider of contact centre services. Ventura is providing expertise in the running of the operation and also providing the staff and facilities to handle calls at the Dearne Valley site.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions who has been awarded the contract for developing the new IT system to deliver Pension Credit; what the estimated contract value is; and on what date he expects the system to become operational. [128747]

Mr. Pond: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 8 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 762W.

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners he estimates will benefit from the pensioners' credit in Eltham; and what the average gain will be per pensioner *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in Eltham. [129412]

Mr. Pond: The information requested is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

Estimates of Pension Credit entitlement are not available at individual constituency level due to insufficient sample cases in the survey data used. However, around half of all pensioner households nationally will be eligible for Pension Credit, and the average gain per year will be around £400.

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to encourage pensioners to claim the pensioners' credit. [129413]

Mr. Pond: The Pension Service began writing to pensioner households in April, to explain Pension Credit and to invite advance applications. In addition, around 1.8 million people in receipt of the Minimum Income Guarantee have been told that they will be transferred automatically to Pension Credit ready for payments to be made from October 2003. By June 2004, all pensioner households will have been contacted. These direct mail arrangements are being supported by a national TV and press advertising campaign, which began on 3 September. The Pension Service is also working with partner organisations at national and local level to encourage take-up of the new entitlement. The Pension Credit freephone application line, which became operational on 7 April, enables our trained staff to help pensioners through the application form and complete it for them over the telephone. Friends and family can use the application line and apply on a pensioner's behalf.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Agriculture Training

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many and what percentage of the workforce in agriculture hold vocational qualifications at NVQ Level 3 or higher in Northern Ireland. [128277]

Mr. Pearson: Information is not available on numbers in the total agricultural labour force with vocational qualifications at NVQ Level 3 or higher. The information that is available is summarised as follows.

The social survey of farmers and farm families (excluding hired workers) carried out in 2000–01 indicated that:

7,029 farmers and regular family workers on family farms (18.9 per cent. of total) had general qualifications (excl. apprenticeships) at or above NVQ Level 3 or equivalent—as well as vocational qualifications in all disciplines, this includes "A" Levels and other non-vocational qualifications;

9,347 farmers and regular family workers on family farms (25.1 per cent. of total) had general qualifications (incl. apprenticeships) at or above NVQ Level 3 or equivalent;

2,131 farmers and regular family workers on family farms (5.7 per cent. of total) had agricultural qualifications at or above NVQ Level 3 or equivalent.

In 2000, the EU Farm Structure Survey indicated that 3,888 farmers, family and regular hired workers (6.4 per cent. of workforce) had undertaken a formal agricultural course of less than two years and 2,101 people (3.5 per cent. of workforce) had undertaken a formal agricultural course of more than two years duration. However there was no assessment of level of qualification.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many business development training places for farmers there were in each Northern Ireland constituency in the last year for which figures are available. [R] [128278]

Mr. Pearson: During the 2002–03 financial year a total of 3,617 business development training places were available for farmers on the Good Business Sense training programme.

The management information system operated by the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise cannot allocate the total places available according to Northern Ireland constituency. The following table illustrates the breakdown according to county.

Number of training places provided per county

	Good business sense
County Antrim	482
County Armagh	420
County Down	900
County Fermanagh	765
County Londonderry	300
County Tyrone	750
Total training places	3,617

Autism Services

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to standardise the services available to sufferers of autism in different parts of Northern Ireland, with particular reference to applied behaviour analysis provision for schoolchildren. [116374]

Jane Kennedy: Children with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) represent a continuum of need, ranging from mild impairments, to the more severe. The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) provide specialised support to schools with pupils with ASD and the Department of Education is aware that there is a degree of variation in assessment and provision across the Province. Work is currently under way between the Department and the ELBs in order to standardise practice by producing criteria which will be common across the board areas.

In line with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's "Priorities for Action 2003/04" the Health and Social Services Trusts, in consultation with the ELBs, are developing costed proposals to enhance diagnostic, assessment and support services.

Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) is one of a range of interventions used in working with children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder and all of the Boards' Educational Psychologists receive training in ABA techniques as part of their degree qualification.

The Report of the Task Group on Autism, published in May 2002 states that:

"The Task Group finds preference for no single approach but concludes that single methods by themselves may not address effectively the triad of impairments associated with ASD. The Group concludes that intervention programmes should be child-centred rather than method-centred, and should address the observed and unique needs of the child and any variation in these which occurs over time and across settings and situations."

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to his answer of 13 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 194W, on autism, whether the proposed Centre of Excellence for Autism will provide regular respite care for sufferers across the province. [116620]

Jane Kennedy: There are no plans to offer respite care for parents and children with Autism at the proposed Centre of Excellence. The centre is planned as an educational facility.

Beef Exports

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the total tonnage of beef exports in Northern Ireland was in each of the last seven years. [115272]

Mr. Pearson: There has been only limited exports of beef from Northern Ireland in each of the last seven years. Exports of 260 and 400 tonnes were made under the Export Certified Herd Scheme in 1998 and 1999 respectively. Northern Ireland companies have either recently been approved, or are at an advanced stage leading to approval, under the Date Based Export Scheme. To date, only an insignificant tonnage of beef has been exported but it is expected that volumes will increase as new contracts are secured and more companies are fully approved in the coming months.

BSE

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken to achieve separate moderate BSE status for Northern Ireland. [115273]

Mr. Pearson: Until last week the definition of BSE moderate risk status was 100 BSE positive cases per million adult cattle aged over 24 months. Northern Ireland incidence of positive cases of BSE for the period May 2002 to April 2003 is 112 positive cases per million adult cattle aged over 24 months. In view of this incidence level it was not possible for Northern Ireland to seek separate BSE moderate risk status.

At the Annual General Meeting of the World Animal Health Organisation (OIE) in Paris on 18–23 May, the EU proposed and the OIE accepted that, taking into consideration the active BSE monitoring programmes in place, and their efficiency at detecting BSE cases, the definition of "moderate risk status" should be doubled to 200 cases per million adult cattle aged over 24 months .

The current BSE incidence rate in the UK is above the 200 cases per million requirement but on current trends should drop below the 200 cases threshold by the end of the year. Taking Northern Ireland alone, we are already below the 200 threshold.

While the development at OIE is welcome, before the UK or any region can be classified as having moderate risk status, this needs to be recognised in EU legislation. This may not necessarily be straightforward.

Discussions are taking place with the European Commission on how best to present a case that all the criteria for moderate risk status are met. This is being taken forward on a UK basis but I will wish to consider making a separate case for Northern Ireland if progress on the UK case is delayed.

Causeway Health and Social Services Trust

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what payments have been made by the Causeway HSS Trust to former employees of the Trust, by way of settlement for cessation of employment for reasons other than age retirement or retirement on medical grounds; when each payment was made; what the individual amount of each payment was; and for what the payments were made, in financial years *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [128345]

Angela Smith: The details requested are set out in the following table:

Date of payment	*Amount*	*Purpose*
2001–02		
January 2002	22,034	Redundancy
March 2002	4,250	Constructive dismissal settlement
2002–03		
February 2003	1,500	Unfair dismissal settlement
March 2003	1,750	Constructive dismissal settlement
February 2003	750	Unfair dismissal settlement

Mature Students (Child Care Support)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Irelands how many mature students are in receipt of child care grants in Northern Ireland. [128279]

Jane Kennedy: In the 2002/03 academic year, 135 mature students aged 25 or over and domiciled in Northern Ireland received the grant in accordance with the Education (Student Support) Regulations (Northern Ireland).

Child Support Agency

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many instances the Child Support Agency in Northern Ireland has recorded of *(a)* deliberate evasive action to prevent the agency securing maintenance payments through (i) deduction from earnings and (ii) deduction from benefits and *(b)* preventing court action for enforcement through non-co-operation. [116096]

Mr. Browne: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Northern Ireland Child Support Agency. I have asked the chief executive to respond to the hon. Gentleman's question directly. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Freedom of Information

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the electronic document and electronic record management systems which have been procured by the public authorities listed in Parts I to V of Schedule 1 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 for which he is responsible. [116395]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The following NI public authorities listed in Parts I to V of Schedule 1 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 for which I am responsible have procured Electronic Document and Records Management Systems.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment purchased 50 licences for electronic document and record management (EDRM) software from Objective Corporation UK Ltd. in February 2003 to support the implementation of the Department's first major e-business project in Corporate Regulation Branch.

Invest NI, having tendered for supply of an EDRM system, have selected and purchased Meridio release 3.3 from Meridio Ltd. in March 2003.

Entrepreneurship/Education

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being taken to promote greater integration of entrepreneurship and education in Northern Ireland. [128288]

Mr. Pearson: In March 2003, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in partnership with the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning, published "Enterprising Education"—the Entrepreneurship and Education Action Plan.

Fully integrating entrepreneurship and education will take time and concentrated effort by a range of key stakeholders. The primary purpose of Enterprising Education is to establish an initial framework of action to provide a strong foundation for moving forward the integration process. The long-term goal is to ensure that every learner, including life-long learners, is given the opportunity to build the skills and develop the attributes which equip any individual to make a unique, innovative and creative contribution in the world of work.

The Action Plan, which will establish benchmarks, is the first stage in a longer-term process and will inform future decision-making. Progress will be reviewed on an annual basis and each Department will continue to promote the benefits of strengthening business/education links within their respective Departments and the wider circles in which they operate.

A copy of the Action Plan can be viewed or downloaded at www.detini.gov.uk.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the Department's policies have been screened for their environmental impact since June 2001; how many environmental appraisals have been conducted, and on what policy issues; and what information has been published about these screenings and appraisals. [124715]

Angela Smith: Since June 2001, Northern Ireland Departments have carried out 37 regulatory impact assessments of policies associated with a range of legislative proposals. However, to date, there have been no free standing environmental appraisals of departmental policies.

Sport Funding

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much public funding was allocated to *(a)* soccer, *(b)* Gaelic games, *(c)* rugby and *(d)* cricket in Northern Ireland in the last five years. [115700]

Angela Smith: The Sports Council for Northern Ireland (SCNI) is responsible for the development of Sport in NI including the distribution of public funding to individual sports.

The following tables provides information from each source of funding distributed by SCNI for the five year period 1998–2003 for the four sports of soccer, Gaelic games, rugby and cricket.

Exchequer funding

£

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*Total*
Soccer	50,000	50,000	50,000	59,000 [1]100,000	52,500 [1]500,000	261,500 600,000
Gaelic games	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	45,000	165,000
Rugby	16,000	16,000	16,000	16,000	24,000	88,000
Cricket	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000	26,330	106,330
Total	116,000	116,000	116,000	225,000	647,830	1,220,830

[1] These figures indicate the funds allocated to Soccer from the Football Development Centre Programme for 2001–02 and 2002–03.

Lottery funding

£

	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03	Total
Soccer	677,073	816,616	942,492	642,710	609,131	3,688,022
Gaelic games	2,703,811	1,303,185	1,694,182	1,025,420	689,962	7,416,560
Rugby	155,526	100,784	312,053	144,000	76,860	789,223
Cricket	215,298	212,837	282,500	57,202	16,000	783,837
Total	3,751,708	2,433,422	3,231,227	1,869,332	1,391,953	12,677,642

Safe Sports Grounds

The money provided by the Safe Sports Ground Programme was made available from financial year 2000–01 for the three sports of soccer, Gaelic games and rugby. The following table shows the funding that was allocated for these sports for the three-year period 1 April 2000–31 March 2003.

£

	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03	Total
Soccer	—	—	1,206,809	784,003	415,188	2,406,000
Gaelic games	—	—	622,085	350,833	507,082	1,480,000
Rugby	—	—	136,843	140,612	68,536	345,991
Total	—	—	1,965,737	1,275,448	990,806	4,231,991

Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP)

The following table shows the total allocation from EU Structural Funds from 1998 to date across various departments, for the four sports. DFP has worked under the assumption that public funding encapsulates funding through the public purse, including EU structural funds.

£

	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03	2003 to date	Total
Soccer	6,325	17,984	—	159,500	—	[1]10,800	194,609
Gaelic games	304,005	10,000	1,000	—	—	—	315,005
Rugby	—	6,500	—	—	—	—	6,500
Cricket	—	25,250	—	—	—	—	25,250
Total	310,330	59,734	1,000	159,500	—	10,800	541,364

[1] This figure of £10,800 reflects the award allocated by DFP for soccer from 2003 to date, this award was made under the Measure 3.2 of the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)

The following table details DARD's funding for the four sports for five-year period 1998–2003. In addition to the figures provided in the table, DARD has allocated £899 in 1998–99 for sport in general, including soccer and cricket, DARD have been unable to provide a detailed breakdown of this amount in respect of each sport referred to.

£

	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03	Total
Soccer	1,270	2,835	—	—	—	4,105
Gaelic games	—	[1]45	8,557	1,885	[1]11,118	21,605
Rugby	[1]606	[2]1,760	—	[1]1,878	—	4,244
Cricket	—	—	4,067	—	—	4,067
Total	1,876	4,640	12,624	3,763	11,118	34,021

[1] This expenditure relates to grants payable under the Woodland Grant Scheme, which encourages the creation of new woodland and the sustainable management of existing woodland.

[2] This amount was allocated to a Gaelic athletic club to help in the promotion of rugby through coaching and exhibition match.

Department of Education

£

	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03	Total
Soccer	422.06	857.31	102.00	—	—	1,381.37
Gaelic games	300.00	—	—	—	—	300.00
Total	722.06	857.31	102.00	—	—	1,681.37

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI)

The following table details the grant payments made by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) for each of the four sports for the periods in question.

£

	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03	Total
Soccer	6,750	6,400	7,200	8,800	13,500	42,650
Gaelic games	—	—	—	500	—	500
Rugby	680	600	—	—	—	1,280
Cricket	—	1,500	—	2,000	—	3,500
Total	7,430	8,500	7,200	11,300	13,500	47,930

Health

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the percentage uptake rates were of *(a)* primary immunisation, *(b)* breast screening and *(c)* cervical screening in Northern Ireland in each of the last three years. [128282]

Angela Smith: *(a)* The uptake rates for primary immunisation at 12 months and 24 months in the October/December quarter for each of the last three years were as follows:

	Percentage
At 12 months	
October/December 2000	93.88
October/December 2001	94.60
October/December 2002	94.35
At 24 months	
October/December 2000	96.18
October/December 2001	95.86
October/December 2002	96.73

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many consultations there were for the mentally ill in the community in each Northern Ireland health trust in each of the last three years. [128284]

Angela Smith: The information requested is not available.

Estimates for the financial year 2001–02 suggest that there were approximately 186,000 contacts with the mentally ill by community psychiatric nurses. In addition, there were approximately 27,500 contacts with the mentally ill by clinical psychologists in either a community or a hospital setting.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* child and *(b)* adolescent in-patient psychiatric beds there were in each Northern Ireland health trust in each of the last three years. [128285]

Angela Smith: The table shows the average number of available beds open overnight by health trust in the child and adolescent psychiatric specialty. It is not possible to supply data for children and adolescents separately.

Trust	2000–01	2001–02	[1]2002–03
Green Park	20.0	20.0	20.0
South and East Belfast	6.0	6.0	10.5
Northern Ireland Total	26.0	26.0	30.5

[1] Provisional

High Technology/Telecommunications Industries

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action is being taken to support Northern Ireland's *(a)* existing and *(b)* new (i) high technology and (ii) telecommunications industry and entrepreneurs; and if he will make a statement. [128294]

Mr. Pearson: Invest NI has focused significant resources in these areas in its overall drive to support existing companies to become more innovative and competitive and to encourage the formation of new, entrepreneurial, business starts. Support for existing hi-tech and telecommunications companies during 2002–03 resulted in companies bringing forward business proposals representing a total investment of almost £109 million, against which Invest NI offered £14.3 million in support. In addition, the Agency assisted the formation of 74 new, potentially high growth companies in these sectors.

In driving forward this work, Invest NI uses a broad range of measures designed to help all companies, both existing and new starts, increase their capability. These include fostering greater innovation, increasing levels of R&D, developing external trade and utilising a variety of other business improvement tools.

During its first year of operation, Invest NI played a key role in establishing the Northern Ireland Science Park and it also provided £26 million to assist the establishment of 17 centres of research excellence, the majority of which are focused on high technology sectors. In addition, Invest NI has drawn up a series of Sector Strategies aimed at maximizing the economic development potential for a range of industrial sectors including hi-tech and telecoms.

This work provides an important demonstration of Invest NI's commitment to engage with companies, higher and further education establishments, centres of research excellence, science parks and other research organisations in developing hi-tech start-up businesses. In addition Invest NI is working closely with the education sector and others to encourage entrepreneurship in Northern Ireland.

Horses

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether horses in Northern Ireland are defined as agricultural animals by Northern Ireland Departments; and if he will make a statement. [R] [128420]

Mr. Pearson: Under NI legislation, the horse is not classified as an agricultural animal. This mirrors the position in the other parts of the UK.

The Report "Vision for the future of the agri-food industry" included a number of recommendations relating to the equine sector. One of these was that the redesignation of the horse as an agricultural animal should be pursued in the longer term. In the Vision Action Plan which I published in November 2002, I highlighted that there were wider issues to consider and that these would be discussed with the industry in due course.

I have recently established an Equine Stakeholder Group, one of whose early tasks will be to advise on a comprehensive study of the equine industry in Northern Ireland. This will run in tandem with a similar study in Great Britain. The designation of the horse will be an aspect of both studies.

The overall rating system in Northern Ireland is currently subject to a major policy review. A Policy paper on existing and potential non-domestic reliefs and exemptions will be published in late autumn. That paper will include consideration of the need for the introduction of any exemption or relief for the equine industry.

Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what further steps will be taken by the *(a)* Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and *(b)* Eastern Health and Social Services Board to address the funding imbalance of the Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust; and if he will make a statement. [128311]

Angela Smith: A target has been set, by the Department, in "Priorities for Action 2003–04", that all HSS Boards should have strategies to address locality equity issues prepared by March 2004 and work is ongoing on this. I understand that the Eastern Health and Social Services Board intend to publish their latest assessment of the locality equity position within their area in the autumn. It is their policy, endorsed by the Department, to ensure that existing services are maintained and to address equity issues by levelling up resources through skewing new money to populations that are currently receiving less than their target share. For example the population of the Down Lisburn area gained by some £1.5 million through such a skewing strategy in 2003–04. It should be noted that equity assessments are based on the needs of a population living in an area and not on the funding of any specific Trust.

Locality equity is a priority for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety but it must be balanced by the need to ensure that existing service provision is not destabilised. This results in change being phased in over a period, usually some 3–4 years.

Literacy/Numeracy

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action is being taken by Northern Ireland Departments to address adult basic literacy and numeracy problems; and if he will make a statement. [128280]

Jane Kennedy: The Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) launched the Essential Skills for Living Strategy and Action Plan in October 2002. The strategy aims to support 25,000 adults to improve their literacy and numeracy skills by 2005.

The Department has established an Essential Skills Committee comprising key stakeholders from Government Departments, business and industry, the further education sector and the voluntary and community sector to take the strategy forward. It has developed also a framework of qualifications through the universities for all levels of essential skills tutors. During 2002–03, Queens University successfully delivered the Certificate in Management and Teaching of Literacy to 70 tutors and a further 66 have enrolled for the course in 2003–04. The Department launched a major promotional campaign in May 2003, with the aim of engaging a wide range of learners to improve their essential skills.

Plans are in place to liaise with the Northern Ireland Departments to ensure essential skills is taken into account in the design and delivery of their policies and programmes. The Department of Finance and Personnel, for example, is developing a strategy and action plan for the delivery of essential skills throughout the Northern Ireland civil service. The Northern Ireland Prison Service has worked with DEL to enhance essential skills provision for prisoners and the Social Security Agency has been actively involved in considering new approaches to encourage benefit claimants to improve their essential skills. Pilot exercises using financial incentives and new essential skills screening tools are planned for January 2004.

Northern Ireland Fishing Task Force

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made by the Northern Ireland Fishing Task Force; and when it intends to publish its overall findings. [113488]

Mr. Pearson: As a response to the December 2002 EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council decision, and the NI fishing community's reaction to it, I set up in January a Taskforce for South Down which is made up of officials from relevant NI Government departments, local councils and representatives of both the fish producers and processors to consider the wider socio-economic effects of the Council decisions and to identify whether there were more steps Government might take to address particular difficulties.

To help inform its work, the Taskforce undertook a consultation exercise with public meetings in Kilkeel, Ardglass and Portavogie. In addition Taskforce representatives have met with the Tri-Council Fisheries Working Group and with the NI Fisheries Harbour Authority. The Taskforce has also received 15 written submissions. A survey of producers and processors is also being undertaken to obtain information and views from the industry.

The Taskforce will be assessing all the information collected and views received with a view to publishing its findings in the summer.

Finally, the Taskforce will also be following closely the work of the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit established by the Prime Minister to look at the medium to long-term issues facing the UK sea fishing industry. I am a member pf the Steering Group for this exercise. Along with the local representatives on the Stakeholder Advisory Group I shall ensure that the Northern Ireland perspective is properly covered in the Strategy Unit's work.

Policing Board/Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made towards negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding between the Policing Board and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission; and if he will place a copy of the memorandum in the Library. [114149]

Jane Kennedy: The Policing Board is committed to developing and maintaining effective working relationships with all other statutory authorities, including the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. It is committed to meeting its statutory duty of carrying out all its functions having regard to the need to co-ordinate its activities and co-operate with other statutory authorities.

The Policing Board has not entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with any statutory authority and is content that it can play its part in maintaining working relationships, including with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, without the need for a Memorandum of Understanding.

This issue was most recently discussed at a meeting between representatives of the Policing Board and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission when both parties gave a commitment to follow good practice in sharing relevant documents and research; where appropriate to consult over and above legislative requirements, and to assist one another in the fulfilment of those statutory duties that relate to human rights issues.

Primary Schools

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will increase the proportion of funding to the primary school sector; and if he will make a statement. [116045]

Jane Kennedy: The Government recognises that the current differential in funding between primary and post-primary funding in Northern Ireland is too wide. The Local Management of Schools Common Formula, scheduled to come into operation in April 2004, contains a number of factors by which resources can be more effectively targeted and it is intended to use these over the initial years of the formula to reduce the funding differential.

In recognition of the issue the Budget Addition allocations for 2003–04, given to schools on top of their formula budget, were for the first time weighted in favour of the primary sector. This has resulted in an additional £1 million being provided for primary schools this year.

Road Safety

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many road accident fatalities there were in each of the past 10 years; and how many there were in the UK. [122545]

Angela Smith: The table provides information on the number of road fatalities in Great Britain and Northern Ireland for the past 10 years.

Fatal casualties 1992–2002

	Great Britain	*Northern Ireland*
1992	4,229	150
1993	3,814	143
1994	3,650	157
1995	3,621	144
1996	3,598	142
1997	3,599	144
1998	3,421	160
1999	3,423	141
2000	3,409	171
2001	3,450	148
2002	3,431	150

School Examinations

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the timetable is for the replacement of the eleven plus examination in Northern Ireland. [112910]

Jane Kennedy: I announced on 24 April 2003 the establishment of a Working Group to provide advice and recommendations on options for future arrangements for post-primary education, including the development of alternative transfer arrangements with a view to the current transfer tests being withdrawn as soon as practicable. The Working Group will report by 31 October 2003.

Pupils currently in P5 and P6 will sit the existing Transfer Tests and decisions about transfer arrangements for subsequent cohorts of pupils will be taken when the advice of the Working Group has been considered. Parents and teachers of pupils currently in P4 will be advised in good time of their transfer arrangements.

Schools Finance

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the difference in funding per pupil is between primary schools and post-primary schools in Northern Ireland; and what recent representations he has received on the difference in funding. [119461]

Jane Kennedy: In 2001–02 financial year the difference in funding per pupil between primary and post-primary schools in Northern Ireland was £934.

Department officials met with a delegation from the Primary Principals' Association of Northern Ireland on 25 March 2003 and a number of letters have also been received from elected representatives, primary schools and parents of primary school pupils.

Social Security Appeal Tribunals

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he will take to ensure that

social security appeal tribunals which have to be re-listed are not delayed because of the non-availability of panel members; and if he will make a statement. [116838]

Mr. Browne: The Appeals Service (NI) is required to re-list all adjourned appeals before the same Tribunal panel following a Direction from the President of Appeal Tribunals. As a result of additional resources being allocated to The Appeals Service (NI) and the appointment of 25 additional Tribunal members the average clearance time for all appeal types has reduced from 22 weeks during April 2002 to 16 weeks during March 2003. The Appeals Service (NI) is currently reviewing the procedures for the re-listing of appeals that have previously been adjourned to further reduce the time taken to reach a final determination and to prioritise appeals that have to be re-listed before the same Tribunal.

Sports Funding

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to the answer of 9 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 251W, why funding has not been allocated to the Northern Ireland Cycling Federation in the last three years. [114156]

Angela Smith: The Sports Council for Northern Ireland has not allocated any funding to the Northern Ireland Cycling Federation over the last three years because it is not the recognised governing body of cycling within Northern Ireland.

Stevens Inquiry

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the overview and recommendations of the report by Sir John Stevens on the murder of Mr. Patrick Finucane, published on 17 April. [110861]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Sir John Stevens's report is to the Chief Constable and he will no doubt wish to study it. We will also be examining his findings most carefully.

Sir John has indicated that specific criminal investigations continue and that files will be sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions (NI). The criminal justice process must take its course.

Teachers

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many teaching posts will be lost in the primary sector in the next 12 months. [118017]

Jane Kennedy: The requested information is not yet available. Decisions on staffing levels are taken by the Boards of Governors of individual schools.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school teaching posts were lost in each year since 1997 in each education and library board. [118018]

Jane Kennedy: The requested information is only available for the period 1999/2000–2001/02. For completeness the number of posts gained is also given.

Education and Library Board Area	*Decrease in number of full time teachers in schools losing posts*		*Increase in number of full-time equivalent teachers in schools gaining posts*		*Net change in number of full-time equivalent teachers*	
	1999/2000–2000/01	*2000/01–2001/02*	*1999/2000–2000/01*	*2000/01–2001/02*	*1999/2000–2000/01*	*2000/01–2001/02*
(a) Primary schools						
Belfast	67.2	79.2	54.7	40.4	-12.5	-38.8
Western	70.2	70.1	64.5	87.2	-5.7	+17.1
North-Eastern	86.6	65.5	72.4	117.1	-14.2	+51.6
South-Eastern	60.7	61.1	93.7	97.9	+33.0	+36.8
Southern	100.6	101.8	90.5	74.3	-10.1	-27.5
(b) Secondary schools						
Belfast	31.0	35.3	68.5	68.5	+37.5	+33.2
Western	22.6	51.1	76.5	29.8	+53.9	-21.3
North-Eastern	37.2	31.6	71.3	69.4	+34.1	+37.8
South-Eastern	21.3	30.6	72.4	60.5	+51.1	+29.9
Southern	27.6	58.1	49.8	40.6	+22.2	+17.5

Ulster Scots Academy

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in making available support for an Ulster-Scots Academy. [115762]

Angela Smith: Officials are currently considering options for ensuring that the commitment in the Joint Declaration by the British and Irish Governments in April 2003 is fulfilled. Officials will make recommendations to Ministers in due course.

SCOTLAND

Beef Farming

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people are employed in the beef farming industry in Scotland; when he last met representatives of the Scottish beef farming industry; and what his assessment is of its prospects. [127844]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scottish Executive's agricultural census in 2002 recorded 32,608 people working on Scottish farms with beef cattle.

Agriculture policy in Scotland is a devolved matter for the Scottish Executive; representatives of the agriculture sector, including the beef farming industry, regularly meet Scottish Executive Ministers. The reformed Common Agricultural Policy announced on 26 June provides the basis for a sustainable future for the beef industry in Scotland.

Fishing Industry

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many are employed in the fishing industry in Scotland. [128015]

Mrs. McGuire: Fisheries Departments estimate that there were 5,707 full and part-time fishermen working in Scotland at the end of 2002. Estimates of employment in the fish processing industry are produced as part of the economic surveys carried out by the Sea Fish Industry Authority, whose latest estimate is that the processing industry in Scotland supports 7,200 full-time equivalent jobs.

Official Engagements

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many official engagements he has undertaken as Secretary of State for Scotland since his appointment. [128017]

Mr. Darling: I have undertaken a number of official engagements since my appointment as Secretary of State for Scotland and I will continue to do so.

Over-30-months Scheme

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he was consulted by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs prior to the decision to lift the Over Thirty Month Scheme in 2004. [127845]

Mrs. McGuire: My right hon. Friend and I have regular discussions with ministerial colleagues on a wide range of issues.

Quality Meat Scotland

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the transfer to the Scottish Executive of Quality Meat Scotland; and what payments are outstanding to *(a)* Quality Meat Scotland and *(b)* the Scottish Executive in respect of the transfer. [127865]

Mrs. McGuire: These are matters for the Scottish Executive.

Sewel Motions

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many requests for Sewel motions have been exchanged between the Scottish Executive and his Department since 1999; how many have been rejected; when they were rejected; for what reasons; and what plans the Government has to review the procedures for dealing with Sewel motions. [128011]

Mrs. McGuire: Responsibility for tabling and the terms of Sewel motions rests with the Scottish Executive under the Memorandum of Understanding. Discussions with the Scottish Executive on Sewel motions are a normal part of the development of the legislative programme. To date, 43 Sewel motions have been agreed to by the Scottish Parliament since devolution.

The Government keep all procedures in relation to the devolution settlement under review.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Air Weapons

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many *(a)* deaths and *(b)* injuries involving air weapons there were in each of the last five years; [128342]

(2) how many criminal offences, broken down by category, involving *(a)* replica guns and *(b)* air weapons, there were in each of the last five years. [128343]

Caroline Flint: The latest available numbers of recorded crimes by offence category in which imitation weapons and air weapons were used are given in the tables. A weapon is said to be used in an offence if it is fired, used as a blunt instrument or in a threat.

Number of offences in which imitation weapons were used

	Violence against the person	*Robbery*	*Burglary*	*Criminal damage*	*Other offences*
1997[1]	268	186	16	3	38
1998–99	354	163	14	2	33
1999–2000	495	228	22	3	65
2000–01	494	227	15	17	34
2001–02	773	277	31	87	33

[1] Calendar year; other years to end of March

Number of offences in which air weapons were used

	Violence against the person	*Robbery*	*Burglary*	*Criminal damage*	*Other offences*
1997[1]	1,449	99	51	5,798	109
1998–99	1,937	83	81	6,362	202
1999–2000	2,438	91	20	7,330	224
2000–01	2,217	116	32	7,674	188
2001–02	2,366	161	22	9,559	232

[1] Calendar year; other years to end of March

There was a change in counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, which would have had the effect of increasing the number of offences counted. Similarly, some police forces adopted the principles of the National Crime Recording Standard in advance of its national implementation on 1 April 2002, and this may also have tended to increase the number of crimes counted, particularly in 2001–02.

The number of deaths and injuries resulting from recorded air weapon offences in the last five years are given in the following table:

	Fatal injuries	*Serious injuries*[1]	*Slight injuries*
1997	0	129	1,065
1998–99	0	133	1,381
1999–2000	0	171	1,806
2000–01	1	166	1,654
2001–02	2	166	1,741

[1] A serious injury is one which necessitated detention in hospital or involved fractures, concussion, severe general shock, penetration by a projectile or multiple wounds.

Al Mujaharoon

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the action he proposes to take over the planned Magnificent 17 conference organised by Al Mujaharoon. [129328]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 11 September 2003]:* Al-Muhajiroun represents neither the British Muslim Community nor its views.

We absolutely reject its offensive statements, as have the vast majority of Muslims living in the UK.

However, we have a long-standing and important tradition of free speech in this country people have a right to air their views, however unpalatable they may be to others. But we also have tough legislative powers to catch those who cross the line from legitimate debate and comment, into inciting violence, or who commit offences motivated by racial or religious hatred. We tightened these powers in the Anti-Terrorism and Security Acts (2001). Police can and do use these powers. Every word and every statement that representatives of Al-Muhajiroun make is closely monitored by the appropriate authorities.

Bailiffs

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases were prosecuted and how many convictions there were in each year since 1997 concerning *(a)* debts or payments in arrears and *(b)* abusive and illegal behaviour by bailiffs. [126950]

Paul Goggins: The information requested is not collected centrally by the Home Office.

Asylum Seekers

Clare Short: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers are being provided with accommodation under Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. [125078]

Beverley Hughes: Reliable information on the numbers of cases receiving support under Section 4 of the 1999 Act is currently unavailable, because of the difficulty of ensuring that the information is accurate. We are working with the YMCA to establish more frequent reporting that will enable us to produce accurate figures.

Information on the number of applications for the National Asylum Supports Service (NASS) support and the numbers of asylum seekers currently being supported by NASS can be found on the website http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people from Somalia *(a)* sought asylum, *(b)* were granted asylum, *(c)* were granted exceptional leave to remain, *(d)* have made applications which are still outstanding and *(e)* have made applications for asylum which have been refused and have been subsequently removed from the United Kingdom in each of the last five years. [127513]

Beverley Hughes: The tables provide the available information, showing the number of asylum applications, initial decisions and removals of Somalis for the last five years. Initial decisions do not necessarily relate to applications made in the same year. Nor do removals necessarily relate to initial decisions or appeal outcomes in the same year.

Information on asylum applications, by nationality, awaiting an initial decision is unavailable. This could be obtained only at disproportionate cost by examination of individual case records.

Information on the number of asylum applications, initial decisions and removals is published quarterly on the Home Office website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Asylum applications received in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, initial decisions, removals and voluntary departures, nationals of Somalia, 1998 to 2002[1]

		Initial decisions[2,3]					
		Cases considered under normal procedures			*Backlog clearance exercise*	
	Applications received	*Total initial decisions*	*Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum*	*Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave*	*Total refused*	*Grants of ELR under backlog criteria*[4,5]	*Non compliance refusals under backlog criteria*[4,6]
1998	4,685	2,805	2,330	375	100	—	—
1999[7]	7,495	350	130	55	120	35	5
2000[7,8]	5,020	11,325	5,310	3,575	2,365	55	15
2001[9]	6,420	8,430	2,910	1,995	3,525	—	—
2002[10]	6,540	6,735	2,515	1,405	2,815	—	—

[1] Figures rounded to nearest 5, with "*" = 1 or 2, and "—" = 0.
[2] Information is of initial determination decisions, excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.
[3] The refusal figures for each year do not necessarily relate to the applications received in the same year.
[4] Cases decided under pragmatic measures aimed at reducing the pre '96 asylum backlog.
[5] Includes cases where asylum or exceptional leave has been granted under the backlog criteria.
[6] Includes some cases where the application has been refused on substantive grounds.
[7] May exclude some cases lodged at Local Enforcement Offices between January 1999 and March 2000.
[8] Cases considered under the normal procedures may include some cases decided under the backlog criteria.
[9] Revised figures.
[10] Provisional figures.

Note:
From October 2000, the source for data on decisions changed. The nationality breakdown is therefore not directly comparable with previous months.

The latest available data on removals of Somali nationals who have sought asylum at some stage are given in the table.

Removals and voluntary departures[1] of Somali principal asylum applicants[2,3]

	Number
1998[4]	35
1999	n/a
2000	n/a
2001[4,5]	25
2002[4,6]	50

n/a = Nationality data are not available for 1999 and 2000 due to data quality issues on IS enforcement databases.

[1] Includes persons departing 'voluntarily' after enforcement action had been initiated against them, persons leaving under Assisted Voluntary Return Programmes run by the International Organisation for Migration, and removals on safe third country grounds.

[2] Figures rounded to nearest 5, with "*" = 1 or 2, and "—" = 0.

[3] Figures exclude dependants of asylum seekers removed. Data on dependants have only been collected since April 2001.

[4] Data for 2001 and 2002 have been estimated due to data quality issues.

[5] Figure may include a small number of dependants leaving under Assisted Voluntary Return Programmes.

[6] Provisional figures.

Note:

From October 2000, the source for data on decisions changed. The nationality breakdown is therefore not directly comparable with previous months.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many victims of crimes received payments from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme in each of the last five years; and how much was paid out. [127251]

Paul Goggins: The data in the table have been provided by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority.

	Number of awards	*Total value (rounded to nearest £ million)*
1998–99	46,240	195
1999–2000	43,495	206
2000–01	39,011	206
2001–02	41,351	233
2002–03	42,688	232

Criminal Records Bureau

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people having passed the Prison Service recruitment selection process are awaiting clearance by the Criminal Records Bureau; and if he will make a statement. [123309]

Paul Goggins: On 2 September 2003, the Criminal Records Bureau had 202 outstanding applications for disclosure of criminal records submitted by Her Majesty's Prison Service. However, it is not possible to identify from the Criminal Records Bureau database how many of these are as a result of recruitment exercises and how many result from internal redeployment and promotion. This information could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

The Criminal Records Bureau was set up to assist in the safer recruitment of people working with children and vulnerable adults. It has the capacity to issue 60,000 disclosures a week and is currently meeting its service levels, issuing 90 per cent of standard disclosures within two weeks and 90 per cent of enhanced disclosures within four weeks.

The Prison Service uses the Criminal Records Bureau to obtain an additional check for those working with children under 18 years of age as required by the Protection of Children Act 1999.

Faith Communities

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are in place to consult faith communities about the work of Government; and if he will make a statement. [128951]

Fiona Mactaggart *[holding answer 11 September 2003]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) on 30 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 12W.

The Review of the Government's Interface with the Faith Communities is making good progress and we are due to report at the end of the year.

Internet Grooming

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are being taken to promote awareness and safe internet usage, with particular reference to younger people. [126940]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 8 September 2003]:* Over the last two years, the Home Secretary's Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet has run and evaluated two successful national awareness campaigns. The campaigns sought to raise awareness of Internet safety measures, via cinema, television and radio advertising, national newspapers, online advertising on teen websites and chatrooms, and sponsorship activity. The core messages that were conveyed were that: children/young people should not give out their address, email, mobile or other contact details, that they should never attend a face-to-face meeting unaccompanied by an adult, and that people may lie about their identity. The task force also issued a 'Keeping your child safe on the Internet' leaflet and 200,000 copies of the leaflet were distributed via doctors surgeries and as an insert in the Department for Education and Skills magazine *Parents + Schools*.

The Home Office also runs two websites, thinkuknow.co.uk and wiseuptothenet.co.uk. The former is aimed at children and young people and the latter is aimed at parents. The Department for Education and Skills, Superhighway website and guidance, includes advice on all aspects of Internet safety such as walled gardens, firewalls, user contacts and net smart rules. Their revised guidance also includes advice on e-mails for students, filtering systems, school websites and chatrooms.

Passports

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he has put in place since 1999 to speed up the process of renewing a passport. [128093]

Beverley Hughes: Since 1999, the UK Passport Service (UKPS) has put in place a number of measures which have all contributed to speeding up the process of renewing a passport.

The UKPS has increased capacity by 30 per cent. through increased staffing, and the opening of a seventh passport office in Durham in March 2000. It opened its new London office in June 2000 which provides much improved service to its customers. TheUKPS has extended the working hours of its public counters which open longer on weekdays, and on Saturdays, and introduced a guaranteed one-day and one-week services, available by appointment, for those customers who need an urgent renewal service. The UKPS Service Standard has been set to process 99.5 per cent. of all correctly completed passport applications within 10 days and this is being consistently achieved throughout this year. To encourage renewal customers to apply early at less busy times, the UKPS has introduced a facility whereby customers can be credited on their new passport with the unexpired validity of their old passport, up to a maximum of nine months.

The UKPS has also improved the guidance to customers wishing to renew their passport. Page 1 of the information guide, which accompanies the passport application form, has a separate and clearly highlighted statement on what sections of the form to complete for renewals, and other relevant advice, to make completion of the form and its accurate submission easier. Finally, the UKPS has established a Call Centre, which handles passport inquiries 24 hours a day, seven days a week; and has enhanced its website (www.passport.gov.uk) to enable, among other things, e-mail inquiries, and online renewal application form completion. These measures all help customers to complete their applications accurately and to use the correct application channel to meet their needs.

Probation Service

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many probation service staff were employed in the last five years; and how many staff there were in each grade for these years. [126810]

Paul Goggins: The information requested is as follows:

	Number of Probation Staff[1,2]				
London	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Chief Officer	54	55	53	54	42
Deputy Chief Officer	15	13	13	12	18
Assistant Chief Officer	207	203	201	213	223
Area Manager	40	45	49	49	53
Regional Training Staff	6	24	40	48	37
Senior Practitioner	73	69	85	130	143
Senior Probation Officers	1,020	989	1,023	1,065	1,106
Probation Officers	5,734	5,773	5,532	5,437	4,789
Trainee Probation Officers	—	229	523	564	1,096
Probation Service Officers	1,919	2,027	2,502	2,869	3,366
All Other Staff	4,900	4,585	4,650	4,798	4,716
Total	13,968	14,012	14,671	15,239	15,789

[1] Figures given as full-time equivalents.

[2] Figures as at 31 December 2001, the figures for 2002-03 are currently being processed and analysed and will be available in due course.

Note:

Figures obtained from data collected for RDS Probation Statistics 2001.

Restorative Justice

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to extend the use of restorative justice, with particular reference to *(a)* mediation and *(b)* reparation; and if he will make a statement. [126818]

Paul Goggins: The Government's restorative justice strategy, issued on 22 July 2003, sets out proposals to extend the use of restorative justice, including mediation and reparation to victims and the community.

The Government aims to maximise the use of restorative justice in the Criminal Justice System, where we know it works well, to meet victims' needs and to reduce re-offending, and in society at large to resolve disputes and build strong, active communities. The strategy will also encourage more high quality, visible reparation by offenders to the community. The key link between restorative justice and reparation is that both are ways the offender can take responsibility for the harm they have caused and put it right. Both are ways that the Criminal Justice System can bring visible benefits to victims and other ordinary citizens, and be seen to be responsive to their needs. In practice, restorative justice can often lead to the offender making reparation to their victim, or to the wider community.

The launch of this strategy (which can be found on the Home Office website) marks the start of a 12-week consultation process. Officials have been working closely with criminal justice practitioners and the voluntary sector to develop the restorative justice strategy. Comments on the consultation paper are welcome.

West Sussex Safe House Project

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions his Department has had with West Sussex county council over the future of the West Sussex Safe House Project; and if he will make a statement. [129089]

Beverley Hughes: We understand that West Sussex are considering closure of the safe house. It is, of course, for local authorities to decide how best to provide support and services for children in need in its area, including accommodation for children who are the victims of trafficking. There is no current specific earmarked funding for services of this nature. Instead, Government funding is allocated to councils with social services responsibilities on the basis of the needs of their populations. It is, therefore, for councils, working in partnership with relevant local stakeholders, to determine their spending priorities on the basis of local needs. A National Asylum Support Service grant reimburses local authorities for the extra costs incurred for the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

West Sussex recognise that a body of expertise has been built up in the safe house over the last two years. They plan to close the safe house and use this expertise in the form of training and support packages for carers of young people assessed as being at risk of being trafficked. Currently, the safe house caters only for 17 and 18-year-old girls. There are also concerns that its location has become widely known, thus undermining the security of the service provided. West Sussex feel that by closing the safe house they will be able to offer a service to all children at risk from traffickers, including boys and under-16s and address the security concerns that have arisen.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Andrew Wang

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from Taiwan regarding Mr. Andrew Wang. [129762]

Mr. Rammell: It is the Government's policy not to make public announcements on individual extradition requests that may or may not have been received. This is to ensure that any on-going investigations by relevant law enforcement agencies are not jeopardised in any way.

However, the UK is not, at present, able to establish extradition arrangements with the Taiwanese authorities as HMG does not recognise Taiwan as a state.

Arms Promotion (Czech Republic)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer of 14 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 48W, on arms promotion activities, if he will list the Ministers carrying out promotion activities in the Czech Republic, the dates on which such conversations took place and the transactions which were discussed; and if he will make a statement. [129510]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 11 September 2003]:* I refer the right hon. Member to my previous answer on 9 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 282W.

I discussed the proposed sale of Gripen fighter aircraft by a UK/Swedish consortium on 25 January 2002 with my then Czech counterpart, Jan Kavan, and informally on other occasions. Ben Bradshaw met the Czech Defence Minister, Stanislav Tvrdik, on 5 March 2002 where they discussed the Gripen proposal. I am not aware of any other meetings during 2002 where Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers discussed UK arms exports with Czech colleagues.

Brazil

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Britain's relations with Brazil following the election of President Lula. [129076]

Mr. Rammell: UK-Brazil relations are good and continuing to develop. I visited Brazil in December 2002 to start the formal process of engagement with the new government, and my noble Friend the Leader of the House of Lords (Lord Williams) represented Her Majesty's Government at President Lula's inauguration. The Brazilian Trade Minister, Furlan visited the UK in March. I led the UK delegation at the latest round of bilateral High Level Political Talks in Brasilia in May. President Lula paid a successful first official visit to the UK in July for the Progressive Governance Summit. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister held substantive of bilateral talks with him.

Chechnya

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the situation in *(a)* Chechnya and *(b)* the Caucasus Region. [129584]

Mr. Rammell: We continue to monitor the situation in Chechnya and in the Caucasus. We have noted the steps the Russian Government is taking to establish a political process in Chechnya and welcomed the constitutional referendum held in March 2003. We continue to believe that the success of the political process will be dependent on the thorough and consistent implementation of the political and civil rights set out in the new constitution. While recognising the serious threat posed by terrorism in the region, we remain concerned about the security and human rights situation in Chechnya and the surrounding republics. We also note with concern the bombings in recent months throughout the North Caucasus.

Conflicts in and between the countries of the Southern Caucasus pose challenges for regional security and stability and the prospects for regional co-operation. As a member of the Group of Friends of the UN Secretary General on Georgia, the UK is participating in the process to find a political settlement to the Abkhazia dispute. On Nagorno Karabakh our policy is to support any solution acceptable to both parties, and capable of delivering a lasting political settlement. We support the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group in this regard. Her Majesty's Government's Special Representative for the Caucasus region. Sir Brian Fall, is actively addressing these problems and will work closely with his newly-appointed EU colleague.

Colombia

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the political situation in Colombia. [129077]

Mr. Rammell: After over a year in power, President Uribe continues to receive much support from the Colombian people. His government is still battling guerrilla and paramilitary groups which commit appalling human rights violations funded by illegal drug production, extortion and kidnapping. We support his efforts to tackle these problems and to develop a fully functioning democratic state throughout Colombia based on social and economic reform and sustainable economic development. At the same time we underline the need in so doing to respect the rule of law, human rights and the safety and welfare of its citizens. There is still much to do.

Cyprus

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many residents from the occupied part of Cyprus have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused a visa to visit the UK in each year since its introduction; and if he will make a statement. [127811]

Mr. Mullin: The information requested is as follows:

Visitor visa applications

	Received	*Issued*	*Refused*	*Other*
1998	7,819	7,286	413	120
1999	7386	6,900	452	34
2000	6,782	5,603	284	895
FY 2001–02	5,831	5,060	135	636
FY 2002–03	6,593	5,400	470	723

The column referring to 'other' may include those unresolved applications which have been deferred pending further inquiries and have been carried over to the following year. Applications may also be withdrawn during processing but still count as an application received. Posts are also required to count all applications received (for example, a mother and her three children on one passport may count as four applications but only one entry clearance may be issued). Not all of the applicants who apply in the "TRNC" are "Turkish Cypriots". From 2001 Posts began reporting statistics by financial rather than calendar year.

European Union

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the rights of national parliaments to *(a)* hold up and *(b)* veto proposals from the EU Commission, as contained in the report of the Convention on the Future of Europe. [129129]

Mr. MacShane: The proposal in the draft Constitutional Treaty, to introduce a mechanism to enforce the subsidiarity principle, represents a significant step forward in the role that national parliaments will have in EU business. It provides, for the first time, a Treaty-based power for national parliaments to question EU legislative proposals on the basis of subsidiarity. If more than a third of national parliaments considered a proposal at odds with the principle of subsidiarity, the Commission would have to review it; and would in practice find it very difficult to ignore those parliaments' views.

This proposal will help to ensure that the EU only legislates when it adds value to the actions of the individual Member States.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visits there have been to the Government's website regarding consultation on the future of the EU; how many have responded with comments; and what percentage have expressed support for an EU constitution. [129130]

Mr. MacShane: The Government's online consultation on the draft EU Constitutional Treaty has received over 2,000 readings and 985 contributions so far. The consultation does not aim to measure support for the draft EU Constitutional Treaty but to enable discussion of the main policy issues we expect the forthcoming Intergovernmental Conference to address.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how far the Government's objectives for the EU of *(a)* simplification of the Union's instruments and *(b)* more democracy, transparency and efficiency in the EU have been met by the proposals of the Convention on the Future of Europe. [129132]

Mr. MacShane: The Convention's draft text meets most of the Government's objectives. It succeeds in simplifying the Union's instruments by streamlining them and defining them more clearly.

The Convention's draft also proposes more democracy, transparency and efficiency by, for example: making it clear where the Union can and cannot act; reinforcing the role of national parliaments in policing the principle of subsidiarity; providing for greater openness in the meetings of the Council of Ministers; replacing the Maastricht "three pillars" system with a single Treaty structure: and setting up a Chair of the European Council.

Food Expenditure

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much was spent on food by his Department and by each of the agencies for which it is responsible in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03; what proportion of that food by value was produced in the United Kingdom; what guidance he has issued to encourage the procurement of home-produced food; and if he will make a statement. [129371]

Mr. Rammell: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) expenditure on food consumed in the UK in 2002–03 amounted to approximately £550,000. Information about 2001–02 expenditure and the proportion of food produced in the UK could only be provided at disproportionate cost. It is only in 2002–03 that we have started to centrally compile this data.

FCO purchasing policy is to buy goods and services on the basis of value for money and through competition unless there are compelling reasons to the contrary. We are currently reviewing our arrangements for buying food for UK consumption as part of a review of public sector food procurement which is being led by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. That review will include examination of whether UK and small producers are being given a proper chance to win contracts.

British Detainees (Guantanamo Bay)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the US Administration regarding the fate of British nationals detained at Guantanamo Bay; and if he will make a statement. [129626]

Mr. Rammell: My right hon. Friend the Attorney General has recently held a number of rounds of talks with the US Administration. His objective has been to ensure that the British nationals detained at Guantanamo Bay, if prosecuted, are assured of fair

trials that meet generally recognised principles, wherever those trials take place, and to make clear our opposition to the death penalty. We are discussing a number of options with the US Government. The possibility of repatriating the detainees' remains under discussion. Further talks are planned for the near future.

Immigration and Asylum

Mr. Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the new EU states about immigration and asylum. [129603]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and the Home Secretary (who has lead responsibility for asylum and immigration matters), and other government ministers have regular discussions with their counterparts in the new Member States on issues of asylum and immigration. These discussions take place within formal bilaterals as well as in the margins of other meetings.

Iraq

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his statement of 8 September 2003 on Iraq, with regard to the post-conflict reconstruction effort in that country, how many contracts for reconstruction projects were in place with companies prior to 27 July 2003; how many contracts for reconstruction projects were placed with companies between 27 July and 8 September 2003; how many of the reconstruction projects agreed prior to 27 July 2003 are under way; how many reconstruction projects placed with companies after 27 July 2003 are under way; how many of the reconstruction projects agreed prior to 27 July 2003 are complete; and how many of the reconstruction projects agreed after 27 July 2003 are complete. [129283]

Mr. Straw: 15 contracts for reconstruction projects were in place with companies prior to 27 July 2003; one contract for a reconstruction project was placed between 27 July and 8 September 2003; 12 of the reconstruction projects agreed prior to 27 July 2003 are under way; one reconstruction project placed after 27 July 2003 is under way. These long-term contracts are not yet complete.

This answer relates to primary contracts from the US and British Governments. Several hundred sub-contracts exist.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what countries have promised to provide troops to the coalition force in Iraq; how many were originally promised; and how many are deployed in Iraq from each country. [129745]

Mr. Rammell: In addition to 11,000 UK and 140,000 US forces, over 30 countries are committed to join the Coalition in Iraq. The following countries are already deployed; Italy (3,000), Netherlands (1,100), Denmark (420), Lithuania (88), Czech Republic (330), Romania (510), Norway (140), Bulgaria (480), Dominican Republic (300), Hungary (300), Mongolia (250), Poland (2,300), Slovakia (120), Spain (1,250), Thailand (26), Ukraine, (1,800), Albania (70), Kazakhstan (25), Uzbekistan (135), Georgia (69), Macedonia (25), Azerbaijan (150), Moldova (42), Estonia (43), Latvia (142), Honduras (366), El Salvador (415), Nicaragua (111), South Korea (675) and the Philippines (55).

Portugal will send 130 military police and New Zealand 44 engineers (for humanitarian and reconstruction assistance) later this month to assist the UK area. Tonga are also expected to deploy troops and Thailand and Denmark are committed to send further forces at a later date.

Israel

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of recent developments in Israel on the peace process. [129061]

Mr. Rammell: The renewal in mid-August of the familiar cycle of violence in Israel and the Occupied Territories has set back the peace process. But the vast majority of Israelis and Palestinians want an end to this violence and a lasting peace. The will of the international community to work for peace remains strong. We must encourage all parties to overcome the current difficulties, implement the roadmap and realise its vision of a two-state solution. To do this, the new Palestinian leadership must act with renewed determination to stop the suicide bombers, and Israel must stop targeted killings.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will press the Israeli Government to stop further seizures of land from Palestinians. [130379]

Mr. Rammell: My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have raised with the Government of Israel, the UK's concerns about the seizure of Palestinian land. We deplore both continuing settlement activity and land appropriation and the isolation of Palestinian villages for construction of the 'security fence'. Our embassy in Tel Aviv and FCO officials have also raised this matter with Israel and will continue to do so; lasting peace can only be achieved through a negotiated settlement and not unilateral actions.

Pakistan

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions have taken place with representatives from Pakistan regarding the persecution of Christians; and what has been done to encourage the Pakistani administration to stop such activities. [129096]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We remain concerned about the treatment of Christians and misuse of the blasphemy laws in Pakistan. The EU made clear its concerns and raised specific cases with the Pakistan authorities on 7 February 2003 and again on 23 June 2003. We will remain engaged and continue to urge Pakistan to pursue laws and practices to protect Christians and other religious minorities against discrimination, intimidation and attacks.

Peter Bleach

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made with the Government's request to release Mr. Peter Bleach from India; and what action will be taken if Mr. Bleach is released into UK custody by the Indian authorities. [129761]

Mr. Rammell: During his visit to the UK in June, the Indian Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. L K Advani, gave assurances to my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary that he would take a fresh look at Mr. Bleach's case. Our High Commission in New Delhi continues to make representations to the Government of India about Mr. Bleach's case.

In the event of Mr. Bleach's release, we understand the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of External Affairs will notify our Posts in Kolkata and New Delhi, where consular officers stand ready to make the practical arrangements for Mr. Bleach's return to the UK.

The British Deputy High Commission in Kolkata remains in close contact with Mr. Bleach about his case. Our consular staff in Kolkata will continue to visit Mr. Bleach regularly and do all they properly can to help him, and will let him know immediately of any developments.

Somali People (Entry Clearance)

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements are made at UK diplomatic posts in *(a)* Kenya and *(b)* Ethiopia for entry clearance applications to be made by Somali people to travel to the UK. [129743]

Mr. Mullin: Due to a specific threat, our High Commission in Nairobi has introduced security restrictions to those entering the High Commission compound.

As a result, the Visa Section is currently only able to accept applications for entry clearance from those who hold appropriate documentation confirming their nationality and identity.

The documents currently accepted by the High Commission in Nairobi are:

national passports issued by a competent authority of a Government recognised by the British Government;

stateless documents issued by a competent authority of a Government recognised by the British Government; and

Kenyan national identity cards.

This requirement applies to all visitors to the High Commission and is not aimed specifically at a particular nationality. However, since the collapse of the central authority in Somalia in 1991, there has been no reliable body authorised to issue marriage or birth certificates, passports or any other form of identification. Therefore, these restrictions affect the majority of Somali nationals who wish to apply at our Visa Section in Nairobi for entry clearance to the UK.

The High Commission is keeping the security situation under close review and the restrictions will be in place no longer than necessary. However, UK visas and the Visa Section in Nairobi are actively reviewing the procedures to try and identify ways for Somali nationals without documentation to submit applications that are compatible with maintaining security.

Our embassy in Addis Ababa does not face the same security issues as our High Commission in Nairobi. The Visa Section in Addis Ababa is able to accept applications from all Somali nationals, even those without documents. Applications can be made in person or through an agent. Applicants are then allocated a date to attend the Visa Section for an interview.

Tibet

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment has been made of the human rights situation in Tibet. [129468]

Mr. Rammell: We remain concerned about the human rights situation in Tibet and encourage China to continue dialogue with the Dalai Lama's representatives.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised our concerns with Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing on 25 June. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister raised Tibet with the Chinese leadership during his visit to China from 20–22 July.

Embassy officials visited Tibet at the end of August and discussed a range of issues with local government officials.

TREASURY

Audit Requirements

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will bring the audit requirements for industrial and provident societies in line with those of registered companies. [129273]

(2) if he will amend the requirement on industrial and provident societies wanting to publish interim accounts to undertake a full audit. [129274]

Ruth Kelly: The Government is keen to see, where appropriate, a level playing field between industrial and provident societies and companies. We continue to examine the options for taking forward this agenda. However, in order to provide for a strategic, consistent and up-to-date approach between companies and societies, the Government believes that the general modernisation of industrial and provident society legislation in this area should be considered in light of the Department of Trade and Industry's Company Law Review.

Bruemark Ruling

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total sum of money deposited with the Bank of England by frustrated liquidations has been since the Bruemark Ruling in June 2001. [129221]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested is not available to the Treasury.

Computer Fraud

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been *(a)* budgeted and *(b)* spent by his Department since April 2002 on (i) combating computer fraud, (ii) preventing theft of computers and (iii) safeguarding the security of information held on computer; and if he will make a statement. [128801]

John Healey: The risks of computer fraud, computer theft and unauthorised access to information held on computer are taken very seriously by the Chancellor's Departments and they are active in raising awareness of those risks and managing them, though most of the expenditure on doing so forms part of existing budgets for business as usual rather than being separately identified. Therefore the information requested is not available in the form requested.

Corporation Tax

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the revenue raised by the March 1998 Budget decision to abolish advanced corporation tax and introduce quarterly payments of corporation tax, for each year from 1998–99 to 2005–06; and if he will make a statement. [130147]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates of the impact on the Exchequer of the abolition of ACT and introduction of quarterly instalment payments were quoted in the 1998 Budget report.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of the cost of the changes to the statutory corporation tax deduction for share schemes announced in the Pre-Budget Report November 2002; what the purpose is of the changes; and if he will make a statement. [130234]

Dawn Primarolo: The provision to introduce a statutory corporation tax relief for employee share acquisition announced in the November 2002 Pre-Budget Report was brought into effect by Schedule 23 of Finance Act 2003. The estimate of exchequer costs to provide the statutory relief is in the Final Regulatory Impact Assessment published on the 10 April 2003 and remain unchanged, growing to around £95 million by 2007–08. The purpose of the statutory relief is to encourage and enable companies to set-up or expand employee share schemes by removing the need for complex arrangements solely to obtain a CT deduction. It levels the playing field between the use of cash and equity as remuneration and provides a modern, simple and fair system. It gives certainty to companies in terms of timing and amount of relief, reduces administration and compliance costs.

Correspondence

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Broxbourne of *(a)* 16 June, *(b)* 15 July, *(c)* 13 August and *(d)* 9 September relating to her constituent, Mrs. Julia Cuxson-Jones of Cheshunt. [129833]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue replied on behalf of the Chancellor on 15 September 2003.

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Broxbourne of *(a)* 16 June, *(b)* 15 July, *(c)* 13 August and *(d)* 9 September relating to her constituent, Mrs. Louise Stevens of Cheshunt. [129834]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue replied on behalf of the Chancellor on 15 September 2003.

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Broxbourne of *(a)* 16 June, *(b)* 15 July, *(c)* 13 August and *(d)* 9 September relating to her constituent, Mr. J.A. Russell of Cheshunt. [129835]

Ruth Kelly: I wrote to the hon. Lady on 10 September.

Developing Countries

Mr. Barry Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the extent of *(a)* illegal property ownership and *(b)* illegal working patterns in developing countries; and what assessment he has made of the impact in each case on the ability of developing countries meeting their international financial obligations; [129314]

(2) what assessment his Department has made of the impact *(a)* property rights and *(b)* a formalised system for establishing property ownership has on the ability of developing countries (i) to improve their economic position and (ii) to fulfil their international debt repayment obligations. [129325]

John Healey: There is widespread consensus that weak property rights are a key barrier to private sector development, economic growth and poverty reduction by, for example, deterring foreign investment, discouraging people from investing in their land, and preventing them from using it as collateral for loans.

Almost all of the world's poor are engaged in some form of private sector activity, with most in the informal sector. Private sector policy must therefore support the development of small, medium and micro enterprises in both the formal and informal sectors.

The ability of a country to meet its international financial obligations depends on a range of factors that will support private sector development and economic growth, including sound macroeconomic policies that ensure the level of debt remains sustainable.

There are many other factors that are important to securing greater investment, raising growth rates and reducing poverty including: the quality of governance, the level of corruption, crime and political instability; access to credit and finance; the quality of infrastructure; and the macroeconomic environment. The ability of a country to meet its international financial obligations also depends on sound macroeconomic policies that ensure the level of debt remains sustainable.

The UK Government supports various initiatives to help developing country governments identify and create the right conditions for private investment and growth

Employer-loaned Computers

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the revenue cost each year of

the tax relief on employer-loaned computers, as introduced in the 1999 Budget, for each year from 1999–2000 to 2005–06; what assessment he has made of the economic value of this relief; and if he will make a statement. [130143]

Dawn Primarolo: Information on which to base up-to-date estimates of the cost of this exemption is not available.

Employment

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his most recent estimate is of the number of people in Crosby who are in *(a)* temporary and *(b)* part-time employment. [129462]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Ms Claire Curtis-Thomas, dated 15 September 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question about part-time and temporary employment in Crosby. I am replying in his absence. (129462)

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) gives estimates of part-time and temporary employment rates, but not the numbers of people, for Parliamentary Constituencies. The latest available estimate, for the twelve month period ending February 2002, is that 24.9 per cent of the employed population resident in Crosby were working part-time. The LFS sample size is too small to give reliable estimates of temporary employment for Crosby.

Enterprise Investment Scheme

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of the cost of reducing the minimum holding period for *(a)* investments under the Enterprise Investment Scheme and *(b)* for venture capital trusts, as announced in the March 2000 Budget, for each year from 2000–01 to 2005–06; what economic benefits have resulted from these changes; and if he will make a statement. [130127]

Dawn Primarolo: The forecast cost of reducing the minimum holding period for investment in the Enterprise Investment Scheme and Venture Capital Trust scheme was given in the Financial Statement and Budget Report 2003 (HC 500).

In April 2003, the Inland Revenue published research into the EIS and VCT schemes carried out by PACEC and the Centre for Business Research at the University of Cambridge (available at http://home.inrev.gov.uk/inlandrevenue/research/report.pdf). This research concluded that both schemes have met their objectives of encouraging more investment by individuals in smaller, high risk trading companies, which in turn has increased their potential to grow and become successful. The research did not measure the benefits of the holding period change specifically, but found that, of those existing investors that were aware of any changes made to the schemes, up to half would be more likely to invest through the schemes in future as a result.

Enterprise Management Incentives

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what his estimate is of the total revenue cost of introducing enterprise management incentives in the March 2000 Budget to allow smaller high risk companies to issue the tax-advantaged share options to key staff, for each year from 2000–01 to 2005–06; what assessment has been made of the economic benefit of this scheme; and if he will make a statement; [130128]

(2) what the total cost of the Enterprise Management Incentives is for each year from 2001–02 to 2005–06; what assessment has been made of the benefits of this scheme; and if he will make a statement. [130131]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates of the exchequer cost of tax and national insurance relief on options granted under Enterprise Management Incentives (EMI) were published in Budget 2000 for 2000–01 to 2002–03 (Table A.13). The additional costs of subsequent changes to the EMI rules were published in Budget 2001 (Table A.13) and the pre-Budget report 2001 (Table B4). These estimates are of the taxable salary sacrificed in lieu of EMI option grants and no further estimates have been made on this basis.

Each year, estimates of the tax and national insurance relief cost of gains made by employees upon exercise of their EMI options are published in Inland Revenue Statistics on the Revenue's website at www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/emp_share_schemes/menu.htm. Only a very small number of employees exercised their options in the early years of EMI, so the estimated costs were negligible for 2000–01 and 2001–02. These costs will rise as the scheme matures.

As stated in the Full Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA), published in March 2000, a full review of the success of EMI will take place during 2005. In the meantime, the Inland Revenue continues to monitor the administration, take-up, and exchequer costs of the initiative. To date, around 4,000 companies have granted EMI options to around 60,000 employees.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of the cost of the expansion of the Enterprise Management Incentives announced in the 2001 Budget for each year from 2000–01 to 2004–05; and if he will make a statement. [130133]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested is contained in the Financial Statement and Budget Report 2001.

Household Debt

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to tackle the levels of household debt in the UK. [129935]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth (Mr. Jenkins) on 16 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 40W and 30 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 52W.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the total cost of tax reliefs on individual learning account contributions for each year from 2000–01 to 2005–06; and if he will make a statement. [130141]

Dawn Primarolo: Information on which to base up-to-date estimates of the cost of these exemptions is not available.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to make changes to the inheritance tax regime to reflect recent trends in property price inflation, with particular reference to the value of the principal residence of the deceased. [129719]

Dawn Primarolo: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer considers all taxes as part of his annual Budget judgment.

Lung Cancer

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people died as a result of lung cancer in *(a)* England and *(b)* Northern Ireland in 2002. [129481]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mrs. Curtis-Thomas, dated 15 September 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your question concerning lung cancer deaths in *(a)* England *(b)* Northern Ireland in 2002. I am replying in his absence. (129481) The latest year for which data are available is 2001, whose figures are shown in the table below.

Mortality for malignant neoplasm of trachea, bronchus or lung[1], (a) England (b) Northern Ireland, 2001[2]

	Northern Ireland	*England*
Number of deaths	26,894	782
Age-standardised rate[3] per 100,000	40.4	41.4

[1] Selected using code C33-C34 from the International Classification of Diseases Tenth Revision.

[2] Data are for occurrences of death per calendar year for England and registrations of death per calendar year for Northern Ireland.

[3] Directly age-standardised to the European Standard Population.

National Insurance Fund

Paul Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the surplus expected in the National Insurance Fund in March 2004. [129717]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer my hon. Friend to Table 2 on page 7 of the Report by the Government Actuary on the drafts of the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 2003 and the Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating and National Insurance Funds Payments) Order 2003.

North Sea Fiscal Regime

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of the cost of abolishing the North Sea royalty for each year from 2003–04 to 2005–06; what the reasons were for this decision; and if he will make a statement. [130235]

Dawn Primarolo: North Sea Royalty was abolished from 1 January 2003 as part of the package of measures introduced by the Chancellor in his 2002 Budget to modernise the North Sea fiscal regime. Along with the other measures in the package its abolition will promote long-term investment in the North Sea, make the tax regime more closely linked to profits and ensure a fairer return for the nation from profits derived from a national resource. The estimated cost of abolition is given in the table A2 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report 2003 [HC 500].

Customs Detector Dogs

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 6 March by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, *Official Report*, columns 952–53, how many food sniffer dogs are available at *(a)* airports and *(b)* seaports. [129143]

John Healey: I refer the hon. Gentlemen to the answer I gave him on 10 September. The additional information requested on the deployment of detector dogs is not available; exemption 4 (Law Enforcement and legal proceedings) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information applies to all such information about Customs anti-smuggling activities.

Premium Bonds

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many unclaimed prizes from premium bonds there are; and what their cumulative value is. [128876]

Ruth Kelly: There are 390,352[1] bonds outstanding that amount to £23 million[1] unclaimed Premium Bond prizes.

[1] Figure correct as of the 1 September 2003.

Regional Pay

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which public sector workers will be affected by his plans on regional pay. [127214]

Mr. Boateng: All departments and agencies across the public sector are expected to consider how regional and local pay flexibilities apply to their workforce, except where an exemption has been specifically allowed, or where responsibility lies with the devolved administrations.

Research and Development Tax Credit

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the cost of the research and development tax credit for each year from 1999–2000 to 2005–06; what assessment he has made of the additional research and development expenditure which has occurred because of this policy; and if he will make a statement. [130145]

Dawn Primarolo: Latest estimates of the cost, on an accruals basis, of the research and development tax credit for each year from 2000–01 to 2002–03 are available on the Inland Revenue's website at http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/taxexpenditures/q_t06_1.htm.

Residential Property Sales

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of the number of annual residential property sales of *(a)* under £100,000, *(b)* under £200,000, *(c)* under £300,000, *(d)* under £400,000, *(e)* under £500,000, *(f)* under £600,000, *(g)* under £750,000, *(h)* under £1 million and *(i)* over £1 million; and if he will make a statement. [130151]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates of the number of residential property sales in 2002 are given in the table:

Price band (£s)	*Number of transactions £000s*
Under 100,000	777
100,000—199,999	425
200,000—299,999	160
300,000—399,999	47
400,000—499,999	21
500,000—599,999	6
600,000—749,999	5
750,000—1,000,000	4
Over £1 million	4
Total:	1,450

Source:
Survey of Property Transactions

Savings

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the amount of savings certificates and savings deposits issued through the Post Office which are unlikely to be claimed or cashed. [128877]

Ruth Kelly: We estimate that there is a potential £710 million forgotten or unclaimed funds held in matured Savings Certificates, and £525 million forgotten or unclaimed deposits held in savings accounts (where no transactions have been made in the last five years).

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions between 31 March 2002 and 31 March 2003 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisors have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [126661]

Ruth Kelly: Between 31 March 2002 and 31 March 2003 special advisers in the Treasury Department travelled abroad on official business on eight occasions, at an average cost of £4,330 per trip. Countries visited are USA on 19–22 April 2002, 30 May to 2 June 2002, 3–5 September 2002, 26–30 September 2002 (×2), 5 March 2003; France on 11 September 2002 and 16 January 2003. All travel by special advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Management Code.

Tax Credits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many child tax credit recipients have made an application for reassessment; and of that number how many were on the basis of *(a)* the award being an overpayment and *(b)* the award being an underpayment. [122699]

Dawn Primarolo: Awards of child and working tax credits are adjusted if claimants report a change in the circumstances on which the award is based. Claimants may also ask for their award to be adjusted to reflect their expected income for the current tax year.

The tax credits award for 2003–04 is initially based on the family's income for the tax year 2001–02. The final tax credits award will be based on 2003–04 income if it is lower, or more than £2,500 higher, than 2001–02 income. Even if income does rise, the first £2,500 of the rise is ignored in finalising the award. To allow awards to be adjusted to reflect current income, claimants can ask during the year for their tax credits to be based on their expected 2003–04 income, which is checked against actual income after the year end.

Table 6.1 of "Child and Tax Credits Quarterly Statistics. July 2003" shows the number of families with awards who have asked for their awards to be adjusted to reflect their expected 2003–04 income. This publication is available on the Inland Revenue website, at www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/personal-tax-credits/menu.htm.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people who are eligible for each of the new tax credits have yet to apply; and how many *(a)* applications have been received and *(b)* eligible people there are in (i) the Teesside region and (ii) the Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland constituency. [128670]

Dawn Primarolo: In total, 6 million families are expected to receive new tax credits. Already, after just 5 months, over 5.8 million families are benefiting, which is over 95 per cent. of those expected to be reached over the entire year.

The available estimates of the number of families in each local authority and constituency receiving child and working tax credit appear in "Child and Working Tax Credit Statistics. Geographical analyses. July 2003". This is on the Inland Revenue website, at www.inlandreveneue.gov.uk/stats/personal-tax-credits/menu.htm.

Estimates of the numbers of people expected to receive new tax credits are not available below the regional level.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are in receipt of *(a)* child tax credit and *(b)* working tax credit, in each London constituency; how many claims are outstanding; and if he will make a statement. [128758]

Clive Efford: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many families in Eltham have benefited from the child tax credit; and what the overall amount paid out through the credit to families in Eltham was in the last 12 months; [129430]

(2) what the average gain of families in Eltham has been from the child tax credit; [129431]

(3) how many families he estimates will benefit from the working tax credit in Eltham; and what will be the average gain per family *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in Eltham. [129433]

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in the Carmarthen East and Dinefwr constituency are in receipt of *(a)* child tax credit and *(b)* working tax credit; and how many claims are outstanding. [129215]

Dawn Primarolo: The available estimates of the number of families in each local authority and constituency receiving child and working tax credit appear in "Child and Working Tax Credit Statistics. Geographical analyses. July 2003". This is on the Inland Revenue website, at www.inlandreveneue.gov.uk/stats/personal-tax-credits/menu.htm.

Any claims outstanding are ones where the Revenue is awaiting for further information, or are being verified. There is no breakdown of such claims by constituency.

Statistics on average awards will be published after the end of the tax year, when awards have been finalised.

Clive Efford: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to encourage families to claim *(a)* the working tax credit and *(b)* the child tax credit. [129434]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on 10 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 604W, regarding child tax credit. Since that date further publicity has included television, press, radio and online advertising as well as direct mail.

Third World Debt

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on progress with cancellation of Third World debt by, *(a)* the UK and *(b)* other countries. [129744]

Mr. Boateng: The UK government have been at the forefront of the international debate on debt relief issues, and continues to press for the rapid and full implementation of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative.

Of the 38 countries that stand to benefit from enhanced HIPC debt relief, there are now 27—23 from Africa and 4 from Latin America—that already benefit from debt relief, which will amount in total to over $70 billion. This is a significant step towards achieving the $100 billion commitment made at the Cologne summit in 1999, and will reduce their debts to below the average for developing countries. For these 27 countries, the UK is providing 100 per cent. relief on their debts. Furthermore, the Chancellor has announced that any payments from countries yet to reach Decision Point would be held in trust for the day they can be returned to fund poverty reduction. Since 1999, the total UK commitment to multilateral institutions such as the World bank, the African Development Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to support the HIPC initiative has been $474 million.

At their recent Summit in Evian, G8 governments reaffirmed their commitment to the HIPC initiative. They recognised the need to encourage and assist eligible countries in taking the steps necessary to complete the HIPC process. They urged the IMF and World bank to intensify their efforts to secure full participation of all creditors in the initiative, and reaffirmed their objective of ensuring debt sustainability for countries reaching completion point. Following on from discussions at Evian, the Chancellor will be working with other G7 Finance Ministers to agree the methodology for calculating the amount of "topping-up" debt relief available to countries. The UK has been pushing for a change in the rules of HIPC to exclude additional voluntary bilateral debt relief from the calculation of topping-up at Completion Point and the Chancellor will be working with other G8 Finance Ministers to review mechanisms to encourage good governance and the methodology for calculating the amount of topping-up debt relief available to countries—a measure that could provide an estimated $1 billion extra debt relief to HIPCs. In addition, the Treasury and the Department for International Development is seeking international support to establish the International Finance Facility, which could raise $50 billion annually to fund the Millennium Development Goals. This money could be disbursed in the form of concessional loans and grants, including debt relief.

Water Efficient Technologies

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of the effects of the introduction of enhanced capital allowances for water-efficient technologies; what assessment has been made by the Treasury of such effects; and if he will make a statement. [130236]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested is contained in Table A1 (page 185) of the Financial Statement and Budget Report 2003 [HC 500].

Actual Exchequer cost will depend upon take-up of the qualifying technology products. It is too early to comment on the actual take-up of thepolicy and the related effects.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Immigration Work (Legal Practices)

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many legal practices specialising in immigration work have ceased to offer their services in the last two years citing insufficient income from legal aid as a reason. [127393]

Mr. Lammy: Neither my Department, nor the Legal Services Commission, maintain records on the number of legal practices specialising in immigration work that have ceased to offer their services citing insufficient income from legal aid as a reason. However, the number of organisations with contracts to provide publicly funded immigration and asylum legal services has increased over the last two years from 548 to 644.

Legal Services Commission

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs whether the Legal Services Commission uses a cost-benefit analysis when deciding whether to grant legal aid. [128813]

Mr. Lammy: The Legal Services Commission assesses applications for Community Legal Service funding (formerly civil legal aid) against a means and a merits assessment under the Funding Code approved by Parliament. The only exceptions are public law Children Act cases and hearings before the Mental Health Review Tribunal, for which funding is available on a non-means, non-merits basis. A cost-benefit test is an important part of this assessment. The Code imposes different types of cost-benefit test according to the nature of the case. Broadly the criteria seek to ensure that public funding is only available in circumstances where a privately paying client would be prepared to litigate.

A cost-benefit test is not used when deciding whether to grant publicly funded legal representation in criminal cases. The only test in determining whether an individual should be publicly funded is whether it is in the interests of justice, as required by article 6 of ECHR.

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what plans the Department has to review the guidelines used by the Legal Services Commission in making decisions on the allocation of legal aid. [128814]

Mr. Lammy: The Legal Services Commission is responsible for granting public funding in civil cases. The merits criteria for the public funding of individual civil claims are contained in the Commission's Funding Code, which is established under the Access to Justice Act 1999. The criteria themselves are supported by detailed decision-making guidance which is regularly reviewed and updated by the Commission.

There are plans to issue a consultation paper later this year to consider whether changes to the Funding Code should be made. Any changes would be implemented on or after April 2004.

Sheriffs

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many *(a)* Sheriffs and *(b)* Under Sheriffs are (i) women and (ii) from minority ethnic communities; and if he will make a statement. [129318]

Mr. Leslie: Of the 51 High Sheriffs in England and Wales that the Privy Council is responsible for appointing (that is, excluding Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cornwall) 16 (31 per cent.) are women. The responsibility for appointing Under Sheriffs lies with High Sheriffs, and the Privy Council has no responsibility for them. Information on the ethnic background of nominees for High Sheriff is not supplied to the Privy Council. Appointment panels have now been set up, in all areas, and they have been asked to ensure that the pool from which nominees are drawn includes people from as wide a variety of backgrounds as possible.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Alconbury Airfield

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will make a decision on the application by Alconbury Development Ltd. concerning the Alconbury airfield. [129685]

Keith Hill: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is currently consulting parties about whether material changes have occurred since the inquiry into the appeals, relating to development at Alconbury Airfield, closed. The deadline for responses is 13 October. Any representations made will then be circulated for comment, giving a further period within which final comments may be made. The decisions on the appeals will be made as soon as possible after that. The exact timing will, however, depend on whether any matters arise from the reference back.

Local Authority Housing

Bob Russell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will set out his reasons for refusing to allocate additional funds to those local authorities who choose not to establish arm's length management operations for their council housing. [129306]

Keith Hill: The Sustainable Communities Plan made it clear that there are three options open to local authorities seeking additional investment in their housing stock: Stock transfer, the Private Finance Initiative and the establishment of an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO).

The range of options is needed so that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister can increase the quality of social housing alongside the achievement of other priorities. Additional resources are directed to options that will improve performance and service quality at the same time.

Bob Russell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the local authorities which have conducted ballots amongst their housing tenants for arm's length management operations; and what *(a)* the turn-out in each case and *(b)* the percentage votes for and against was. [129307]

Keith Hill: The information requested is tabled as follows:

Percentage

Local authority	*Turnout*	*In favour*	*Not in favour*
ALMO round 1			
Derby	48	88	12
Hounslow	35	83	17
Kirklees	47	81	19
Rochdale	46	90	10
Stockton	44	93	7
ALMO round 2			
Barnsley	25	57	43
Carrick	61	96	4
Colchester	57	76	24
Leeds—East	35	83	17
Leeds—North East	41	88	12
Leeds—North West	42	89	11

Local authority	Turnout	In favour	Not in favour
			Percentage
Leeds—South	39	91	9
Leeds—South East	40	88	12
Leeds—West	38	90	10
Waltham Forest	49	85	15

Bob Russell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will allocate additional funds to local authorities whose tenants have voted in favour of the establishment of arm's length management operations. [129308]

Keith Hill: Allocation of funds to a local authority under the Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) Programme is subject to two conditions: the council obtaining approval from the Secretary of State under section 27 of the Housing Act 1985 to delegate its housing management functions to an ALMO, for which tenant support is a key criterion; and the ALMO gaining at least a 2* from the Housing Inspectorate. We confirm the allocation of funds when both of these conditions are satisfied.

Census Forms

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people have been prosecuted for not filling in their census forms in *(a)* Crosby and *(b)* the UK. [129452]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:

The National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales has been asked to reply to your recent question asking how many people have been prosecuted for not filling in their census forms in *(a)* Crosby and *(b)* in the UK. I am replying in his absence.

In England and Wales there were 38 prosecutions for refusal to complete and return a census form. There was one prosecution in the Crosby constituency. Scotland and Northern Ireland conducted their own Censuses and prosecution for refusal to complete and return a census form was the responsibility of the respective Registrars General of these countries.

The Office for National Statistics followed a policy of only prosecuting in cases where it had obtained clear and sufficient documentary evidence of a refusal to return a completed Census form.

Correspondence

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Broxbourne of *(a)* 19 June, *(b)* 15 July, *(c)* 13 August and *(d)* 9 September relating to correspondence from Hertfordshire county council. [129832]

Yvette Cooper: I replied to the hon. Member on 11 September.

Disability Grants

Lynne Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make it his policy that no elderly or disabled person should wait more than six months for an assessment of needs, the provision of finance and the execution of works required under disability facilities grant arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [128898]

Yvette Cooper: Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) are administered by local authorities who are under a statutory duty to notify an applicant on whether or not their application is approved as soon as is reasonably practicable, but no later than six months after the date of application. The grant is payable on completion of the works. Authorities have a statutory power to delay payment if they are under financial pressure but in these cases this must not be beyond 12 months from the date of grant application.

We have recently consulted on new Office of the Deputy Prime Minister/Department of Health draft guidance on delivering housing adaptations for disabled people, which sets out the Government's view of best practice on service delivery. This includes target times for the complete delivery process including needs assessment, processing of the application and the completion of building works. These target times will depend on the complexity of, and priority attached to, individual cases but the guidance suggests that the maximum target time for the entire process should in any event be no more than 260 working days and only 80 working days in high priority cases.

We are currently considering responses to this consultation and hope to issue final guidance to local housing and social service authorities before the end of this year.

Dispute Resolution

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what developments there have been in the introduction of alternative dispute resolution methods into public sector contracts; and if he will make a statement. [128669]

Phil Hope: On 23 March 2001, the Lord Chancellor published a formal pledge committing Government Departments and agencies to settle disputes by Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) techniques. As part of that pledge, Departments are committed to including appropriate clauses in their standard procurement contracts on the use of ADR to settle disputes arising under those contracts. The document "Dispute Resolution Guidance" issued by the Office of Government Commerce and available on their website at http://www.ogc.gov.uk/sdtoolkit/reference/ogc_library/generic_guidance/dispute.pdf contains further details on the pledge, and includes at Annex B model clauses relating to ADR.

Fire Sprinklers

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make it a legal requirement for fire sprinklers to be installed in all new dwellings; and if he will make a statement. [129118]

Phil Hope: The Building Regulations apply to most building work undertaken in England and Wales, typically the erection, extension or material alteration of a building. Part B of the Building Regulations sets out the requirements for fire safety and is supported by Approved Document B which provides guidance on measures that will meet these requirements,

A major review of Part B and its supporting Approved Document is due to commence in early 2004. As part of this review it is our intention to consider the potential of extending the existing provisions for sprinkler protection under the Building Regulations to new residential premises, including dwellings. The proposals will be subject to a full public consultation, and will be supported by a Regulatory Impact Assessment.

General Permitted Development Order

Matthew Green: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what changes have been made to Class B under Part 4 of the General Permitted Development Order since September 2001. [128528]

Keith Hill: There have been no changes to Part 4, Class B of Schedule 2 to the General Permitted Development Order (GPDO) since September 2001. In January 2002 the Government published a consultation paper on possible options for change to the temporary use provisions. Due to the high level of public interest in the matter of temporary uses, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister made an interim announcement on 21 August 2002 that there would be no change to existing provisions.

Housing

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assistance he can give to areas with high house prices and low incomes to increase housing affordability; and if he will make a statement. [129156]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister published the "Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future" on 5 February. This set out a range of measures to create conditions in which private house builders can increase supply and to make the best use of the existing housing stock.

In addition funding for the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme in 2003–04 has been increased to around £1.5 billion—an increase of £500 million on last year—to enable housing associations to provide homes for both rent and low cost home ownership. In all the Government will be providing around £5 billion for investment in affordable housing by 2005–06. Decisions on the allocation of these funds will be based on recommendations from the regional housing boards based on priorities identified in regional housing strategies.

The Sustainable Communities Plan announced that the Home Ownership Task Force would be examining all the various home ownership programmes and the scope for better targeting and design. The task force is due to report in the autumn.

Housing Development (Sewerage Networks)

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what inspections local authority planning officers are required to carry out to ensure that new housing developments are correctly connected to sewerage networks. [129870]

Keith Hill: Planning policy guidance note 23 "Planning and pollution control", which was published in 1994 clearly states that the arrangements for sewage disposal are capable of being a material consideration in planning applications and appeals. It advises that local planning authorities may need to refuse planning permission where they are not satisfied about the adequacy of sewerage infrastructure or they may be able to impose conditions to ensure that suitable arrangements are in place. Examples of the types of conditions are given in Department of the Environment Circular 11/95 "The use of conditions in planning permissions".

The consideration given to sewage disposal when determining planning applications will depend on the circumstances. Local authority planning officers are only responsible for enforcing planning conditions that have been imposed. In many circumstances there will be no need to impose planning conditions related to sewerage arrangements.

However, Part H of the Building Regulations 2000 requires the provision of an adequate system of drainage to carry foul water from appliances within the building to a prioritised list of alternative foul water outfalls (public or private sewer, septic tank or a cesspool). Enforcement of the Building Regulations 2000 is by local authority building control departments or approved inspectors. Where a connection is to be made to a public sewer, under the Water Industry Act 1991, there is a duty to notify the sewerage undertaker and provision for the undertaker to inspect the connection.

Local Rates

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister under what powers local authorities may charge a local rate on new build houses when the roads, drains and play areas have not been adopted by that local authority. [129175]

Keith Hill: Local taxation on domestic property has been in the form of council tax since 1993–94. Currently local authorities have no power to vary council tax across their areas because roads, drains and play areas have not been adopted. However, subject to parliamentary approval, the Local Government Bill will provide a discretionary power for local billing authorities to offer locally determined council tax discounts.

Park Homes

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he expects to consult on measures affecting park homes which require legislation. [129301]

Yvette Cooper: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister set up the Park Homes Working Party to consider the need to change existing legislation. The Working Party's we considered recommendations and consulted on in 2001. Options for changes to the law are currently being considered.

Planning

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what sanctions can be used by *(a)* his Department and

(b) members of the public if a section 106 planning gain for a new primary school is not then taken up by the planning authority. [129177]

Keith Hill: There are no powers for my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister or members of the public to enforce s106 agreements directly.

Planning obligations made under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by section 12 of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991) are either agreements between the local planning authority and persons with an interest in the land or undertakings given by persons with an interest in the land relating to the matters set out in section 106 (1) (a)–(d):

(a) restricting the development or use of the land in any specified way;

(b) requiring specified operations or activities to be carried out in, on, under or over the land;

(c) requiring the land to be used in any specified way; or

(d) requiring a sum or sums to be paid to the authority on a specified date or dates or periodically.

The planning obligation can only be enforced by the local planning authority against the person who entered into the obligation or any person deriving title from the person who entered into the obligation. The relevant powers are set out at section 106 (5) and section 106 (6). There is no power for the Secretary of State or any other person to enforce the obligation.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what powers a local authority has to prevent further buildings by a developer where the houses recently built by the company on that site which have many snags per house still to be resolved. [129178]

Phil Hope: There are no such powers.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many complaints about homes built by Redrow plc *(a)* in total and *(b)* on the Meads Estate near Bobbing have been received by NHBC Building Control Services Ltd. [129179]

Phil Hope: NHBC Building Control Services Ltd. is a subsidiary of NHBC (National House-Building Council), an independent company limited by guarantee. Questions regarding complaints made about developers or house builders to NHBC or its subsidiaries should be directed to NHBC.

Regional Assemblies

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what powers existing regional assemblies have in relation to *(a)* the hiring of permanent staff and *(b)* the expenditure of public money. [129025]

Mr. Raynsford: Regional chambers (which style themselves assemblies) are voluntary. Some are companies while others are unincorporated bodies. Their arrangements for the hiring of permanent staff, are a matter for them and will vary between chambers, operating within the constraints ordinarily imposed by the law.

Each regional chamber, or its accountable body, receives an annual grant from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and grant conditions in the funding agreement letters determine permitted expenditure.

Regional Assemblies may derive other income through subscriptions from local authorities and other organisations (such as social and economic partners). Conditions that relate to the expenditure of this money is a matter for those funding bodies to decide.

Social Exclusion

John Robertson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what action he is taking to tackle social exclusion among pensioners. [128134]

Yvette Cooper: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is working across Government to tackle pensioner poverty and social exclusion. Since 1997, our strategy for tackling poverty has been to target our help on the poorest pensioners through the minimum income guarantee, the new pension credit and winter fuel payments. The poorest third of pensioners households will have gained over £1,600 a year in real terms.

The Social Exclusion Unit is taking forward a programme of work looking at impacts and trends in social exclusion. This will develop a clearer understanding of how Government policies work together to tackle social exclusion for particular groups, including older people. The programme of work includes a review of the evidence about the impact of policies on social exclusion among older people

The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit aims to ensure that older people benefit from regeneration initiatives. The work of Local Strategic Partnerships should be informed by the views of all local groups, including older people. We are making £36 million available through the Community Empowerment Fund to make sure that under-represented groups are better able to have their voices heard at the local level.

Fear of crime can itself be a cause of social exclusion, particularly among some older people. Neighbourhood Warden Schemes are showing early signs of reducing crime and the fear of crime across some of the most deprived neighbourhoods.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister recognises that it needs to know more about those older people who live within the most deprived areas. Following the recent consultation on updating the Indices of Multiple Deprivation, we will be creating an index of income deprivation among older people.

The "Supporting People" programme offers vulnerable members of the community, including older people, the opportunity to improve their quality of life through greater independence, which can help to combat social exclusion. Through this programme we are promoting high quality, strategically planned housing-related support services that will enable older people to remain in their own homes for as long as possible.

Voter Turnouts

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the average voter turnout in the May 2003 local

government elections was *(a)* where only traditional voting methods were used and *(b)* where postal ballots were piloted. [126451]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does not hold the information requested centrally and it could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Electoral Commission published their evaluation of the 2003 local electoral pilots on 31 July. According to their report, the average voter turnout across all local elections in 2003, including results from elections held on a pilot basis, was 34.9 per cent. The average turnout at elections where all-postal voting pilots were held was 49.4 per cent.

HEALTH

National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse plans to locate staff within the Government Office for the north-west during 2003. [128567]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse (NTA) was originally structured with a regional manager in nine areas across the country. In 2002, a review of the NTA found regional managers had been over stretched and were not always fully engaged, with Government offices.

The board of the NTA, with the agreement of the Department of Health and the Home Office, decided that further resources and staff should be deployed in each of the regions, commensurate with the area and the number of drug action teams covered. Within the north-west, the regional manager has been joined by two deputy regional managers and one other additional member of staff. A third deputy regional manager is also being recruited.

The Board also decided that collocating the NTA teams in the Government Office for the north-west would enable closer working with Government Office colleagues. Collocation of the north-west NTA team took place on 7 July 2003.

Anti-TNF Therapy

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he plans to take to ensure that health care trusts abide by National Institute for Clinical Excellence guidance on anti TNF therapy. [128678]

Dr. Ladyman: Clinicians have to make an independent clinical judgment, taking due account of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence's (NICE) advice and the strength of evidence which lies behind it. They may therefore depart from the advice if, in their view, the circumstances of the individual patient justify doing so. But they will be held accountable, through clinical governance arrangements, for their clinical decisions.

The Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) and NICE have agreed a methodology for CHI to incorporate the monitoring of NICE guidance in its clinical governance reviews. Specifically, CHI now looks to see if national health service trusts have mechanisms in place to implement and comply with NICE guidance. CHI will also support and facilitate clinicians to discuss when NICE guidance is and is not followed on an individual patient basis.

The Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection will be the main inspector of NHS services in the future. It will carry out inspection against clear national standards and we expect NICE guidance to be included in those standards.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to collect centrally information regarding the level of availability of anti-TNF therapy to qualifying patients for each primary care trust. [129135]

Dr. Ladyman: The National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommended the use of anti-TNF therapy in March 2002. We have issued directions obliging strategic health authorities and primary care trusts to provide appropriate funding for treatments recommended by NICE. This is in line with our manifesto commitment to ensure that patients receive drugs and treatments recommended by NICE on the national health service if considered appropriate by their clinicians. The Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) and NICE have agreed a methodology for CHI to incorporate the monitoring of NICE guidance in its clinical governance reviews. Specifically, CHI now looks to see if NHS trusts have mechanisms in place to implement and comply with NICE guidance. CHI will also support and facilitate clinicians to discuss when NICE guidance is and is not followed on an individual patient basis.

The Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection will be the main inspector of NHS services in the future. It will carry out inspection against clear national standards and we expect NICE guidance to be included in those standards.

Broomfield Hospital (Waiting Times)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time is at the accident and emergency department at Broomfield Hospital, Chelmsford; and what the equivalent figure was 12 months ago. [127438]

Dr. Ladyman: Information on average waiting times in accident and emergency departments is not collected centrally. Information on the proportion of patients who spend four or fewer hours in a major A and E department from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge has been available each quarter since July 2002.

Information for Mid Essex Hospital Services National Health Service Trust, which runs Broomfield Hospital, is shown in the table.

	Quarter	Percentage of patients who spent less than four hours in A and E
2002-03	2	71
2002-03	3	71
2002-03	4	83

Source:
Department of Health form QMAE

Information from Essex Strategic Health Authority indicates that the average waiting time in A and E at the trust for June 2003 was two hours and 22 minutes. The figure for June 2002 was three hours and 20 minutes.

Care Home Beds (London)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of care home beds in London. [128765]

Dr. Ladyman: The number of care home places in Greater London as at 31 March 2001 was 47,430, an increase of four per cent. over the 1997 figures. This compares to a one per cent. increase for England over the same period. Figures for later years have been collected by the National Care Standards Commission and will be published this autumn.

Carers

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to identify family carers; whether he plans to create a family carers list; and what health, financial and other assistance can be granted to family members who care for relatives. [129104]

Dr. Ladyman: There are no proposals either to identify or create a list of family carers.

As with all carers, family carers are entitled to an assessment to determine their needs as carers and eligibility for support. The Carers Grant, worth £100 million this year, provides money for local councils to provide short breaks and services for carers to enable them to continue in their caring role. Carers are also entitled to cash payments for carers' services to enable them to purchase the type of support they require and promote a better quality of life.

Delayed Discharges

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the most recent national delayed discharges figures which are available. [129844]

Dr. Ladyman: The latest figures on delayed discharge (June 2003), which have been placed in the Library, show that around 4,170 patients of all ages were occupying an acute bed with a delayed transfer at the end of the quarter. This is over 1,300 fewer patients than at the same time the previous year.

Disabled Children (Family Support)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many families with *(a)* severely disabled children and *(b)* severely learning disabled children have received family support in each year since 1997, broken down by local authority; and if he will make a statement. [125978]

Dr. Ladyman: Responsibility for the area now rests with my hon. Friend, the Minister for Children, at the Department for Education and Skills.

I refer the hon. Member to the response given to him by my hon. Friend, the Minister for Children at the Department for Education and Skills (Margaret Hodge) on Monday 1 September, *Official Report*, column 716W.

Health Professionals (Suicide)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths from suicide were recorded of *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses in 2002. [129483]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Claire Curtis-Thomas, dated 15 September 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question concerning deaths from suicide among *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses in 2002. I am replying in his absence. (129483)

The latest year for which data are available is 2001. I refer you to the answer given in the Official Report Volume Number 395 of 4 December 2002, column 910, to Evan Harris MP, which gives the information requested for that year.

Health Protection Agency

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether resources for the Health Protection Agency's civil contingency planning will come from the NHS's general budget. [128664]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Health Protection Agency's funding for civil contingency planning like all of its other central funding is from Section F (central and miscellaneous services) of the Department of Health's "Request for Resources 2 (RfR2)". The national health service's "general budget" is in "Request for Resources 1 (RfR1)".

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether stocks of emergency materiel for the Health Protection Agency will be funded from his Department's overall budget. [128665]

Miss Melanie Johnson: It is not a function of the Health Protection Agency to stockpile material for national medical emergencies. Any such material procured centrally by the Department of Health is funded from the resources and moneys voted to it by Parliament in the Central Government Supply Estimates.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health from what accounts the Health Protection Agency will be funded. [128668]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Health Protection Agency is funded from the resources and moneys voted to the Department of Health by Parliament in the Central Government Supply Estimates. The relevant part is Section F (central health and miscellaneous services) of Request for Resources 2 (RfR2). The Main Estimates for 2003-04 were approved by Parliament on 6 May 2003.

Health Service (Worcestershire)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the capacity of the medical assessment unit and the accident and emergency department at the Worcestershire Royal Hospital. [129310]

Dr. Ladyman: Worcestershire Royal Hospital is currently engaged in Wave 1 of the NHS Modernisation Agency Emergency Services Collaborative programme. Through this, we would expect the collaborative methodology to review and assess the impact and effectiveness of different parts of the emergency service, including any assessment units they may have.

In July 2003, the Department of Health published a checklist for assessment units on the emergency care website at www.doh.gov.uk/emergencycare. This provides advice and recommends good operational practice. The type and size of assessment unit provided depends on the exact model of care adopted which should reflect local needs.

The Department is currently carrying out a voluntary survey of emergency assessment and observation units within acute trusts across England.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the implications for children's health of the reduction in health visiting services in South Worcestershire. [129311]

Dr. Ladyman: It is for local organisations to determine the health visiting work force required to deliver local and national health priorities including child health. The proposals which have been put forward by South Worcestershire Primary Care Trust are based upon the commitment to provide a family-centred health visiting service which will work with individuals, families and communities to improve child health and tackle health inequalities.

The Department of Health is currently funding a range of initiatives to support PCTs in promoting recruitment, retention and return to practice within the primary care nursing and health visiting work force.

Heartburn

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the connection between heartburn and cancer of the gullet. [127450]

Dr. Ladyman: Cancer of the oesophagus affects around 6,000 people a year in England and Wales, the majority of whom are aged 40 or over. Common symptoms of the cancer are heartburn and difficulty in swallowing. Most people also lose weight and about half have anaemia, which causes severe tiredness.

Cancer of the oesophagus or gullet develops as a result of cell changes in the lining of the oesophagus. There are two main types of cancer of the oesophagus: squamous carcinoma, which is more common at the upper end of the gullet; and adenocarcinoma, which is more common at the lower end, particularly around the junction between the gullet and the stomach. There has been a recent increase in the proportion of tumours arising close to the junction of stomach and gullet, but the reasons for this are not yet known.

We know that cancer patients need to be diagnosed and treated as quickly as possible. This is a very stressful and anxious time for them and they want a diagnosis of their condition as quickly as possible. The Government launched the NHS Cancer Plan on 27 September 2000. This sets out the first ever comprehensive strategy to tackle the disease. It is a major programme of action linking prevention, diagnosis, treatment, care and research.

The Cancer Plan sets out new waiting time targets for cancer treatment. A two-week out-patient waiting time standard was introduced for all urgently referred suspected cancer patients in December 2000 and the most recent figures show that over 98 per cent. of all urgent referrals were seen with two weeks.

By 2005, all cancer patients will wait a maximum of one month from diagnosis to treatment and a maximum of two months from urgent general practitioner referral to treatment. The Government's ultimate goal is that no patient should wait longer than one month from an urgent referral for suspected cancer to the beginning of treatment, except for a good clinical reason or through personal choice. It is planned to achieve this by 2008.

However, past decades of under investment mean this goal is not yet within reach. We are making significant extra investment—an extra £570 million a year by 2003–04—the biggest ever single cash investment in cancer equipment, additional doctors and nurses working in new ways and modernisation through the Cancer Services Collaborative, which aims to cut out delays in the patient journey.

Hospital-acquired Infections

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes have taken place in the number of deaths from MRSA in each of the past nine years; and what changes in the number of deaths he expects to occur in the next three years. [129237]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Paul Flynn, dated 15 September 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question asking what changes have taken place in the number of deaths from MRSA in each of the past nine years; and what changes in the number of deaths are expected to occur in the next three years. I am replying in his absence. (129237)

Information on deaths from MRSA is not routinely available but a recent research study published in the British Medical Journal identified the number of death certificates that mentioned MRSA as the underlying cause of death or as a contributory cause for the years 1993–1998. The table below gives figures from the study for these years.

Number of deaths where MRSA was mentioned as the underlying or a contributory cause of death, England and Wales, 1993–98

	Number of deaths
1993	47
1994	88
1995	187
1996	290
1997	377
1998	398

The Office for National Statistics is currently in the process of updating this study to cover the period 1999–2002. The results of this analysis will be published next year.

It is impossible to put a firm figure to the number of people who die from MRSA because people are often very sick with a number of other conditions so the contribution of MRSA to the outcome in any particular case is uncertain. In addition, the underlying cause of death is most often the disease or injury which led them to be admitted to hospital, rather than the MRSA which may have complicated the course of the illness.

It is not possible to predict what the figures will be for the next three years.

Learning Disability Services

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the net expenditure was on learning disability by the national health service in each year since 1997–98. [126928]

Dr. Ladyman: The gross expenditure in the hospital and community health servicesince 1997–98 is shown in the table.

£ million

	Expenditure on learning disability
1997–98	1,324
1998–99	1,365
1999–2000	1,421
2000–01	1,486

It is not possible to exclude charges and receipts from the figures to produce a net expenditure figure. It is also not possible to determine the amount of primary care expenditure that is purely learning disability.

Lymphoedema

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the treatment of lymphoedema sufferers in *(a)* England and *(b)* Gloucestershire. [129028]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 11 September 2003]:* The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has issued guidance on the use of drugs for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and chronic myeloid leukaemia, but not on non-cancer related lymphoedema.

NICE has recently updated the "Improving Outcomes in Breast Cancer Guidance", and that guidance made some recommendations about lymphoedema. These include that cancer networks should agree guidelines for identification and management of lymphoedema and that a lymphoedema service, staffed by nurses and physiotherapists who have experience in dealing with this problem, should be available for all patients who experience arm swelling or discomfort.

In Gloucestershire, lymphoedema patients can access support from their general practitioner practice and community nursing staff. Lymphoedema patients with cancer can also access support from a practice-based dedicated specialist nurse.

Medicines and Health Care Products Agency

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the consultants and their projects being used by the Medicines and Health Care Products Agency. [R] [128594]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 8 September 2003]:* Consultants currently being used by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency and the projects they are being used on are as follows:

Accenture—Design and build of IT applications.

Accenture—General Practice Research Database (GPRD) Accelerator Project.

Charles Mackenzie—Enhancements to website applications.

Hay Group—Design of Personal Development and Performance Management System.

Oxford Group—Delivery of Management and Leadership Training programme.

RedAnt Design—General Practice Research Database (GPRD) marketing and customer interface.

TK Consultancy—Design and build of medicines enforcement case investigation system.

Turner and Townsend—Post-merger co-location project.

Unipart Advanced Learning systems—enhancements to device adverse incidents tracking system.

Winton Nightingale—Management of staff restaurant contract.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to appoint a Chief Executive to the Medicines and Health Care Products Regulatory Agency. [R] [128595]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 8 September 2003]:* Professor Kent Woods, who has been appointed Chief Executive of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), will take up the appointment on 1 January 2004.

Waiting Lists/Times Trust

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people had been waiting for inpatient treatment in the Mid Essex Hospital Services Trust area in each of the last three months for which figures are available. [128871]

Dr. Ladyman: The number of patients waiting for elective in-patient admission at Mid Essex Hospital Services National Health Service Trust was 8,710 at the end of May 2003, 8,414 at the end of June 2003 and 8,299 at the end of July 2003.

Source:
Department of Health form KH07.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people had been waiting 13 weeks or more for an outpatient appointment in the Mid Essex Hospital Services Trust area in the last two available quarters. [128872]

Dr. Ladyman: The number of patients still waiting for a first consultant out-patient appointment following general practitioner written referral at Mid Essex Hospital Services National Health Service Trust was 450 at quarter 4 2002–03 and 578 at quarter 1 2003–04.

Source:
Department of Health form QM80.

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many NHS dental practices there were in *(a)* Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, *(c)* Tyne & Wear, *(d)* the North East and *(e)* the UK (i) in 1980, (ii) in 1990, (iii) in 2000 and (iv) on the latest dates for which figures are available. [128889]

(2) many dental practices there were in *(a)* Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, *(c)* Tyne and Wear, *(d)* the North East and *(e)* UK (i) in 1980, (ii) in 1990, (iii) in 2000 and (iv) on the latest date for which figures are available. [128897]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The table gives the requested information for the number of general dental service (GDS) practices. The information is available from 1991. Information is given for 1995, 1996 and 2002 because of the changes in health administration areas.

No information is available currently on the number of totally private dental practices. The Office of Fair Trading Report, The private dentistry market in the U.K. states that about 210 practices are totally private (para 3.30).

General Dental Service: Number of Ental Practices

August each year

	1991	*1995*	*1996*[1]	*2000*	*2002*	*2003*[2]
England	8,390	8,269	8,298	8,474	8,497	8,596
Northern Region	1,136	1,099	—	—	—	—
Gateshead	36	35	—	—	—	—
Newcastle	68	61	—	—	—	—
North Tyneside	33	30	—	—	—	—
South Tyneside	23	22	—	—	—	—
Sunderland	35	33	—	—	—	—
Northern and Yorkshire Region	—	—	2,201	2,176	2,149	—
Gateshead and South Tyneside HA	—	—	58	58	57	—
Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	—	—	89	95	93	—
Sunderland HA	—	—	33	32	33	—
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear SHA	—	—	—	—	—	230
Gateshead PCT	—	—	—	—	—	32
Newcastle PCT	—	—	—	—	—	61
North Tyneside PCT	—	—	—	—	—	28
South Tyneside PCT	—	—	—	—	—	23
Sunderland Teaching PCT	—	—	—	—	—	36
Jarrow Constituency[3]	12[4]	11	12	12	12	11

[1] Following the move from Family Health Service Authority (FHSAs) to Health Authority (HAs) in 1996, results are available by HA rather than by FHSA.
[2] Following the move from Health Authority (HAs) to Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) in 2001, results are available by Stategic Health Authority (SHA) and PCT rather than by region and HA.
[3] Constituency defined by current boundaries
[4] 1990 figure.

Source:
Dental Practice Board

Care Standards Act

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact on voluntary organisations concerned with the care of the elderly of the registration fee imposed by the Care Standards Act 2000. [130703]

Dr. Ladyman: The fees payable by care providers registered under the Care Standards Act were the subject of a wide-ranging public consultation in 2001. As part of the funding arrangements, we expect the costs associated with regulatory fee increases to be passed on by providers through increased fees to service users and commissioners of services. This would mean, for example, that local authorities would pay higher amounts and their financial settlements from central Government reflect this.

The Government are committed to a review of the framework for regulatory fees in 2004. This review will include further public consultation.

Prosthetic Services

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment his Department has made of the ability of prosthetic services to meet the needs of users; and if he will make a statement. [128320]

Ms Rosie Winterton: It is for primary care trusts to assess the ability of their prosthetic services to meet the needs of users, as part of their general duty to determine what level of resources to devote to the treatment of different conditions in their localities. Strategic health authorities are responsible for the performance management of primary care trusts.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he gives to hospitals with regard to skin colour matching in the provision of prosthetic limbs. [128274]

Ann Winterton: The National Health Service Purchasing and Supply Agency issues guidance on the availability of products, which enables skin colour

matching in the provision of prosthetic limbs. It is for local clinicians and service providers to decide what products to use in individual cases.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding has been made available for silicone cosmesis for prosthetics users in each of the last three years; how much was made available to each of the prosthetics centres in each of the last three years; how many patients were treated; what plans he has for the future funding of this service; and if he will make a statement. [128322]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Baseline allocations of £0.5 million in 2001–02, £1.5 million in 2002–03 and £2.0 million in 2003–04 were expected to be used for the provision of silicone cosmesis for artificial limbs. Spending on silicone cosmesis through the National Health Service Purchasing and Supply Agency, which probably represents most if not all spending on silicone cosmesis, was £81,858 for 2001–02, £410,479 for 2002–03, and £137,502 in the first quarter of 2003–04. Information is not held centrally on the sums made available to individual prosthetics centres, nor on numbers of patients treated with silicone cosmesis. In future years primary care trusts will remain free to determine what amounts from their baseline allocations to use for the provision of silicone cosmesis.

Pulmonary Care

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the provision of pulmonary rehabilitation services in Gloucestershire. [129027]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 11 September 2003]:* The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is currently developing a guideline on the management of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) in primary and secondary care. It is due to publish the guideline in 2004. In January 2003 the Respiratory Alliance published their guidance, "Bridging the Gap", which aims to help primary care trusts (PCTs) to commission and deliver high quality allergy and respiratory care.

In line with our policy of "Shifting the Balance of Power", it is up to PCTs, in conjunction with strategic health authorities (SHAs) to take this work forward. I have been advised by the Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire SHA that in Gloucestershire patients with COPD have access to support within the primary care setting and also secondary care services within the wider hospital respiratory team. The local PCTs in Gloucestershire are jointly funding a project post to look at ways in which delivery of the current service can be improved, and to consider the development of future initiatives including COPD rehabilitation.

Redundant/Empty Hospital Buildings

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of maintaining redundant and empty hospital buildings in each region in the last six years. [127335]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the cost of redundant and empty properties held by national health service organisations is not held centrally.

Until these properties are sold they must be maintained both for health and safety reasons and to ensure the best price is obtained for them. Sales of these properties have generated considerable receipts for re-investment in the NHS in recent years, as shown in the table.

£ million

	2001–02	*2002–03*
Receipts from sales	160	151

Stroke Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 5 August 2003, *Official Report*, column 958W, on stroke services, how many and what percentage of hospitals have had a working specialist stroke unit in each *(a)* region and *(b)* strategic health authority in each of the last six years for which figures are available. [129122]

Dr. Ladyman: The most comprehensive source of information is the National Sentinel Stroke Audit, carried out by the Royal College of Physicians. The audit was commissioned by the national health service in 1998 and was last updated in 2002. The results can be found at http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/pubs/strokeaudit 01–02.pdf.

The 2002 audit shows that 73 per cent. of trusts that participated had a stroke unit, compared to 56 per cent. three years earlier. The audit shows that 80 per cent. of trusts that participated have a consultant physician with specialist knowledge of stroke who is formally recognised as having principal responsibility for stroke services. While it is recognised that some services need to increase their capacity, the audit notes that very significant improvements have already been made.

Our major vehicle for further improving standards for stroke services is through the older people's national service framework (NSF), which sets specific milestones for improvement by 2004 of stroke services in primary care trusts, specialist services and general hospitals that care for people suffering from a stroke. Our document, "Improvement, Expansion and Reform", which sets for the NHS a priorities and planning framework for 2003–06, makes clear that implementation of the older people's NSF is a top priority and that the 2004 milestone around specialist stroke services is a key target.

We monitor progress against the key milestones in the NSF. From the information gathered so far, we know that 83 per cent. of the hospitals which have replied now have plans to have a specialist stroke service in place by April 2004.

Tooth Decay

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures the Department is taking to reduce the number of children with tooth decay. [128895]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Due mainly to the introduction of fluoride toothpaste and the fluoridation of water in some areas of the country, there has, over the last 20 years, been

a major improvement in oral health. Nearly 60 per cent. of 5-years-olds now have no experience of tooth decay. However, significant variations remain which, in areas where drinking water is not fluoridated, are strongly associated with economic and social deprivation. The Government are committed to reducing these inequalities and have made provision in the Water Bill, currently before Parliament, to give communities with high levels of tooth decay a real option of having their water fluoridated. We have also established the "Brushing for Life" scheme in areas of poor dental health, whereby families with young children receive free fluoridated toothpaste, toothbrushes and advice on oral hygiene when attending child health developmental checks at aged eight months and 18 months and three years.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 16 September 2003

HEALTH

Acrylamide

14. **Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent guidance the Chief Medical Officer has issued to the public regarding the incidence of acrylamide in baked and fried food. [129962]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Following the discovery of acrylamide in a range of foods, the Food Standards Agency advises that people should continue to eat a balanced diet including moderating their consumption of fried and fatty foods. The Agency continues to review this advice as further information on acrylamide becomes available.

Prostate Cancer

16. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's strategy is for tackling prostate cancer. [129964]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Good progress has been made since we published the Prostate Cancer Programme in September 2000. £4.2 million will be spent on research in 2003–04, the Prostate Cancer Risk Management Programme has been launched, and the Prostate Cancer Advisory Group has been established to take forward policy on prostate cancer.

Nurses

17. **Mrs. Roe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on retention of nurses. [129965]

Mr. Hutton: The Government are implementing a range of measures to retain more nurses. These include increasing the health care workforce, improving pay and conditions, encouraging the NHS to become a better, more flexible and diverse employer, investing in child care and continuing professional development, tackling violence and creating safe and healthy working environments.

18. **Mr. Wiggin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the recruitment and retention of nurses. [129966]

Mr. Hutton: The Government are implementing a range of measures to recruit more health care professionals. These include improving pay and conditions, encouraging the NHS to become a better, more flexible and diverse employer, increasing training, investing in child care and continuing professional development, attracting back returners and running national and international recruitment campaigns.

Acute Hospitals

19. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the overall capacity of the acute hospital sector in Worcestershire. [129967]

Dr. Ladyman: Significant investment has been made available nationally to accommodate the required increase in national health service capacity. Primary Care Trust revenue allocations for the three Worcestershire PCTs will rise to £426 million in 2003–04 and will reach £510 million by 2005–06, an overall total increase of 30.4 per cent., for the three years up to 2005–06.

Prior to the completion of the Worcestershire Royal hospital there were 1,035 acute beds in Worcestershire. Since the opening of the new hospital there are 1,044 acute beds available in the county.

Patient Environment Action Team Programme

20. **Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the patient environment action team programme. [129968]

Mr. Hutton: We have recently worked with a larger number of NHS colleagues to refine the PEAT process in the light of experience to date. This review confirmed that the system has been a major factor in ensuring that all hospitals meet acceptable standards or better in terms of the patient environment. The NHS is to be congratulated for the progress it has made. The PEAT programme has been extended to include Mental Health and Accident and Emergency units, demonstrating the importance we continue to attach to this, and the need for the NHS to continue to focus on high standards.

Infection Prevention

21. **Richard Younger-Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department is taking to prevent patients from catching infections in health care settings. [129969]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We already have standards to ensure there is a managed environment which minimises the risk of infection to patients, staff and visitors. Hospitals' performance against these has improved over the last three years. For the first time this year these standards and an MRSA improvement score contributed to the star ratings. The Chief Medical Officer is leading a new initiative to produce a longer-term strategy to reduce health care associated infections.

Locum Consultants

22. **Mr. Peter Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on locum consultants in the NHS in the last year for which figures are available. [129970]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Hospital Building Programme

23. **James Purnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the hospital building programme. [129971]

Mr. Hutton: Since 2000, 39 hospitals have been opened, and a further 18 are being built. There are 54 hospitals in procurement through the private finance initiative process. This is the biggest hospital building programme in the history of the NHS, replacing old and outmoded buildings with facilities fit for the 21st Century.

Atkinson Morley Hospital

24. **Roger Casale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the disposal of the Atkinson Morley hospital site in Wimbledon. [129972]

Mr. Hutton: I have received no representations. However, I am aware that St. George's Healthcare NHS Trust has recently submitted a planning application for redevelopment of the Atkinson Morley hospital site, the Firs Nursing Home and a large area of open space, following the reprovision of services at St. George's hospital, Tooting.

The proposed development comprises 149 residential units accessed from Copse Hill and associated car parking.

People with Communication Difficulties

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice the Department has given to *(a)* Government Departments and *(b)* others who consult with people who have communication difficulties about how that consultation should be carried out. [123393]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health has not issued formal guidance.

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are in place to control the levels of charging for *(a)* repairing teeth from mottling and *(b)* other cosmetic dental work by NHS dentists. [129963]

Ms Rosie Winterton: All dental treatment necessary to secure and maintain oral health is available under the national health service, including the facing of upper front teeth with porcelain veneers to correct teeth mottling. Patients liable to pay NHS dental charges will pay 80 per cent. of the NHS fee paid to the dentists for the service.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will discuss trends in the incidence of tuberculosis with the World Health Organisation. [129961]

Dr. Ladyman: Colleagues in the Department and at the Health Protection Agency are regularly invited to speak at and attend World Health Organisation conferences on tuberculosis.

We provide on a regular basis, trends of TB in this country as well as receiving information from the WHO on trends from other countries.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Domestic Violence

Mr. Byers: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he will take to increase the provision of accommodation available to women victims of domestic violence. [130038]

Yvette Cooper: The Government are committed to increasing the full range of accommodation options for victims of domestic violence including more refuges and better help to support victims to stay in their own homes if appropriate. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is investing £8.9 million this financial year in refuge provision and an additional £9.9 million has been allocated by the Housing Corporation. The money is being used by Registered Social Landlords, in partnership with local refuge providers and local authorities to provide 273 units of accommodation in all regions in England. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has also committed £7 million in each of the next two financial years towards similar projects which will also be administered through the Housing Corporation.

In addition, the Supporting People programme enables local authorities to provide housing related support services for victims of domestic violence. This year £34 million has been allocated to domestic violence schemes including accommodation and non-accommodation based services.

Domestic violence can be a significant cause of homelessness. Under the homelessness legislation, people who are vulnerable as a result of fleeing their home because of violence (including domestic violence) have a priority need for accommodation. Moreover, all local housing authorities in England are now required to have a strategy for preventing homelessness in the district and ensuring that accommodation and any necessary support are available for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. All authorities were required to have a homelessness strategy in place by 30 July 2003. The Homelessness Directorate is providing £260 million between 2003–04 and 2005–06 in support of local housing authorities' efforts to tackle homelessness. A number of authorities are using this funding to improve the support available to victims of domestic violence in order to prevent homelessness among this client group.

Home Loss Payments

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much was previously allocated in 2002–03 to home loss payments in compulsory purchase; how much this has been increased as a result of the Government announcement in July; and whether similar changes have been made to farm loss payments. [130199]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does not have a central fund allocated for these purposes. Acquiring authorities are liable for the costs incurred arising from compulsory purchase and would be expected to fund this through their respective budgets.

Housing

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he *(a)* records and *(b)* acts upon housing affordability data. [129155]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister records a wide variety of data on housing, including affordability issues, which provide an essential underpinning to policy development. Through the Housing Corporation the Government finances housing for those who are unable to purchase their own home. More generally, as part of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's drive to create sustainable communities, we are working to improve the supply of housing in those regions where high demand is causing prices to rise beyond the reach of those on modest incomes. Regional Housing Strategies, produced for the first time this year, which will be considered, are important in highlighting problems of affordability at regional and sub-regional level. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will be taking account of these, in my decisions on the allocation of housing resources, later this year.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Chope: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to permit local authorities to limit annual increases in council tax for pensioners to the rate of inflation; and if he will make a statement. [130646]

Mr. Raynsford: Subject to parliamentary approval, the Local Government Bill will allow local billing authorities to introduce locally defined council tax discounts from 2004–05. This power could be used by local billing authorities to create a discount which would have the effect of limiting council tax increases for pensioners.

Playing Fields

Mr. Moss: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what the latest estimate is of the total gross receipts for each year since 1997, from land sold under general consent orders; and what percentage of those receipts relate to the sale of playing fields; [130362]

(2) if he will list each of the playing fields, broken down by local authority, which have been disposed of under general consent orders. [130363]

Keith Hill: The Information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Local authorities are given powers under the Local Government Act 1972 to dispose of land in any manner they wish. The disposal must be for the best consideration reasonably obtainable, unless the Secretary of State consents to the disposal. General consents have been issued so that local authorities can, in certain circumstances, dispose of land for less than the market value without having to apply to the Secretary of State for specific consent. However, the Local Government Act 1972 requires local authorities proposing to dispose of open space that is used for public recreation to advertise their intentions in a local newspaper and consider any objections received.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what his official engagements were for Sunday 9 March. [130010]

The Prime Minister: None.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his oral Answer of 10 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 322, on Iraq, on which occasions the Chief of the Defence staff before the outbreak of war expressed concerns about the legality of what the armed forces were being asked to do; and if he will make a statement. [130704]

The Prime Minister: It is part of the Chief of the Defence Staff's duty of care over members of Her Majesty's armed forces that he satisfies himself with the legality of any operation to which they may be committed. As I said to my hon. Friend at Prime Minister's Questions on 10 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 322, the Chiefs of Staff on no occasion expressed to me any unease. Lord Boyce was entirely content with the legal basis for the recent conflict in Iraq. This was set out by my right hon. and noble Friend the Attorney-General on 17 March 2003, *Official Report*, House of Lords, columns 2–3WA.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Departmental Computer Security

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been *(a)* budgeted and *(b)* spent by her Department since April 2002 on (i) combating computer fraud, (ii) preventing theft of computers and (iii) safeguarding the security of information held on computer; and if she will make a statement. [128784]

Alun Michael: The Department manages the security of its information, including information held on its computers systems, in accordance with the guidance given in the Manual of Protective Security, a comprehensive body of policy and interdepartmentally agreed security standards issued by the Cabinet Office. From this guidance, we employ a range of measures to protect physical, computer and information assets. These measures are reviewed according to specific project requirements and as circumstances and technology changes require. All aspects of security (physical, personnel, procedural, information and IT) are inextricably linked and it is therefore not possible to provide a budget breakdown for IT related aspects only.

LANTRA

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the role of LANTRA, with specific reference to how it is encouraging employment opportunities for *(a)* environmental organisations and *(b)* the land-based sector. [130589]

Alun Michael: LANTRA's role as the Sector Skills Council for environmental and land-based industries is to support employers and employees in the sector to identify, acquire and use the skills needed to raise productivity and to deliver sustainable development. Sector Skills Councils have a key role in delivering the Government's Skills Strategy set out in the White Paper "21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential" (Cm 5810). LANTRA'S strategic and business plans set out in detail how the organisation will deliver these objectives for the environmental and land-based sector.

Rural Development Fund

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the application procedures for rural development funds. [129637]

Alun Michael: Rural development funds are made available through grant schemes under the England Rural Development Programme, which was launched in October 2000. Application procedures have been kept under continual review, and changes made to benefit applicants and improve administrative efficiency.

Significant further improvements are also in development. In the short term, a fast-track appraisal process was piloted recently for applications seeking less than £15,000 under the Rural Enterprise Scheme. The indications are that such an approach can substantially reduce the time taken to confirm the decision over an award of grant and we hope to introduce new arrangements generally, over the coming months. For the longer term, we are engaged in a major programme to improve ERDP delivery radically, and support the delivery of new agri-environment schemes. These benefits, facilitated in part by a completely new IT system, will begin to come on stream in early 2005.

Rural Payments Agency

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of the performance of the Rural Payments Agency; and if she will make a statement. [129790]

Alun Michael: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State agreed to the creation of the Rural Payments Agency on 16 October 2001.

The Rural Payments Agency's second Annual Report and Accounts, which records performance against the Agency's key performance targets, as set by the Secretary of State, will be laid before Parliament shortly.

An Ownership Board chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs meets quarterly to monitor the performance of the Agency, on behalf of the Secretary of State. In addition, I receive weekly progress reports, as the Rural Payments Agency is part of my ministerial portfolio. I also monitor the response to issues raised by MPs and discuss relevant issues with the Agency.

Vocational Training

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with representatives of further and higher education on the potential for delivering vocational training in rural areas. [130542]

Alun Michael: I frequently meet people engaged in providing all forms of learning in rural areas in the course of visits and meetings around the country. The Department's Learning Skills and Knowledge Review is looking specifically at the need for vocational training in rural areas and how that need can be met. Representatives of further and higher education are on the steering group for the review.

Water Pollution

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what powers water companies have to stop *(a)* companies and *(b)* residential properties discharging pollutants into waterways. [129822]

Mr. Morley: Water companies do not have any powers to stop companies or residential properties discharging pollutants into waterways. Their responsibility, under the Water Industry Act 1991, is to regulate trade effluent discharges made to public sewers.

Responsibility for controlling discharges to waterways belongs to the Environment Agency (the Agency). Under section 85 of the Water Resources Act 1991 (as amended by the Environment Act 1991) it is an offence to cause or knowingly permit polluting matter to enter "controlled waters", that is rivers, estuaries, coastal or groundwaters without permission. This is obtained as a discharge consent granted by the Agency. The Agency sets consent conditions which control volumes and concentrations of particular substances or imposes broader controls on the nature of the effluent. Each consent is based on an objective set by the Agency for the quality of the stretch of water to which the discharge is made as well as taking into account any relevant statutory requirements.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Microsoft (Licensing Fees)

Norman Lamb: To ask the Leader of the House how much was paid to Microsoft in licensing fees by the Office of the Leader of the House in each of the last three years; and how much has been budgeted for *(a)* 2003–04 and *(b)* 2004–05. [130674]

Mr. Hain: In the last three years the Office of the Leader of the House paid no licensing fees directly to Microsoft and has made no separate provision for 2003–4 or 2004–5.

The IT service for my Office is provided by the Cabinet Office and charged on a per PC basis. Any costs for licence fees are included in the overall IT charges.

Sitting Hours

Mr. Amess: To ask the Leader of the House what representations he has received in favour of reverting to the sitting hours of the House of Commons of 2002. [130374]

Mr. Hain: A number of Members have raised with me their view on the sitting hours—both for and against the change—by raising it in the Chamber, at Business Questions and Oral Questions to the Leader of the House, by letter and in private discussion. I have had no representations from outside Parliament in favour of the House reverting to its former hours. The House has agreed the change for the remainder of this Parliament and will then need to review the matter.

Written Questions

Norman Baker: To ask the Leader of the House what plans he has to propose measures to allow hon. Members to challenge a refusal by a Minister to provide information requested by means of a written parliamentary question. [129257]

Mr. Hain: Ministers answer questions in accordance with the requirements set out in the Ministerial Code, the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information and guidance on disproportionate cost. As the Ministerial Code makes clear, it is for individual Ministers to account for their decisions and actions. If a Member of Parliament is unhappy with the answer received to a parliamentary question, he or she should raise the matter with the relevant Minister. There are no plans to propose changes to current practice.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Parliamentary Works

Michael Fabricant: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission what the expected cost is of clearing construction equipment and materials from the precincts of the House prior to the two-week sitting in September and reinstating it at the start of the Conference Adjournment. [130289]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: Officials are collating the costs associated with clearing and reinstating construction equipment and materials before and after the September sitting and I will arrange for the hon. Member to receive the figures when they become available.

SCOTLAND

Prohibition Orders

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he plans to amend the powers of the Secretary of State for Scotland to issue prohibition orders in relation to reserved matters; and who will have jurisdiction in determining matters of vires in connection with reserved matters. [126746]

Mrs. McGuire: There are no plans to amend the powers of the Secretary of State under section 35 of the Scotland Act. This gives the Secretary of State the power to make an order prohibiting the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament from submitting a Bill for Royal Assent in certain circumstances.

In terms of section 33 of the Scotland Act the Advocate General, the Lord Advocate or the Attorney General may refer the question of whether a Bill or any provision of a Bill would be within the legislative competence of the Parliament to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council for adjudication. The Government published a consultation paper in July, Constitutional Reform: A Supreme Court for the United Kingdom, which seeks views on the proposition that the new Supreme Court should have jurisdiction over devolution cases presently heard by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.

Aircraft Carriers

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what role his Department has played in facilitating contact between BAe systems and the Scottish Executive to discuss training requirements for the carrier project. [127848]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scottish Executive has well established contact with BAe Systems and other shipbuilding interests in Scotland in relation to the Future Aircraft Carriers (CVF) programme.

The Clyde Shipyards Task Force recognised the need to ensure that Scottish shipyards have the necessary skills and infrastructure in place to secure a major role in the CVF programme. Further work to address the training requirements of the shipbuilding industry in Scotland is being taken forward by Scottish Enterprise.

Edinburgh Waverley Station

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he plans to meet *(a)* Network Rail and *(b)* the Strategic Rail Authority to discuss the proposed investment at Edinburgh Waverley station. [127868]

Mr. Darling: I meet senior representatives of Network Rail and the Strategic Rail Authority on a regular basis to discuss a wide range of railway matters, and will continue to do so.

Air Tranpsort

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what his policy is on Scotland increasing its international hub status for air transport. [128024]

Mrs. McGuire: The Government will publish an air transport White Paper later this year which will cover a range of key issues, including the development of air traffic at Scottish airports.

Manufacturing

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many are employed in the manufacturing industry in Scotland; how many were employed in 1997; and if he will make a statement on the proposals for the manufacturing industry in Scotland. [128016]

Mrs. McGuire: The manufacturing sector continues to be very important to the economy of Scotland. Figures from the Office for National Statistics indicate that employment in the manufacturing industry in Scotland was 387,000 at the end of the Spring Quarter of 1997, and 301,000 at the end of the Spring Quarter of 2003.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Apprenticeships and Training

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Education and Skills regarding the level of apprenticeships and work-related training offered to school leavers. [128205]

Mr. Sutcliffe: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry works closely with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, meeting regularly to discuss areas of joint interest.

The recent publication of the Government's national Skills Strategy demonstrates the joint commitment to reforming qualifications and training programmes to meet the needs of employers and to provide clear routes to employability for the learner.

The joint remit being taken forward by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority with other partners will ensure that learning programmes will enable all young people to develop the skills that employers seek, with programmes of vocational education and training from age 14, and Modern Apprenticeships as the primary vocational option for young people. The Government's target is that by 2004, 28 per cent. of young people will start a Modern Apprenticeship by age 22. The expansion of Foundation Degrees will enable the progression into higher education from vocational programmes. Young people not yet ready to enter a Modern Apprentieeship will be able to join Entry to Employment, to benefit from help in developing basic skills as a means of entering a Modern Apprenticeship or employment.

Asbestos

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many UKAS asbestos surveyors are registered in the UK. [129934]

Nigel Griffiths: The Department for Work and Pensions is responsible for the Health and Safety Executive, which holds the data.

British Energy

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she intends to take in the event that British Energy is unable to reach agreement with its creditors by 30 September. [129939]

Mr. Timms: British Energy continues to work on implementing its restructuring plan and the announcement on 11 September of its sale of Amergen was a further step in that process. But, British Energy still needs to work hard to implement the plan in full, and, as we have made clear since last year, the Government is prepared for administration should it fail.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what changes in the time deadlines originally set for British Energy to sell off its North American assets in the restructuring plan have been made since the plan was announced; and what the reasons are for those changes. [130306]

Mr. Timms: With regard to British Energy's 50 per cent. interest in its US joint venture, Amergen, I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, on 3 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 3WS. British Energy announced on 11 September that it had agreed the sale of its interest in Amergen.

British Energy completed the sale of its interest in Brace Power within the deadline set out in its restructuring plan.

BSkyB

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will instruct the Office of Fair Trading to reopen its investigation into BSkyB's pricing structure for licensed premises; and if she will make a statement. [129036]

Mr. Sutcliffe: For the Office of Fair Trading to launch an investigation into this matter they must have reasonable grounds to suspect that there has been an infringement of the Competition Act 1998. This is entirely a matter for the Office of Fair Trading to determine.

Building Standards

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures are in place to assist people who are victims of poor standards of work by builders; if she will take steps to set up a national list of reputable builders and plumbers; and if she will make a statement. [129152]

Nigel Griffiths: The best protection against cowboy builders is not to give work to casual workers that house holders meet in pubs, but rather to use someone reputable and qualified to carry out the work. The Quality Mark scheme has been established in England to achieve quality, and in Scotland the Construction Licensing executive has developed a new registration scheme.

Company Records

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will allow Companies House to amend publicly available company records if a company is subject to a police investigation. [130243]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Companies Act and not the Secretary of State governs the maintenance of the register of companies. The Companies Act does not allow the registrar to amend publicly available company records if a company is subject to a police investigation.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will require Companies House to amend its website and correspondence material with a disclaimer stating that the reliability of company records cannot be guaranteed. [130244]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Companies House has had a disclaimer on its website for a number of years. However, I can confirm that the website has recently been amended to state that information is accepted by Companies House in good faith, and that the fact that it has been placed on the public record should not be taken to indicate that Companies House has validated it in any way. Companies House issues such a wide range and high volume of correspondence material, that it would not be appropriate to annotate it in this way.

Competition Act

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the occasions when she has used her powers under Chapter 1 of the Competition Act 1998 to amend Schedule 3 to that Act; what her reasons for doing so were in each case; and if she will make a statement. [130654]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The powers under Chapter 1of the Competition Act 1998 to amend Schedule 3 to that Act have not been exercised.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the occasions when she has provided an exemption to Chapter 1 of the Competition Act 1998; what her reasons for doing so were in each case; and if she will make a statement. [130655]

Mr. Sutcliffe: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry provided for an exemption to Chapter I of the Competition Act 1998 for public transport ticketing schemes, under the Competition Act (Public Transport Ticketing Schemes Block Exemption) Order 2001, SI 2001/319, which came into force on 1 March 2001.

The Order was made on the recommendation of the Director General of Fair Trading, that the category of agreements concerned were likely to meet the criteria for exemption under section 9 of the Competition Act 1998.

Competition Commission/ Competition Appeal Tribunal

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when each of the present members of *(a)* the Competition Commission and *(b)* the Competition Appeal Tribunal were appointed; and what procedure was used. [130651]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The information requested is as follows.

(a) Competition Commission

Name	*Date of first appointment*
Morris, Sir D	1 October 1991
Freeman, Mr P	6 May 2003
Geroski, Prof PA	2 March 1998
Kingsmill, Mrs. D	14 April 1997
Trelford, Prof D.G.	11 February 1999
Ahmed, Mr. S	4 March 1999
Gibson, Mr. W	4 March 1999
Holbrook, Mr. G.L.	4 March 1999
Christmas, Ms L.I.	11 February 1999
Hopkirk, Mrs. M.J.	4 March 1999
Pollard, Ms E.	4 March 1999
Wilson, Mr. C.M.	11 February 1999
Klemperer, Prof P.	10 September 2001
Hamlin, Prof A.	10 September 2001
Moizer, Prof P.	10 September 2001
Elks, Mr. L.	10 September 2001
Haskel, Prof J.	10 September 2001
Wilks, Prof S.	10 September 2001
Goodall, Mr. C.	10 September 2001
Stoddart, Mr. P.	10 September 2001
Walzer, Mr. S.	10 September 2001
Holroyd, Mr. R.	10 September 2001
Clarke, Mr. C.	10 September 2001
Collings, Dr. J.	10 September 2001
Gregory, Prof A.	10 September 2001
Prof John Baillie	9 January 2002
Peter Hazell	9 January 2002
Turgoose, Mr. R.	1 February 2002
Lyons, Prof B.	1 July 2002
Rawlinson, Mr. R.A.	5 January 1998
Henderson, Mr. C.E.	5 January 1998
Darke, Mr. C.	2 February 1998
Garthwaite, Mr. N[1]	27 March 2000
Hadley, Mr. G.H.[1]	27 March 2000
Parker, Prof D.[1]	27 March 2000
Webster, Mr. M.[1]	27 March 2000
Seddon, Mr. E.J.[1]	27 March 2000
Young, Mr. A.M.[1]	27 March 2000
Graham, Prof C.[1]	27 March 2000
Smallwood, Mr. C.	10 September 2001
Brown, Mrs. S.E.	1 February 1998
Monck, Dr. E.[1]	27 March 2000
Mills, Dame B.	10 September 2001
Coyle, Ms D.	10 September 2001
Waddams, Prof C.	1 November 2001
Guy, Ms D.	1 December 2001
Rickford, Mr. J.	9 December 1997
Stark, Mr. J.D.	2 March 1998
Shovelton, Mrs. H.	11 December 1997
Garthwaite, Mr. N.	1 June 1998
Hadley, Mr. G.H.	1 June 1998
Macdonald, Mr. N.	1 June 1998
Parker, Prof D.	1 June 1998
Young, Mr. A.M.	1 July 1998
Hadfield, Mr. A.	1 July 1998
Seddon, Mr. E.J.	1 July 1998
Graham, Prof C.	31 March 1999
Monck, Dr. E.	31 March 1999
Foster, Mr. T.	1 September 2003

[1] Specialist panel members also appointed to the reporting panel following a limited competition in 2000.

(b) Competition Appeal Tribunal

Name	*Date of first appointment*
Bellamy, Sir C.	16 December 1999
Prosser, Mr. R.	1 March 2000
Colgate, Mr. B.	1 March 2000
Summers, Mr. D.L.	1 March 2000
Pryor, Dr. A.J.	1 March 2000
Clayton, Mr. P.	1 September 2000
Bain, Prof A.	1 September 2000

(b) Competition Appeal Tribunal

Name	*Date of first appointment*
Picketing, Prof J.	1 September 2000
Stoneman, Prof P.	1 September 2000
Blair, Mr. M.	1 September 2000
Lewis, Mr. A.	1 September 2000
Zellick, Prof G.	1 September 2000
Hewitt, Mrs. S.F.	1 March 2000
Kelly, Ms A.M.	1 March 2000
Smith-Hillman, Mrs.	1 September 2000
Quigley, Ms P.	1 September 2000
Davey, Mr. M.	1 September 2000
Grant-Hutchison, Mr. P.	1 March 2000
Scott, Mr. A.	1 March 2000
Mather, Mr. G.	1 September 2000
Grinyer, Prof P.	1 September 2000
Rubin, Ms J.	15 September 2003

These appointments were made, under the Competition Act 1998, to the Competition Commission Appeal Tribunals, the forerunner of the Competition Appeal Tribunal created by the Enterprise Act 2000. The members were transferred to the new body on 1 April 2003.

Except as indicated, all appointments to the Competition Commission and the Competition Appeal Tribunal were made by open advertised competition following and, since 1996, in accordance with the guidelines of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the duties and responsibilities of *(a)* the Competition Commission and *(b)* the Competition Appeal Tribunal are; and if she will make a statement. [130652]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The information requested is as follows.

(a) Competition Commission

The Competition Commission is responsible for conducting investigations, after referral by the Office of Fair Trading, the Secretary of State or various regulators into markets, mergers licence modifications and other matters involving competition issues under the following legislation:

Enterprise Act 2002
Fair Trading Act 1973
Water Industry Act 1991
Broadcasting Act 1990
Telecommunications Act 1984
Gas Act 1986
Gas (N. Ireland) Order 1996
Electricity Act 1989
Electricity (N. Ireland) Order 1992
Airports Act 1986
Airports (N. Ireland) Order 1994
Railways Act 1993
Postal Services Act 2000
Transport Act 2000
Financial Services and Markets Act 2000

(b) Competition Appeal Tribunal

The responsibilities of the CAT are:

to hear appeals in respect of decisions made under the Competition Act 1998 by the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) and the regulators in the telecommunications, electricity, gas, water, railways and air traffic services sectors;

to hear actions for damages and other monetary claims under the Competition Act 1998;

to review decisions made by the Secretary of State, OFT and the Competition Commission in respect of merger and market references or possible reference under the Enterprise Act 2002;

to hear appeals in respect of decisions made by the Office of Fair Trading under the EC Competition Law (Articles 84 and 85) Enforcement Regulations 2001 (as amended) in respect of air transport services and international maritime tramp vessel services.

Consumer Credit

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will take steps to simplify the formula for calculating APRs on credit cards once the industry adopts an honesty box or summary table of its fees and charges on promotional material; [129871]

(2) what assessment she has made of the benefits of reforming APRs on credit cards so that additional charges are not included in the APR formula. [129872]

Mr. Sutcliffe: I intend to publish a White Paper in the autumn, which will set out the Government's intentions for the reform of the consumer credit regime.

This will be followed by a detailed consultation on a unified method for calculating APRs on credit cards and the information that industry will have to include in promotional material and credit agreements.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions her Department has had with the European Union on section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act 1974. [129881]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Department is working hard in the negotiations, within the European Union, on a revised Consumer Credit Directive to ensure that we maintain the joint and several liability protections that currently govern credit card use in the UK. I am not prepared to see this important and valuable piece of consumer protection removed.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 17 July, *Official Report*, column 507W, on the Consumer Credit Act, when she expects to publish the results of the consultations. [128751]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Government will publish a white paper on consumer credit during the autumn. This will include our proposals on the reform of the licensing regime. Shortly after the publication of the white paper we will also publish a summary of the responses to the recent consultation.

Electricity Generation

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much electricity in the UK has been generated through *(a)* coal, *(b)* gas, *(c)* nuclear power, *(d)* renewable and *(e)* other sources in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [129942]

Mr. Timms: The available data are shown in the following table.

TWh

	Coal	*Gas*	*Nuclear power*	*Renewable*[1]	*Other sources*[2]	*Total*
1998	123.0	117.8	99.5	9.2	13.2	362.7
1999	106.2	142.9	95.1	10.2	13.8	368.2
2000	120.0	148.1	85.1	10.4	13.6	377.1
2001	131.5	142.0	89.9	10.1	11.3	384.7
2002	124.4	152.1	88.0	11.3	11.2	387.1

[1] Includes electricity generated from biofuels, hydro-natural flow, wind, wave and solar photovoltaics.
[2] Includes oil, coke oven gas, blast furnace gas, waste products from chemical processes and hydro-pumped storage.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much *(a)* coal and *(b)* gas has been used for the generation of electricity in the UK in each of the last five years for which figures are available; how much of these totals has been imported; and if she will make a statement. [129943]

Mr. Timms: The available information is shown in the following table:

Selected fuels used for electricity generation in the UK

	Coal (million tonnes)	*Gas TWh*	*Imported coal*[1] *(million tonnes)*
1998	48.6	267.8	9.7
1999	41.2	315.5	8.1
2000	46.2	324.6	14.1
2001	50.9	309.8	23.2
2002	47.7	326.3	19.4

[1] These figures show the level of coal imports by electricity generators.
Sources:
Digest of UK Energy Statistics and major power producers.

Although the Department collects information on gas supplied to power stations from dedicated pipelines from indigenous production there is no central record for distinguishing how much of the gas that they take from the National Transmission System has been imported as the origin of gas cannot be distinguished once it has entered the NTS.

Export Credit Guarantees Department

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 25 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 798W, on the Export Credit Guarantees Department, if she will list, for each country, the amounts *(a)* which relate to military and defence products, contracts or services and *(b)* which do not. [125930]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The amounts are detailed by country and split between defence and non-defence in the table, which has been placed in the Library, by reference to ECGD's exposure as at 30 June 2003. Given the way ECGD's records are held it is not possible to split claims outstanding for recovery in respect of Account 1 (pre-1992 business) between defence and non-defence nor amounts in respect of moratorium interest accrued on claims paid.

Fossil Fuel Reserves

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the remaining reserves of domestic supplies of *(a)* gas, *(b)* oil and *(c)* coal. [129944]

Mr. Timms: The Department of Trade and Industry publishes annually estimates of oil and gas reserves on the UK Continental Shelf. The latest estimates are that, as at the end of 2002, remaining proven and probable discovered recoverable reserves amounted to 920 million tonnes of oil and 1,000 billion cubic metres of gas. A further 425 million tonnes of oil and 330 billion cubic metres of gas are classified as possible reserves in discovered fields. There are a further 90 to 490 million tonnes of oil and 70 to 265 billion cubic metres of gas in potential additional reserves in smaller undeveloped fields. Furthermore, it is also estimated that additional reserves of between 270 and 1,770 million tonnes of oil and between 235 and 1,390 billion cubic metres of gas could exist in fields that had not been yet discovered.

A study carried out by IMC Group Consulting Ltd. for DTI which was published in December 2002 assessed UK coal reserves in the 15 deep mines operating at that time at around 150 million tonnes, with further known mineral potential of around 260 million tonnes, mainly in 7 mine licence areas. The UK opencast reserve is estimated to be around 230 million tonnes.

International Atomic Energy Agency

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals the United Kingdom is putting to the 47th General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency, 15–19 September; how the United Kingdom will be represented at the General Conference; and if she will place in the Library copies of documentation presented to the conference that is relevant to the United Kingdom. [130370]

Nigel Griffiths: The UK will, as usual, be represented at the Agency's General Conference by a team of officials from different Government Departments, led by the UK's Governor to the IAEA. Throughout the week the UK will be negotiating and working with other member states on a wide range of issues relevant to the Agency's activities: these include nuclear safety and security, nuclear verification safeguards, promotion of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and technology. Copies of the UK's statement to the Plenary and resolutions which have been agreed at the Conference will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Large Combustion Plants Directive

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the expected impact on the UK coal industry of the Large Combustion Plants Directive. [129945]

Mr. Timms: The Government are currently consulting on options before taking the decision on how to implement the Large Combustion Plants Directive

for plants first licensed before July 1987. Officials have discussed the potential impact of the alternative implementation routes with representatives of the UK coal industry, who are also expected to respond formally to the consultation paper. Consultation closes on 29 September. The Government will take a decision on the most appropriate implementation approach only after considering all of the responses received by this data.

Mineworkers' Compensation

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on discussions with the surface mineworker claimants solicitors group with regard to the incorporation of surface mineworkers within the framework of the Claims Handling Agreement for respiratory compensation. [129196]

Mr. Timms: I met with members of the co-ordinating group of solicitors at the Coal Health Ministerial Monitoring Group on Wednesday 10 September, I agreed to give them access to British Coal's dust record archives to assist them in identifying specific cases. This exercise will help the parties to determine how best to resolve outstanding cases.

National Federation of Retail Newsagents

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask t he Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with the National Federation of Retail Newsagents. [129506]

Mr. Sutcliffe: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has not had any recent discussions with the National Federation of Retail Newsagents.

The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) is currently reviewing Code of Practice on newspaper distribution. OFT published a statement of provisional recommendations on 12 December 2002, for public consultation. OFT is now analysing the responses to its public consultation and will make its final report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry shortly.

Store Cards

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what discussions she has had with the Office of Fair Trading regarding high rates of interest levied on store cards; [128144]

(2) what action she is taking to protect consumers from high rates of interest levied on store cards; [128145]

(3) what action she is taking to ensure that retail customers are aware of the terms and conditions before signing up for a store card. [128146]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Department has had no specific discussions regarding the interest rates levied on, or the terms and conditions associated with, store cards.

My hon. Friend is no doubt aware however, that the DTI is reaching the conclusion of its review of the Consumer Credit Act 1974. Government proposals in this area will be set out in a White Paper planned for publication in the autumn. This will address issues such as the transparency of credit products including how they are sold to consumers, advertising and the form and content of credit agreements.

Through discussions and focus groups, we have been particularly careful to involve key stakeholders from consumer groups, business and enforcement agencies at all stages of the review.

In terms of consumer protection, the objective is to increase transparency and understanding throughout the UK credit market, empowering consumers to make informed financial decisions.

My hon. Friend may also be aware that the Department of Trade and Industry recently appeared to give evidence at a Treasury Committee inquiry into the transparency of credit charges.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Ministerial Visits

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list *(a)* foreign and *(b)* UK visits she has made since 1 April; what the cost was to public funds of each trip; who she met; and what gifts were received. [126884]

Tessa Jowell: The Government publish the overall costs of all ministerial overseas travel and a list of all visits overseas by Cabinet Ministers costing in excess of £500 on an annual basis. The list for the period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003 was published by the Prime Minister on 16 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 482W. The next list for the period 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004 will be published at the end of the financial year.

In respect of gifts received, I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 14 March, *Official Report*, column 482W.

I have taken the following UK trips since 1 April 2003.

£

Date	*Destination*	*Event*	*Transport*	*Price*
3 April 2003	Bristol	British Empire and Commonwealth Museum and speech at The Building Legible Cities Conference	Train	101.4
4 June 2003	Liverpool	Liverpool city council for Capital of Culture	Train	256
9 June 2003	Aldeburgh	Aldeburgh Festival	Train	67
24 June 2003	Eastbourne	Speech to The Royal College of Physicians	Train	51.4
25 June 2003	Newcastle	IPPR Seminar	Train	238
1 July 2003	Birmingham	Visit to Lichfield Garrick	Train	160

Royal Parks

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how much peat the Royal Parks purchased in the last two years; and where it was used; [129239]

(2) how many animals and birds were culled in the Royal Parks, broken down by *(a)* species and *(b)* culling methods used in the most recent year for which figures are available; [129263]

(3) what *(a)* pesticides and *(b)* herbicides the Royal Parks purchased in the last two years, broken down by (i) type and (ii) quantity. [129264]

Mr. Caborn: Responsibility for the subject of this question has been delegated to the Royal Parks Agency and I have asked its Chief Executive, William Weston, to reply.

Letter from William Weston to Norman Baker, dated 16 September 2003:

I have been asked by the Secretary of State to reply to your Parliamentary Questions about the pesticides we purchase, the number of animals we cull and our use of peat, because these are operational matters which have been delegated to me.

We do not use peat in our horticultural and grounds maintenance work, but most bedding plants we purchase are supplied to us in peat. We have been looking into alternatives to peat for bedding plants and will be running a trial next year in which all the plants purchased in one park will be grown in an alternative medium. We will assess the result in terms of quality and cost of the plants involved.

The only cull we carried out last year was the annual deer cull, when 179 deer were shot.

We do not purchase herbicides or pesticides. The horticultural and grounds maintenance functions in the parks are carried out by contractors. Park managers specify what tasks require doing and how they are to be done. Where pesticides and herbicides are required, park managers approve which ones should be used and the information is not, therefore, held centrally. We could only find out which types have been used by asking contractors to obtain the information from each job order they have had from park managers for the past two years. Even that would say what type had been approved but not what quantities had been used.

Royal Parks Constabulary

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what progress has been made in the implementation of the recommendations of the Speed review of the Royal Parks Police; and if she will make a statement. [129784]

Mr. Caborn: All 23 main recommendations of the Speed inspection of the Royal Parks Constabulary (RPC) have been implemented, apart from those relating to the merger with the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS).

Agreement in principle on the merger was reached in July with the MPS and the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) to merge the RPC with the MPS to create a separate Royal Parks Operational Command Unit (OCU) within the MPS.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many officers were employed in the Royal Parks Constabulary in each of the last five years. [129785]

Mr. Caborn: The information is as follows.

As at 31 March	*Officers*
1999	158
2000	154
2001	155
2002	148
2003	146

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent assessment she has made of the morale of the Royal Parks Constabulary. [129786]

Mr. Caborn: A change of this magnitude is bound to cause concern among staff. This is an unusual situation and it takes time to find out exactly what is involved and how it can be achieved. During this period there is not much concrete information we can tell staff and I understand how the lack of information can lead to uncertainty which is bound to affect morale. I can only assure RPC officers that Ministers from this Department and the Home Office are working to resolve outstanding issues so that the details can be made available to them and this unfortunate period of uncertainty brought to an end.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her policy is on security of tenure of their homes for Officers of the Royal Parks Constabulary, in the event of a merger with the Metropolitan Police. [129787]

Mr. Caborn: The Royal Parks will do what it can to ensure that Royal Parks Constabulary (RPC) officers currently living in Royal Parks accommodation will not be disadvantaged by the merger with the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS).

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she expects the merger of the Metropolitan Police with the Royal Parks Constabulary to take place. [129788]

Mr. Caborn: The aim is that the Royal Parks Occupational Command Unit should start on 1 April 2004 but this is conditional on resolving funding issues and obtaining the necessary enabling legislation.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Bonded Labour

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what further action will be taken at *(a)* the EU Council of Ministers and *(b)* G7 meetings to ensure an end to the use of bonded labour in developing countries; and if he will make a statement. [128600]

Hilary Benn: We are not aware of any specific proposals to discuss this issue in the EU Council of Ministers or in G7 or G8 meetings in the near future.

The Government are committed to helping to eliminate all abusive labour practices. These include bonded labour, forced labour and child labour. These abusive practices persist where poverty denies people their rights and a decent livelihood. All the programmes of the Department for International Development

(DFID) are intended to contribute to improving the livelihoods of poor people and helping them realise their rights. We also support projects targeted at particular abusive practices. Examples have included a programme in India to eliminate child labour, including bonded child labour, collaboration with the Asian Development Bank in Pakistan on rural development strategies that include tackling bonded labour and support for Action Aid's Poverty Reduction Project which has been working with bonded labourers in the Kailali district of Nepal to help them achieve secure livelihoods.

The United Kingdom has played a leading role in ensuring that the international framework to promote workers' rights and to tackle abuses of those rights, including bonded labour, is in place, particularly through its work with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the UN specialised agency responsible for labour rights. The UK fully supports the ILO work to help end forced and bonded labour, which we see as both a cause and result of poverty.

Through DFID's Partnership Framework arrangement with the ILO, the UK provides support for technical assistance designed to eliminate forced labour. DFID is also supporting ILO programmes in West Africa and South East Asia to tackle forced labour and trafficking.

The Government strongly support the ILO's core labour standards and are actively seeking to raise awareness of voluntary codes of conduct based on these for the working of business in developing countries. In particular we helped to set up and fund the Ethical Trading Initiative, which is an alliance of UK retail companies, non-governmental organisations and trade unions that works to improve labour conditions in the supply chain of its corporate members. The employment standards adopted by ETI members come from the Core Conventions of the ILO. The combined annual turnover of the corporate members amounts to over £100 billion and is expected to rise significantly.

We are also supporting Anti-Slavery International to raise awareness of the issue and stimulate action by trade unions, business and other civil society organisations and governments.

Caucasus (Oil Pipelines)

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will place reports which his Department has *(a)* carried out and *(b)* commissioned on the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline Project in the Library. [130026]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID is currently assessing whether the Environmental and Social Assessement for the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline project complies with the policies and procedures of European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank Group. I will place that assessment in the Library in due course.

Developing Countries (Property Ownership)

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment his Department has made of the effects on development of the lack of effective systems to establish property ownership in developing countries. [130192]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID recognises that secure rights to land and property are fundamental to poor people's ability to act as citizens and pursue their livelihoods within a democratic society and open economy. The absence of systems to establish property ownership holds back development. In many cases it excludes the poor from accessing basic services and participating in formal markets for land and property, limiting social mobility and economic opportunity. The rights of large numbers of people living in informal settlements (which make up between 30–70 per cent. of populations of urban centres in developing countries) and those of rural people dependent on natural resources are frequently not recognised by the authorities. As a result they are vulnerable to eviction and loss of physical and natural assets. Many developing countries are seeking to address these problems by remodelling their systems of land and property administration, but lack the financial resources and technical capacity to do so effectively.

Iraq

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will make a statement on *(a)* the humanitarian situation in Iraq and *(b)* the impact of security on the humanitarian situation. [130351]

Hilary Benn: While significant challenges face the reconstruction effort in Iraq, particularly in the electricity, water supply and oil sectors which have suffered from looting, sabotage and the breakdown of obsolete infrastructure, progress has been made in improving humanitarian conditions for most Iraqis. The public distribution system for food is up and running, most hospitals are in operation, medical supplies are coming into the country, children are being vaccinated and most schools were open by June. Continuing security problems are making the work of humanitarian organisations difficult and often dangerous. The Coalition Provisional Authority is making strenuous efforts to put in place an effective new Iraqi police and justice system, at the same time as coalition forces are being strengthened to help maintain law and order.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will publish the plans the Government have to release money for humanitarian needs in Iraq before the donors conference in October. [130352]

Hilary Benn: DFID spending commitments for Iraq are published regularly in our weekly "Iraq Updates". We have to date committed £198 million of the £210 million currently available to DFID for the Iraq crisis. Additional commitments may be made from this £210 million between now and the Donors' Conference in Madrid in October. Any further significant allocations for assistance to Iraq will be considered by the Government in view of the needs assessments being undertaken by the World Bank, the IMF and the United Nations, which will be presented to the October Donors' Conference.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what recent discussions the Department has had with non-governmental organisations on their continued presence in Iraq. [130353]

Hilary Benn: DFID has regular discussions with NGOs on a range of issues concerning their work in Iraq, including over security and their continued operations in the country. We have told those NGOs whose work we are currently supporting in Iraq that we would be prepared to consider requests for additional financial resources to cover the costs of increased security provisions that they may need to put in place.

CABINET OFFICE

E-Envoy

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office in which month he expects the Annual Report of the e-envoy for 2003 to be published. [129126]

Mr. Alexander: We are committed to publishing an Annual Report each year on the UK online strategy. We intend to publish the 2003 report by the end of the year.

TREASURY

Government Contracts

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what advice is issued to government departments about placing contracts for goods and services with organisations which have been indicted for fraud or are being investigated for fraud [130650]

Mr. Boateng: The EC procurement rules allow contracting authorities to exclude firms from a procurement where they have been convicted of a criminal offence, or have committed an act of grave misconduct related to the conduct of their business or profession. This can include cases involving fraud and corruption.

Air Passenger Duty

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the revenue yield from increasing the level of air passenger duty from £5 to £10 on economy flights within the European Economic Area; and if he will make a statement. [130125]

John Healey: Increasing the reduced rate of air passenger duty from £5 to £10 on flights within the European Economic Area would have raised an estimated £595 million in 2002–03 from this category of passenger.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the revenue yield from raising the level of air passenger duty for club class and first class flights *(a)* from £10 to £20 for destinations within the European Economic Area and *(b)* from £40 to £50 for non-EEA destinations. [130126]

John Healey: Increasing the standard rate of air passenger duty (APD) from £10 to £20 on flights within the European Economic Area (EEA) would have raised an estimated £65 million in 2002–03 from this category of passenger. Increasing the standard rate of APD from £40 to £50 on flights outside the EEA would have raised an estimated £135 million in the same financial year from this category of passenger.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the relationship between the level of air passenger duty and petrol duty in terms of the environmental objectives of Government taxation policies; and if he will make a statement. [130554]

John Healey: Levels of all taxes, including air passenger duty and petrol duty, are reviewed on a Budget-by-Budget basis, taking account of a range of social, economic and environmental considerations.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what his latest estimate is of the revenue cost of the changes to capital gains tax introduced in the March 2000 Budget for each year from 2000–01 to 2005–06; what assessment has been made of the economic benefits of the reform; and if he will make a statement; [130129]

(2) what his latest estimate is of the cost of changing the capital gains tax business assets taper relief in the November 2001 Pre-Budget Report; and if he will make a statement; [130132]

(3) what his estimate is of the revenue yield from abolishing capital gains tax taper relief for each year from 2000–01 to 2005–06; and if he will make a statement. [130139]

Dawn Primarolo: The estimated yield, on an accrual basis, from abolishing Capital Gains Tax Taper Relief, as currently operating, for 2000–01 and 2001–02 are published in Table A3.1 in the Budget Report 2003. The figures take into account some of the likely effects on yield from changes in taxpayers' behaviour. Figures for later years are not available.

The estimated cost, on an accrual basis, of changes to the Capital Gains Tax Taper Relief announced in Budget 2000 for each year from 2000–01 to 2002–03 are published in Table A. 13 in the Budget Report 2000.

The estimated cost, on an accrual basis, of changes to the Capital Gains Tax Taper Relief outlined in Pre-Budget Report 2001 for each year from 2002–03 to 2004–05 are published in Table A.2 in Budget 2002 report.

The estimates of cost of Budget 2000 and Pre-Budget Report 2001 changes take into account most of the likely effects on yield from changes in taxpayers' behaviour. Figures for later years are not available.

We intend to evaluate taper relief once the system has had time for its effects to become measurable.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 8 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 98W, what new technology and extra operational activity at *(a)* Newhaven, *(b)* Poole, *(c)* Isle of Wight, *(d)* Portsmouth and *(e)* Southampton, is intended to replace the full-time manning at present; and if he will make a statement. [129846]

John Healey: The Technology will improve existing capacity to detect the illicit importation of radiological material into the UK. It will not replace any existing Customs capability. As to Custom's operational activity, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him to his earlier question on 8 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 99W.

Deprivation

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which electoral wards are among the 10 per cent. most deprived in England and Wales. [128899]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

There are 841 wards in England and 865 wards in Wales that are among the 10 per cent. most deprived wards in the two countries. The full list of these most deprived wards is available in the Libraries of the House.

There are separate deprivation measures for England and Wales and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is only responsible for deprivation-related policy in England. Deprivation policy in Wales is the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly.

Film Industry

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the total annual *(a)* revenue cost and *(b)* economic benefit of the film industry tax reliefs introduced in and since the July 1997 Budget for each year from 1997–98 to 2005–06; and if he will make a statement. [130013]

Dawn Primarolo: Section 48 of the Finance (No.2) Act 1997 introduced a tax relief for expenditure on the production or acquisition of the master version of a British qualifying film with total production expenditure not exceeding £15 million. This relief is estimated to have cost £440 million for the period 1997–98 to 2001–02 and costs for the further years are estimated as follows:

	£ million
2002–03	300
2003–04	140
2004–05	70
2005–06	50

We are continuing to assess the overall effectiveness of this relief as part of the Budget process.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the yield to the Exchequer from abolishing the film industry tax reliefs; and if he will make a statement. [130014]

Dawn Primarolo: There are three main measures providing enhanced tax relief for expenditure on the production or acquisition of the master version of a film. None of these reliefs has been abolished. However, the relief contained in section 48 of the Finance (No.2) Act 1997 for British qualifying films with total production expenditure not exceeding £15 million applies only to expenditure incurred on or before 2 July 2005. I also refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer which I am today giving to his companion question 130013.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many questions directed to him remain unanswered. [130762]

John Healey: 2,483 of the 3,341 (74.3 per cent.) written questions tabled to the Treasury Ministers in the present parliamentary session to date received substantive replies on or before the dates on which answers were due. Answers have not yet been given to 727 questions, but in 131 cases the answers are not overdue.

Pensions

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the cost of restricting income tax relief on pensions to the basic rate of income tax; and if he will make a statement. [130565]

Dawn Primarolo: The estimated yield from restricting income tax relief on employee and self-employed pension contributions to the basic rate is £1.9 billion in 2002–03. The yield from restricting employer contributions is £2.8 billion, this estimate assumes that the proportion of total employer contributions relating to higher rate taxpayers is that same as that for employees. The estimates take no account of any behavioural effects which are likely to result from such changes.

Stamp Duty

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will publish *(a)* the results of the consultation on the reform of stamp duty land tax affecting commercial leases and *(b)* revisions to the Government's proposals. [130009]

Dawn Primarolo: We expect to publish shortly.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to align the residential and non-residential property upper thresholds for the zero rate stamp duty band. [130556]

Dawn Primarolo: The Chancellor's decision to increase the zero rate stamp duty threshold to £150,000 for non-residential property has been welcomed by business representatives as a boost for small businesses investing in commercial property and will come into effect from 1 December 2003. The level of the thresholds is kept under regular review.

As part of the Government's plans to regenerate the most deprived parts of the UK, in 1,997 Enterprise Areas the purchase of residential property costing up to £150,000 is already exempt from stamp duty.

Tax

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the impact on the tax yield of increasing the top rate of tax to 50 pence in the pound. [129254]

Dawn Primarolo: This estimate can be derived from the Inland Revenue Statistics table T1.6 "Direct effects of illustrative tax change" which is available on the Inland Revenue website. It excludes any behavioural response to the tax change.

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to change the rules relating to non-domicile status for tax purposes. [129255]

Dawn Primarolo: At Budget 2002, the Chancellor announced a review of the residence and domicile rules as they affect the tax liabilities of individuals. That work is continuing. The background paper published on Budget Day 2003 provides a framework for further analysis and discussion.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of the annual cost for each year from 2002–03 to 2005–06 of the tax changes made in the March 2002 Budget to *(a)* research and development tax credit for large companies, *(b)* exemption for gains on large shareholdings, *(c)* community investment tax credit, *(d)* Vaccines Tax Credit, *(e)* tax relief for community amateur sports clubs, *(f)* beer duty relief for small brewers, *(g)* expansion of the scope of the lower rate of air passenger duty and *(h)* reform of the tax relief on intellectual property; what assessments have been made in each case of the economic benefits of the tax changes made; and if he will make a statement. [130237]

Dawn Primarolo: The available information is shown in Table A1 of the Budget 2002 Financial Statement and Budget Report (pp153–154).

HOME DEPARTMENT

Alcohol Reduction Strategy

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the reasons for the delay in the publication of the National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy; and when he expects the strategy to be published. [127147]

Ms Blears: The Government are on course to meet the target in the NHS Plan to implement the National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy by 2004. A large scale consultation has been conducted jointly by the Department of Health and the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit. This yielded a large number of responses which have been extremely valuable in informing the development of the strategy. The Strategy Unit is due to publish its interim analysis shortly.

The Strategy Unit's final report, which will set out the cross-governmental alcohol harm reduction strategy, is due for publication during the autumn. There will then be further Government consultation on the details of implementation and the strategy will be implemented according to timetable by 2004.

Antisocial Behaviour

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to tackle antisocial behaviour associated with drinking alcohol. [129081]

Ms Blears: The Government have already brought forward a range of legislative measures designed to help tackle anti-social behaviour associated with drinking alcohol. The Licensing (Young Persons) Act 2000 makes it an offence for any person to sell alcohol to a person aged under 18 on licensed premises, or knowingly to allow another person to do so. It also created the offence of buying, or attempting to buy, alcohol on licensed premises on behalf of a person aged under 18.

The Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 provides the police and local authorities with increased powers to tackle under-age drinking. The Act contains measures to make it easier for local authorities to designate areas where restrictions on anti-social drinking will apply. It also created a positive duty on licensees and their staff not to sell alcohol to persons aged under 18s.

Section 155 of the Licensing Act 2003, which came into force on 10 September 2003, extends existing police powers relating to the confiscation of alcohol from people who are drinking and causing a nuisance in public places, so as to allow for the confiscation of sealed containers, in addition to opened containers, in defined circumstances.

In addition, anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) have been used to prohibit individuals from consuming alcohol or being under the influence of alcohol in public. Such orders can also be used to prohibit individuals from entering licensed premises or off-licences and buying alcohol. ASBO prohibitions can cover any geographical area up to and including the whole of England and Wales.

For the future, the Home Office is working with the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit on their project to develop a national alcohol harm reduction strategy. The project is looking at the wide range of alcohol harms including alcohol-related crime, anti-social behaviour and community safety. A report setting out the cross-governmental alcohol harm reduction strategy for England is due for publication during autumn 2003.

Sexual Offences

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been cautioned for gross indecency in lavatories at Baker Street tube station since 1995. [128636]

Ms Blears: The information on cautions collected centrally in England and Wales does not enable areas below police force level to be identified.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the use of CCTV cameras in public lavatories to combat the problem of sexual activities. [128639]

Ms Blears: No assessment has been made of the use of CCTV cameras in public lavatories to combat the problem of sexual activities.

Accidents (Emergency Service Vehicles)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* fatal and *(b)* non-fatal accidents involving (i) police, (ii) ambulance, (iii) fire service and (iv) other emergency service vehicles there were in each year since 1993, in each London borough; and if he will make a statement. [128760]

Ms Blears: The tables attached give the number of accidents in the Metropolitan and City of London police areas involving police vehicles engaged inimmediate/emergency response or pursuit at the time of the

accident. The figures are broken down by the severity of injuries sustained by police officers and civilians. Information is not available broken down by London Borough. The Home Office does not collect data on accidents involving ambulance, fire service, or other emergency vehicles.

The Government welcomes the recognition by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) that they must work to reduce the number of collisions involving police vehicles.

ACPO are working closely with the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) to identify why they occur and how they might be avoided. Useful information can be expected from the increasing use by forces of Automatic Data Recorders (ADR) and Vehicle Accident Data Recorders (VADR). These operate in a similar way to aircraft black boxes, providing data on such issues as speed, gear changes, braking, and the use of blue lights.

Table A: The number of accidents in the Metropolitan (Met) and City of London (CofL) police areas involving police vehicles engaged in immediate/emergency response or pursuit at the time of the accident, broken down by severity of injuries sustained to police officers.

	Fatal		Serious Injury		Slight Injury	
Year	Met	CofL	Met	CofL	Met	CofL
1993	2	0	51	0	N/a	N/a
1994–95	2	0	22	0	421	2
1995–96	0	0	23	0	297	4
1996–97	0	0	43	1	352	7
1997–98	0	0	47	3	419	0
1998–99	0	0	45	0	280	6
1999–2000	0	0	11	0	235	0
2000–01	0	0	11	0	235	0
2001–02	0	0	15	0	218	5

Table B: The number of accidents in the Metropolitan (Met) and City of London (CofL) police areas involving police vehicles engaged in immediate/emergency response or pursuit at the time of the accident, broken down by severity of injuries sustained to civilians.

	Fatal		Serious Injury		Slight Injury	
Year	Met	CofL	Met	CofL	Met	CofL
1993	10	0	45	1	N/a	N/a
1994–95	11	0	22	1	353	6
1995–96	4	0	25	0	335	2
1996–97	1	0	27	0	189	4
1997–98	1	0	28	0	246	3
1998–99	1	0	25	1	310	3
1999–2000	1	0	24	0	220	0
2000–01	6	0	29	0	393	2
2001–02	2	0	36	1	389	1

Notes:
1. The information is provided by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, to which forces submit statistical returns
2. All figures are for financial years, except for 1993 (calendar year)
3. Figures for 2002–03 are not yet available
4. Information on fatalities and injuries is only available for accidents involving police vehicles which were engaged in immediate/emergency response or pursuit at the time of the accident.

Airwave Radio

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Home Office expects the airwave radio to be in service in the Thames Valley police area; what the original estimate was for when airwave radios would be introduced into the Thames Valley police area; what changes have been made in the payment of government grant in respect of the airwave radio system in *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04; and if he will make a statement. [129423]

Ms Blears: The Airwave network became available for operational use in the Thames Valley police area on 23 July 2003.The force is expected to be fully operational on the Airwave service by August 2004. The original estimate for the introduction of the Airwave service in Thames Valley was 24 June 2002.

The payment of government grant in respect of Airwave is adjusted in each police force depending on progress of the roll-out. In the case of Thames Valley, the force received payment in 2002–03 to assist with setting-up costs, but no payment was made for the service itself. Payment in 2003–04 will cover the core Airwave service and part of the extra features required by the Thames Valley Police Constabulary to ensure its specific operational needs are met.

Alcohol Restricted Zones

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what Act of Parliament anti-social drinking orders are made; and how such orders will be enforced. [128652]

Ms Blears: I believe my hon. Friend is interested in alcohol restricted zones.

Section 13 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 allows local authorities to introduce designation orders to restrict anti-social public drinking in areas that have experienced alcohol-related disorder or nuisance. The arrangements introduced by the Act replaced a previous Home Office public drinking bylaw.

The police have responsibility for enforcing such designation orders through their discretionary powers to confiscate alcohol if they reasonably believe that a person is, or has been, consuming alcohol in a designated public place. The discretionary powers are set out in section 12 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001.

Anti-terrorism Legislation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the use of anti-terrorism legislation against the protesters at the Excel Exhibition Centre in East London on 9 September. [129947]

Mr. Blunkett: I have called for an immediate report, to be with me by 18 September, into the use of Section 44 stop and search powers during the policing of the DSEi exhibition at the Excel Exhibition Centre in London.

It would be inappropriate to comment further until I have had an opportunity to consider the report.

Child Abuse

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many England and Wales police forces have been involved in investigations into

allegations of child abuse in children's homes and other institutions in the past five years; and how many of these allegations relate to historical abuse. [128348]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not available centrally. The Home Office does not collect information on police investigations into allegations of child abuse in children's homes or similar institutions.

In its report on "The Conduct of Investigations Into Past Cases of Abuse in Children's Homes" in October 2002, the Home Affairs Committee noted that 34 police forces had conducted investigations, and that there had been a total of 226 charges relating to historical abuse. It did not record the number of allegations made.

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action has been taken to revise the internal police handbook for senior investigating officers to set out the terms of an initial approach to potential witnesses in a child abuse case. [128350]

Ms Blears: I understand from the Association of Chief Police Officers that the team responsible for writing this handbook has been considering the recommendations of the Home Affairs Committee in its report on "The Conduct of Investigations into Past Cases of Abuse in Children's Homes", and the Government's response, and is expected to reach its conclusions before the end of the year.

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will issue a code of practice for the audio and visual recording of police interviews with complainants and other significant witnesses in cases of historical child abuse; [128351]

(2) if the Government will issue guidelines to enforce recording of police interviews of complainant and other significant witnesses in home care abuse cases. [128392]

Ms Blears: There is no current code of practice which directs the police to record (either by audio or video) interviews with complainants or other significant witnesses, and we do not propose to introduce one.

Guidance entitled 'Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings' was issued to the police and other agencies involved in criminal proceedings in 2002, superseding the 'Memorandum of Good Practice on Video Recorded Interviews with Child Witnesses for Criminal Proceedings (1992)'. The guidance describes best practice procedures when interviewing vulnerable or intimidated witnesses, whether adults or children, to ensure that they are able to give their best evidence.

There may be clear advantages to both complainant and defendant if greater transparency were built into the process of obtaining evidence in historical abuse cases, and the Government will consider with the Association of Chief Police Officers how to take this forward.

Copies of 'Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings' have been placed in the Library.

Child Protection

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what improvements to child protection measures have been instituted by police forces since the publication of the Laming Report. [129332]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 September 2003]:* The Government response to the Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report was published on 8 September as an annex to the Green Paper, "Every Child Matters". The response directly addresses the recommendations made by Lord Laming to the police and the Home Office.

One key improvement we have made is to issue revised guidance to the police on the appropriate use of police protection powers. The Home Office Circular for this purpose was published on 8 September and has been issued to all Chief Constables.

In the National Policing Plan 2003–06, we asked all police forces to address their child protection service as part of local policing plan priorities, and this was reflected in all plans received by the Home Office in March 2003.

In addition, we understand that the Association of Chief Police Officers has prepared draft standards for child protection policing. These will be produced by the National Centre of Policing Excellence by the end of 2003 as part of a manual of guidance.

Child Rescue Alert

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the findings of the pilot scheme into Child Rescue Alert carried out by Sussex Police. [127570]

Ms Blears: The findings of the pilot will not be published. However, they have informed the setting up of a national text messaging service by Police Information Technology Organisation (PITO), which can be used to quickly alert the public in the event of child abductions.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on individual police forces entering into commercial contracts with private companies providing text messaging services for child abduction warning schemes as envisaged in the Child Rescue Alert Scheme in Sussex. [127571]

Ms Blears: The Vice Chair of the Information Management Communications Group of the Association of Chief Police Officers has written to all Chief Constables and Commissioners of Police advising them to first discuss any intention to enter into such commercial contracts with the E-policing Management Group and Police Information Technology Organisation.

I support the advice given in that letter.

Crime (Merseyside)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the level of recorded crime in Crosby in the last 12 months. [129471]

Ms Blears: Six categories of recorded crime at Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) and police Basic Command Unit (BCU) level have been collected and published for the period from 1 April 1999. These categories are listed in the table, with the number of crimes for the latest available year in the Sefton CDRP and BCU within which Crosby falls.

This data has been published on the Home Office Website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/hosb703sup1.xls.

Recorded Crimes in Sefton CDRP/BCU area in year ending March 2003.

Offence category	*Number of recorded crimes*
Violence against the person	3,016
Sexual Offences	185
Robbery	334
Burglary in a dwelling	2,533
Theft of vehicle	1,542
Theft from vehicle	1,629

Merseyside adopted the National Crime Recording Standard in April 2002, and so this will have affected the 2002/03 figures given above.

Police (Havering)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent measures have been taken to cut crime rates in Romford by the Metropolitan police. [128376]

Ms Blears: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that the Borough Commander for Havering and his senior management team continue to police Havering borough using intelligence-led policing, focusing on crime hot spots within the borough. An example of one of these initiatives, which began on 5 September 2003, is an operation which targets street robbery, disorder and assault and involves the co-operation of Havering borough council and the British Transport Police. A further initiative has been introduced whereby one sergeant and seven constables patrol outside nightclubs in Romford on both Friday and Saturday nights to reduce disorder. The Metropolitan police believe that this has helped to reduce disorder and provide reassurance in the town centre.

Since 1 April this year, figures provided by the Metropolitan police indicate that total notifiable offences in Havering borough have been reduced by 4.3 per cent. and burglary has been reduced by 25.4 per cent.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he had with the Metropolitan police in the London borough of Havering in July. [128380]

Ms Blears: While I had no discussions with the Metropolitan police of the London borough of Havering in July, I did meet the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service on 16 July. This meeting was one of a series held throughout the year which focus on the whole of the Metropolitan police area.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Metropolitan Police in the London Borough of Havering during the past 12 months. [128403]

Ms Blears: I have had no meetings with the Metropolitan Police in the London Borough of Havering during the past 12 months. I have regular bilateral meetings with the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service.

Criminal Trials

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was paid to witnesses in criminal proceedings in each of the last 10 years. [127659]

The Solicitor-General: I have been asked to reply.

The following table shows the amounts paid to prosecution witnesses in each of the last six years. It is not possible to provide figures for the last 10 years as records have only been kept consistently since 1996 following the introduction of a new accounting system. The figures are broken down between expert witness fees, foreign witness expenses and ordinary and professional witness allowances.

Allowances paid to expert witnesses are discretionary. Guidance is provided to staff when paying expert witness fees. Rates of payment for ordinary witness allowances which include loss of earnings, travel and subsistence and, where appropriate, overnight, overnight allowances, are prescribed by the Crown Prosecution Service (Witnesses' allowances) Regulations 1988 which set out maximum rates payable.

All rates are reviewed annually and any increases in the rates set out in the Regulation are approved by HM Treasury.

£

	Expert witness fees	*Foreign witness expenses*	*Ordinary/ professional witness allowances*	*Total*
1997–98	3,482,667	463,670	7,124,681	11,071,018
1998–99	3,790,877	458,976	6,744,345	10,994,198
1999–2000	4,039,521	479,969	6,306,982	10,826,472
2000–01	4,331,570	449,355	6,491,143	11,272,068
2001–02	4,664,002	375,687	6,573,290	11,612,979
2002–03	5,067,840	436,840	6,644,757	12,149,437

Disruptive Youngsters

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to ensure that children under 16 are not on the streets very late at night; and what measures are in place to allow the police to remove disruptive young children from the streets at night. [128096]

Ms Blears: The Anti-social Behaviour Bill currently before Parliament gives the police a power to return young people under 16 who are unsupervised in public places after 9pm to their homes. The power will only be available in areas designated in advance by a senior officer as an area where anti-social behaviour is a significant and persistent problem and where members of the public have been intimidated, harassed, alarmed or distressed by groups.

The local child curfew scheme introduced in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 allows a local authority or police force (after confirmation by the Secretary of State) to set up a scheme banning children and young people under 16 from being in a public place during specified hours. The police have a power to take home a child found in contravention of a curfew under this scheme.

DNA Profiles

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many UK citizens have their DNA profiles stored in his Department's database; and what the number of additions was in each of the last four months for which figures are available. [129478]

Ms Blears: There were 2,052,018 DNA records relating to individuals at 31 August 2003. Information is not available about the nationality of individuals whose profiles are held.

The number of profiles added each month for the last four months has been as follows: May 36,839; June 34,503; July 42,138; August 35,459.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to monitor the performance of police forces in giving support to victims of domestic violence. [127279]

Ms Blears: The Government are determined that effective action should be taken to deal with domestic violence.

Police performance is currently monitored via the collection of data relating to the percentage of arrests made where an arrestable offence has been committed. For the future, police performance on domestic violence will be monitored through the inclusion of domestic violence as an indicator within the Police Performance Assessment Framework.

In addition HMIC/CPSi are currently undertaking a thematic review of domestic violence which will provide a detailed insight into current police performance on domestic violence. We will consider the recommendations of that review very carefully.

Ellie Baker

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the progress of the investigation into Detective Chief Superintendent Ellie Baker since 15 July; [129655]

(2) how many complaints were made against Detective Chief Superintendent Ellie Baker by other police officers prior to 1 October 2002; [129656]

(3) if he will make a statement on the support services available to Detective Chief Superintendent Ellie Baker since the commencement of investigations into allegations against her; [129664]

(4) if he will list the allegations made against Detective Chief Superintendent Ellie Baker. [129665]

Ms Blears: *[holding answer 15 September 2003]:* My officials have requested this information from the West Midlands Police. Once it has been received I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Extradition Treaties

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether *(a)* membership of the International Court of Justice and *(b)* compliance with the Human Rights Act are criteria applied in determining with which countries the UK agrees extradition treaties are based; and if he will make a statement. [128036]

Caroline Flint: Membership of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is not, in itself, a factor that determines if the UK can agree an extradition treaty with another state. The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) was incorporated into the Human Rights Act 1998 and underpins all UK extradition legislation.

Any decision to order a fugitive's surrender is taken with full regard to the UK's international obligations.

Forensic Science Laboratory

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which police forces in England and Wales contract work to the Forensic Science Laboratory in Chepstow; how many staff are employed at the Forensic Science Laboratory in Chepstow; and what representations he has received in response to his statement of 17 July regarding the future of the Forensic Science Service from *(a)* trade unions, *(b)* police forces and *(c)* other bodies. [129337]

Ms Blears: Chepstow Forensic Science Laboratory provides services to the police forces in its region, which are Avon and Somerset; Devon and Cornwall; Dorset; Dyfed Powys; Gloucestershire; Gwent; Hampshire; South Wales; Thames Valley and Wiltshire.

These services are based on Service Level Agreements and not legally binding contracts. Some forces in the area (Dorset for example) use services supplied by other forensic providers; these may be managed through legally binding contracts.

There are currently 226 individuals employed at Chepstow Forensic Science Laboratory.

Representations in response to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's statement of 17 July about the future of the Forensic Science Service have been received from two trade unions Prospect and PCS, and from Brendan Barber, General Secretary of the TUC.

Illegal Camping

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent progress has been made in controlling illegal camping. [129066]

Ms Blears: The Anti-Social Behaviour Bill currently before Parliament includes a new eviction power to deal with unauthorised encampments. This new power will allow the police to take firm action against unauthorised

encampments, without having to satisfy the pre-conditions found in the current legislation, where there are places available on local authority sites.

Immigration Control

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost is to his Department per person per day of detaining a person subject to immigration control in *(a)* a prison and *(b)* a removal centre. [128517]

Beverley Hughes: The Prison Service categorises establishments by their main role only and it is not possible to say what the cost is of detaining a person subject to mmigration control in a prison.

The average cost per place per day of detention in removal centres contracted out to the private sector is £97. The average cost of detention in Dover and Haslar, the two establishments operated by the Prison Service wholly as removal centres is £66.56.

Intelligent Pedestrian Pilot

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the Minister of State's letter (ref M 3759/3) of 20 August, when he expects to receive the outcome of Intelligent Pedestrian Surveillance Pilot schemes; and if he will make a statement. [128270]

Ms Blears: The Intelligent Pedestrian Surveillance pilot is a collaboration between Kingston University, University College London, London Underground and Sollatek. It is not sponsored by the Home Office. However, I await the outcome of the pilot with interest.

Mobile Phones

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crime numbers were issued by the police for *(a)* lost and *(b)* stolen mobile phones in the last 24 months for which figures are available. [127826]

Ms Blears: The Home Office collects statistics on the basis of recorded crime figures, not crime numbers issued by the police.

The Home Office does not centrally collect or collate national statistics on the numbers of mobile phone thefts as mobile phone theft is not a separate crime category. Mobile phone theft crime figures are included within the crime categories of robbery, snatch theft and theft from person.

The Home Office collects four-weekly figures from the 10 street crime police force areas on the numbers of robberies, snatch thefts and thefts from person involving a mobile phone and for nine of the 10 areas these are broken down into those involving a mobile phone only. The data are for internal management and monitoring purposes and are unpublished.

Home Office Research (Mobile Phone Theft, HORS 235) published in January 2002 looked at the scale of the mobile phone theft problem. Its best estimate of the number of mobile phones stolen in the UK in 2000–01, including unreported offences, was 710,000. This estimate was based on findings from police recording, British Crime Survey, MORI schools survey and the On Track schools survey.

Police Complaints Authority

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints under investigation by the Police Complaints Authority are *(a)* less than one year old, *(b)* one to three years old, *(c)* three to five years old and *(d)* over five years old; and if he will make a statement. [128762]

Ms Blears: Information is not available in the form requested. The Police Complaints Authority (PCA) has provided the following table in response.

Total outstanding cases for the PCA at 8 September 2003

Year received[1]	*Misconduct Cases only*[2]	*Misconduct cases that were supervised*[3]	*Supervised investigations*[4]	*Total*
1999	1	4	2	7
2000	1	11	5	17
2001	4	19	32	55
2002	30	41	97	168
2003	727	5	225	957
Total	763	80	361	1,204

Note:
It is important to note the following:
The PCA does not "investigate" any cases itself; the police forces undertake all investigations;
Of the above cases, the PCA undertakes a supervisory role for the second and third columns of the table only;
There are some cases that have been supervised and where the Section 75 is to be issued that are not included in these figures.

[1] Year received for the column "Misconduct Cases Only" relates to the year the case arrived at the PCA after the investigation had been completed by a police force. The PCA has no control over the time a complaint was made (though legislation dictates it should be within 12 months of the date of incident) or the length of the police investigation.

[2] These are cases received by the PCA after the investigation has been completed by a police force where a review of the file is required. This includes "Dispensation" cases (those where the complaint is not followed through for any reason).

[3] These are cases where the PCA has previously supervised an investigation and where a review of the file is now taking place.

[4] These are cases where the PCA is supervising the investigation.

Police Conduct

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps he takes to assess whether appropriate disciplinary action is taken against police officers whose conduct while not on duty is found to be improper; [127286]

(2) what action he is taking to ensure that complaints by the public relating to a police officer's conduct while not on duty are investigated; [127287]

(3) what action he is taking to ensure that the Police Complaints Authority has access to all necessary evidence while conducting investigations into improper conduct by police officers when not on duty; [127288]

(4) what steps he takes to assess the extent to which police forces release information regarding the outcome of a complaint to those that make the complaint, when release of such information is not prohibited by data protection legislation. [127291]

Ms Blears: The Police (Conduct) Regulations 1999 set out at Schedule 1 a Code of Conduct, the principles of which guide police officers' behaviour. The Code applies to the conduct of police officers in all ranks while on duty, or while off duty, if the conduct is serious enough to indicate that an officer is not fit to be a police officer.

Any breach of the principles in the Code may result in an officer facing misconduct proceedings under the Police (Conduct) Regulations 1999. Chief officers are responsible for applying the Regulations to their own forces.

The investigation of complaints by the public relating to the conduct of a police officer falls under Chapter I, Part IV, of the Police Act 1996 (the Act). Under those provisions the police authority is the appropriate authority for handling complaints against senior officers (those above the rank of chief superintendent) and the chief officer of the force is the appropriate authority for recording and investigating complaints in respect of all other ranks.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department does not have the power to intervene in either the recording or investigation of individual complaints, whether they concern on or off duty conduct, or in any disciplinary proceedings.

Under Section 72 of the Act, the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) will supervise the investigation of certain types of complaints and it is within that process of supervision that it will have access to all the necessary evidence, primarily by way of the Investigating Officer's report. In such cases, the PCA may also impose such additional reasonable requirements as to the conduct of the investigation as appear to them necessary.

There is currently no statutory requirement for a force to disclose information to a complainant. The Secretary of State for the Home Department does not assess the extent to which police forces release information to a complainant regarding the outcome of a complaint.

A new police complaints system will be introduced from April 2004 under provisions in the Police Reform Act 2002. This new system will operate under the guardianship of the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC).

The new system will not change the Secretary of State for the Home Department's role in regard to the handling of complaints or disciplinary proceedings taken against police officers. Similarly, although it does not change the handling with regard to supervised complaints, it does provide for a managed investigation by the IPCC and for an independent investigation by the IPCC. As these two new types of investigation will put the IPCC in full control of the investigation, they will have unrestricted access to all the necessary evidence. Finally, with regards to the disclosure of information, the new complaints system places a clear duty on the police to keep the complainant properly informed during, and at the end of, an investigation, subject to a sensitivity test.

Police Notebooks

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Metropolitan police officers have been subject to an internal disciplinary process for tearing a page or pages from their police notebook in the last five years; and if he will list the sanctions imposed. [127068]

Ms Blears: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that in the last five years one officer has been subject to disciplinary proceedings for removing a page from a pocket book. The officer received a caution.

Police Procedures

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent steps the Government has taken to *(a)* simplify police procedures, *(b)* reduce procedural and administrative burdens on the police, *(c)* save police resources and *(d)* speed up the process of justice. [128621]

Ms Blears: The report of the Joint Home Office/ Cabinet Office Review of the Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) Act 1984 set the above criteria as the basis for identifying potential changes to PACE.

The Government's current legislative programme takes forward the findings of the review in areas such as provision for extending the powers of stop and search; the execution of warrants; street bail; review of police detention; limits on periods of detention without charge; property of detained persons; taking fingerprints before charge; and the process of revising or introducing PACE Codes of Practice. The remaining findings are being taken forward administratively or through future legislative opportunities.

Public Sector Employees

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what protection is afforded to public sector employees from violence in the workplace; and what plans he has to introduce a specific offence for assaulting public sector workers. [128110]

Ms Blears: The Government take a very serious view of violence in the workplace and are pursuing a range of action to combat it.

In March 2000 the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) embarked on a three-year programme to help employers, including those in the public sector, to tackle assaults on staff, with the aim of reducing the number of incidents of violence at work. So far the programme has resulted in the publication of new guidance specifically aimed at small businesses, the development of new National Occupational Standards on work-related violence, a programme of inspections in the health care sector, and new research to establish good practice for lone workers, including those in the public sector.

Health and Safety Executive officials are now evaluating the programme and will be submitting written proposals to the HSC on the next stage (2003 06) later this year.

Assaulting a public sector worker in the course of his or her duty is an extremely serious matter, as reflected in guidelines issued by the Magistrates' Association in September 2000 (and amended in July 2001). The guidelines already make it clear that, if the assault is against an individual serving the public, this should be considered as an aggravating factor.

We have no current plans to introduce a specific offence of assaulting a public sector worker.

Secondments

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many UK police officers are seconded to police *(a)* forces and *(b)* agencies overseas; which countries are involved; from which forces the officers have been seconded; and what plans there are to send further offices to overseas countries in addition to Iraq. [128318]

Ms Blears: Each police force keeps its own records on overseas secondments and comprehensive figures are not held centrally. Figures are available on the number of United Kingdom police officers participating in international peacekeeping and crisis management operations overseas. Contributions to peacekeeping missions and crisis management operations account for the overwhelming majority of police officers seconded from English and Welsh forces to police forces and agencies overseas. On 5 September 2003, the United Kingdom had 195 serving police officers working in peacekeeping missions in Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Kosovo, East Timor, Sierra Leone, Serbia and Montenegro and Iraq.

Of these 195 police officers, 92 are from English and Welsh police forces and the National Criminal Intelligence Service. All English and Welsh police forces currently have at least one police officer on secondment to overseas peacekeeping missions with the exception of the City of London Police, Cumbria Constabulary, Gwent Police, Hertfordshire Constabulary, Leicestershire Constabulary, Norfolk Constabulary, Nottinghamshire Police, Staffordshire Police, Thames Valley Police and West Mercia Constabulary. The largest number of secondees from any one force in England and Wales is seven.

Contributions from the Ministry of Defence Police, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and Scottish police forces make up the remaining numbers of UK police officers serving on international peacekeeping missions.

Any plans to send police officers from English and Welsh forces to new peacekeeping missions in addition to Iraq will be initiated through a formal request to the Home Office from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. I have received no such requests.

Stolen Art

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are in place to provide a national database of stolen art and artefacts; and if he will make a statement. [129512]

Ms Blears: The Home Office continues to work closely with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport on the issue of developing a national cultural property database. We are currently in the process of re-assessing various options available to us.

Street Crime

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what change there has been in the level of street crime in each of the 10 hot spot areas during the year 2002–03 [128863]

Ms Blears: The table compares recorded robbery in 2002–03 with 2001–02 in the 10 police force areas involved in the Street Grime Initiative (SCI). The figures are not adjusted for National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS). The NCRS effect in 2002–03 on recorded robbery figures in England and Wales was to inflate those by three per cent.

Force	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*Percentage change*
Metropolitan Police	53,547	42,496	-21
West Midlands	13,322	10,249	-23
Greater Manchester	11,027	10,745	-3
West Yorkshire	5,674	4,947	-13
Avon & Somerset	4,889	3,504	-28
Merseyside	3,155	2,994	-5
Thames Valley	2,894	2,406	-17
Nottinghamshire	2,726	2,799	3
South Yorkshire	1,952	2,112	8
Lancashire	1,608	1,409	-12
Total for 10 SCI forces	100,794	83,661	-17

Underage Drinkers

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the impact on effective policing of the removal of the power to confiscate sealed containers of alcohol from underage drinkers in public places; [127129]

(2) in what plans he has to extend the power to confiscate alcohol from young people drinking in public places to sealed containers. [127133]

Ms Blears: Police powers to confiscate alcohol and alcohol containers from under-age drinkers are provided by the Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Act 1997. That Act was amended by section 29 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 with the effect that the police were able to confiscate alcohol in opened containers from young people in public places, but not alcohol in sealed containers.

Following representations from the police and others to strengthen these powers to include sealed containers, we brought section 155 of the Licensing Act 2003 into force on 10 September 2003. This extends police confiscation powers in respect of under-age drinkers in public places to include alcohol in sealed containers where the officer believes that the young person is, has been or intends to drink the alcohol in any public place.

Video Surveillance

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the use of

video surveillance in public areas; what effect this has had on crime in those areas; and what plans there are to expand video surveillance. [127990]

Ms Blears: Under the Crime Reduction Programme CCTV Initiative, around £170 million has been spent on 684 CCTV schemes across England and Wales, covering town centres, car parks, residential and rural areas. Of these schemes, 675 are already operational with the remaining schemes due to go live later this year. The Initiative is now closed and there are no plans for a new CCTV-specific funding round in the near future.

Police operational experience and various other research studies show that CCTV has considerable crime reduction and detection potential, particularly when used as part of a wider strategy.

To help ensure maximum impact and sustainability of CCTV, a 1.5 million Home Office funded national evaluation programme is being carried out by the Scarman Centre, University of Leicester, on 15 approved CCTV Initiative schemes.

The final evaluation report will not be published until 2004, but interim reports will be available before then. The first—providing guidance for practitioners on implementation of CCTV schemes—is available on the crime reduction website (www.crimereduction.gov.uk).

Opportunities for funding of further CCTV schemes in England and Wales currently exist through the Building Safer Communities Fund. Under this fund, £72.3 million has been made available to Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships in 2003–04 for tackling local problems of crime and disorder. In addition, a special £50 million Basic Command Unit (BCU) fund has been distributed to local police commanders to help tackle the problems that matter most in their communities. Police will be able to target the extra resources at local level problems, like anti-social behaviour and drugs, deploying CCTV where appropriate.

The Scottish Parliament has responsibility for CCTV funding in Scotland.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

International Student Visas

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how long it takes for an international student visa to be issued. [129425]

Mr. Mullin: Visa sections at our overseas posts aim to resolve student applications for entry clearance within 24 hours.

However, if the applicant requires an interview, this can delay the resolution of the application. We normally aim to offer an interview within 10 days. However, applicants may face longer queues in some individual posts where security or other factors mean that we are unable to offer the level of service that we would like.

Afghanistan

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the changes in quantities of opium produced in Afghanistan since the overthrow of the Taliban. [127172]

Mr. Rammell: The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) conducts an annual survey into the level of opium poppy cultivation and production in Afghanistan. These two sets of figures need to be read together to provide full information about trends in poppy production. It has reported levels of cultivation and production over the past 5 years as follows:

Year	*Hectares*	*Tonnes*
1998	64,000	2,700
1999	91,000	4,600
2000	82,000	3,300
2001	8,000	185
2002	74,000	3,400

The UNODC figures for 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001 were all recorded under the Taliban regime. The figures in 1999 are the highest UNODC have recorded in Afghanistan. The low level of cultivation and low production figure in 2001 reflect the Taliban ban on opium cultivation; the ban did not however address the underlying causes of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan and was enforced with mix of threat and bribery.

The UNODC is in the process of preparing the report of the 2003 survey on behalf of the Afghan government. It will be published in the autumn.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place with NATO members in the Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society regarding the monitoring of chemical leaks from chemical weapons stocks dumped in the Baltic after the second world war. [129098]

Mr. Ingram: I have been asked to reply.

Following a Norwegian-led NATO Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society (CCMS) Pilot Study on Cross Border Environmental Problems Emanating from Defence Related Installations and Activities, the Russian Government approached NATO in 1997 regarding possible cooperation in the monitoring and prevention of leakage of chemicals from German chemical weapons stocks sunk in the Baltic and Skagerrak after World War Two. A CCMS expert meeting on chemical weapons dumped in the Baltic Sea and Skagerrak took place in Oslo in 1997. A member of the British embassy in Oslo attended the meeting.

At that meeting, the Russian delegation gave preliminary information on recent environmental expeditions to the Baltic and Skagerrak. The Russian delegation proposed that a further CCMS expert meeting should be held before the end of 1997 to consider the full findings from the expeditions; and that a joint NATO- Russia expedition should be organised for 1998.

CHADWYCK-HEALEY

HOUSE OF COMMONS PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD) ● 2002-03

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It was the Ministry of Defence's understanding that CCMS was continuing to lead on this issue. However, we have now been advised that the Russian proposals were forwarded to the NATO Political Committee in 1997. That Committee rejected the proposals, stating that the results of the Russian expeditions and any plans for future expeditions should be conducted through, or as part of, the Helsinki Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea.

Cyprus

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to reduce the barriers to obtaining a visa to visit the UK for residents of the occupied part of Cyprus; and if he will make a statement. [127810]

Mr. Mullin: The visa regime on the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" ("TRNC") stems from the fact that the United Kingdom requires holders of non-national travel documents to obtain visas to enter the UK. The "TRNC" travel document is considered to be a non-national travel document as it is issued by an authority which is not recognised by HMG. This will remain the case after the entry of the Republic of Cyprus into the EU in May 2004, unless a comprehensive political settlement is achieved first.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Mr. Doug Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. [129583]

Mr. Mullin: The transitional process in Kinshasa is now making encouraging progress. The new Transitional National Government (TNG) should provide a real opportunity for the Democratic Republic of the Congo to put an end to the cycle of conflict and human rights abuses and start on the path to democracy and development. We are looking actively at ways in which we can provide support—bilaterally, with EU and other partners, and through the UN.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo regarding human rights abuses in that country; and if he will make a statement. [129827]

Mr. Mullin: Before the Transitional National Government (TNG) was installed in Kinshasa at the end of July our ambassador made regular representations to the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo about human rights abuses in the territory they then controlled. During the same period the Government supported international efforts to raise human rights awareness in rebel-held areas and, with the EU, condemned abuses in those territories.

Since installation of the TNG, we have continued to make our views known, both bilaterally and with our international partners. We will support the work of relevant institutions such as the National Human Rights Observatoire.

Iraq

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many officials the Coalition Provisional Administration has in the British-controlled sector of Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [128795]

Mr. Rammell: The number of Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) officials in the British-controlled sector is approximately 90. These officials are of various nationalities, and include military and civilians (who might be government secondees, consultants, or contractors). This excludes *(a)* people and organisations that support CPA with services e.g. security, *(b)* contractors who are implementing projects but not in any strict sense involved in administration and *(c)* military who are doing related jobs and are part of the coalition forces but not of CPA.

The 90 currently includes 27 British civilian staff members with the Coalition Provisional Authority South in the British-controlled sector of Iraq. These include three police and 14 from the Department for International Development. In addition, there are 39 uniformed personnel. It is expected that at least 34 more additional posts will be filled in the near future.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on which dates the UNSCOM inspectors visited presidential sites in Iraq before 1999; and what facilities were inspected on each date. [129282]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 15 September 2003]*: A special team of inspectors, with 20 senior diplomats acting as observers, was established in March 1998 to carry out inspections at eight presidential sites. The inspection mission, UNSCOM 243, visited the sites on the following dates: Radwaniya on 26 and 27 March; Tikrit on 28 March; Mosul and Jabal Makhul on 29 March; Tharthar and Basrah on 30 March; and the Republican Palace and Sijood sites in Baghdad on 1 and 2 April. The inspectors' report was subsequently published as a United Nations document (S/1 998/326), which can be found on the UN internet website at www.un.org/Depts/unscom/s98-326.htm.

There were no further visits to any of these sites.

Liberia

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Liberia. [129826]

Mr. Mullin: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. Dhanda) on 8 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 63W.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the members of ECOWAS about *(a)* UK, *(b)* EU and *(c)* UN assistance in Liberia; when these discussions took place; what the outcome of these discussions has been; and if he will make a statement. [129975]

Mr. Mullin: The UK is committed to working closely with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to ensure that the present Multi-National Force, and the UN Mission planned for Liberia, are successful in restoring peace and security to Liberia. We have been in close and regular contact with members of ECOWAS, especially Nigeria, over assistance in Liberia.

We have had discussions within the European Union to ensure adequate funding for Liberia. We have also had discussions within the UN to ensure that the UN Mission is fully equipped to do its job. We have committed £1 million to the ECOWAS Multi-National Force, and have seconded a military adviser to the ECOWAS Secretariat. We have also offered military advisers to the UN planning mission and head quarters.

Moldova

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking to assist with the control of proliferation of *(a)* weapons and *(b)* nuclear materials in Transnistria in Moldova. [130184]

Mr. MacShane: We are not aware of any dangerous nuclear materials in the breakaway region of Transnistria. Along with EU partners and allies, we are assisting Russia with the destruction/removal of arms from Transnistria. We are also focusing closely on the political settlement negotiations between Moldova and Transnistria. Resolution of this "frozen conflict" is essential for extending the rule of law throughout the entire territory, an element of which is improved control of arms proliferation. The UK joined with EU partners in imposing targeted sanctions on the Transnistrian leadership in February this year to put pressure on them to negotiate with the Moldovan authorities. I urged the Ukrainian government to take action with the Moldovan authorities to deal with the Transnistria problem in talks in Kiev on 15 September.

Nepal

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what instructions have been issued to officials at the High Commission in Kathmandu regarding applications from the wives of Gurkhas, serving in this country, for visitor visas in cases where the soldiers have six months or less to serve. [130181]

Mr. Mullin: No specific instructions are issued to the British Embassy in Kathmandu in respect of visit visa applications from the dependants of Gurkha soldiers. Applications for all visitor visas are considered on their own merits in accordance with the United Kingdom Immigration Rules, and no special arrangements are in place for the dependants of Gurkha soldiers.

However, entry clearance staff in Kathmandu are aware that any Gurkha whose family wish to visit him in the United Kingdom has to follow British Army standing regulations.

A Gurkha soldier is required to submit to his Commanding Officer a request for members of his family to visit him in the United Kingdom. If the visit is agreed the Army issues a "certificate—Visit by Gurkha Family to Husband's/Father's duty station in the UK"

An entry clearance application is then made in the normal way. Entry clearance staff in Kathmandu would expect the above-mentioned certificate to be included with other supporting documentation.

Overseas Students

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received on the level of charges for visas and leave to remain for overseas students; and if he will make a statement. [129981]

Mr. Mullin: I have received few representations regarding the level of visa fees for students. Visa fees are set at a level to ensure that the full cost of providing the entry clearance service worldwide is met from fee income and that the UK taxpayer does not have to meet any of the costs. From 1 July 2002, the visa fee for students has been set at £36. Student visas are issued for the duration of their course regardless of its length. Charges for leave to remain are administered by the Home Office and I have therefore not received representations on this matter.

Uganda

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement concerning the human rights situation in Northern Uganda. [129323]

Mr. Mullin: We deplore the actions of the rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army, in northern Uganda. In their 17 year war against the Government of Uganda they have been responsible for the abduction of over 20,000 children, many of whom become child soldiers, and massacres of thousands of local civilians. We are also concerned about reports that the Ugandan Army has been involved in recruitment of child soldiers, arbitrary arrests and mistreatment of detainees and have failed to protect the local population. The conflict has resulted in over one million displaced persons now living in refugee camps. We have raised these issues with the Ugandan government. The UK has responded to the worsening humanitarian situation by working with the international donor community and the World Food Programme (WFP) to bring relief to the affected region. Total UK support was £2.5 million in 2002–03.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the UN Security Council concerning the situation in Northern Uganda; and if he will make a statement. [129324]

Mr. Mullin: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not raised the situation in northern Uganda with the UN Security Council. While we recognise the Government of Uganda's need for a security response to the Lord's Resistance Army insurgency, we are concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the region caused by the fighting. We have raised our concerns with the Ugandan

Government and have encouraged them to consider other solutions to a military one. The UK is also liaising with EU partners and members of the donor community to consider how to help the Government of Uganda resolve the conflict.

UN Arms Embargoes

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Government has responded to the requests by the United Nations Security Council for information on violations of arms embargoes in Rwanda by UK companies discussed in the United Security Council document Third Report of the International Commission of Inquiry (Rwanda) (S/1997/1010). [129880]

Mr. Mullin: The Government takes seriously its responsibilities to ensure UK companies respect arms embargoes. Document S/1997/1010 mentions two requests for information: one to HM Customs and Excise (paragraph 64) and one to the Ministry of Defence (MOD) (paragraph 65). The MOD letter was answered, although the International Commission of Inquiry did not have enough time to follow up on it. The letter to HM Customs and Excise was unanswered at the time of the report, but it is very unlikely that any information about alleged criminal activity or any investigation could be made available. The report did not refer to any unanswered letters addressed to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of traditional tribal demarcations and affinities in developing countries on the effectiveness of UN arms embargoes. [130183]

Mr. Rammell: No formal study of the impact of traditional tribal demarcations and affinities in developing countries on the effectiveness of UN arms embargoes has been made by Her Majesty's Government.

UN Peacekeeping Operations

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the United Nations on the use of reputable transport suppliers for UN peacekeepers. [130193]

Mr. Rammell: The Government maintains an on-going dialogue with the United Nations about all aspects of UN peacekeeping missions, including logistics.

Western Sahara

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects a UN authorised referendum to be held on the future of Western Sahara; and if he will make a statement. [130022]

Mr. Rammell: The United Kingdom supports fully the efforts of the UN Secretary General and his Personal Envoy, James Baker III, to find a just, lasting and mutually acceptable solution to the Western Sahara dispute that provides for self-determination for the people of Western Sahara.

In July this year the Security Council called upon the parties to the dispute to work with the United Nations and with each other towards acceptance and implementation of James Baker's Peace Plan which provides for a UN organised referendum after a transitional period. We are encouraging the parties and states of the region to cooperate fully with the Secretary-General and his personal envoy to this end.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Broadband

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of *(a)* secondary and *(b)* primary schools in rural areas have a broadband connection. [129359]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The information is not yet held in the format requested but feedback from Regional Broadband Consortia currently indicates that a significant number of rural schools are already connected to broadband using a range of technologies including radio and satellite. The Department has requested specific information from Regional Broadband Consortia and local education authorities, which, when compiled by November 2003, will give the percentage of rural schools connected.

In England, 91 per cent. of secondary schools are connected at a minimum of 2 megabits per second, as are 26 per cent. of primary schools.

The Department is supporting the Government's Broadband Aggregation Project launched in July 2003, which will see the formation of nine Regional Aggregation Bodies tasked with aggregating demand and procuring broadband across the public sector. The project's two key aims are to ensure best value for the public sector's 1 billion investment in broadband and to help stimulate supply in areas where very little broadband is available. The Regional Aggregation Bodies and the Broadband Aggregation Project should significantly improve access to broadband by rural schools.

Circulars

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the circular documents that were sent by his Department to *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools between 1 July and 31 August; and how many pages each document contained. [129722]

Mr. Miliband: We did not send any documents automatically to either primary schools or to secondary schools in the period, 1 July 2003 to 31 August 2003. The last mailing of documents to schools occurred in June 2003.

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Walsall, North of 5 August regarding a constituent, ref: 2003 0050920. [129734]

Mr. Miliband: I replied to my hon. Friend's letter of 5 August on 10 September.

Crosby

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the projects to which his Department has allocated funding in Crosby in each year since 1997. [129458]

Mr. Miliband: The table shows the total recurrent and capital funding allocated to Sefton local education authority between 1997–98 and 2003–04. Separate figures for Crosby are not available.

£ million

Pupils aged 3–19	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Education Formula Spending—general funding for schools and LEAs	116.5	122.2	128.2	132.0	129.6	143.0
Standards Fund—is paid to LEAs and schools to support national education priorities, focussing on key strategies for reform and improving standards.	1.6	3.2	6.0	9.4	11.6	13.9
3yo Nursery Education Grant—to assist LEAs to reach universal (participation) provision of all 3 year olds.		0.1	0.8	1.1	1.2	
4yo Nursery Education Grant—to assist LEAs to reach universal (participation) provision for all 4 year olds.	0.4	0.4	0.3			
Class Size Reduction—to assist schools to reduce class size in ks1 and 2.		0.4	1.1	1.2	1.0	
Teacher Green Paper Grants—the main grants in this category are Teacher Threshold payments and Performance pay			1.9	3.4	4.0	N a
Schools Standard Grant—to help schools improve standards and is allocated based on the number, size and type school in each authority.			1.8	3.8	3.9	4.8
Learning and Skills Council—is responsible for planning and funding education and training of 6th form school provision.					9.1	9.8
School Budget Support—paid to LEAs in a particular year to cope with particular school budgetary pressures.			0.3			
Education Budget Support—paid to LEAs in a particular year to additional education budget support.				0.9		
Post 16 Budget Support—paid in order assist the transition of post 16 funding to the LSC.					0.6	
Capital Funding—to improve school buildings.	0.7	1.5	3.3	7.6	8.1	9.1
Total	119.2	127.8	143.7	159.3	169.1	n a

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many classroom assistants were employed in Crosby in each year since 1997. [129459]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Maintained nursery, primary, middle and secondary schools and pupil referral

Units: Full-time equivalent number of teaching assistants

Crosby Parliamentary Constituency—
Position at January each year

	FTE teaching assistants[1]
1997	89
1998	92
1999	103
2000	123
2001	145
2002[2]	131
2003	157

[1] Includes teaching assistants, special needs support staff and minority ethnic pupil support staff

[2] Changes in the collection of support staff data in 2002 may have altered the distribution of staff between "teaching assistants" and "other staff" categories, affecting, comparisons with other years.

Source:

Annual Schools' Census

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many times he has visited Crosby in his official capacity; and what the purpose was of each visit. [129461]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I have not visited Crosby in an official capacity since taking up post as Secretary of State for Education and Skills.

Departmental Computer Security

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much has been *(a)* budgeted and *(b)* spent by his Department since April 2002 on (i) combating computer fraud, (ii) preventing theft of computers and (iii) safeguarding the security of information held on computer; and if he will make a statement. [128772]

Mr. Charles Clarke: This Department manages the security of its information, including information held on its computer systems, in accordance with the guidance given in the Manual of Protective Security; a comprehensive body of policy and interdepartmentally agreed security standards that is issued by the Cabinet Office.

The Department has an experienced IT security officer and deputy who advise how IT systems should be designed to minimise risk.

Portable IT equipment In London, at particular risk, is electronically tagged to prevent unauthorised removal and this has contributed to a reduction in the level of theft. The maintenance cost of the tagging system is £15,000 a year.

All external links to the Department are protected against unauthorised access by firewalls. Anti-virus software protects the Department's systems against malicious software at an annual cost of £45,000.

Deprivation

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures are being taken to raise the aspirations of young pupils in deprived areas; and what progress has been made in encouraging them to attain higher standards. [129091]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We are currently investing over £500 million pounds a year in revenue funding to raise the aspirations and achievements of young pupils in deprived areas through the Excellence in Cities programme. The programme covers 58 authorities as well as Excellence Clusters which tackle smaller pockets of deprivation. It includes some 1,000 secondary schools and over 1,000 primaries. In addition to providing Learning Mentors Learning Support Units enhanced opportunities for Gifted and Talented pupils and EiC Action Zones and City Learning Centres, the funding also provides for the delivery of Behaviour Improvement Plans, Leadership Incentive Grant and Aim Higher which is specifically designed to raise aspirations and widen access to Higher Education.

OFSTED's recent report on Excellence In Cities found that: schools and teachers had been helped to meet the needs of disaffected and vulnerable pupils more effectively; exclusions are being reduced; attendance is improving at a faster rate in the schools involved in the programme; and the introduction of the programme has been associated with a faster rise in standards in secondary schools in EiC areas than nationally .

As well as the additional support provided through the Governments targeted initiatives we are aiming to raise the aspirations and educational performance of pupils in deprived areas through mainstream programmes. The mainstream Primary and KS3 National Strategies are built on the principle that all children are capable of attaining high standards.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in what circumstances children in deprived areas are paid to attend *(a)* school, *(b)* sixth form college, *(c)* further education colleges; and what guidance he has issued on how much is granted on a weekly basis. [129092]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is currently running as a pilot scheme in 56 Local Education Authority (LEA) areas in England. The pilots have tested eight variants of payment arrangements for EMA, two of which concentrate on the costs of transport. The maximum weekly payments vary from £20 to £40 assessed on income levels up to £30,000. Guidance on the pilot arrangements is made available through the LEAs.

From September 2004 EMAs will be made available across England, offering a weekly payment of up to £30, paid directly to young people who stay on in further education after they reach statutory leaving age. Young people may also receive bonuses if they remain on their course and make good progress with their learning. A leaflet explaining the national EMA scheme was published in August this year and copies are available in the House of Commons Library.

For young people with specific needs there is financial support available through the Learner Support Funds, providing help towards transport costs, books and equipment, residential allowances and help with childcare.

The support arrangements for school leavers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are a matter for the devolved administrations.

Gifted Pupils

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils attended the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth in 2003; how many places were available; and what proportion of the pupils attended non-specialist, non-selective maintained schools. [129166]

Mr. Miliband: 522 students took part in the 2003 summer schools provided by the Academy, against a planning assumption of 900 places. 82 per cent. were from non-selective, maintained schools. Data was not collected on numbers from specialist schools.

The Academy provides a range of services and support to its members in addition to the summer schools, including on-line communities, research material and outreach events. 621 Academy members took part in such outreach events during the pilot year. In the 2003–04 academic year, the Academy is planning over 200 events reaching a potential 6,000 participants. Membership of the Academy currently stands at 2,022 with applications arriving at a rate of 75 each week.

Gurkhas (Children's Education)

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the children of Gurkha soldiers, stationed in this country attending British schools are classified as *(a)* home and *(b)* overseas students for the purposes of university fees. [130178]

Alan Johnson: Universities and higher education colleges decide whether to classify students as "home" or "overseas" for tuition fee purposes using the Education (Fees and Awards) Regulations 1997, as amended. To qualify for home fee status under these regulations, students at higher education institutions normally need to have been resident in the UK for three years before the start of their course, and have "settled status" under the Immigration Act 1971.

Implementation Review Unit

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what role school governors will play in *(a)* the new Implementation Review Unit and *(b)* the Monitoring Group; and if he will make a statement. [125427]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 14 July 2003]*: We are proposing to set up termly meetings between the panel of the new Implementation Review Unit (IRU) and governor organisations The IRU is also keen to hear from individual school governors on particular workload burdens they would most like tackled and any constructive time-saving examples from their school that could be used more widely. Governors will be notified of IRU contact details in the September "Governors" newsletter.

Earlier this year I met with representatives of the National Governors' Council and the National Association of Governors and Managers to discuss how best to ensure that school governing bodies are fully involved in the implementation of the National Agreement and the work of the Workforce Agreement Monitoring Group (WAMG).

Following these discussions, my Department has set up a regular forum between governors' representatives and the WAMG. The first took place on 27 June; a further one-day seminar was held on 21 July. One of the outcomes will be the development and distribution of specific materials for school governors to help them contribute to workforce reform.

Learning and Skills Council

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on redundancies likely to be involved in restructuring of the Learning and Skills Council and its local councils. [129703]

Alan Johnson: The Learning and Skills Council is undertaking a reshaping exercise which is designed to build on its existing strengths, to enhance its capacity to work with partners to develop and to implement the strategies necessary to achieve national targets for skills and learning, while streamlining routine administrative arrangements. At the end of its reshaping the LSC will have significantly fewer staff. The LSC intends to manage these reductions through a process of voluntary severance as far as possible.

John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, will write to the hon. Gentleman with more information about the reshaping exercise and place a copy of his reply in the Library.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the budget of the Learning and Skills Council was for each of the last three years; and what the predicted budget is in each of the next three years. [129792]

Alan Johnson: The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) assumed many of its responsibilities under the Learning and Skills Act 2000 from 1 April 2001 and for funding of school sixth forms from 1 April 2002. The amounts of its budgets for each financial year from 2001–02, as notified in the relevant Grant Letters to the LSC are as follows:

	£ million
2001–02	5,536.000
2002–03	7,310.890
2003–04	8,095.374
2004–05	8,618.254
2005–06	9,200.308

The LSC's budget for 2006–07 is dependent on the outcome of the 2004 Spending Review.

Level 2 Qualification

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what local discretion he will allow to *(a)* further education colleges and *(b)* local learning and skills councils in determining entitlement to free study for a Level 2 qualification. [129696]

Alan Johnson: The eligibility criteria for the new entitlement to free learning at Level 2, announced in the Skills Strategy White Paper, will be determined nationally. Our intention is to encourage those not already qualified at full Level 2 to achieve at that level. However, further education colleges will continue to have the discretion to waive fees for learners studying at Level 2 who are not covered by the national entitlement.

Modern Apprenticeships

Rob Marris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the success rates for modern apprenticeships as set out in Statistical First Release ISR/SFR 25 issued on 24 July; what plans he has to improve these rates; and if he will make a statement. [129523]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The success rates for Modern Apprenticeships (MA) published in July were issued for the first time in this form. The rates vary widely between sectors and some will need to improve markedly if we are to achieve our ambition to revitalise and expand apprenticeship programmes. However, the latest figures we have do show that overall MA success rates have increased to 39 per cent. in the year to January 2003. While this improvement is significant and sustained we and the Learning and Skills Council are not complacent. We need to do more.

We have asked the Modern Apprenticeship Task Force, chaired by Sir Roy Gardner, to focus on this issue. They and the LSC are doing so sector by sector.

In addition as part of the 'Success for All' programme the LSC has introduced minimum performance levels from 2003/04 for all providers, including those of MAs. These should be achieved by 2005/06. The LSC will rigorously monitor and review progress with each of its providers against these targets. Where performance is not satisfactory the LSC will take decisive action with the provider concerned up to and including the withdrawal of contracts.

Older Workers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make it his policy *(a)* to monitor the participation levels of various age cohorts of adults and *(b)* to set targets to reduce the drop-off of learning from age 40 onwards. [129040]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Department and partner bodies do already monitor participation levels, and other factors such as attitudes and experiences of learning, through a number of sources including the Labour Force Survey, the Learning and Skills Council's Individualised Learner Record, the National Adult Learning Survey and NIACE surveys. Age of learner is an important factor in all of these sources and the Department regularly undertakes analyses based on age. Many of the publications based on these sources do contain breakdowns by age. Results from the 2002 NIACE survey on adult participation showed that the proportion of 35 to 44-year-olds who were current/recent learners had increased from 43 per cent. in 1996 to 49 per cent. in 2002. Participation among 45 to 54-year-olds increased from 36 per cent. to 44 per cent. over the same period. These increases are greater than for younger age groups.

The Government recognises the importance of encouraging all people, regardless of age, to participate in learning and increase their skills and is committed to safeguard the provision of a wide range of earning for

adults for culture, leisure community and personal fulfilment purposes with a better choice of opportunities to encourage adults back into learning. Through our Success for All reforms we will raise standards, increase participation and improve outcomes for learners and employers. We have introduced targets for learner numbers and learner success rates, including new national floor targets which set out the minimum acceptable levels of performance for colleges and other providers to be met or exceeded by 2006. These are aimed at improving the responsiveness and quality of provision to meet the needs of learners at all ages. The recently published Skills Strategy includes the new guarantee of free tuition for any adult without a good foundation of employability skills to get the training that they need to achieve such a qualification, known as a Level 2 qualification—explicitly noting that a higher than average proportion of older workers do not possess a Level 2 qualification.

The Government has set itself stretching targets to increase the basic skill levels of 1.5 million adults by 2007 and to reduce by 40 per cent. the number of adults without a qualification at NVQ level 2 or its equivalent by 2010. These targets will only be achieved if those over the age of 40 increase their participation and attainment in learning. Government believes that targets focused on ensuring all individuals achieve minimum levels of skill are the most appropriate for meeting the needs of the economy and society.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the implications of extending modern apprenticeships to all age groups. [129041]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Our Skills Strategy, "21st Century Skills—Realising Our Potential", explained that we are committed to removing the age cap on Modern Apprenticeships in response to industry's concern that it constitutes a barrier to meeting their skill needs. As a first step, we have changed the rules so that, from 1 August 2003, young people who start their Modern Apprenticeship at any point up to their 25th birthday can complete it. Beyond that, we will invite the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) to put forward their proposals to design and implement a Modern Apprenticeship programme for adults in their sector as part of the new Sector Skills Agreements. It will be for individual SSCs, the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) and key partners including employers to assess the implications of this change for particular sectors. They will do so taking account of the need to maintain high standards; current budget limitations; and forthcoming European age discrimination legislation.

Pupil Exclusions

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* city technology colleges, *(c)* other secondary schools and *(d)* special schools have been fined for excluding pupils in each year since 1998; if he will list each school; and what the size was of the fine for each individual school affected. [127897]

Mr. Miliband: Schools have never been fined for excluding pupils. Between 1999 and 2003 they received more than £350 million in specific funding for preventive work with pupils at risk of exclusion in addition to the normal delegated funding for those pupils. If a pupil was excluded LEAs were able to recover between £2,000 and £6,000 from schools to help pay for alternative provision. LEAs were not required to give the Department details of such recoveries. Funding for preventive work and provision for permanently excluded pupils is now mainstreamed so LEAs and schools determine resourcing arrangements locally.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent correspondence he has had with the teacher unions on the exclusion of pupils from schools; and if he will place that correspondence in the Library. [127898]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no recent correspondence with the teacher unions on the exclusion of pupils from schools.

Teachers

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the life expectancy of *(a)* male and *(b)* female teachers in post aged (i) 50 to 55 and (ii) 55 to 60; and whether he has compared his estimates with those for other professionals in the same age groups. [129101]

Mr. Miliband: Based on the Government Actuary's recent valuation of the Teachers' Pension Scheme, average life expectancy for teachers in each of the age groups is:

	Years
Males	
Aged 50–55	33
Aged 55–60	28
Females	
Aged 50–55	36
Aged 55–60	31

In carrying out the valuation, the Government Actuary did not make any direct comparisons of life expectancy with other professions.

Training Initiatives

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which publicly funded training initiatives are open to *(a)* EU nationals of other member states resident in the UK and *(b)* asylum seekers. [129778]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: European Union (EU) nationals and their dependants resident in the UK or elsewhere in the European Economic Area for the previous three years are eligible for further education (FE). EU nationals are also eligible for work based learning for young people, which consists of the Entry to Employment and Modern Apprenticeship initiatives, and are eligible for local authority organised adult education.

Asylum seekers and their dependants who are supported by the National Asylum Support Service or similar, are eligible for FE. Unaccompanied asylum seekers aged 16–18 in the care of social services are also eligible for FE. Asylum seekers are not eligible for Modern Apprenticeships but may be accepted on to

Entry to Employment courses. Eligibility for access to local authority organised adult education is generally in line with that for FE but local authorities have discretion to set their own criteria and might make provision available to additional categories of asylum seekers.

TRANSPORT

Air Terrorism (Electronic Countermeasures)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer of 7 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 98W, (1) on commercial aircraft terrorism, if he will make a statement about progress made in seeking specialist advice on fitting electronic countermeasures to UK civil aviation fleets over and above Goodrich Video Surveillance apparatus; [130286]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with UK commercial aircraft operators about fitting electronic counter measures to UK civil aviation fleets. [130287]

Mr. McNulty: The Department is engaged in continuing work with a number of parties on measures, including on-board electronic systems, for countering the threat from shoulder-launched weapons. Those parties include UK aircraft operators. It would not be appropriate on security grounds to disclose the progress of this work.

Aircraft Security

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent assessment he has made of the security risks posed by *(a)* glass bottles and *(b)* minor household items, with particular reference to nail files, aboard aircraft. [128736]

Mr. McNulty: As part of the heightened security measures introduced in September 2001, airports and airlines are required not to allow into an airport's Restricted Zone, or into the cabin of an aircraft, any item which could potentially be used as a weapon. The list of prohibited items, which was provided, is not exhaustive, and includes a requirement to remove from passengers any other article which the airport or airline reasonably consider might be used, or adapted, for causing injury. All of the measures in the National Aviation Security Programme are kept under permanent review.

Biofuels

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he intends to implement the EU guidelines for biofuel use in road transport of 2 per cent. use by the end of 2005 and 5.75 per cent. use by the end of 2010. [130423]

Dr. Howells: The Government intend to consult with key stakeholders on UK implementation of this legislation early next year. This consultation will cover the level of indicative targets for both 2005 and 2010.

Road Transport Fuels

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what percentage by weight of road transport fuel LPG/CNG has provided over the last 12 months; [129922]

(2) what incentives are in place for motorists to use LPG/CNG; and how long these have been in place; [129923]

(3) what percentage by weight of UK road transport fuel is expected to be biofuels by the end of *(a)* 2005 and *(b)* 2010; [129924]

(4) what incentives are in place for motorists to use biodiesel and bioethanol; and how long these have been in place. [129925]

Mr. Jamieson: Figures supplied by HM Customs and Excise indicate that the percentage of all road transport fuel, by volume, of road fuel gases provided between July 2002 and June 2003 was 0.39 per cent.

The Government support the take-up of LPG and natural gas vehicles through both the fuel duty incentives for road fuel gases, which have been in place since 1995, and the grants, which have been available since, towards the purchase of LPG and natural gas vehicles, which are available through the PowerShift programme. In addition, discounts apply to alternatively fuelled cars under the carbon dioxide emissions based company car tax and graduated Vehicle Excise Duty regimes. As announced in Budget 2003, the Government have been consulting stakeholders on how best to ensure that future support for road fuel gases continues to reflect environmental and other policy objectives, with a view to announcing decisions in the 2003 Pre-Budget Report.

We recognise that biofuels also have a role to play in reducing the environmental impact of road transport. In recognition of these benefits, the Government have introduced a reduced rate of duty for biodiesel of 20p/l below that for conventional ULSD. Since introduction of this rate in July 2002, production of biodiesel has increased more than 10 fold to over two million litres a month. A similar incentive 20p/l in the rate for bioethanol is due to be introduced on 1 January 2005.

The Government intend to consult with all key stakeholders on UK implementation of the Biofuels Directive, which requires the UK to set indicative targets for the use of biofuels in road transport for both 2005 and 2010. Publication of the consultation paper is due in the first half of next year.

Highways Authority

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he intends to take to amend or remove Highways Authority Performance Indicators BVPI 100 and BVPI 96. [129749]

Mr. Jamieson: BVPI 96 measures the condition of the carriageway on principal roads. BVPI 100 measures the duration of temporary traffic controls on traffic sensitive roads. A road may be defined as traffic sensitive at certain times of day only. Although temporary traffic controls or road closure may be necessary to carry out road repairs, BVPI 100 encourages authorities to plan these measures to take place outside traffic sensitive times, thereby minimising disruption to traffic.

Low Emission Zones

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consult hon. Members before he authorises the introduction of traffic low emission zones. [130190]

Dr. Howells: My Department is currently undertaking a public consultation exercise on proposals to change the regulations concerning Traffic Regulation Conditions (TRC) that the Traffic Commissioner can apply to registered local bus services in a particular area (outside London). This will cover, among other things, the power to specify minimum emission limits that vehicles affected by a TRC would have to meet.

The consultation document can be found on my Department's website at: http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_localtrans/documents/page/dft_localtra_023519.hcsp. The consultation period ends on 3 October.

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what *(a)* discussions and *(b)* representations he has had on the introduction of low emission zones; who was involved; and if he will make a statement on what was agreed. [130191]

Dr. Howells: We are aware of the consideration of Low Emission Zones (LEZ), as one way of reducing emissions in areas where there are air quality problems. The National Society for Clean Air (NSCA), together with the Association for London Government (ALG) and the Greater London Authority (GLA) are jointly investigating the possibility of introducing a London-wide LEZ. The London Low Emission Zone Feasibility Study Phase II Final report has been published in July this year (available on website www.london-lez.org) and I understand that the findings of the study are being considered for further action. The NSCA consulted on a recommended standard for National Low Emission Zones in May. However I understand that further research will be necessary before an agreed standard may be announced.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the sites of special scientific interest in the ownership of his Department or its agencies. [129345]

Mr. McNulty: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency is the owner of one site designated as being SSSI. This site is at Prawle Point in Devon.

The Highways Agency is the owner/part owner of 43 sites within the operational estate and two sites within the non-operational estate, designated as being SSSIs. The sites are as follows:

Operational estate:

Severn Estuary
Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain
River Kennet
River Lambourn
Aston Rowant
Devil's Dyke
Tebay Road Cuttings
Ashburton Road Cuttings
Buckland-in-the-Moor
Slop Bog and Uddens Heath
Epping Forest
Purfleet Road, Aveley
River Wye
River Test
The New Forest
Hurcott and Podmore Pools
River Lugg
River Wye, Hereford and Worcester
Wilton Bluff, Ross
Ashwell Springs
Northaw Great Wood
Sherrards Park Wood
Therfield Heath
Castlethorpe Tufas
Humber Flats and Marshes: Upper Humber
Folkestone Warren
Ant Broads and Marshes
Potter and Scarning Fens
Southfield Farm Marsh
River Coquet and Coquet Valley Woodlands
Aston Rowant Cutting
Sugworth
River Severn at Montford
Doxey and Tillington Marshes
Orwell Estuary
Thursley, Hankley and Frensham Commons
Titsey Woods
Griff Hill Quarry
River Blythe
Stockton Railway Cutting and Quarry
Ufton Fields
Bingley South Bog
Hook Moor

Non-operational estate:

Plot 1 – Bescott Viaduct, Walsall, West Midlands
Land adjoining M3 and River Itchen, Itchen Abbas, Hampshire

To the best of our knowledge these are the only SSSI on the DfT estate.

Station Facilities

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action the Strategic Rail Authority is taking to ensure that train operating companies improve *(a)* train station facilities and *(b)* access for disabled people. [129582]

Mr. McNulty: Those bidding for new and replacement franchises will be asked to price various options, including improved station facilities, which the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) could consider taking forward at any time during the life of the franchise. On 27 August 2003, the SRA announced a programme of investment of £25 million in Modern Facilities at Stations. This will provide enhanced facilities at 68 stations. The SRA's Code of Practice on Train and Station Services for Disabled Passengers sets out standards on accessibility. Train and station operators have been asked to review their Disabled Peoples Protection Policies to identify and prioritise accessibility improvements.

US Warship Disposal

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the Health and Safety Executive has granted an exemption from the Asbestos (Prohibitions) Regulations to former US naval ships seeking passage to Teesside for demolition. [130017]

Mr. Jamieson: HSE issued an exemption certificate to the Asbestos (Prohibitions) Regulations to Able UK Ltd. on 5 September 2003. This allows the importation of 13 ships from the US Government reserve fleet into Teesside for decommissioning and recycling and disposal of the asbestos subject to conditions.

A copy of the exemption certificate including those conditions will be placed in the House Libraries and on the HSE asbestos website.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Older Workers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans he has to introduce incentives for people to work beyond the age of 60; and if he will make a statement; [129037]

(2) what plans he has to abolish normal retirement ages; if he will make it his policy *(a)* to increase the state pension and *(b)* to devise incentives for those who continue in work; and if he will make a statement. [129042]

Mr. Pond: The Government's Green Paper—"Simplicity, Security and Choice: Working and saving for retirement", (CM5677) issued in December 2002, outlined a number of incentives to help people continue in work up to and over state pension age.

From 2003, we will introduce a package of intensive back to work help for people aged 50 and over including extending the support available through new deal 50 plus. The working tax credit now includes additional elements for eligible people aged 50 or over who move into work for 16 hours a week or more.

From 2005, we will be looking at changes to the tax rules to allow people to continue working for the sponsoring employer while drawing their occupational pension and consulting on best practice to ensure that occupational pension rules do not discourage flexible working.

The Government's Green Paper also recognised that the state pension has a role to play in encouraging flexible retirement. We therefore published proposals to improve the reward for deferring state pension from 2006 by increasing the rate at which weekly increments can be earned, and offering an alternative to increments in the form of a taxable lump sum payment. We will be announcing our plans on this proposal in due course.

In October 2006, we will implement anti-age discrimination legislation covering employment and vocational training. This will include making compulsory retirement ages unlawful except in those cases where employers can show they are objectively justified.

And from 2010, as state pension ages start to equalise, as well as looking at policies to treat men and women aged between 60 and women's new state pension age as active labour market participants, we also propose to raise the earliest age that a pension may be taken from age 50, to age 55, to further promote the benefits of extending working life for both employee and employer.

Alongside the implementation of these policies, we will continue to work to change employers' attitudes through our Age Positive campaign, and through the development of good practice guidance materials with employer organisations and other external partners. This work will help ensure opportunity for all and remove discriminatory practices, which encourage involuntary withdrawal from the labour market and early retirement.

The Government are currently consulting on options for outlawing age discrimination in employment and vocational training under the European Employment Directive. The Age Matters consultation document launched on 2 July includes proposals for tackling employers' mandatory retirement ages—that is, the ages employers set for the compulsory retirement of their employees. Under the directive, compulsory retirement ages will be unlawful unless they can be objectively justified. The Government will decide how to tackle this once it has analysed and considered the responses to the consultation. Age Matters also explains that we shall take advantage of the directive's provisions that allow occupational pension schemes to set ages for admission or entitlement to retirement benefits. Such normal pension ages are necessary for the operation of defined benefit schemes.

Operation Gangmaster

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what representations Operation Gangmaster has *(a)* sought and *(b)* received from (i) local authorities, (ii) primary care trusts, (iii) chambers of commerce and (iv) locally based government agencies. [129779]

Mr. Pond: Operation Gangmaster has neither sought nor received representations from local authorities, primary care trusts or chambers of commerce. However, we have involved the following organisations on a regional basis as partners in Operation Gangmaster:

Department for Work and Pensions
Inland Revenue
H M Customs and Excise
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Department of Trade and Industry
Health and Safety Executive
U.K. Immigration Service
National Asylum Support Service
Uniform and Plain Clothes Police Officers
National Criminal Intelligence Service
Scottish Executive
Social Services

Child Support

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment his Department has made of progress in the implementation of the new

child support system; when the full transfer of child support cases onto the new system will take place; and if he will make a statement. [129974]

Mr. Pond: A report on progress in the implementation of the new child support scheme was placed in the Library on 14 July 2003. We have made it clear that we shall only make a decision on the transfer of old scheme cases once we are sure that the new scheme is working well.

Employment Statistics

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what assessment he has made of the most recent employment statistics; [129500]

(2) what the change in the level of unemployment in the Crosby constituency has been since 1997. [129502]

Mr. Browne: Latest statistics show that employment is at record levels and that the number of people in work continues to grow. Employment has risen by 63,000 in the last quarter, 224,000 over the last year and by more than 1.5 million since 1997.

The improvement in the labour market has been spread right across the country. Since 1997, unemployment rates have fallen fastest in the areas with the highest unemployment. In Crosby, claimant unemployment has nearly halved since 1997, while the number of long-term unemployed claimants has fallen by 70 per cent.

Incapacity Benefit

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many recipients of Incapacity Benefit there are; and how many there were in each of the last 10 years. [130025]

Maria Eagle: The information is in the table.

	Number of recipients of Incapacity Benefit and its predecessors
2 April 1994	1,809,000
12 April 1995	1,894,000
29 February 1996	1,813,000
28 February 1997	1,749,000
28 February 1998	1,671,000
28 February 1999	1,557,000
29 February 2000	1,504,000
28 February 2001	1,515,000
28 February 2002	1,497,000
28 February 2003	1,506,000

Notes:

1. Figures rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. Incapacity Benefit replaced Sickness and Invalidity Benefits from 13 April 1995.
3. Figures for 1994 and 1995 are taken from a 1 per cent. sample of claims to benefit.
4. From February 1996 onwards figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample of the benefit computer system and will exclude a small number of clerically held cases.
5. Figures include a small number of people resident overseas.

Source:

IAD Information Centre, 1 per cent. and 5 per cent. samples.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of pensioners *(a)* entitled to Minimum Income Guarantee and *(b)* who were not claiming it in each of the last five years. [129758]

Mr. Pond: Estimates of the number of recipients and entitled non-recipients of Minimum Income Guarantee can be found in editions of the annual DWP and DSS statistical report "Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take-Up"—copies of which are available in the Library. Estimates for 2000–01, the latest year for which information is available, incorporate results of research which improved the quality of statistics relating to the Minimum Income Guarantee. Estimates for 2000–01 are, therefore, not on a fully consistent basis with past figures.

Notes:

1. Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take-Up published annually by DSS and DWP contains estimates of both the number of MIG (and formerly pensioner Income Support) recipients and the number of pensioners that appeared to be entitled to but not in receipt of the benefit. The vast majority of the count of recipients will be entitled but the estimates will also include a small unquantifiable proportion that are not.
2. Annual changes in MIG rates and improvements in the approach to estimating take-up can affect estimates of MIG entitled non-recipients. Past estimates of take-up are not reworked to reflect these changes and therefore results are not strictly comparable over time. Estimates for 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000 employ the same methodology. Results relating to 2000–01 have benefited from research and the latest estimates are therefore on a different basis to previous years.

New Deal

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent representations he has received from *(a)* employers and *(b)* participants on the New Deal; and if he will make a statement. [124551]

Mr. Browne: We receive representations on behalf of employers through the National Employer Panel which is an employer-led body providing independent advice to Ministers on the design, delivery and performance of the UK Government's labour market policies and programmes. Its remit encompasses all the New Deals and other welfare to work activities delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions, Jobcentre Plus and partner organisations at the national and local levels. The Panel reports on a regular basis to my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State also receives advice from the 10 employer coalitions throughout the country who work with Jobcentre Plus districts to engage local businesses and open job opportunities for people disadvantaged in the labour market.

We also receive many representations from participants in the New Deal. These are dealt with on an individual basis with regard to the circumstances of each case.

Pension Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many calls have been made to the Pension

Credit telephone application line; and of that number how many have resulted in *(a)* successful claims and *(b)* unsuccessful claims. [128740]

Mr. Pond: The Pension Credit application line received a total of approximately 413,000 calls between 7 April 2003, when it became operational, and 31 August. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in his written statement on progress on 14 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 6–7WS, there are over 1.1 million pensioner households already on our systems ready to be paid Pension Credit from October. We intend from November to publish monthly reports on the progress of Pension Credit take-on, which will include information on the number of applications.

Pension Reform

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on his plans for pension reform. [129501]

Mr. Pond: We have recognised the need to reform the pension system of the UK. Our approach has been, in the first instance, to focus additional spending on the poorest pensioners. This means achieving a balance between providing a solid foundation of support for all while targeting support at those who need it most. Pension Credit will, from October guarantee everyone (who applies and qualifies) aged 60 and over an income of at least £102.10 a week for single pensioners, (£155.80 for couples). These amounts will be more if pensioners have caring responsibilities, are severely disabled or have housing costs.

For the first time, Pension Credit will reward people aged 65 with modest savings or income. In the past, those who had managed to save a little were left no better off than those who had not saved at all. People who had capital of £12,000 or more could get no help however low their income.

Pension Credit will change this by giving new money to those 65 and over who have saved. This will be worth up to £14.79 for single pensioners, £19.20 for couples.

Pension Credit is radically different from the Minimum Income Guarantee in that pound for pound deductions will be scrapped. And the credit will reward those over 65 with total weekly incomes up to £139 for single pensioners, £203 for couples. Around half of all pensioner households will be eligible and stand to gain around £400 a year on average.

The basic State Pension will remain the foundation of income in retirement on which to build. Between April 2000 and April 2003 the basic State Pension has increased by almost £10 a week for a single pensioner and £16 a week for a couple. This represents an increase of over 7 per cent. in real terms. We will continue to uprate by either 2.5 per cent. or RPI, whichever is higher for the remainder of this Parliament.

We have recognised the importance of a good second pension by reforming SERPS. From April 2002, 20 million people—2.5 million carers, 2.5 million long-term disabled people and 15 million low to moderate earners—begin to benefit by building up a State Second Pension.

The Government also introduced Winter Fuel Payments (WFP) for people aged 60 and over. The WFP is £200 a year for qualifying households and will continue to be paid at this rate throughout this Parliament.

People aged 80 or over who are entitled to a Winter Fuel Payment will get an extra £100 per household. This is the 80+ annual payment which will be paid as part of the Winter Fuel Payment, to those who are aged 80 or over in the qualifying week (15–21 September this year).

The Government have also introduced free TV licences for the over 75s and there have been increases above the rate of inflation to the Pensioners' Tax Allowances.

In 2003–04, the Government will be spending around £8 billion extra a year on pensioners as a result of policies introduced since 1997. This includes £3.75 billion more on the poorest third of pensioners. This is almost six times more than an earnings link to the basic State Pension since 1998 would have provided.

We have also recognised that there is a need to address reform of private pension provision. Our Green Paper 'Simplicity, security and choice: Working and saving for retirement' set out our proposals to radically simplify the pensions system including reducing eight tax regimes into one, ensure that individuals have access to the right information to make informed pensions savings choices and ensure that older workers can access the employment opportunities they deserve and balance this with flexible retirement choices.

To build on this, after the largest consultation on pensions ever, we published 'Working and Saving for retirement: Action on occupational pensions' in June which introduced a balanced package of measures to assist employers in providing occupational pension schemes while ensuring protection for pension scheme members. We will set up a Pension Protection Fund, the first ever protection scheme for defined benefit pensions, bring in measures to ensure that where a solvent company chooses to wind up its scheme it will fully buy-out members benefits and establish a pensions regulator that will target badly run and high risk schemes in order to put consumers first.

There is a need to engage with employers to re-invigorate the pensions partnership and that is why we have set up the Employer Task Force to identify and promote employer lead solutions. We also have accepted that there is a need to consider the voluntarist system in the longer term and to monitor progress independently. Therefore we have set up the Pensions Commission to monitor and keep under review the system of private pensions and long-term savings.

There is also a need to make individuals aware of their pension provision—both from the State and private saving. That is why we are extending combined state and private pensions forecasts through a concerted and targeted campaign. We will continue to develop a web-based retirement planner and will pilot a scheme for employer-based information. All these measures will seek to enable individuals to make the right pensions choices from a more knowledgeable position.

We have recognised the need for pension reform from both a State and private perspective and will continue to press ahead with our proposals of targeting resources and expanding provision.

Pensioners

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in Eltham have benefited from the minimum income guarantee; and what the overall amount paid out through the guarantee to pensioners in Eltham was in the last 12 months. [129409]

Mr. Pond: The number of pensioners to have benefited from the minimum income guarantee in Eltham during the last 12 months is 2,200. The average annual payment to each pensioner household was £2,400.

Notes:
1. The overall amount is based on the 12 month period ending February, 2003.
2. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling variation.
3. Caseload figures have been rounded to the nearest 100.
4. Parliamentary constituencies have been assigned by matching postcodes against the relevant ONS postcode.
5. £2,400 is rounded to the nearest £50, and figures at a local level are subject to greater margins of error than national figures.

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average gain of pensioners in Eltham has been from the Minimum Income Guarantee. [129410]

Mr. Pond: The average weekly amount of Minimum Income Guarantee received by pension age households in Eltham at February 2003 was £46.30.

Notes:
1. The source of the data is the IAD Information Centre.
2. The figure is based on a 5 per cent. sample and is therefore subject to a degree of sampling variation.
3. The average weekly amount figure has been rounded to the nearest 1p.
4. Parliamentary constituencies have been assigned by matching postcodes against the relevant ONS postcode directory.
5. Pension age is defined as men aged 65 and over and women aged 60 and over.

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the total paid out since May 1997 to increase pensioner incomes has been; and what has been the average gain per pensioner *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in Eltham. [129411]

Mr. Pond: The information requested is not available at constituency level, but the total paid out since May 1997 to increase pensioner incomes for the UK is shown in the table.

£ billion

	Total DWP	
	Expenditure on pensioners	*Discretionary spending on pensioners*
1998–99	56.5	0.2
1999–2000	58.6	1.4
2000–01	60.5	2.8
2001–02	63.6	5.1
2002–03	65.1	6.4
2003–04	66.8	8.0

Following the introduction of the pension credit the average pensioner household will be £1,250 per year, or £24 per week, better off than in 1997 due to the Government's personal tax and benefit changes.

Notes:
(a) The information shown is based upon the Family Resources Survey.
(b) Discretionary spending refers to additional spending as a result of changes to pension policy since 1997. This is a subset of total spending.
(c) Figures are in £ billion rounded to the nearest £0.1 billion, in 2003–04 price terms.
(d) Figures include expenditure on all benefits.

Post Office Card Accounts

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 15 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 160W, what the current indication of the final number of Post Office card accounts is, rounded to the nearest 100,000; on what data his statement that the final number would be significantly above 3 million was based; if he will place the data in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [127584]

Mr. Pond: It is impossible to predict accurately how many customers will eventually choose to open a Post Office card account as this will be based on customer choice. But based on current take-up, with around a million having said they want to open a Post Office card account, the card account is proving very popular and we now expect the total number of card accounts to exceed our operating assumption of 3 million.

Winter Fuel Payment

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Cardiff and *(c)* Cardiff, West will be eligible for Winter Fuel Payments in 2003–04. [129522]

Mr. Pond: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is shown in the table.

The number of people who received a 2002–03 Winter Fuel Payment was:

	All	*Men*	*Women*
Wales	629,025	279,860	349,170
Cardiff West Constituency	14,135	6,135	8,000
Cardiff Local Authority	54,115	23,555	30,560

Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest five.
2. Figures taken from the Matching Intelligence Data Analysis Service Winter Fuels
Payment 2002–03 exercise.
Source:
IAD Information Centre, 100 per cent. sample.

We would expect the figures for 2003–04 to be similar.

DEFENCE

Aircraft Carriers

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress on the CVF

programme; and how work will be shared between Thales and BAe Systems. [127121]

Mr. Ingram: The CVF Programme is still in the Assessment Phase and we expect to award the Demonstration and Manufacture (D&M) contract in spring 2004, as planned. Discussions on how work will be shared between the companies are progressing well as part of the negotiations on the alliance arrangements. Final arrangements will be confirmed with the award of the D&M contract next year.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions with the defence manufacturers have taken place on reducing the *(a)* size of the aircraft carriers and *(b)* number of aircraft carried; and if he will make a statement on how such changes affect power projection. [128075]

Mr. Ingram: Regular discussions occur between the future carrier (CVF) project team, BAeSystems and Thales United Kingdom as part of the routine business of the Assessment Phase. This phase is intended to reduce risk in emerging design solutions and balance the key parameters of performance, time and cost in order to best meet our developing capability requirements, both in terms of the ships themselves and in the aircraft they will operate. Power projection is a fundamental part of this capability requirement.

The CVF programme is currently midway through this assessment phase. The key specifications in capability terms will be determined prior to the award of the Demonstration and Manufacture contract, currently planned for spring 2004.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy that the full sized carriers will be procured for the Royal Navy as originally intended; and what plans he has to ensure that the in-service date is kept. [128076]

Mr. Ingram: In the Strategic Defence Review published in 1998, it was envisaged that the two new Future Aircraft Carriers would be in the order of 30,000 to 40,000 tonnes and be capable of carrying up to 50 fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters. The intention, as with any other new equipment project, has always been to refine the design during the Assessment Phase in order to best meet our developing capability requirements. The Carrier programme is currently in this assessment phase. The key specifications in capability terms will be determined prior to the award of the Demonstration and Manufacture (D&M) contract, currently planned for spring 2004.

Our target in-service dates for the two carriers remain 2012 and 2015 respectively.

Army Personnel (Self-Harm)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 9 September 2003, ref. 127070, if he will make it his policy to collate data centrally concerning incidents of self harm in army barracks; and if he will make a statement. [130223]

Mr. Caplin: I take the issue of self-harm in the armed forces extremely seriously. The collation of data in this area is complex, due to the number of agencies involved and the sensitivity of the information. However, I have commissioned work to trial the collection and analysis of the existing information for the Army. This work is due to report back later this year.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in the arrangements for the EU to assume the NATO peacekeeping mandate in Bosnia; and whether *(a)* NATO and *(b)* the United States has accepted the EU decision of December 2002. [130030]

Mr. Hoon: At its meeting in December 2002 the European Council indicated the European Union's willingness to lead a military operation in Bosnia following the NATO SFOR mission. No decisions have been taken, however, on the end date of the SFOR operation or on the arrangements for any follow-on mission. Discussions continue and no decision will be taken without full consultation between all interested parties.

Charmaine Maeer

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what investigations his Department carried out into the allegations made by Charmaine Maeer; on what basis she was discharged from the Army; what pension or benefit she received as a result of her discharge; and if he will make a statement. [128809]

Mr. Caplin: No investigation has been carried out as no complaint has been received. I am unable to make public any personal details concerning Charmaine Maeer's discharge and pension without her explicit written consent.

Chatham Dockyard (Radiation Records)

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many former Chatham Dockyard workers who received estimated radiation dose records were advised that their estimated records were *(a)* above and *(b)* below the recommended level of exposure. [130314]

Mr. Caplin: There was no statutory or MOD requirement to record numbers of former Chatham Dockyard workers for whom estimated doses were entered in their radiation dose records and therefore it is not possible to supply the numbers requested. However, those individuals who were involved in incidents at the dockyard, such as exceeding a statutory dose limit, would have been involved in the investigation and therefore would have been aware of the outcome.

Deepcut and Catterick Barracks

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will order a public inquiry into the way that unnatural deaths at *(a)* Deepcut and *(b)* Catterick barracks have been investigated; [128810]

(2) if he will order an inquiry into the way that unnatural deaths at Deepcut Barracks have been investigated. [128811]

Mr. Ingram: The civilian police have primacy in investigating such deaths within the armed forces. Given that investigations are yet to conclude, calls for a public or other inquiry into the way that unnatural deaths have been investigated are premature.

Defence Fire Service

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Defence Fire Service. [129073]

Mr. Ingram: The Defence Fire Service continues to provide excellent support to the Ministry of Defence.

Over the last year in addition to its normal duties, the Service successfully provided vital assistance during the fire fighters dispute, including training those members of the armed forces deployed on emergency fire fighting duties. Members of the Defence Fire Service were also deployed to the Gulf in February this year and continue to be engaged in support of operations in Iraq.

Destroyers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to change the number of type 42 destroyers in service; and if he will make a statement. [127276]

Mr. Ingram: There are at present no plans to change the number of Royal Navy type 42 destroyers in service.

Export Controls

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department made of the impact of the proposed secondary orders for the Export Control Act 2002 on the security of UK military personnel deployed abroad. [130189]

Mr. Ingram: Proposals are being considered on measures to ensure that the efficiency of our armed forces is maintained when the Act is implemented.

Intangible Assets

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what specific assets are contained in the line item Intangible Assets on the MOD balance sheet for 31 March 2002. [129909]

Mr. Ingram: The specific assets included in Intangible Assets at 31 March 2002 can be classified into the following main headings:

(i) Development expenditure incurred in respect of fighting equipment and other tangible fixed assets which are in use

(ii) Development expenditure incurred in respect of fighting equipment and other tangible fixed assets which are in the course of construction

(iii) Other intangible non-financial assets comprising mainly intellectual property rights.

The development costs, which mainly represent costs incurred prior to the commencement of production of the asset, are capitalised in the accounts in accordance with the HM Treasury Resource Accounting Manual. The Department's accounting policy on capitalisation and amortisation of the development expenditure is stated in the Departmental Resource Accounts 2001–02.

The detailed analysis of tangible and intangible fixed assets is produced every three years in the form of the National Asset Register, the current publication being in respect of 1999–2000. This publication does not require the break down of the development expenditure in respect of assets in use by individual assets, but the range and type of assets in use by the Department are identified. At 31 March 2002, development expenditure for fixed assets in use amounted to £11.4 billion. Similarly, development expenditure relating to assets in course of construction is not analysed by asset type, but the main projects under construction are identified in the 1999–2000 National Asset Register under Assets In Course of Construction. At 31 March 2002, this development expenditure totalled £8 billion. Other intangible assets amounted to some £80 million as at 31 March 2002.

Iraq

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of British unexploded munitions in Iraq have been cleared; and when this work will be completed. [125698]

Mr. Ingram: United Kingdom and other coalition armed forces and non-Governmental organisation teams have been engaged in explosive ordnance disposal tasks since before the end of the conflict in Iraq. It is not yet possible to say either what percentage of British unexploded munitions have been cleared or when all the work will be completed. To date, UK and other coalition explosive ordnance disposal teams in the UK area of operation have completed over 1,500 tasks and destroyed over 500,000 individual munitions. Those munitions include not only those dropped or fired by coalition forces, but also many from the Iraq-Iran war as well as mines laid, ordnance fired or dropped, and stores of ammunition and other ordnance left by Iraqi military and paramilitary forces.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how much ordnance was released by British aircraft over Iraq in *(a)* February and *(b)* 1 to 20 March; on how many occasions during these periods coalition aircraft were responding in self-defence; and if he will make a statement; [129147]

(2) how much ordnance has been released in each month by coalition aircraft over Iraq since 21 March; and if he will make a statement. [129148]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 September 2003]:* During February, five weapons were released by United Kingdom aircraft over Iraq. A further four weapons were released in the period 1–19 March. All of these weapons were released in self-defence. Warfighting commenced on 20 March. In the period 20–31 March, United Kingdom aircraft released 518 weapons over Iraq. A further 396 weapons were released from 1–30 April. UK aircraft dropped no ordnance after 30 April. Weapons released by other coalition partners' aircraft during the warfighting is a matter for them.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the duties of Dr. David Kelly were. [130515]

Mr. Hoon: Dr. Kelly was a special adviser to the Director of Counter Proliferation and Arms Control within the Ministry of Defence. Dr. Kelly's duties have been described in both written and oral evidence to the Hutton Inquiry which has been published on its website at www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 7 May, *Official Report*, column 724W, what the current usage of British medical assets in Iraq is. [119216]

Mr. Caplin: As at 1 September, 23 beds were occupied at MND (SE) field hospital by United Kingdom personnel and two beds were occupied at the UK medical facility in Al Amarah.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of the Navy, Army and Air Force Institution in Iraq *(a)* during the recent conflict and *(b)* post-conflict. [120741]

Mr. Ingram: The NAAFI has played an important role both during, and after, the recent conflict in Iraq. The organisation entered Iraq soon after the fighting started, offering a range of products from mobile containers. Now, NAAFI stores are located in more permanent facilities, which will continue to be upgraded over time.

Joint Strike Fighter

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many joint strike fighter aircraft have been ordered. [128535]

Mr. Ingram: None. Our current planning assumption is for 150 of the Short Take Off and Vertical Landing variant of the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) aircraft to meet our requirement for a Future Joint Combat Aircraft. In order to align with the US acquisition cycle, we do not expect to place orders for JSF aircraft before 2006.

Land Rovers

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many armoured Land Rovers have been sold off as surplus since May 2003. [128807]

Mr. Ingram: No surplus armoured Land Rovers have been sold by the Ministry of Defence since May 2003.

Manning Control Review

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers subject to Manning Control review have been *(a)* discharged and *(b)* re-engaged in the last 12 months. [130003]

Mr. Caplin: No individuals have been discharged under Queens Regulations for the Army paragraph 9.413, 'Not required for a full Army career', in the last 12 months.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether soldiers in Army units are being warned that they could be subject to Manning Control review after *(a)* nine and *(b)* 12 years. [130004]

Mr. Caplin: Each potential soldier, and the parent or guardian of a recruit under the age of 18, is given a copy of the Notice Paper, a statutory document which gives details of the soldier's Terms of Service. Within this paper it states that a soldier's future employability will be reviewed after six, nine and 12 years' Colour service and he or she may be discharged if their service is no longer required.

Additionally, soldiers being considered for discharge by Manning Control points are sent a letter up to 18 months beforehand. They are asked to sign a certificate to agree that they have been warned about this.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to allow soldiers who were subject to Manning Control and then changed to S/Type contract, to sign back onto the open engagement. [130005]

Mr. Caplin: There are no plans to allow soldiers who were subject to Manning Control Point discharge, and subsequently employed on a Short Service Type S Engagement, to be engaged on the Open Engagement.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers who were subject to Manning Control and were discharged or signed on to the S/Type contract and subsequently discharged since 1994 have been called up for service in UK operational deployments in the last seven years. [130006]

Mr. Caplin: Twelve individuals who had been subject to Manning Control since 1994 and then were discharged under Queen's Regulations for the Army 1975 Paragraph 9.413—'Not required for a full Army Career' or were signed on to an 'S'-Type engagement and subsequently discharged, have been called out for, and accepted into, military service in the last seven years.

MARS Project

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if all vessels for the MARS Project will be classed as warships; and if he will make a statement. [127761]

Mr. Ingram: The Military Afloat Reach and Sustainability (MARS) project is in its initial stages. Decisions have yet to be taken on the scope of the capability sought and on how best to deliver that requirement.

Offshore Patrol Vessels

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for *(a)* modernising the Royal Navy fishing protection fleet and *(b)* ordering further Tyne class offshore patrol vessels; for what reasons plans to transfer Anglesey, Lindisfarne and Guernsey have been delayed; and if he will make a statement. [127255]

Mr. Ingram: A programme of modernisation of the Royal Navy fishery protection fleet is currently under way. The capability provided by the five Island Class

vessels is being replaced with three modern and more capable River Class Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPVs). The first two, HMS Tyne and HMS Severn, have now entered service. The third, HMS Mersey, is currently scheduled to enter service early next year. Unsolicited proposals have been received from two companies; however, the Ministry of Defence currently has no plans to order additional OPVs.

The five surplus Island Class vessels have been sold to Bangladesh. Angelsey's transfer has been delayed by about two weeks due to problems with her gearbox. There has been no delay to the planned transfer of Lindisfarne and Guernsey.

Service Personnel (NHS Treatment)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on service personnel getting priority NHS treatment; what budget is available for private treatment for service personnel; and whether all service personnel are eligible for prompt medical treatment. [123571]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 4 July 2003]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) on 1 September 2003, *Official Report*, columns 897–98W.

Territorial Army

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes there have been in the strength of the Territorial Army in the last six months. [129072]

Mr. Caplin: Available information is shown in the table.

2003	*Strength*
1 March	39,210
1 April	38,140
1 May	38,370
1 June	38,040
1 July	37,650
1 August	37,360

Note:
Data have been rounded to the nearest 10.

Type 23 Frigate

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis), of 10 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 516W, on Type 23 frigates, if he will name the second six Type 23 frigates to be fitted with Sonar 2087; what plans there are for the remaining four frigates; and if he will make a statement. [128557]

Mr. Ingram: It is not currently planned to select for another year or so the second six Type 23 Frigates likely to be fitted with Sonar 2087. The remaining four Frigates will continue to contribute to Royal Naval operations until the end of their scheduled service life, around the middle of the next decade, from which point they will be progressively withdrawn.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Ambulance Response Times

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the average ambulance response time was in each year since 1997 in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* North Down; and if he will make a statement. [121926]

Angela Smith: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service does not report average ambulance response times on a Northern Ireland or parliamentary constituency basis. Ambulance performance is assessed against national response time standards. In Northern Ireland these are applied as follows:

ambulance at the scene of 50 per cent. of 999 calls in 8 minutes

ambulance at the scene of 95 per cent. of 999 calls in 18 minutes (eastern area); or 21 minutes (northern, southern and western areas).

The results for each area are as follows:

Percentage of calls at scene within 8 minutes

	Northern	*Southern*	*Eastern*	*Western*
1998–99	48	47	55	62
1999–2000	46	45	59	56
2000–01	47	42	63	56
2001–02	47	41	57	53
2002–03	47	41	57	53

Percentage of calls at scene within 18–21 minutes

	Northern	*Southern*	*Eastern*	*Western*
1998–99	95	94	96	95
1999–2000	95	93	97	94
2000–01	94	92	97	94
2001–02	93	92	96	94
2002–03	93	92	96	94

Bangor Community Hospital

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what funds have been made available to Bangor Community hospital *(a)* in 2001, *(b)* in 2002 and *(c)* since January. [120887]

Angela Smith: The information sought is not centrally available. The Bangor Community hospital, as part of the Ulster Community hospitals trust, derives the bulk of its income from the Eastern Health and Social Services Board. The trust accounts do not, however, distinguish between the income received by the Bangor Community hospital and that received by the rest of the trust.

Belfast City Airport

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with residents' groups regarding the possible introduction of late-night flights at Belfast City airport. [129837]

Angela Smith: I have had no discussions with residents' groups regarding the possible introduction of late night flights at Belfast City airport. The Department of the Environment's Planning Service has not received any request from Belfast City airport to

alter the terms of the existing planning agreement governing flight times to and from the airport, nor has Belfast City airport indicated that they intend to make such a request.

Brain Banks

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many brain banks *(a)* exist and *(b)* have existed in Northern Ireland; and where. [121606]

Angela Smith: One brain bank currently exists in Northern Ireland. This is held within the Neuropathology Department of the Royal Group of Hospitals. No other brain banks have previously existed in Northern Ireland Trusts.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what relationship with mainland *(a)* hospitals and *(b)* research facilities brain banks in Northern Ireland have had. [121611]

Angela Smith: A brain tissue bank exists in the Neuropathology Department of the Royal group of hospitals. The Royal have been involved in joint research or diagnostic projects, involving the transfer of tissue samples, with the following facilities:-

National MS Brain Bank, London;

Schizophrenia Research, Oxford Medical School, Oxford University;

National Unit for Research into CJD, Edinburgh;

National Parkinson's Disease Society, London;

Netherlands Brain Bank, Holland and

MS Research Project, Dublin.

All organs and tissue samples involved have been consented for use in research.

No other brain banks exist in Northern Ireland Trusts.

Broadband

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to provide broadband internet access in areas of Northern Ireland where there is no broadband provision; and if he will make a statement. [129847]

Mr. Pearson: The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) has developed a range of complementary initiatives designed to progressively develop telecommunications infrastructure in Northern Ireland, stimulate demand for broadband, and develop broadband applications to both support its innovation driven economy and to ensure everyone has the opportunity to use computers to enhance their daily life.

The Government's aim in Northern Ireland is to have 100 per cent. coverage of broadband services. To progress this aim, DETI published in the European Journal on 7 May 2003, a Prior Information Notice indicating its intention to issue a tender for the provision of broadband services. The tender was issued on 22 July 2003 and a total of 27 organisations and consortia have responded to the call to assist us to advance the Government's telecommunications agenda. I expect to announce the winner of the tender before the end of 2003.

Care Homes

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the progress being made by the inter-departmental working group established to examine the issue of free personal care for people in residential homes. [122355]

Angela Smith: The Northern Ireland Executive commissioned work on free personal care and a report was forwarded to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister on 8 August 2002. Following discussion at the Executive on 12 August, Ministers asked for further work to be undertaken. The inter-departmental group has reviewed a number of costed options that will be adjusted to current levels of provision at the time a further report is made to a new devolved Administration.

It is not possible at this stage to give any indication about the timing or subsequent handling of the report, since this is a matter which should be determined by the Northern Ireland Executive.

Child Maintenance

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of those paying child maintenance in Northern Ireland have yet to be incorporated into the new system for calculating child maintenance introduced in April 2002; what steps he is taking to reduce this figure; and if he will make a statement. [130402]

Mr. Spellar: The Government sought to reform the child support system to provide prompt, accurate maintenance calculations and quick, reliable maintenance payments. The introduction of the new scheme was delayed from April 2002, to allow further testing of the new IT system, and was introduced on 3 March 2003.

It was always intended that the new scheme would be introduced initially for new cases only. Existing child support cases would transfer at a later date, when Ministers were satisfied that the new scheme, supported by the new IT, was working well. The exception to this is where an existing case is linked to a new application. In such circumstances the existing case is reassessed under the new scheme.

A decision on the date when the remainder of existing child support cases will transfer to the new scheme has not yet been made.

Civil Service

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being taken to implement the Senior Civil Service Review. [120108]

Mr. Pearson: Following Lord Ouseley's report on the Review of Appointment and Promotion Procedures in the Senior Civil Service in Northern Ireland, the devolved Administration issued a consultation paper. This sought views on two key recommendations—the recommendations on recruitment in the open market and on work-life balance—and on an action plan covering the remainder of the 25 recommendations made, excepting two which were outside the responsibility of the devolved government. The recommendations have naturally required particularly

careful consideration in the light of suspension, but I anticipate that we shall be in a position to make an announcement shortly.

Community Police Officers

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many community police officers are in full-time service with the Police Service of Northern Ireland; and how many served in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002. [130420]

Jane Kennedy: The Police Service of Northern Ireland currently record officers engaged in community policing duties under the title neighbourhood police. The table sets out the actual number of regular and full-time reserve neighbourhood police in service for the period 2000 to 2002.

	Regular	*Full-time reserve*
4 September 2000	367	103
3 September 2001	288	97
4 September 2002	415	147
4 September 2003	482	161

Congestion Charges

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce congestion charges for cities and towns in Northern Ireland. [114547]

Angela Smith: The Chief Executive of the Roads Service has written to the hon. Gentleman. A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library.

Crime

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures have been taken since 1997 to tackle *(a)* organised crime, *(b)* smuggling and *(c)* drug crime. [121135]

Jane Kennedy: The Organised Crime Task Force which I chair was established in September 2000 to set the strategic direction for a multi-agency approach to tackling smuggling, drug crime and indeed organised crime in all its forms.

While the law enforcement agencies have always worked well together at an operational level, and both PSNI and Customs had undertaken tremendous work to tackle all areas of organised criminality prior to September 2000, the Task Force has co-ordinated and focused their efforts to increased effect.

Crime (International Co-operation) Bill

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland about the Crime (International Co-operation) Bill. [116369]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have had no specific discussions with the Chief Constable on the Crime (International Co-operation) Bill. However, the PSNI have been involved in the consultation process throughout the various stages of the Bill.

Cross-border Health Care

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many patients from the Republic of Ireland have been treated in hospitals in Northern Ireland in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [129817]

Angela Smith: The total number admissions classified as an in-patient, day case or regular day/night admission at hospitals in Northern Ireland where the patient was recorded as a resident in the Republic of Ireland is given in the table. Patients may have been admitted on more than one occasion.

The number of deaths and discharges[1] in NI hospitals recorded as residents of the Republic of Ireland for the years 1998–99 to 2002–03[2]

	In-patient	*Day cases*	*Regular day admission*	*Regular night admission*	*Total*
1998–99	946	340	0	0	1,286
1999–2000	1,000	377	559	0	1,936
2000–01	1,070	604	995	0	2,669
2001–02	1,037	554	850	1	2,442
2002–03[2]	1,170	504	650	0	2,324

[1] Deaths and discharges are used as an approximation for admissions.
[2] Provisional.
Source:
Hospital Inpatients System

Figures for the number of patients treated as out-patients or at accident and emergency departments are not available.

Residents of countries within the European Union are entitled to treatment if they are taken ill while visiting another European Union state. Patients may also be transferred to another country under formal contractual arrangements between individual hospitals or health boards if the treatment required is not available locally. Consequently residents from the Republic of Ireland are sometimes treated in Northern Ireland and vice versa.

Departmental Under-spending

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures have been introduced in each Northern Ireland department to reduce budget under spend. [128295]

Mr. Pearson: Northern Ireland departments have introduced a number of measures to reduce the level of budget under spend. These include enhanced information and monitoring systems, improved arrangements to monitor the progress of expenditure on capital investment projects, providing additional training for budget managers and reviewing, on an on-going basis, profiled expenditure against actual expenditure.

At a more strategic level, the revised spending plans for 2003–04 to 2005–06, which I announced on 11 December 2002, included arrangements to set spending plans at a level which exceeded the total spending power available by building in under spend assumptions. Full details are set out in Section 2 of the Budget Document ("Building on Progress: Budget 2003–06").

Environmental Protection

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when sheep grazing will be permitted in the Inner Mourne mountains. [111537]

Angela Smith: The Chief Executive of the Water Service has written to the hon. Lady. A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library.

EU Regulations

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many regulations originating from the EU have been implemented by his Department over each of the last five years. [120823]

Mr. Pearson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe on 30 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 64W.

Euro Roadshow

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the events he plans to attend as part of the Government's euro roadshow. [121399]

Mr. Pearson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury on 20 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 459W.

First-time Buyers

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he has taken to assist first-time buyers in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [121729]

Mr. Spellar: A number of steps have been taken to assist first time buyers in Northern Ireland. The housing executive's house sales scheme has enabled over 100,000 tenants to become home owners and sales of housing executive homes currently account for over one third of all first time buyer transactions in Northern Ireland. The Department for Social Development also provides funding for the Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Housing Association which, through its equity sharing scheme, gives those on low incomes an opportunity to gain a foothold on the home ownership ladder and has, since its inception in 1978, helped over 17,500 participants to become home owners on an equity sharing basis, with over 13,000 of these eventually moving to full home ownership.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce a purchaser's pack for potential first-time house buyers and sellers in Northern Ireland. [121731]

Mr. Spellar: I have no plans at present to introduce a purchaser's pack in Northern Ireland.

The proposal to impose a condition on house vendors to produce a home information pack for prospective purchasers is aimed at addressing specific problems in England and Wales by speeding up the home buying and selling process and making it more transparent and certain. Such problems are not prevalent in Northern Ireland, where many measures aimed at speeding up the process have already been implemented and further proposals continue to be developed. I will, however, continue to monitor developments as regards the home information pack with a view to determining whether there may be merit, at some time in the future, in introducing similar measures in Northern Ireland.

Growth Hormone Research

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether Northern Ireland has a facility to deal with growth hormone research. [121608]

Angela Smith: Growth Hormone Research is carried out at the Growth Centre at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children and at the Regional Endocrinology and Diabetes Centre at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

Hare Coursing

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what estimate he has made of the number of hares *(a)* coursed and *(b)* killed by coursing in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years. [129535]

Angela Smith: No estimate has been made of the number of hares *(a)* coursed and *(b)* killed by coursing, in either organised events or informal coursing.

Health Staff

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to increase the number of operating department practitioners in Northern Ireland. [121315]

Angela Smith: The recruitment of staff, including operating department practitioners, is a matter for individual Health and Social Services Trusts taking into account factors such as service needs and available resources. However, the Department has a role in ensuring that sufficient suitably qualified and trained staff are available to meet the needs of the health and personal social services. The supply of support staff, such as operating department practitioners, will be addressed through the Department's work force planning mechanisms.

Health Trusts

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much each health trust has spent on security measures in the last three years. [130254]

Angela Smith: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Hospital Procedures

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to his answer of 9 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 700W, on hospital procedures, if he will estimate the cost to the national health service of the in-patient admissions of residents of the Republic of Ireland. [121011]

Angela Smith: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Housing

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many houses were sold through the Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Scheme in each of the last five years. [121728]

Mr. Spellar: The information is as follows:

Financial year	*Number of new Co-ownership participants*	*Number of participants moving to full home ownership*
1998–99	578	539
1999–2000	587	666
2000–01	510	585
2001–02	645	567
2002–03	801	621

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the budgetary allocation to the Northern Ireland Co-ownership Scheme was in each of the last five years; what plans he has to improve the scheme's budgetary position; and if he will make a statement. [121732]

Mr. Spellar: The funding available to the Northern Ireland Co-ownership Scheme in each of the last five years is as follows:

£ million

Financial year	*Housing Association Grants*	*Recycled receipts*	*Total*
1998–99	3.60	7.40	11.00
1999–2000	3.60	8.60	12.20
2000–01	6.24	6.43	12.67
2001–02	9.90	9.51	19.41
2002–03	12.94	12.98	25.92

The scheme operates on the basis of grant aid from the Department for Social Development, in the form of Housing Association Grant, and recycled receipts from surpluses made on the sale of equity tranches to participants.

Because of other demands on the housing budget it is becoming difficult to sustain funding from the Department for the scheme at the levels which have been seen in recent years. I will however continue to do everything possible to secure an adequate level of funding to allow the scheme to assist as many participants as possible.

Human Organs

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland with whom responsibility lies for giving permission for *(a)* the removal of organs from deceased individuals and *(b)* the disposal of such organs. [123259]

Angela Smith: Before a hospital post mortem examination, which is carried out at the request of the doctor or family, the next of kin is asked to make a choice: whether to limit the post mortem or organs taken for further examination; whether to donate some or all of the organs and tissue samples for medical education and ethically approved research; whether to allow the hospital to respectfully and lawfully dispose of them; or, whether to have them returned for burial or cremation after investigations are complete.

A coroner's post mortem examination, which is required by law, does not require the consent of the next of kin, although the family will be informed about it. When the post mortem examination has been ordered by a coroner, the next of kin will be told what organs have been retained. Once the post mortem report has been completed the next of kin will be contacted again by the coroner and asked how they wish these to be disposed of.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many recommendations of the Human Organs Inquiry have been implemented by hospitals in Northern Ireland. [123261]

Angela Smith: Work is ongoing to implement all 20 of the recommendations contained in the Report of the Human Organs Inquiry. The primary responsibility for implementing many of the recommendations does not rest with hospitals but with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Trusts have been co-operating fully in implementing those aspects of the recommendations that fall directly to them.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the procedure is for the return of organs to the families of the deceased. [123264]

Angela Smith: Relatives wishing to make enquiries about reclaiming organs that have been kept following either hospital or coroners' post mortem examinations before 2001, should contact the DHSSPS Human Organs Enquiry Line at telephone number 0808 800 8810. Coroners' cases are dealt with on an individual basis and the decision whether or not organs will be released is a matter for the coroner. The trained enquiry line staff can provide information, discuss relatives' concerns and advise about the support that is available. In line with the recommendations contained in the Human Organs Inquiry Report, this telephone enquiry line and the opportunity to reclaim organs and tissue samples currently in storage will no longer be available after November 2004.

Further information about the enquiry line is available on the DHSSPS web site, which can be found at http://www. dhsspsni.gov.uk/hss/HOI/index.html. A DHSSPS public information leaflet entitled "Post Mortem Examinations and theHuman Organs Inquiry" is being distributed to every home in Northern Ireland over the summer. This leaflet can also be viewed on the above web page and explains how relatives can seek the return of organs and tissue samples.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the publication of the Isaacs Report and its implications for Northern Ireland. [121605]

Angela Smith: The Isaacs Report was commissioned from HM Inspector of Anatomy by the Secretary of State for Health and applies to England only. The implications for Northern Ireland of the recommendations of the Isaacs Report; will be considered by the steering group currently working on implementing the recommendations contained in the Report of the Human Organs Inquiry.

In Northern Ireland, the Chief Medical Officer has issued an Interim Statement on 9 May 2003 on the use of human organs and tissue pending the introduction of new legislation. Since November 2002 a telephone inquiry line operated by the Parents Advice Centre on behalf of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has provided a central point of information for public inquiries about post mortem examinations and has helped with requests for the retention of organs and tissue kept after post mortem examinations. It has also dealt with a small number of enquiries resulting from the Isaacs Report.

The Chief Medical Officer has sought assurances from Trust Chief Executives and University Vice Chancellors that no additional or undeclared material has been retained following coroners' post mortems.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will initiate an investigation by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Anatomy into missing organs in Northern Ireland. [121609]

Angela Smith: In May 2001 the Chief Medical Officer reported on the result of her investigation into retained organs in Northern Ireland hospitals. This revealed the continued retention of organs from 1,167 cases. Queen's University conducted a further audit in 2002, which revealed additional material held by the University, which was then declared. There is no evidence to suggest that there is a need for further investigation.

Organs kept from coroners' post mortem examinations can only be disposed of once the investigations are complete or when the material is no longer required for evidential purposes.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland under what circumstances the organs of deceased individuals on the UK organ donor register are prevented from being given to other patients. [120982]

Angela Smith: Organ donation may not be carried out if there are medical contra-indications, if the deceased does not die on a life support machine, or if the deceased is not on the organ donor register and relatives are unsure of the individual's wishes.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the locations in Northern Ireland, apart from Queen's University, Belfast, where banks of retained brains and hearts are stored. [128991]

Angela Smith: There are no heart banks in Northern Ireland.

All retained organs were declared in the Chief Medical Officer's report on Organ Retention, May 2001.

In relation to brain banks, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 25 June 2003. (121606).

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the medical practice of removing and retaining additional organs from individuals who have agreed to donate particular organs on their death. [128992]

Angela Smith: During the organ donation procedure no additional organs or tissues have been removed other than those to which the families have stated their lack of objection on the UK Transplant form entitled "Statement of Lack of Objection to Organ/Tissue Donation".

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide help and support to relatives of deceased people whose organs have been retained improperly. [128994]

Angela Smith: The Department funds the Relatives Reference Group, chaired by Mrs. Pip Jaffa, OBE. The Relatives Reference Group provides help and support to relatives and also acts as a contact point between relatives and the DHSSPS, Queen's University, the Northern Ireland Office and the NI court service.

The DHSSPS Human Organs Inquiry Line, set up by the Department on 20 November 2002, provides a central point of contact for inquiries about post mortem examinations and organs and tissue that may have been kept as a result. It can provide information to relatives, discuss their concerns in confidence and advise them of the support that is available.

The Parents Advice Centre, of which Mrs. Jaffa is the chief executive, is currently running a support group for people affected by organ retention issues. The Parents Advice Centre can also provide a counselling service for relatives through its project workers. Counselling is also available through the Health and Personal Social Services.

The DHSSPS is currently engaged in a multimedia public information campaign as recommended by the Human Organs Inquiry report. A public information leaflet entitled "Post Mortem Examinations and The Human Organs Inquiry," which includes information on organ retention and organ reclamation, is being delivered to every home in Northern Ireland. The leaflet contains details of organisations that can provide help and support to relatives.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being taken to identify the deceased and their relatives in the cases of unidentified brains in storage at Queen's University, Belfast. [128995]

Angela Smith: No brains that are being held in storage by Queen's University can be identified as belonging to an individual or family. The brains that are being held are for purposes of medical education and are either those obtained from bodies donated under the Anatomy Order or those that have been anonymised and cannot now be traced back to any individual or family.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the export of brains from Northern Ireland during the 1990s followed Government guidelines on the risks attributed to CJD. [128996]

Angela Smith: During the 1990's the guidelines from the National CJD Unit in Edinburgh were followed when brain tissue was being exported. These national guidelines continue to be followed when brain tissue is being exported.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland where Queen's University will source the brains they need each year for medical and scientific research. [128997]

Angela Smith: Such material is obtained from individuals who donate bodies or organs for medical research under the Anatomy Order, or from post mortems where consent has been properly obtained. In addition, consented material may be acquired from officially sanctioned brain banks in the UK or elsewhere.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what *(a)* medical and *(b)* scientific reasons there are for removing and retaining spinal cords from deceased individuals. [129022]

Angela Smith: Spinal cords are retained for diagnostic purposes in relevant cases when it is neurologically or neurosurgically suspected that spinal cord disease may be present. It is also retained in cases of spinal cord injury to determine the type and extent of injury.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many transfers *(a)* out of and *(b)* into Northern Ireland of retained brains and brain tissue have taken place in the last 12 months; and whether transfers have taken place outside the United Kingdom. [121610]

Angela Smith: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether payment is made for the transfer of organs, tissue and other materials between hospitals. [121607]

Angela Smith: No payment is made for the transfer of organs, tissue and other materials between hospitals.

Irish Hares

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what assessment he has made of whether the Biodiversity Species Action Plan to double the number of Irish Hares by 2010 is likely to be achieved. [129533]

Angela Smith: The target to double the population by 2010 is one of three challenging targets contained in the Species Action Plan for the Irish Hare published in 2000.

The Plan is based primarily on the need to increase the extent, and improve the quality, of habitats favoured by the Irish Hare. While there are specific plans in place for these habitats, demonstrable effects on hare numbers cannot be expected for several years.

At this stage it is not possible to predict whether the target to double the population by 2010 will be achieved. Estimates of the Irish Hare population were made in 1997 and 2002 and suggested that the population remained stable between those dates. Further estimates will be made as the Plan progresses, but it should be recognised that the margin of uncertainty associated with these estimates is high, and the detection of population trends is therefore difficult.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether he has received the report on the status of the Irish Hare for the review of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985; and if he will make a statement. [129534]

Angela Smith: My Department has commissioned a study of changes needed to the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. The study is being carried out to complement aspects of the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy and local Species Action Plans. One of its objectives is to examine the case for changes in the legal status of certain species, including the Irish Hare.

A draft report was received by the Department of the Environment on 30 June. It puts forward a number of legislative options in relation to the status of the Irish Hare. The final report is expected to make specific proposals. Before I consider whether to take these proposals forward, I will seek the advice of the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group and the Department's statutory advisory committee, the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside.

Irish Language

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what changes have been made to the policy on the use of the Irish language in *(a)* the Department of Health and *(b)* the Department of Education in Northern Ireland since suspension of the devolved Assembly. [121088]

Jane Kennedy: There has been no change in either Department's policy on the use of Irish since the suspension of the Assembly. This is in line with the Secretary of State's decision on 9 December 2002 that Departments should maintain their existing practices with regard to the use of Irish and Ulster Scots. The position was reviewed subsequently and the Secretary of State agreed on 19 March that existing practices should continue for a further period subject to another review in September 2003.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what costs have been incurred by the Department of *(a)* Health, Social Services and Public Safety and *(b)* Education as a result of their Irish language policy in each of the last five years. [120977]

Jane Kennedy: The costs incurred by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in the last five years are as follows.

	£
1998–99	nil
1999–2000	17,604
2000–01	61,261
2001–02	119,823
2002–03	107,500

The costs incurred by the Department of Education in the last five years are as follows:

	£
1998–99	Nil
1999–2000	2,928
2000–01	10,461
2001–02	18,074
2002–03	16,339

Multiple Sclerosis

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to his answer of 11 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 966W, on multiple sclerosis, how many sufferers of multiple sclerosis have commenced *(a)* beta interferon and *(b)* glatiramer treatment in Northern Ireland since 1 January. [122344]

Angela Smith: Since 1 January 2003 20 patients have commenced treatment with *(a)* beta interferon and one patient has commenced treatment with *(b)* glatiramer.

Neurosurgery

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on Early Day Motion 1382 (Neurosurgery in Northern Ireland). [121405]

Angela Smith: Pressures on the neurosurgery service have arisen mainly as a result of a need for more theatre time, and shortages in experienced nursing staff. This is not a problem unique to Northern Ireland—there are similar problems with this service throughout the NHS.

The Royal Group of Hospitals, in liaison with the four boards, has been working hard to improve the situation, both in the short-term, and with regard to the longer-term development of the service.

A task force was established by the trust to lead the effort in addressing the problems faced by the service;

Extra theatre lists have been introduced;

A twin-track approach to enhance the recruitment and retention of nurses has been implemented to restore nursing levels and enable more beds to be opened. This has involved:

the appointment of a 'clinical educator' to enhance training opportunities and to support and increase the number of nurses in training; and

the recruitment of additional nurses, allowing the phased opening of beds from June 2003, with all beds re-opening by January 2004.

A clinical careers framework for nurses has also been launched to improve opportunities for personal development and career pathways;

In addition, treatment has been provided for some suitable patients in units outside Northern Ireland.

These measures should make a significant contribution to addressing the problems in this service. I have asked my Department, in liaison with the boards and the trust, to keep me apprised of progress.

Nurse Recruitment

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many nurses have been recruited in Northern Ireland in each year since 1997. [123806]

Angela Smith: Figures are provided in the tables.

Bank nurses [1] who have been recruited to work in trusts in Northern Ireland in each year since 1997 (headcount figures given only)

Trust	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
South and East Belfast HSS Trust	1	19	0	5	3	9
Armagh and Dungannon HSS Trust	2	5	3	8	7	14
Southern Board HQ	0	0	0	0	0	0
Homefirst Community HSS Trust			Unable to provide			
Belfast City Hospital HSS Trust	1	20	16	7	37	41
Sperrin/Lakeland HSS Trust	26	37	35	22	33	26
Blood Transfusion Service	0	0	1	0	0	0
Altnagelvin Group HSS Trust	26	31	35	45	23	21
Craigavon and Banbridge Community HSS Trust	11	11	7	9	8	8
Craigavon Area Hospital Group HSS Trust	6	8	17	34	17	38
Ulster Community and Hospitals Group HSS Trust	20	10	32	32	29	29
Down Lisburn HSS Trust	33	23	22	32	55	39
Regional Medical Physics Agency			Not applicable			
Foyle Community HSS Trust	27	53	45	24	14	27
Royal Hospitals	12	3	32	31	19	22
Green Park Healthcare HSS Trust	14	12	21	9	14	9
North and West Belfast HSS Trust	4	13	3	7	15	18
Newry and Mourne HSS Trust	0	0	0	0	14	72
Causeway HSS Trust	27	25	22	8	14	14
Mater Infirmorum Hospital HSS Trust	4	0	3	1	2	4
United Hospitals HSS Trust	15	9	15	32	15	14
Total	229	279	309	306	319	405

[1] Bank nurses are staff who cover for staffing shortfalls and fluctuating workloads in order to maintain service delivery

Non-bank nurses[1] who have been recruited to work in trusts in Northern Ireland in each year since 1997 (headcount figures given only)

Trust	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
South and East Belfast HSS Trust	26	44	41	18	48	59
Armagh and Dungannon HSS Trust	5	11	10	10	14	25
Southern Board HQ	0	0	1	1	0	1
Homefirst Community HSS Trust	144	114	195	225	141	312
Belfast City Hospital HSS Trust	30	165	81	115	144	191
Sperrin/Lakeland HSS Trust	47	75	54	58	34	77
Blood Transfusion Service	1	0	0	0	1	1
Altnagelvin Group HSS Trust	96	86	72	80	81	63
Craigavon and Banbridge Community HSS Trust	22	23	35	28	34	22
Craigavon Area Hospital Group HSS Trust	20	37	98	82	46	110
Ulster Community and Hospitals Group HSS Trust	81	71	150	189	248	333
Down Lisburn HSS Trust	39	62	59	57	105	102
Regional Medical Physics Agency	0	0	0	0	0	1
Foyle Community HSS Trust	40	26	46	42	60	36
Royal Hospitals	160	191	253	281	289	341
Green Park Healthcare HSS Trust	74	111	71	39	63	92
North and West Belfast HSS Trust	25	19	22	16	51	30
Newry and Mourne HSS Trust	26	27	18	30	38	47
Causeway HSS Trust	84	61	85	66	72	84
Mater Infirmorum Hospital HSS Trust	13	24	36	21	48	85
United Hospitals HSS Trust	107	103	93	120	74	82
Total	1,040	1,250	1,420	1,478	1,591	2,094

[1] Bank nurses have been excluded from these figures—they cover for staffing shortfalls and fluctuating workloads in order to maintain service delivery

Organised Crime Taskforce

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much funding has been made available to the Organised Crime Taskforce since its introduction in September 2000. [129816]

Jane Kennedy: With the exception of an annual publicity budget of £50,000 to meet the cost of publishing the annual Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF) Threat Assessment and Strategy Documents and to promote the role of the OCTF, no specific funding has been allocated to the Organised Crime Task Force. Costs for administering the OCTF are met from the overall resources allocated to the Security Policy and Operations Division of the Northern Ireland Office. Individual constituent members of the OCTF are responsible for funding their involvement from within their overall organisational budgets.

Police Recruitment

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the 50:50 recruitment procedure to the Police Service of Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on police recruitment. [129838]

Jane Kennedy: The Police Service of Northern Ireland continues to attract a very high number of applicants: over 27,500 have applied over the course of the five competitions held since the 50:50 recruitment procedures began. As a direct result of 50:50 recruitment, the proportion of Catholics in the PSNI has increased from 8 per cent. at the time of the Patten Report to 13.3 per cent. as of 1 September this year.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to increase the representation of *(a)* females, *(b)* ethnic minorities and *(c)* those with disabilities on district policing partnerships; and if he will make a statement. [129839]

Jane Kennedy: Schedule 3 to the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 sets out how the appointments of political and independent members to District Policing Partnerships (DPPs) are to be made. District councils are responsible for the appointment of political (elected) members. Councils were required to ensure that the political members of the DPP reflected the balance of the parties prevailing among the members of the council, immediately after the last local government election.

The responsibility for the appointment of independent members lies with the Policing Board. A widespread advertising campaign and public information evenings were used by the Policing Board to encourage applications.

In addition, approaches were made to several thousand community groups to promote the interest from potentially under-represented sections of the community including females, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. To facilitate those with disabilities, the application form was produced in Braille, audio and large print.

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many and what percentage of *(a)* Roman Catholics and *(b)* Protestants have been unsuccessful in their applications since the 50:50 recruitment policy started for the Police Service of Northern Ireland. [130419]

Jane Kennedy: Details of the number of unsuccessful applicants to the Police Service of Northern Ireland since the introduction of 50:50 recruitment are as follows:

	Number	*Percentage*
Catholic applications	9,823	35.6
Catholic applicants unsuccessful	9,342	95.1
Non Catholic applications	17,727	64.4
Non Catholic applicants unsuccessful	17,284	97.5

The figures are based on the total number of applications received in the five competitions held so far i.e. they will include more than one application from some individuals. As not all of the competitions have been completed there may be some minor changes to the numbers over time.

Police Reserve

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many officers are serving in the Police Service of Northern Ireland full time reserve; what their expected future length of service is; and if he will make a statement. [130422]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Unfortunately it has not been possible to collate the information requested in the requested time-scale. I will reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Police Service

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will make a statement on the impact of the Force Order issued by the Police Service of Northern Ireland on 25th March on access to police exercise facilities for retired police officers; [120973]

(2) who has responsibility for day to day security management at police exercise facilities across Northern Ireland; and whether retired police officers will have to be vetted in order to gain access to such facilities; [120974]

(3) what action the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland has taken with regard to retired police officers having access to police exercise facilities in Northern Ireland; [120975]

(4) if he will make a statement on why retired police officers in Northern Ireland have no access to police exercise facilities in Northern Ireland; and if he will take action to remedy this. [120976]

Jane Kennedy: The General Order referred to seeks to regulate access to exercise facilities in PSNI establishments for both security and health and safety considerations. The Order outlines the separate circumstances and procedures applicable for 'Employee' and 'Guest' access to such facilities. Retired Police Officers fall into the category of 'Guests' and as such will be required to apply for 'Guest Status' as outlined in the General Order.

The Chief Constable has responsibility for security at Police establishments. Any individuals who fall into the 'Guest' category will require security clearance. No exceptions are made to this vetting process. Retired Police Officers with 'Guest Status' will have access to police exercise facilities at eight major sites listed in the PSNI General Order.

Primary/Secondary Education

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to the answer of 30 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 100W, what the publicly declared positions are of each member of the working group on a form of selection in the transfer procedure for pupils from primary to secondary education. [123981]

Jane Kennedy: I am not aware of any publicly declared positions of members of the Working Group in favour or against a form of selection in the transfer procedure for pupils from primary to secondary education.

Prisons

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many self-inflicted *(a)* injuries and *(b)* deaths there have been in Northern Ireland prisons in each of the past five years; and what action the Government is taking to reduce these figures. [129829]

Jane Kennedy: The information is as follows:

(a) Self-inflicted injuries

	Number of self-inflicted injuries
1998–99	89
1999–2000	70
2000–01	90
2001–02	98
2002–03	146
2003 to date	53

(b) Self-inflicted deaths

	Number of self-inflicted deaths
1998–99	1
1999–2000	3
2000–01	3
2001–02	Nil
2002–03	[1]
2003 to date	[2]

[1] Two deaths in custody awaiting Coroner's inquest.
[2] One death in custody awaiting Coroner's inquest.

Action Government taking to reduce these figures

A review of policy and practices for dealing with prisoners at risk has recently been completed by the Northern Ireland Prison Service. This takes a holistic approach to providing the necessary support and care to prevent the individual harming him or herself. It includes an initial assessment on reception to prison, Samaritan services, listener schemes, an anti-bullying policy and improved structures, systems and procedures. This will include a multi-disciplinary case conference being held, leading to the development of a care plan for those at risk. This policy is due to be implemented by December 2003.

Recycling

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce a doorstep recycling service in Northern Ireland. [129809]

Angela Smith: The Northern Ireland Waste Management Strategy, published by the Department of the Environment in March 2000, provides a framework for developing waste management practices to increase recycling rates and reduce the amount of waste going to landfill. A key element of the Strategy is the preparation of Waste Management Plans by District Councils. Plans covering all of Northern Ireland are currently being implemented and are geared towards achieving a primary target set out in the Strategy of recovering 25 per cent. of household waste by 2005.

The Plans were adopted following extensive public consultation throughout each district council area. They set out the full range of activities and facilities to be put in place to provide a recycling service, taking account of the needs and circumstances of individual councils areas. These activities and facilities to be put in place include a mix of kerbside collection for individual households, home composting schemes and the development of new and enhanced civic amenity sites and recycling centres. Under its Waste Management Grant Scheme, the Department provides significant financial assistance to district councils to assist with the cost of implementing the Plans. The Scheme commenced in April 2001 and up to March 2003 some 20 Councils used the assistance for the purchase of bins to enable householders to segregate waste for recycling.

Remicade

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the availability of Remicade to NHS patients in Northern Ireland. [129810]

Angela Smith: The medicine Remicade has been prescribed in Northern Ireland since November 1999 for a number of health service patients with severe rheumatoid arthritis who have failed to respond to existing drug therapies. The use of Remicade for the treatment of an individual patient is a matter for clinical judgment and is the individual responsibility of the prescriber. The decision is taken by a hospital consultant in collaboration with the patient, having discussed with him or her, the risks and benefits of treatment.

An extra £3.1 million for the provision of specialist drugs, including those for the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis, was allocated to Health and Social Services Boards in the last financial year. This has now been uplifted for inflation and has been provided on a recurrent basis, All four Health and Social Services Boards have made a commitment to ensure an equitable approach to the management and reduction of waiting lists for expensive specialist medicines for arthritis and other conditions as one of the Priorities for Action 2003–04.

Road Resurfacing (Killeen, Newry)

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what the final cost was of the recent work to resurface the section of the Newry/Dundalk Road at Killeen, Newry; [116960]

(2) whether the contract for the resurfacing of the section of the main Newry/Dundalk Road at Killeen, Newry was awarded to the lowest tender; [116961]

(3) what the lowest tendered price was for the recent resurfacing of the section of the main Newry/Dundalk Road at Killeen, Newry. [116962]

Angela Smith: The Chief Executive of the Roads Service has written to the hon. Gentleman. A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library.

School Exclusions

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many children were excluded from school in 2001–02. [123791]

Jane Kennedy: During the 2001–02 school year, 61 pupils were expelled and 5,096 pupils were suspended.

Sexual Offences

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will take steps to make male against male rape an offence in Northern Ireland. [115046]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Article 18 of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 makes it possible for rape victims to be men and boys.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will abolish the penalty for consensual heterosexual anal intercourse in Northern Ireland. [115045]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Article 19 of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 provides that anal intercourse is not an offence if it takes place in private and both parties are 17 years or over.

Sports Funding

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in what circumstances *(a)* Exchequer and *(b)* Lottery funding may be granted to prepare competitors in *(i)* hockey, (ii) athletics, (iii) cycling, (iv) swimming and *(v)* equestrianism to compete for Ireland against British teams or individuals at Olympic Games or World Championships. [109541]

Angela Smith: No Exchequer funding is allocated to help prepare competitors for specific international events. Exchequer funding is solely designed to provide for a range of general sports development needs.

The only Lottery funding designed to assist Northern Ireland's leading sportspeople to prepare for competition at international level is through the Sports Council's Talented Athlete' programmes.

All athletes granted Talented Athlete Lottery funding for Hockey, Swimming and Equestrianism, if selected for major international competition, would compete for Ireland. This is because the local provincial clubs are affiliated to All-Ireland Governing Bodies. However, those in receipt of Talented Athlete Funding, who compete in Athletics orCycling, given the make-up of their governing bodies may compete for either Ireland or Great Britain if selected for international competition.

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consultation has taken place on new legislation in respect of telecommunication masts [120155]

Angela Smith: Following the publication of the Stewart Report, the Department of the Environment issued a consultation paper in November 2000 on the subject of planning control for telecommunications development. The consultation paper proposed various options for changing the existing telecommunications planning regime, and put forward a draft Planning Policy Statement for consideration.

As a result of that consultation process, the then Minister of the Environment brought forward legislation which introduced a requirement for full planning permission for all new telecommunications development, including alterations and extensions. This process also led to the Department's new Planning Policy Statement 10: Telecommunications, which was published in April 2002, and takes full account of the precautionary approach advocated in the Stewart Report.

Traffic Cones

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what the cost of placing and retrieving traffic cones on Northern Ireland roads and motorways was in each of the last three years; [110578]

(2) what proposals his Department has to improve the safety of placing and retrieving traffic cones on Northern Ireland roads and motorways; [110562]

(3) how many people have been *(a)* injured and *(b)* killed, placing and retrieving traffic cones on Northern Ireland roads and motorways in each of the last three years. [110577]

Angela Smith: The Chief Executive of the Roads Service has written to the hon. Gentleman. A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library.

Health Service (Taxi Costs)

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much has been paid to private hire taxi companies by each trust board in each of the last four financial years; and what the criteria are for the use of private hire taxis by trust boards. [122376]

Angela Smith: The information required for the years 1999–2000 to 2002–03 is as follows:

£

Trust	*1999–2000*	*2000–2001*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Altnagelvin	7,809	9,877	13,137	23,804
Armagh and Dungannon	n/a	n/a	[1]100,000	[1]104,000
Belfast City Hospital	155,674	92,632	146,800	146,800
Causeway	29,506	42,356	[1]124,342	[1]124,342
Craigavon and Banbridge Community	94,267	124,599	116,000	118,000
Craigavon Area Hospitals	132.80	172.20	4,846	5,008
Down Lisburn	253,618.07	313,841.07	314,049.49	370,826.97
Foyle	141,887	150,200	146,800	146,800
Green Park	3,657.58	7,153.45	5,675.15	7,474.95
Homefirst	222,596	240,996	[1]265,000	[1]265,000
Mater Hospital	7,079.88	10,404.72	9,992.25	16,027.61
Newry and Mourne	111,609	116,091	107,921.75	134,990.72
Ambulance Service	0.00	0.00	0.00	[2]4,282
North and West Belfast	140,814	166,030	[1]176,794	[1]233,460
Royal Group of Hospitals	14,366.86	21,681.57	228	1,086
South and East Belfast	150,358	181,820	186,216	201,368
Sperrin Lakeland	91,962	156,619	211,923	217,824
Ulster Community and Hospitals	44,005	55,020	55,738	74,599
United Hospitals	64,396	73,129	84,241	94,980

n/a = Not available
[1] Estimated
[2] Renal dialysis patients

A Regional Transport Manual for the HPSS was produced and issued by the Department in June 1998. In relation to the use of taxis it states clearly that their use should be strictly controlled in order to minimise costs. Trusts have to ensure that when taxis are used to support fleet operation for regular or ad hoc work, that there are proper management protocols and monitoring arrangements in place.

Trusts must have mechanisms in place to ensure relevant directors are notified of expenditure on taxis. Also taxi services obtained from commercial taxi companies are subject to a process of tender through Regional Supplies Services.

Unsolved Murders

Mr. David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on progress with the investigations of unsolved murders of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and army personnel in the County of Londonderry in 1972. [130471]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I understand from the PSNI that a Major Crime Review Group is being established to address the issue of unsolved murders. Inquiries regarding its progress are a matter for the PSNI.

Water Service

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many Hippo Bags have been issued in Northern Ireland; and how many have been installed in domestic and commercial premises in each of the last 12 months; [111054]

(2) what assessment he has made of *(a)* the savings possible from water leakage and water efficiency measures and *(b)* the capital spending required by the Department of Regional Development and its Water Service for new water capacity; [111056]

(3) if he will list, for each of the last 12 months, the progress made by the Department of Regional Development's Water Service in reaching its water efficiency and leakage reduction targets; [111052]

(4) if he will undertake a review into how the Water Service manages leakages in Northern Ireland; and if he will make an assessment of how far a stronger and more robust programme for energy efficiency in domestic and commercial premises would reduce wastage; [111051]

(5) what the *(a)* rainfall in Northern Ireland and *(b)* the capacity of each of the reservoirs was in each of the last 12 months; what the capital building programme for water was in each month; and if he will make a statement; [111055]

(6) what recent measures have been undertaken by the Water Service in Northern Ireland *(a)* to reduce domestic water leakages and *(b)* to improve domestic water efficiency. [111053]

Angela Smith: The Chief Executive of the Water Service has written to the hon. Gentleman. A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library.

Welcome Signs

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many signs welcoming people to Northern Ireland there are *(a)* along the border with the Republic of Ireland and *(b)* on other main roads; and what estimate he has made of the cost of these signs. [109543]

Angela Smith: The Chief Executive of the Roads Service has written to the hon. Lady. A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 17 September 2003

WALES

Tourism

10. **Mr. Liddell-Grainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the tourist industry in Wales on promotion abroad of tourism in Wales. [129545]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend and I work very closely with the First Minister of the Welsh Assembly Government. Tourism is a major focus of our discussions. The tourist industry contributes more than £2.5 billion a year to the Welsh economy and provides employment for around 100,000 people.

Coal Industry (Compensation Schemes)

11. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent information the Welsh subgroup of the coal health claims monitoring group has received on payments made to retired miners or their families under the respiratory disease and vibration white finger compensation schemes. [129546]

Mr. Touhig: The latest available figures for Wales indicate that at the end of August under the respiratory disease scheme we had settled over 21,000 claims and paid £258.5 million and under the VWF scheme we had settled nearly 10,500 claims and paid £96.4 million.

Affordable Housing

12. **Gareth Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with *(a)* Cabinet colleagues and *(b)* National Assembly for Wales Secretaries about the provision of affordable housing in Wales. [129547]

Mr. Hain: This year, Welsh Assembly Government is making available £56.4 million in Social Housing Grant to assist the provision of affordable housing. Together with private funding this will generate investment of over £90 million and provide around 1,000 additional homes for rent and low cost ownership.

Economic Growth

13. **Mr. John Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the prospects for economic growth in Wales in the next 12 months. [129548]

Mr. Hain: Most recent economic indicators show that the Welsh economy is performing more strongly now than for a generation, with unemployment continuing to fall, and employment and economic activity rising.

Friction Dynamex Ltd.

14. **Hywel Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the Department of Trade and Industry and the Welsh Assembly Government regarding the closure of Friction Dynamex Ltd. [129549]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend has discussed this issue with colleagues at the Department of Trade and Industry and the National Assembly for Wales. We are all anxious that those workers treated so badly receive their due.

Community Support Officers

15. **Mr. David:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Home Office on community support officers in Wales. [129550]

Mr. Touhig: My hon. Friend and I have regular discussions with ministerial colleagues about matters affecting Wales.

All four Welsh police forces now have funding for Community Support Officers. In July I met a group of CSOs based in my own constituency who are already coming to be recognised as a valuable part of the local policing team.

Departmental Food Expenditure

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was spent on food by his Department in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03; what proportion of that food by value was produced in the United Kingdom; what guidance he has issued to encourage the procurement of home-grown food; and if he will make a statement. [129384]

Mr. Touhig: The Wales Office has a complement of 55 and does not provide a catering service for staff.

It is not possible to determine how much of the hospitality budget was spent on food; we always ask catering companies to use Welsh produce where possible.

Health and Social Care

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which of the four options to reduce bed blocking outlined in the Review of Health and Social Care in Wales advised by Derek Wanless would require primary legislation to implement. [129674]

Mr. Touhig: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 17 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 447W.

The Assembly are currently considering all the options outlined in the Review of Health and Social Care in Wales as part of their detailed report and action plan, which is now due for publication in November. It would therefore be inappropriate to comment on the likely need for legislation that may be identified by the Assembly in order to support any proposals detailed in their implementation plan.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Deprivation

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his policy is to assist areas with *(a)* low average wages, *(b)* low average incomes and *(c)* both low average wages and low average incomes. [129157]

Yvette Cooper: The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal is designed to narrow the gap between the most deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country. Low income is a key indicator in the Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2000 used to target resources and focus activity on those areas in greatest need. Policies for neighbourhood renewal include the New Deal for Communities partnerships, the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, Floor targets and the development of local partnerships and community networks.

Government Funding (North-west)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Government Office for the North West financial programmes for *(a)* UK Online, *(b)* small retailers in deprived areas and *(c)* CCTV. [128570]

Yvette Cooper: These programmes received the following funding allocations:

	£ million
(a) 2000–03	25
(b) 2001–04	2.8
(c) 2001–04	14.4

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which wards and programmes within Sefton have benefited from the Government Office for the North West funding programmes for *(a)* capital investment in housing, *(b)* major repairs allowance, *(c)* disabled facilities grants, *(d)* Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, *(e)* Community Empowerment Fund, *(f)* Community Chest and Community Learning Chests, *(g)* the Objective 1 Programme, *(h)* the Objective 2 Programme, *(i)* the Objective 3 Programme, *(j)* the Community Champions Fund, *(k)* Pathfinder Young Community Champions Fund, *(l)* UK Online, *(m)* Connexions, *(n)* Connexions Summer Plus, *(o)* Transforming Youth Work Development Fund, *(p)* drug and alcohol training, *(q)* Lifelong Learning Partnerships, *(r)* Sustainable Development Regional Promotional Budget, *(s)* renewable energy, *(t)* Mersey Basin Campaign, *(u)* building safer communities, *(v)* Wardens Scheme, *(w)* small retailer in deprived areas, *(x)* partnership development, *(y)* Partnership Support Programme, *(z)* CCTV, (aa) Target Policing Initiative, (bb) prostitution and (cc) violence against women. [128569]

Yvette Cooper: Due to the nature of the grants it is not possible to provide specific details of allocated funds at ward level. The following are programmes that have received funding in Sefton:

(a) £4.852 million (2003–04)—Capital Investment in Housing.

(b) £7.37 million (2002–03) £7.191 million (2003–04)—Major Repairs Allowance.

(c) £713,000 (2002–03) £720,000 (2003–04)—Disabled Facilities Grants.

All the above can be borough wide. Major repairs allowance is only for use on local authority stock.

(d) £12.671 million (2001–04) £16,893 million (2004–06)—Neighbourhood Renewal Fund is not prescribed but intended for spend in the most deprived wards.

(e) £435,423 (2001–04) £290,282 (2004–06)—Community Empowerment Fund for use to set up a borough wide community network.

(f) £651,015 (2001–04) £657,050 (2004–06)—Community Chest. £128,996 (2001–04) £154,796 (2004–06)—Community Learning Chests.

(g) The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does not hold information on levels of European funding at ward level. Also as the Objective One programme is Merseyside-wide in scope, a substantial amount of programme-funded activity will be delivered by organisations that have a pan-Merseyside remit. A project based in one particular area (often at the organisations head office) will therefore draw beneficiaries, or have benefits, and spend money outside its immediate locality. However, Sefton will benefit from the £160 million invested through Objective One in Merseyside in 2002.

(h) Areas that receive Objective 1 monies are not eligible for either Objective Two or Objective Three funding.

(i) *Objective 3—see h.*

(j) There are seven Community Champions receiving a total of £7,257.

Current Community Champions include:

Colette Sheerin Oscroft, No. 35—£416; Tony Roberts, No. 63—£1000; Ian Mackinson, No. 65—£180 Margi Robinson, No. 73—£1,209; Mary French, No. 74—£457; John Cunningham, No. 76—£2,000; Eileen Green, No. 100—£1,993.77.

(k) Sefton does not receive Pathfinder Young Community Champions Fund as Sefton is not an eligible area. DfES ran a national competitive bidding process which Sefton did not enter.

(l) £261,813 for three UK Online Centres.

(m) £17.4 million (2003–04) for Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership. It is not possible to provide specific figures for Sefton as the Merseyside Connexions is Merseyside-wide in scope.

(n) £333,000 (2003–04)—Positive Activities for Young People (formally Connexions Summer Plus).

(o) £49,000 (2003–04)—Transforming Youth Work Development Fund.

(p) £22,000 (2003–04) allocation for Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership-drug and alcohol training.

(q) £75,000 (2003–04) for Lifelong Learning Partnerships.

(r) £500 in 2000 to help the local authority with Local Agenda 21 issues.

(s) Between 1998–2002 Government Office for the North West employed an energy and environmental adviser who visited 87 businesses in the Sefton area promoting environmental management and resource efficiency. This cost GONW approx £9,000.

(t) Details on funding for Sefton are not held by the Mersey Basin Campaign.

(u) Sefton has been awarded £298.5k (2003–04). The initiatives under the Building Safer Communities programme are also being funded in conjunction with £196,745 allocated to Sefton Division under the Basic Command Unit Fund.

(v) There are no Wardens Schemes being managed by GONW in Sefton at present.

(w) £21,000 (2001–02), £29,000 2002–03, £29,000 2003–04 Small Retailers in Deprived Areas. Match funding has also been obtained for all three years from the South Sefton Partnership and all South Sefton wards have benefited.

(x) £50,000 awarded between 2001–03—Partnership Development.

(y) Allocated on a regional level for 2002–03—Partnership Support Programme awarded six days consultancy to Sefton CDRP to develop a partnership—Training Needs.

(z) £636,000 has been awarded between 2001–03 for CCTV schemes in Crosby Town Centre, Bootle Town Centre, Southport Town Centre and South Road, Waterloo.

(aa) No projects were directly supported in the Sefton area from the Targeting Police Initiative.

(bb) No projects were directly supported in the Sefton area from the prostitution initiative.

(cc) No projects were directly supported in the Sefton area from the Violence against women initiative.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which census figures will be used for the 2004–05 formula funding share. [129852]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister intends to use mid-2002 population estimates for the 2004–05 Local Government Settlement.

The formulae used to distribute grant to local authorities in England make use of various sets of data from the Census, apart from the population estimates that are updated each year. Officials of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister have been discussing with local authority representatives the use of 2001 Census data other than population in the 2004–05 Settlement. Unfortunately, the late availability of some of the 2001 Census data has limited the options for using it in this years settlement. Therefore the 1991 Census data will be used for the 2004–05 Settlement.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is announcing this now in order to remove any uncertainty felt by local authorities regarding the data that will be used for the settlement.

Officials of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will continue to discuss with local authority representatives the use of the 2001 Census data in future Local Government Finance settlements.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the budgetary impact on social services in the London boroughs named in the Laming Inquiry if the 1991 census figures are used to calculate the 2004–05 formula funding share. [129853]

Mr. Raynsford: None. The 1991 census data were used to calculate the 2003–04 formula spending shares. Continuing to use these to calculate the 2004–05 formula spending shares should therefore have little impact on any authority's grant allocation relative to 2003–04. The level at which a local authority sets its budget is a matter for that authority, depending on its local priorities.

Homeless People

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much has been spent on providing temporary accommodation for families claiming to be homeless in *(a)* the Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, *(c)* the north east and *(d)* England, in each year since 1997. [128710]

Yvette Cooper: Information annually reported to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister by local authorities identifies expenditure incurred in respect of bed and breakfast, private sector leasing and all other forms of temporary accommodation used by homeless households. This includes associated costs, such as the provision of furniture, property maintenance/refurbishment, rent guarantees, nomination fees and administrative costs, chargeable to the General Fund Services Revenue Account, along with any specific capital charges. Information is not available below local authority level, and that reported by South Tyneside MBC, and all councils comprising the north east region and nationally is shown in the following table.

Local authority revenue expenditure on homelessness

£000

	Total	*Net*	*Capital charges*
South Tyneside			
1997–98	33	33	n/a
1998–99	35	35	n/a
1999–2000	25	25	n/a
2000–01	29	29	0
2001–02	39	39	0
GONE			
1997–98	2,235	1,497	n/a
1998–99	2,577	1,631	n/a
1999–2000	2,737	1,768	n/a
2000–01	2,645	1,885	39
2001–02	4,277	3,634	1,100
England			
1997–98	214,802	122,669	n/a
1998–99	278,474	150,299	n/a
1999–2000	334,853	171,492	n/a
2000–01	372,424	201,321	2,769
2001–02	429,376	189,426	4,366

Note:
Data on capital charges were not collected prior to 2000/01
Source:
ODPM RO6 financial returns

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what measures are in place to help to reduce the number of homeless people; [128712]

(2) what further support he plans to offer to help the homeless. [128709]

Yvette Cooper: The March 2002 report, "More than a roof", set out the Government's approach to tackling and preventing homelessness. Specific measures included investment of £125 million in 2002–03 to support local authorities and the voluntary agencies working with them to support new approaches for tackling and preventing homelessness. The Homelessness Directorate within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has a revenue budget of £70 million and £23.5 million capital allocation for 2003–04. These resources will help to support the Government's commitment that by March

2004 no homeless family with children should be placed in a bed and breakfast hotel other than in an emergency, and even then for no more than six weeks.

Funding will also support new approaches that help people tackle the problems that are making and keeping them homeless and help to sustain the Prime Minister's target to reduce rough sleeping by two thirds of 1998 levels. The number of people sleeping rough on any one night in England has reduced from a baseline figure of 1,850 in June 1998 to the lowest recorded level of 504 in June 2003.

Other measures include:

the Homelessness Act 2002, which required local authorities to undertake a review of homelessness in their area and put a strategy in place by end of July 2003 to ensure that support and accommodation is available within their districts for homeless people, and those at risk of homelessness;

a widening of the groups of people with priority need for accommodation under the homelessness legislation, ensuring that more vulnerable people get the help they need;

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has invested £6 million in 2002–03 and are investing £11 million in 2003–04 on a special initiative to make 500 homes available for homeless families with children living in bed and breakfast (B&B) hotels in London;

new advice to housing authorities on arrangements to ensure that all babies and children placed in temporary accommodation receive their health and developmental tests;

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister launched a three month consultation in May 2003 on legislation and statutory guidance to limit the use of B&B accommodation for families with children, raise standards in all forms of temporary accommodation—particularly B&Bs—and ensure that households in B&B hotels have access to support from health, education and social services. We are currently considering responses to take forward proposals by end of 2003 to help reinforce achievement of B&B target;

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is working to improve access to services and information on services for households in England experiencing domestic violence or the threat of it. The Homelessness Directorate will invest £23 million of capital funding over the next three years to provide additional safe refuge bedspaces for those fleeing violence and their families where this is supported by local authorities as part of their homelessness duties.

Housing

Bob Russell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many of the proposed new dwellings in the Thames Gateway area he estimates will be council houses. [129309]

Keith Hill: Provision of affordable housing to meet the needs of Gateway communities and secure sustainable and balanced growth, is an important element of the Gateway strategy. Decisions on central Government funding to support this, which will be allocated through the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme (ADP), will be made by Ministers of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in the light of recommendations from the East of England, London and South-East Regional Housing Boards. ADP funding is not available for local authorities but they can provide housing through their own capital programme where this a priority and represents good value for money.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what conclusions have been drawn from the effectiveness of differing schemes to aid key workers onto the housing ladder. [130041]

Keith Hill: Around 4,100 key workers have so far been helped under the Starter Home Initiative to buy homes they would otherwise have been unable to afford. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister receives regular monitoring data from the Housing Corporation on activity under the Starter Home Initiative and, in addition, will be commissioning an evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme. This study is expected to start towards the end of the year and will report during 2004.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently discussing with key worker sponsor departments how key worker housing assistance can best be targeted in future to meet recruitment and retention needs. These discussions include the type of properties and tenure required and take into account views expressed by employers, key workers and others about the operation of the Starter Home Initiative, and also key worker housing preferences. Regional Housing Boards are also advising on the allocation of funding for key worker schemes in their areas. Bids for key worker housing schemes will be invited in the Autumn.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what research his Department has *(a)* undertaken and *(b)* sponsored into the effectiveness of those local authorities that have transferred their housing stock through large-scale voluntary transfer. [130521]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has funded two studies which explore issues connected with the local authority role after the stock has transferred. They are (i) "Large Scale Voluntary Transfers: Staff impacts and implications" published in August 2003 which explores the impact of the transfer programme on employees in both the local authority and the registered social landlord sectors and considers the role of staff who remain in the local authority post transfer. (ii) "Housing Functions and stock transfer" will be published in late 2003 which will set out the key issues that housing authorities need to consider when deciding whether to retain or contract out the delivery of their statutory housing functions.

The Audit Commission Housing Inspectorate is responsible for inspecting and reporting on local authority housing services, including those retained when stock is transferred. The Office contributed to the Audit Commission report "Housing After Transfer—The Local Authority Role" which was published in December 2002 and which drew upon previous housing inspection reports.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he will ensure the arguments for and against a large scale voluntary transfer of council housing are made available to tenants in advance of their ballot; [130526]

(2) if he will take steps to ensure that councils opting for large-scale voluntary transfers provide equal *(a)* financial assistance to the parties involved and *(b)* opportunity for them to distribute campaign material to all tenants. [130628]

Keith Hill: The "Delivering Decent Homes Option Appraisal—Guidance for Local Authorities" published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in June this year sets out how tenants should be central to the

appraisal of options for delivering decent social housing within their authority. Where the choice emerging from the option appraisal is to pursue housing transfer, we then expect authorities to further explain the transfer proposals to tenants and to provide them with the facts surrounding housing transfer in accordance with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. The code allows authorities to refute any misleading arguments put to tenants by those opposed to transfer.

To enable tenants to make an informed choice the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister expects accurate information on the housing association sector to be provided to them by authorities and Independent Tenants' Advisors. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister would also expect the individual housing associations working with tenants with a view to becoming their new landlord to provide tenants with accurate information on their policies and operations.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will ask the Housing Corporation to report on the performance of housing associations taking over council housing stock in respect of *(a)* promised improvements, *(b)* rent and service charge increases, particularly after the five year moratorium and *(c)* evictions. [130527]

Keith Hill: The information is as follows:

(a) Promised improvements: The National Audit Office (NAO) carried out a study in 2002, "Improving Social Housing Through Transfer". This showed that transfer associations had met their promises to improve houses, or were on schedule to do so. The Housing Corporation has a role in monitoring the performance of all registered associations to ensure that they meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard by 2010.

(b) Rent and service charge increases: The Housing Corporation collects details of average rents and service charges for all registered social landlords. These are published annually in a sector study. For the last three years for which data are available, the increase for all whole stock transfers are:

	Percentage
2000	4.4
2001	2.9
2002	4.8

It is possible to analyse the increase for each association post transfer guarantees, and I will write with further details to my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby.

(c) Evictions: The number of evictions for all large scale voluntary transfer landlords recorded by the Corporation's Continuous Recording of Lettings (CORE) survey over the last three years is:

	Number
2000–01	1,640
2001–02	2,095
2002–03	2,664

Unpublished research commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister shows that evictions as a percentage of stock for all housing associations and local authorities is:

	Housing association	*Local authority*
	Percentage	
2001–02	0.63	0.63
2002–03	0.64	0.65

The number of evictions as a percentage of stock transferred is less than half of 1 per cent.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 18 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 341, to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts), on council housing, what proposals he has to provide adequate funding for those council tenants who wish to stay with local authorities after tenants' ballots on council housing transfers. [130624]

Keith Hill: Some local authorities will be able to meet the decent homes target using mainstream housing funds and their own resources, e.g. capital receipts, particularly since mainstream housing funds have been increased since the Government came to Office.

However, alternative options have been provided. The Sustainable Communities Plan made it clear that local authorities seeking additional investment in their housing stock are able to choose from three options; set up a high performing Arm's Length Housing Management Organisation (ALMO); pursue a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme; and stock transfer. Only stock transfer results in a change of ownership of the stock.

The Sustainable Communities Plan also made it clear that authorities that do not pursue any of the three alternative options cannot expect increased investment above that provided for in the Housing Investment Programme.

The option appraisal process is designed to ensure that tenants are at the heart of the decisions about the future management of their homes. This process should make a negative vote on the chosen option less likely. However, in the event of a negative ballot the local authority and the tenants will need to revisit the options that will deliver decent homes by 2010.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister by when local authorities were required to submit their proposals on the future of their council housing stock; and what proposals he has for encouraging early applications. [130626]

Keith Hill: As announced in the Sustainable Communities Plan all authorities with housing stock have to produce objective and rigorous option appraisals for Government sign-off by July 2005.

To ensure that we reach the 2010 target Government Offices for the Regions and the Community Housing Task Force are working with individual local authorities on creating an action plan that will ensure that all local authorities have an option appraisal signed off as soon as possible.

Local authorities wishing to take advantage of future Arm's Length Housing Management Organisation (ALMO), stock transfer or Private Finance Initiative (PFI) schemes will not be granted a place on a programme unless their option appraisal has been signed off by the relevant Government Office.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many local authorities have submitted proposals on bringing their council housing stock up to the decent homes standard; how many have chosen between the Government's three options of large-scale voluntary transfer, private finance initiative and arms length management organisation; and how many have not yet notified their intentions. [130627]

Keith Hill: The Sustainable Communities Plan made it clear that all stock owning local authorities must undertake a formal options appraisal process for Government sign-off by July 2005. Guidance on the process was issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in June 2003. No options appraisals have yet been signed off.

However since April 2001, when there were 246 local authorities that owned housing stock, the following schemes have been put in place:

22 local authorities have transferred all of their stock to a registered social landlord.

Seven have undertaken partial transfers,

18 local authorities are on the 2002 and 2003 programmes for whole stock transfer pending a ballot

Seven more are proposing partial transfers pending a ballot

34 local authorities have secured places on the Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) programme, 12 of which have already set up their ALMO and secured additional funding after gaining a 2* or 3* rating from the Housing Inspectorate.

Nine local authorities have been given permission to let Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts for the management of some of their housing stock. Two of these contracts have now been signed.

In total 74 local authorities are on programmes which account for the whole of their stock. That leaves 172 local authorities that have yet to formally agree an approach.

Operation Gangmaster

Mr. Luff: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what role his Department has played in Operation Gangmaster in relation to *(a)* planning, *(b)* housing, *(c)* housing benefit, *(d)* council tax benefit and *(e)* community cohesion responsibilities of local authorities. [130202]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is not one of the Government Departments directly involved in Operation Gangmaster.

South Sefton Partnership

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps the South Sefton Partnership have taken to improve access to *(a)* job and training opportunities and *(b)* affordable childcare. [128878]

Yvette Cooper: This is one of South Sefton Partnership's four key objectives. The Partnership has recently prepared a small booklet "South Sefton Partnership—The Story So Far" which aims to illustrate steps taken to date on these four key objectives.

The steps taken in respect of this objective are as follows:

Establishing an Intermediate Labour Market scheme to act as a 'bridge' back to work for long-term unemployed residents.

Developing the Sefton@Work project which will help unemployed South Sefton residents gain access to jobs and training through advice, guidance and placement services and encouraging local firms to recruit local people.

Improving educational opportunities for South Sefton residents through an adult community learning programme in local schools.

Helping 12 local people to find work as teacher's assistants within South Sefton Education Action Zone schools.

Supporting the Bootle-based Independence Initiative which helps ex-substance abusers to access training and work.

Funding the Seaforth Older Children's Service (SOCS) which provides childcare in school holidays allowing local people to retain jobs that might otherwise be at risk.

Providing laptop computers for looked-after children in the area to help to improve their hitherto below-average levels of success in GCSE exams.

Supporting Sefton council's IMPACT project which provides vocational experiences for pupils who find traditional school subjects are not for them.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps have been taken by the South Sefton Partnership to create safe, healthy, and managed neighbourhoods. [128879]

Yvette Cooper: This is one of South Sefton Partnership's four key objectives. The Partnership has recently prepared a small booklet "South Sefton Partnership—The Story So Far" which aims to illustrate steps taken to date on these four key objectives.

The steps taken in respect of this objective are as follows:

Establishing the Green It Clean It Mean It environment fund which provided each Neighbourhood Action Group with 10,000 to undertake local 'green' improvements.

Supporting the new-build premises of the successful Feelgood Factory health initiative which will provide advice on healthy living, training courses, alternative therapies and a crèche.

Employing an Active Communities Co-ordinator to give South Sefton residents improved access to sports opportunities.

Funding a new mobile police station for the area to improve relationships with local communities, provide a more visible police presence. A new community safety officer post has been created.

Funding an Environmental Hit Squad in the Linacre/Derby area to improve the physical appearance and cleanliness of the neighbourhood and look at ways to reduce the rat population.

Working with Sefton Council Housing Market Renewal on a £500,000 alleygating initiative to improve the local environment and reduce crime in terraced street across South Sefton.

Creating the post of a Co-ordinator to work with the Neighbourhood Action Groups on developing and implementing community safety projects.

Funding important feasibility studies into the restoration of Bootle Derby Park and upgrading the local stretch of the Leeds-Liverpool Canal.

Written Ministerial Statements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many Written Ministerial Statements have been made by the Department since 29 October 2002. [126613]

Yvette Cooper: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has made 130 Written Ministerial Statements since 29 October 2002.

PRIME MINISTER

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Prime Minister when he intends to reply to the letter dated 12 August 2003 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to a new post office for Rusholme. [130456]

The Prime Minister: I replied to my right hon. Friend on 12 September 2003.

Director of Public Prosecutions

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what contact took place between 10 Downing street and *(a)* the members of the panel which selected Mr. Ken Macdonald QC as Director of Public Prosecutions and *(b)* Mr. Ken Macdonald QC during the process of the decision-making on the appointment; [129241]

(2) if he will list the *(a)* dates and *(b)* attendees of meetings which took place between 10 Downing street *(i)* officials and (ii) civil servants with members of the selection panel which appointed Mr. Ken Macdonald QC as Director of Public Prosecutions. [129240]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General gave to him today.

Iraq

Adam Price: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of his pre-war assessment of the challenges of post-Saddam Iraq. [130715]

The Prime Minister: The scale of the reconstruction task in Iraq caused by decades of neglect and misrule was greater than expected. But good progress in Iraq is being made despite security setbacks, and Saddam's appalling legacy. The Iraqi Governing Council has appointed Ministers, work is under way on preparing a new constitution, institutions are being rebuilt, the international financial community is engaging, children are receiving better health care and education, and work is in hand to improve the infrastructure deficiencies. We are also giving urgent priority to building up the Police Force, Civil Defence Corps and New Iraqi Army, so that Iraqis assume greater responsibility for their own security.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Amess: To ask the Prime Minister when he next plans to visit Southend, West. [130959]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to visit in the near future.

Security Clearance

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 8 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 18W, on Security Clearance, what further clearance is required for Downing street staff in order to see *(a)* secret and *(b)* top secret Joint Intelligence Committee material, once they have been positively vetted. [130397]

The Prime Minister: The levels of security clearance that staff need in order to be granted access to classified material are those which apply across Government. They are set out in HM Government's statement of vetting policy, as announced to the House on 15 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns 764–66.

DEFENCE

Aircraft Carriers

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what increase in cost for the proposed two new aircraft carriers has been communicated to him; what reasons were given; what his response has been; and if he will make a statement. [127152]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 1 September, *Official Report*, column 894W, to the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis).

Apache Helicopter

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to upgrade and replace the night-vision system on the Apache helicopter. [129490]

Mr. Ingram: An upgrade of Apache's night vision system has been identified as one of a range of possible enhancements to the helicopter during its service life. However, no decision has yet been made on this specific element.

Asbestos

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 26 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 944W, on asbestos, if he will list the buildings identified as containing asbestos. [130943]

Mr. Caplin: There is no central register of buildings in which asbestos is known to be present. Such a register or list could be compiled only at disproportionate cost.

Battle Group Thermal Imaging System

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress is being made in the procurement of the Battle Group Thermal Imaging System; on which platforms it will be deployed; when it is likely to come into service; and what capability it will bring. [129191]

Mr. Ingram: A contract to supply and support the Battle Group Thermal Imaging System was placed with Thales Optronics Ltd. in 2001. The system is on track to meet its approved in-service date in 2004. It will be deployed on Warrior armoured fighting vehicles and Scimitar combat reconnaissance vehicles and will further improve the effectiveness of armoured combat formations at night and in bad weather.

Defence Exhibition

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* civilian security personnel and *(b)* armed services personnel his Department assigned to the Defence Systems Equipment International Exhibition in London; and if he will make a statement. [129692]

Mr. Ingram: The security arrangements for Defence Systems Equipment International, including the assignment of civilian security personnel, were the responsibility of the exhibition organisers (Spearhead Exhibitions Ltd.). 31 Ministry of Defence Police (MDP) officers were deployed to the exhibition site, with an additional small marine unit of 12 MDP officers being present at the request of the Metropolitan police.

Ministry of Defence civilian and armed forces personnel attended the event in an official capacity, but details are not held centrally.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for which foreign delegations attending the Defence Systems and Equipment International exhibition in September the Government paid for *(a)* travel, *(b)* accommodation and *(c)* hospitality; and if he will make a statement. [129775]

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the country delegations *(a)* invited to and *(b)* attending the Defence Systems Equipment International Exhibition in London; what role his Department had in formulating the list of invited countries; and if he will make a statement. [129693]

Mr. Ingram: Most of the funding for the attendance of official overseas defence delegations at the Defence Systems and Equipment International exhibition was provided by the exhibition organisers and defence companies.

However, in addition, the official overseas delegations that attended the exhibition as guests of Her Majesty's Government accepted some contribution from the Ministry of Defence towards their visit for travel, accommodation and/or hospitality.

The MOD Defence Export Services Organisation prepares a list of countries to receive official invitations to the exhibition, taking into consideration current marketing campaigns and longer-term prospects for business with the countries concerned. The list is then passed to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for consideration. Throughout the process, political issues, arms embargoes and current international relations imperatives are also considered, as is the cost involved in hosting the delegations.

Of the 62 countries invited to attend the exhibition as guests of HMG, 56 accepted. The list of countries invited to attend is as listed, with the countries that declined highlighted in italic.

Algeria
Australia
Austria
Bahrain
Belgium
Botswana
Brazil
Brunei
Bulgaria
Canada
Chile
Colombia
PRC (China)
Czech Republic
Denmark
Egypt
Finland
France
Germany
Ghana
Greece
Hungary
India
Republic of Ireland
Italy
Japan
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Republic of Korea
Kuwait
Malaysia
Mexico
Netherlands
New Zealand
Nigeria
Norway
Oman
Pakistan
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Qatar
Romania
Russia
Saudi Arabia
Singapore
Slovakia
Slovenia
South Africa
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland[1]
Syria
Thailand
Trinidad & Tobago
Turkey
UAE
USA
Vietnam
Venezuela

[1] The official overseas delegation from Switzerland was unable to attend.

The exhibition organisers, Spearhead Exhibitions Ltd. have also invited country delegations. Their invitees are military/Government personnel who are below ministerial or chief of staff level, as well as industrial visitors, and invitations are extended to reflect the requirements made by exhibitors as well as London based embassies, in consultation with United Kingdom defence attaches based overseas.

At the outset of the invitation process Spearhead may take advice from MOD about the attendance of particular countries or exhibitors. However, provided they act responsibly and within the law, Spearhead is not obliged to take that advice. Requests for release of information on the delegations invited by the organisers should be directed to the company.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost to his Department was of the Defence Systems and Equipment International Exhibition at the Excel Centre on 9 to 12 September; how many departmental staff were present; and if he will make a statement on the purpose of hosting arms sales fairs. [130293]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) on 20 May 2003, *Official Report*, columns 677–78W. The final cost remains to be established, but we do not expect it to exceed the estimated figure.

Ministry of Defence staff attended the Defence Systems and Equipment International (DSEi) exhibition as part of their normal duties and to gain greater understanding of defence industrial capabilities around the world. This was at the discretion of line managers and no central record of attendance is held.

The purpose of defence exhibitions is to bring together purchasers and suppliers of defence equipment and services. DSEi enables the United Kingdom defence industry to demonstrate its capabilities to potential overseas customers and provides an opportunity for those responsible for the defence of their countries to see the range of equipment and services available to meet their legitimate requirements. Formal invitations to DSEi do not imply that Her Majesty's Government would be prepared to issue export licences for the supply of all or any of the equipment displayed, and all export licence applications would be considered on a case-by-case basis in line with the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria.

Export Controls

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions his Department has had with the US State Department on *(a)* the use of extraterritorial export control legislation and *(b)* the need to have strict end-user controls on arms shipments, to reduce threats to military personnel. [130182]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 September 2003]*: A range of issues have been discussed with the United States Government in the context of the negotiations, concluded earlier this year, on a text for an unclassified waiver from the US International Traffic in Arms Regulations. These have included consideration of extraterritorial control in relation to the export of strategically controlled goods, but not specifically of end-user controls. The national security of the United Kingdom and its allies is considered at the time an application for a licence to export is made, under the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria.

Iraq

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate *(a)* the length of time in training that British army units require before deployment in Iraq and *(b)* the ratio of deployed personnel to total personnel absorbed by operations in Iraq. [130278]

Mr. Ingram: The duration of pre-deployment training for military forces deploying on operations depends on two factors: firstly, the existing level of training, which is closely aligned to readiness, and, secondly, the operational task the force is required to undertake. The amount of pre-deployment training required is therefore dictated by the extent to which the troops need to raise their military capability, and it is not meaningful to specify set periods of time.

As at 11 September there were approximately 10,000 British servicemen and women in the Gulf region. Following the deployment of the balance of the forces announced by the Secretary of State on 8 September this figure will shortly rise to approximately 10,500. Beyond this it is not possible to quantify accurately the total number of people within the Department whose work touches on current operations in Iraq. This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are being taken by the Government to ensure that an effective trial-or-release system for Iraqi prisoners is operating in Iraq. [130347]

Mr. Hoon: The Coalition is working with the Iraqi people to establish a fair and just legal system, and estimates that some 100 courts are now in operation across the country.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the results of the inquiry into the al Majarr al Kabir incident will be published; and if he will make a statement. [123420]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 4 July 2003]*: The Ministry of Defence is determined to do all we can to establish the facts, and to bring to account those responsible for the deaths of the six RMP soldiers killed so tragically in Iraq in June. It is not possible to say how long this investigation will take.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 8 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 46W, on civil servants working in Iraq, if he will report on a weekly basis how many civil servants are searching for weapons of mass destruction. [130770]

Mr. Ingram: The number of civilian staff working for the Iraq Survey Group on a weekly basis is as follows:

Week ending	*Number of staff*
2003	
13 June	2
20 June	6
27 June	7
4 July	7
11 July	7
18 July	15
25 July	15

Week ending	Number of staff
1 August	15
8 August	15
15 August	18
22 August	19
29 August	19
5 September	19
12 September	19

Naval Procurement

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in establishing the Maritime Afloat Reach and Sustainability Project; what will new design ships will be procured; what capabilities this will bring; and if he will make a statement on how they will improve flexibility and responsiveness. [128120]

Mr. Ingram: The Military Afloat Reach and Sustain (MARS) project is now reaching the end of its Concept Phase, in which the Support Requirement is defined and a plan for procuring it in the most cost-effective and efficient way is established. It is anticipated that the project will progress to its Assessment phase before the end of this year. During the Assessment phase the project team will invite industry to provide solutions to this requirement, including ship designs, and will establish how new technologies, vessel designs and logistics concepts can deliver the increases in flexibility and responsiveness our future forces will require.

The afloat support capability provided by the MARS programme is essential if the United Kingdom is to maintain the ability to deploy joint forces worldwide to engage in operations where Host Nation Support cannot be guaranteed. As an enabling capability, its effectiveness will be measured by its ability to support our future forces and concepts of operation.

Recruitment

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people were recruited to the armed forces since January for *(a)* each of the recruitment posts in Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [129220]

Mr. Caplin: Statistics for officer recruitment are not broken down by region. The numbers of other rank enlistments for all three Services in each month since January 2003 are detailed in the following table.

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September[1]	Total
RN/RM										
Scotland:										
Aberdeen	5	4	8	0	9	5	8	2	0	41
Dundee	10	10	21	10	14	19	7	4	0	95
Edinburgh	11	12	25	6	11	15	8	9	0	97
Glasgow	11	10	19	4	11	19	12	4	0	90
Inverness	4	5	7	0	2	2	4	0	0	24
England	459	423	469	150	355	428	282	164	0	2,730
Wales	29	26	21	6	21	26	16	10	0	155
Northern Ireland	9	9	8	6	9	5	3	10	0	59
Army										
Scotland:										
Aberdeen	20	14	3	4	4	1	6	11	11	74
Dundee	69	20	15	19	13	7	20	40	37	240
Edinburgh	51	19	13	14	16	8	14	28	26	189
Glasgow	153	86	49	49	44	21	58	68	95	623
Inverness	20	12	5	10	8	2	8	10	17	92
England	2,178	925	817	714	767	687	779	1,045	1,382	9,294
Wales	178	80	61	70	66	50	38	66	105	714
Northern Ireland	53	19	24	13	12	12	8	28	11	180
RAF										
Scotland:										
Aberdeen	0	2	5	4	3	1	4	5	4	28
Dundee	6	8	10	13	6	7	3	8	3	64
Edinburgh	7	7	9	4	9	1	9	5	3	54
Glasgow	10	18	9	14	9	9	12	10	4	95
Inverness	2	5	7	9	5	2	5	2	3	40
England	140	332	305	273	250	172	279	201	83	2,035
Wales	13	28	29	44	36	12	42	20	17	241
Northern Ireland	1	5	9	4	2	2	6	3	1	33

[1] Figures give the position as at 12 September 2003. No figures available for RN/RM.

War Pensions Agency

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the proposal to redefine the eligibility criteria for disablement through the War Pensions Agency. [130518]

Mr. Caplin: There are no plans to change the eligibility criteria used for decisions under the War Pensions Scheme. I refer my hon. Friend to the details of my statement to the House of 15 September 2003, *Official Report*, columns 39–40WS. I can confirm that there will be no effect on existing war pensioners. Decisions on whether a condition was caused or significantly aggravated by service will be evidence-based, using a 'balance of probabilities' standard of proof. This is in line with the approach of the civil courts and other modern compensation arrangements. All decisions will be appealable to a fully independent tribunal.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Civil Compensation Cases

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many civil compensation actions have been brought against the employer of the abusing child carer in the UK in each of the past five years. [128397]

Mr. Leslie: The information requested is not collected centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Community Legal Service

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what proportion of the population living in *(a)* rural and *(b)* urban areas has access to services provided by Community Legal Service Partnerships. [129360]

Mr. Lammy: To date, Community Legal Service Partnerships cover over 99 per cent. of the population of England and Wales and so include nearly all rural and urban areas. Although the provision of services within the Community Legal Service (CLS) falls to individually contracted providers, each CLS partnership has responsibility for advising on the co-ordination and planning of local service delivery. Data produced by the CLS partnerships, particularly in relation to priority legal needs, helps to inform the allocation of CLS resources through the contracting system. Along with policy developments, such as the Partnership Initiative Budget (PIB) and the Method of Delivery Pilots, the Legal Services Commission ensures that there is both adequate and improving service provision across all regions in England and Wales.

Court Attire

Lady Hermon: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many responses were received to the Court Working Dress Consultation Paper; and if he will make a statement on the responses received. [129828]

Mr. Leslie: The consultation period for comments closed on 14 August and 3,406 responses were received.

The responses are currently being analysed and the Government will make a statement in due course.

Mental Incapacity Bill

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what representations he has received regarding the length of the consultation for the draft Mental Incapacity Bill. [129630]

Mr. Lammy: My Department has received four letters to Ministers about the length of the consultation period set up by the Pre-legislative Committee which is examining the draft Mental Incapacity Bill.

Sheriffs

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many claims for negligence, errors or omissions have been made against under sheriffs in each of the last three years; what was *(a)* the highest claim, *(b)* the average claim and *(c)* the total value of claims; what was the total paid in settlement of claims for each of the last three years; what plans he has to indemnify sheriffs against liability for claims against under sheriffs; and if he will make a statement. [129317]

Mr. Lammy: The information requested is not available. The courts do not maintain statistics on the identity or role of defendants; nor does the Department employ or have direct responsibility for under sheriffs.

We do, however, consider the responsibility for enforcement of High Court writs as an onerous one for sheriffs to undertake, as their position is a voluntary one, and that responsibility extends for up to six years following their term of office. Therefore we are relieving them of this responsibility through measures contained in the Courts Bill. Present insurance arrangements made by under sheriffs cover the possibility of litigation for the duration of a high sheriffs responsibility. The matter of continuing cover once new measures are brought in is under careful consideration by the representatives of those who undertake this work and wish to continue to do so as well as those who represent under sheriffs and high sheriffs. We have no plans to indemnify sheriffs from public funds.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what the duties of the office of sheriff consist of *(a)* formally and *(b)* informally; and if he will make a statement. [129319]

Mr. Leslie: High sheriffs are technically responsible for the enforcement of High Court writs, but this is, in practice, carried out on their behalf by under sheriffs, and this duty will be removed from high sheriffs by legislation currently before Parliament. The traditional role of the high sheriff is to escort to court and offer hospitality to High Court judges who visit their area. Informal duties are entirely a matter for individual sheriffs, who also have an informal representational role for their county. The office is unpaid, and the expenses are borne personally by the incumbent. High sheriffs receive no public funds, other than a small allowance for days when they attend judges in court.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have appealed disability living allowance decisions in each year since 1997; what proportion were successful in an appeal; and what reasons people give for appealing initial decisions. [128103]

Maria Eagle: This is a matter for Christina Townsend, Chief Executive of the Appeals Service. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Christina Townsend to Mr. James Wray, dated 17 September 2003:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question regarding the number of people who have appealed Disability Living Allowance decisions in each year since 1997, what proportion were successful in an appeal and what reasons people gave for appealing the initial decisions.

We do not have information on the total number of appeals against Disability Living Allowance decisions nor the reasons why initial decisions were appealed. The attached table shows the number of appeals relating to Disability Living Allowance decisions which were received by the Appeals Service; the number cleared with or without a hearing; the number found in favour of the appellant and the percentage found in favour of the appellant for each year since 1998. We began collecting information for the first full year in 1998 and therefore no information is available for 1997.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Disability Living Allowance appeals received by the Appeals Service, cleared at hearing or without a hearing, found in favour of the appellant at hearing and the percentage found in favour of the appellant each year since 1998.

Number

	Caseload	*Received at the Appeals Service*	*Non hearing clearances*	*Cleared at hearing*	*Found in favour*	*Percentage found in favour*
1998	1,980,200	62,925	2,255	42,950	20,330	47.3
1999	2,042,300	40,260	7,165	51,680	25,170	48.7
2000	2,110,200	95,160	18,270	63,050	31,065	49.3
2001	2,210,600	87,295	22,610	86,285	45,165	52.3
2002	2,322,800	82,345	20,880	72,815	39,490	54.2
January 2003 to July 2003	2,468,900	46,940	11,715	41,655	22,470	53.9

Notes:
All figures are subject to change as more up-to-date data becomes available. Figures for the latest months will rise significantly as information feeds through to the Appeals Service. Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and percentages to 1 decimal place.
Source:
IAD Information Centre, 100% sample.
Caseload notes:
1. Cases where payment of benefit has been suspended are excluded
2. Taken from a 5 per cent. sample therefore figures may be subject to sampling variation.
3. Caseload as at February each year rounded to the nearest 100.
Source::
IAD Information Centre, 5 per cent. sample

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proposals he has to speed up the appeals process for disability living allowance. [128104]

Maria Eagle: This is a matter for Christina Townsend Chief Executive of the Appeals Service. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Christina Townsend to Mr. James Wray, dated 17 September 2003:

The Secretary of State has asked me to respond to your question regarding the proposals that are in place to speed up the appeals process for Disability Living Allowance.

The Appeals Service Agency is committed to a twin strategy of reducing waiting times and clearing the backlog of older cases that accrue. We have made a determined effort to tackle older cases based on the policy of "first in first out". Wherever possible cases are cleared at first hearing. The average time from a Disability Living Allowance appeal being received by the Appeals Service to being cleared has reduced from 31.1 weeks, in 1998, to 15.1 weeks for the period January 2003–July 2003.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Disability Handbook

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans the Government have to update the 1998 Disability Handbook to include a guide on the needs of adults with autistic spectrum disorders. [129900]

Maria Eagle: The Department intends to improve and update the medical guidance currently provided to decision-makers. This will be based on information technology that will enable the guidance to be more comprehensive and easier to access. The guidance on all conditions contained in the Disability Handbook, including autistic spectrum disorder in children and adults, will be revised as part of this initiative. A programme for this work is being developed.

Disabled Employees

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures are in place to ensure that companies provide the necessary access improvements and assistance for disabled employees; and what financial support can be made available for companies to make the changes. [129105]

Maria Eagle: The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) requires that employers consider making a 'reasonable adjustment' to premises, working practices, or other aspects of a job, if a disabled employee or job

applicant would otherwise be at a disadvantage compared to someone else. Improved access, or the provision of various types of personal or technological assistance might constitute reasonable adjustments. The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) advises employees, employers and the general public on the law.

Redress for failure to make reasonable adjustments is via Employment Tribunals.

The Access to Work programme provides a grant towards the additional employment costs resulting from disability. Help available can include adaptations to premises, special aids and equipment, help with travel to work, and personal support in the workplace.

Access to Work pays 100 per cent. of the approved costs where an individual is starting a new job, or has been in their job for less than six weeks. It also pays full costs for people in self-employment and where assistance with travel to work, support workers or communicators for job interviews is required.

In all other cases Access to Work meets up to 80 per cent. of costs above a threshold of 300 and below a ceiling of £10,000 and 100 per cent. of costs above £10,000, over a three year period.

Forestry

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will meet the Association of British Insurers to discuss the level of employers' compulsory liability insurance premiums in the forestry industry. [130426]

Mr. Browne: Ministers will meet the Association of British Insurers (ABI) and insurers to discuss the level of Employers' Liability Compulsory Insurance premiums and their impacts on businesses in general. The Department is undertaking a review of Employers' Liability Compulsory Insurance and has already had a number of meetings with the Association of British Insurers and other organisations. We will report progress and next steps arising out of this second stage of the review, in autumn.

Jobcentre Advisers

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average number of days wait is before an unemployed person's initial appointment with a jobcentre adviser; what research his Department has conducted into the particular problems faced in waiting for appointments by agency workers who become unemployed for short periods of time on a regular basis; and if he will make a statement. [124020]

Mr. Browne: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the Chief Executive, David Anderson. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from David Anderson to Mr. Oliver Heald, dated 16 July 2003:

As Jobcentre Plus is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question concerning the average number of days an unemployed person has to wait for their initial appointment with a Jobcentre Plus advisor and the particular problems faced by agency workers who become unemployed for short periods of time on a regular basis. This is something that falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

We want to give everyone who needs our help the best possible service, including providing them with prompt appointments when they are needed. Our Customer Charter, which details the level of service customers can expect from Jobcentre Plus, states our aim to make sure interviews, including initial interviews at the beginning of a claim, are undertaken within four working days of the customer making initial contact. This aim applies to all our customers, including agency workers.

We do not collect data about the number of days unemployed people have to wait for an initial interview with a Jobcentre Plus adviser. However, we do have a target for the end to end processing of new claims which includes the time leading up to the initial interview. Our target is to make the first payment within 12 days of initial contact about a claim and I am pleased to say that the average clearance time for Jobseeker's Allowance is currently only 10.5 days.

I hope this is helpful and assures you of our intent to provide people with the best possible service.

Targeting Fraud Website

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many hits the Targeting Fraud website has received; how many cases of suspected fraud have been reported to the website; how many of these suspected cases have been investigated; how many of them have led to a successful prosecution; and how many of them have led to a custodial sentence. [126563]

Mr. Pond: Information is not collated centrally on sentences imposed by the courts where successful prosecutions have resulted from the Targeting Fraud Website. The available information is in the table.

Targeting fraud website

	Number of hits	*Number of 'report a cheat' forms submitted*	*Number of cases accepted for investigation*	*Number of successful prosecutions*
2000–01[1]	1,431,093	3,808	319	0
2001–02	222,421	8,453	1,067	4
2002–03	123,575	8,309	1,201	20

[1] The 'report a cheat' online form was introduced in May 2000.

TRANSPORT

Counter-terrorism

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the purpose was of the counter-terrorism exercise held on 7 September. [R] [129631]

Mr. McNulty: The exercise held at Bank tube station on Sunday 7 September was designed to test the co-ordinated response of the emergency services to a chemical release on a train on the London Underground. The exercise involved rescue and decontamination both at the scene and at a hospital. It also tested the use of new equipment and procedures for the emergency services.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the cost was of holding the simulated terrorist attack at the Bank underground station and its surrounds on 7 September; what lessons were learned

from the exercise; and whether the exercise dealt with the requirements of decontamination of the site of the simulated dirty radioactive bomb. [130292]

Mr. McNulty: As with other exercises designed to test the preparedness of the emergency services, the costs are being borne by the participating organisations, whose budgets naturally include general funding for training and exercising.

Our early view is that the elements we planned to test in this exercise worked well. A full assessment is currently being carried out. There will of course be lessons to learn for all those involved.

The exercise was based on a simulated release of a chemical agent on a train stuck in the London underground and was designed to test new equipment and procedures for rescuing and decontaminating people trapped on the train. The exercise was not designed to test site decontamination or the response to a dirty radioactive bomb.

Cyprus Turkish Airlines

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many complaints *(a)* he and *(b)* the Civil Aviation Authority have received about cancellations and delays affecting flights operated by Cyprus Turkish Airlines; and if he will make a statement. [130357]

Mr. McNulty: No complaints have been made to the Department for Transport relating to the cancellation and delays affecting flights by Cyprus Turkish Airlines. The Air Transport Users Council, which was set up by the Civil Aviation Authority, has received four written complaints and two by telephone since April this year.

Devolution (Transport Services)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 9 September 2003, ref 127778, which *(a)* Minister and *(b)* devolved Administration is responsible for (i) ferry services and (ii) air services between (A) England and Northern Ireland, (B) Wales and Northern Ireland, (C) Scotland and Northern Ireland and (D) Scotland and Wales. [130288]

Mr. McNulty *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* Ferry and air services between different parts of the UK are generally reserved matters, and the Secretary of State for Transport has policy responsibility. Explicit provision was made last year for the devolved Administrations in Scotland and Northern Ireland to take responsibility for financial support for a possible ferry service between Campbeltown and Ballycastle.

East Midlands Airport

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made with the decision on whether to open a second runway at East Midlands airport. [130947]

Mr. McNulty: We are currently considering the responses to the airports' consultation. These will inform our final conclusions on airport capacity which will be published in an Air Transport White Paper later this year.

Flight Cancellations

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what statutory duty of care airlines have towards passengers whose flights have been cancelled. [130257]

Mr. McNulty: UK airlines currently have no statutory duty of care to passengers with regard to cancelled flights. However, all the significant "full-service" UK airlines (both scheduled and charter) have signed up to the Airline Voluntary Commitments on Air Passenger Rights, developed in 2001 under the guidance of the European Commission and the European Civil Aviation Conference. These commitments contain non-legally binding agreements to deliver defined standards of service to air travellers in a number of key areas, including the prompt notification of known delays, cancellations and diversions.

At the Transport Council in December 2002 the European Community reached political agreement on a proposal from the European Commission for a regulation establishing common rules on compensation and assistance to air passengers in the event of denied boarding and of cancellation or long delays of flights. We expect this regulation, which is currently under discussion between the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission to become law during 2004.

Green Transport

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which green transport initiatives the Government have supported in the Merseyside PTA area in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04. [130433]

Mr. McNulty: The Government expect local authorities to reflect the principles of sustainable development in their Local Transport Plans (LTPs). They are, for example, required to show how their LTPs will reduce CO_2 emissions from transport sources, how they would contribute to tackling air quality problems, and how they would minimise noise impacts. The Government, through their funding of LTPs, aim to deliver better environmental outcomes across the whole range of Local Transport Plan schemes and initiatives. It would therefore be misleading to identify "green transport initiatives" separately—environmental issues are fully integrated into wider local transport policy.

The Merseyside local authorities have reported in detail on their delivery of schemes and initiatives in LTP Annual Progress Reports, covering 2001–02 and 2002–03.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many questions directed to him remain unanswered. [130755]

Mr. McNulty: The effective handling of parliamentary questions is an issue to which I, and ministerial colleagues, attach great importance. At 15 September 2003, my Department had 43 unanswered parliamentary questions. Of these, eight were named day questions for answer on 16 September 2003 and 35

were ordinary written questions which by convention are answered within one working week of appearing in the Order Book.

Sky Marshals

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) who will cover the employment costs of sky marshals; [129223]

(2) how many sky marshals are available for duty on *(a)* UK airlines and *(b)* airlines flying into and out of the UK; [129224]

(3) how many sky marshals are being trained; and how long their training lasts; [129225]

(4) what the expected establishment of sky marshals will be; [129226]

(5) whether sky marshals are authorised to carry *(a)* firearms and *(b)* other weapons; [129227]

(6) whether *(a)* UK airlines and *(b)* foreign airlines are required (i) to opt in and (ii) to opt out of using sky marshals; and if he will list the airlines that have (A) opted in and (B) opted out. [129228]

Mr. McNulty: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport made a written statement on 19 December last year on the capability which has been developed to place specially trained armed police officers aboard UK civil aircraft. Security reasons preclude making public operational details of that capability. Other countries, with an equivalent capability in respect of flights by their own airlines, have adopted a similar approach.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many special marshals he has appointed; and from which budget funding for special marshals will come; [130951]

(2) what powers special marshals will have if a person refuses to hand over *(a)* alcohol and *(b)* cigarettes. [130952]

Mr. McNulty: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today to the hon. Member for Carshalton & Wallington (Mr. Brake).

Transport Projects (Warrington)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many projects his Department has supported in Warrington since 1997; and how much funding was allocated to each project. [129926]

Mr. McNulty: In April 1998 Warrington became a unitary authority; prior to that they were part of Cheshire. The funding figures for 1997 and 1998 are not readily available.

The Department for Transport has provided Warrington with funding £11.342 million over the last two financial years. The Department has accepted the urban traffic management control major project, and has provisionally accepted two other major projects, Bridgefoot environmental enhancement and Warrington town centre bus interchange.

Details of the schemes and spend can be found in Warrington's annual progress report.

TravelSafe Scheme

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how he has measured the success of the TravelSafe scheme; and what the cost of the scheme has been to date. [130953]

Mr. Jamieson: TravelSafe is a local partnership initiative, led by the Merseytravel Passenger Transport Executive to deal with crime on public transport in their area. My Department has taken an interest in this and other anti-transport crime initiatives throughout the country as part of its on-going work commitment to reduce crime and the fear of crime wherever it occurs on the transport system. In February 2003, Merseytravel reported to the Government's Safer Travel on Buses and Coaches Panel on the successes of the initiative. The Department for Transport has not funded this initiative and we hold no information on its cost to date.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Public Appointments

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Minister for Women what progress she has made in increasing the proportion of women appointed to public bodies. [129453]

Ms Hewitt: The percentage of women on the boards of public bodies at 31 March 2003 was 35.7 per cent., up from 34 per cent. in March 2002. The Government remain committed to the aim that by the end of 2005, and for the majority of departments, women should hold 45–50 per cent. of the appointments to the bodies they sponsor.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

EU Enlargement

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from EU non-applicant states bordering the enlarged EU on access to the Single Market after enlargement. [128175]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, met with the Russian Deputy Prime Minister Mr. Kudrin on 26 June this year, and also in October 2002. During both these meetings the issue of current and future Russian access to EU markets was raised.

Computer Viruses

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has for reducing the threat from computer viruses. [130197]

Mr. Timms: Malicious software—including viruses—is a global phenomenon. No one Government can eliminate the development and spread of malicious software but the Government are playing their part in a range of activities to minimise the impact on users. We are talking to vendors about improving the identification of vulnerabilities in software and the underlying protocols. We are working with industry to disseminate advice about the availability of solutions to the problems which are identified and how to deal with

the difficulties posed by events, such as viruses, which exploit those vulnerabilities. The Department has taken a prominent role in the promotion of good information security management and has developed promotional material aimed at helping smaller companies understand and deal with common security problems. The detection and prosecution of those who create malicious software is the responsibility of the Home Office and Section 3 of the Computer Misuse Act already criminalises the unauthorised modification of the contents of any computer, which includes modifications caused by viruses. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is, however, reviewing the effectiveness of the Act and, as part of this process, will consider whether any further legislation is required to further deter those who write or knowingly disseminate computer viruses.

Departmental Computer Security

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much has been *(a)* budgeted and *(b)* spent by her Department since April 2002 on (i) combating computer fraud, (ii) preventing theft of computers and (iii) safeguarding the security of information held on computer; and if she will make a statement. [128782]

Ms Hewitt: It is not possible to separately identify the budgets and costs requested as they are spread across a number of areas including:

The overall IT service cost from our outsourced IT services provider;

Individual project development and system operating costs;

Overall physical and building security costs;

IT systems and network (including firewall) management costs;

Overall Internal Audit effort;

Staff recruitment and training costs.

Electricity Generation

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much electricity has been used in the UK in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and how much has been used in this year so far. [129941]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* The available information is shown in the following table.

Electricity used in the UK

	TWh
1998	345.4
1999	352.5
2000	360.1
2001	363.1
2002	364.7
2003[1]	189.8

[1] First half

Source:
DTI Energy Trends

EU Tariffs

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the EU tariffs on textiles and clothing imports from *(a)* India, *(b)* Sri Lanka and *(c)* the United States; and if she will make a statement. [129167]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There are over 1,000 individual EU tariff lines covering imports of textiles and clothing so it is not possible to list them individually. These duties are applicable to all countries including USA, India and Sri Lanka and range from 0 per cent. to 12.2 per cent. Both India and Sri Lanka benefit from preferential arrangements with the EU that give lower duties for textile and clothing products.

Everything but Arms Agreement

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 14 June, *Official Report*, column 17W, on the Everything but Arms Agreement, what proportion of total trade exports to the United Kingdom are represented by *(a)* sugar, *(b)* oil, *(c)* tobacco, *(d)* cotton and *(e)* olive oil regimes for (i) least developed countries and (ii) non-least developed countries in sub-Saharan Africa. [128558]

Ms Hewitt: To obtain such information would require extracting information on a large number of commodity codes for 51 countries and therefore could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Export Control

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the feasibility of using *(a)* mutual and *(b)* multilateral legal assistance treaties to allow the UK Government to develop effective end-user controls of arms shipments from the UK. [129849]

Mr. MacShane: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have a system for the post-export monitoring of UK-origin arms. Where there is a case of diversion or fraud by a private individual, we look to co-operate with the authorities of friendly countries to bring the perpetrators to justice. Legal assistance treaties are of little use in cases of alleged misuse by Governments.

Export Licences

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the export licences that have been granted to Royal Ordnance for the export of TNT to the USA in the past three years. [129284]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 15 September 2003]:* A list of all UK export licences is published in the Annual Report on Strategic Export Controls. However, details of export licence applications from particular companies are normally commercially confidential and exempt from disclosure under categories 13 and 14 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Gangmasters

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to introduce a system of registration for gangmasters to ensure minimum standards of health and safety training for the staff they provide. [124890]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have been asked to reply.

The Government are working with organisations and businesses in the food chain to draw up a code of practice for gangmasters in the agriculture and fresh produce sectors and to devise a system of accreditation gangmasters who abide by this standard. The aim is to test whether a voluntary accreditation scheme combined with a readiness by businesses in the food chain to use accredited labour can achieve an improvement in employment practices in the sector. The option of a statutory registration requirement has not been ruled out if the accreditation approach proves insufficient. The proposed code of practice and the standard it will set would be a key element in either approach.

Higgs Review

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department has taken to implement the findings of the Higgs review of the role and effectiveness of non-executive directors. [129916]

Jacqui Smith: The Government warmly welcomed the Higgs Review. The majority of the recommendations of the Review were for changes to the Combined Code. The Code is the responsibility of the Financial Reporting Council, which published a revised Code on 23 July this year. The Government believe that this will provide a clear and robust framework to improve the performance of boards and increase investor confidence.

Following the Higgs Review, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State asked Professor Laura Tyson, Dean of the London Business School, to consider how a broader range of non-executives might be identified and recruited in order to improve board effectiveness. Laura Tyson's report was published on 19 June. The Department of Trade and Industry s currently engaging with various stakeholders in order to take forward Professor Tyson's recommendations.

The Higgs Review also recommended the development of guidance on directors' and officers' insurance. The Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators are currently developing this.

IT Security

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she has taken to review the security of the Department's IT system; and how many digital attacks there were on the Department's system in the last six months. [129507]

Ms Hewitt: All DTI IT systems are designed in accordance with HMG IT security policy.

The core Department's internal IT system undergoes a regular cycle of security testing in line with its security policy. In addition, the processes and procedures of those parts of the Department responsible for overseeing its IT services are subjected to six monthly independent audit as part of our certification of compliance with BS 7799 Part 2.

During the past six months, one attempted digital attack was identified which failed.

Nanotechnology

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance is given to companies researching nanotechnology; what proposals she has to increase its use in British industry; and if she will make a statement on *(a)* its future and *(b)* the improvements it can bring. [129153]

Ms Hewitt: Support for nanotechnology research and training in excess of £125 million over the last six years has been provided by OST, via the Research Councils, to UK universities. This has laid a solid foundation for future commercial investment and exploitation. The SBS "Smart" Scheme has helped many small companies, including university spin-outs, to develop their ideas from this technology. Other initiatives, for example the LINK Basic Technologies for Industrial Applications R&D programme, and other LINK programmes in the electronics, IT, chemicals, materials, and biotechnology sectors; although not dedicated to nanotechnology, have also supported projects that enable UK companies to collaborate with universities and commercially exploit this technology.

On 2 July my noble Friend the Minister of State for Science and Innovation announced a £90 million programme over the next six years to help industry harness the commercial opportunities offered by nanotechnology. My Department is partnering with the Regional Development Agencies and Devolved Administrations to facilitate regional investment in facilities.

Ofgem

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with Ofgem following their announcement of the possible shortfall in the Roc fund; what measures *(a)* are being taken and *(b)* are planned to avoid a shortfall; and what assessment she has made of the impact of this announcement upon the renewables industry. [128870]

Mr. Timms: My officials are discussing the possible shortfall with Ofgem, and with representatives from the renewables industry. Since the extent of any possible shortfall will not be clear until 1 October, it is too early at this stage to assess the impact on the renewables market or to propose measures to address the possible shortfall or to avoid the problem recurring in the future.

In the interim, Ofgem are in communication with the administrators over compliance with the Renewables Obligation.

Productivity Gap

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she is taking to close the productivity gap with other European Union countries. [128204]

Ms Hewitt: Today my Department publishes its strategy, setting out our priorities for the next five years to narrow the productivity gap with our competitors, including those in the EU. A copy of the strategy has been placed in the Libraries of the House, along with a companion paper setting out the analysis on which the strategy has been built.

The Strategy focuses on practical action where the Department can have the greatest impact:

helping business to access the knowledge and ideas it needs to innovate;

encouraging employers and employees to improve their skills and create more productive, high performing workplaces;

ensuring the right frameworks exist so that markets are open and fair at home and overseas;

ensuring that all regions are able to fulfil their economic potential.

DTI will work in close partnership with its stakeholders, customers and other policy makers to achieve these aims.

Red Tape

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment her Department has made of the number of jobs that have been lost to the British economy as a result of regulations on business introduced since May 1997; and if she will make a statement. [129390]

Ms Hewitt: Since 1997 over 1.5 million jobs have been created within the British economy and the number of people in employment is currently at 27.92 million, the highest since records began in 1984. The claimant count rate of unemployment benefits is the lowest for 27 years.

A Regulatory Impact Assessment is produced for all regulations that have a cost to or benefit for business as part of the policy development process. These are prepared in consultation with industry and the Small Business Service.

Safeway

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will make an announcement on the proposed takeover bids for the Safeway chain of supermarkets. [129394]

Ms Hewitt: I will announce my decision on the proposed acquisition of Safeway alongside publication of the Competition Commission report. The administrative target for publication of this report is within 30 working days of its receipt from the Competition Commission. As the report was received on 18 August 2003, our aim is to publish by 30 September 2003.

Skills Shortages

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate her Department has made of the annual cost to British businesses, in terms of extra training and lost productivity, of basic skills shortages in the workforce. [129391]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I have been asked to reply.

There is robust evidence that poor literacy and numeracy skills have adverse effects on the earnings and employment prospects of individuals.

However there is limited evidence on the cost to British businesses of basic skill shortages in the workforce.

One 1992 study that attempted to quantify the costs to employers of poor basic skills suggested that they were costing companies employing over 50 workers an average of £165,000 a year and for the largest companies (with over 1,000 employees) the costs could be as high as £500,000 per year (equivalent to £208,000 and £626,000 in 2002 prices).

Based on this evidence, the total cost to UK businesses (employing over 50 workers) of poor basic skill levels was estimated to be in the region of £4.8 billion pounds per annum (£6 billion in 2002 prices).

These costs are likely to be underestimated, as they do not account for costs associated with lost future business, the need for additional training because staff may be unable to cope with written material, the cost of work that needs to be re-done or the costs incurred by firms with 50 or fewer employees.

The influential report "Improving Literacy and Numeracy: A Fresh Start" by Sir Claus Moser highlighted further analysis based on this 1992 research study. It suggested that the impact of poor basic skills on the UK economy as a whole could be as high as £10 billion per annum (in 1999 prices).

Stock Exchanges

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the potential establishment of regional and local stock exchange bourses for small and medium sized enterprises. [129392]

Nigel Griffiths: Proposals were published by the independent Centre for the Study of Financial Innovation in 2000. I understand that Advantage West Midlands have been developing these ideas, and I have asked for a copy of their proposal.

I am determined to ensure that all UK companies have access to the finance they need to expand with viable products and services, and the DTI has a number of programmes to assist with this.

World Trade Organisation

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* civil servants will be attending the Cancun conference in September; and if she will make a statement. [128781]

Ms Hewitt: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and the Secretary of State for International Development, and my hon. Friend the Minister of State for International Trade, Investment and Foreign Affairs and myself attended the Cancun conference.

We were supported by a total of 32 civil servants from Department of Trade and Industry, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Department for International Development and Her Majesty's Treasury. Each Department was able to deploy its expertise during discussions on the various trade and development issues contained in the Doha Development Agenda.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to my oral statement to the House earlier today.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she is having with member states of the European Union on the trade policies that will be presented at the World Trade Organisation conference in Mexico in September; and if she will make a statement. [127166]

Ms Hewitt: I hold regular discussions with European Union member states on issues relating to the current World Trade Organisation Round. These continued during the conference itself.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to my oral statement to the House earlier today.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with *(a)* ministerial colleagues, *(b)* NGOs and *(c)* member states of the European Union on (i) policies and (ii) objectives to be presented at the World Trade Organisation conference in Mexico; and if she will make a statement. [128779]

Ms Hewitt: I have had regular discussions with my ministerial colleagues, NGOs and member states of the European Union on our objectives for the 5th World Trade Organisational Ministerial conference in Cancun. These discussions continued during the conference.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to my oral statement to the House earlier today.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the Government's objectives for the Fifth WTO Ministerial Conference in Cancún. [127598]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 8 September 2003]:* Our main objective for Cancun was to work for a successful outcome to the current round of world trade negotiations that benefits industrialised and developing countries alike. In particular to: (i) secure an ambitious framework for an agreement on agriculture, where the EU has shown its commitment to the Round in agreeing historic changes to the CAP; (ii) press for progress on reducing non-agricultural tariffs, increasing services liberalisation and agreeing special and differential treatment for developing countries. I refer the hon. Gentleman to my oral statement to the House earlier today.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Duty of Care

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action her Department is taking to assist small businesses with the implementation of the Duty of Care Regulations; and if she will make a statement. [128692]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has issued a code of practice under section 34(7) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The purpose of the code of practice is to provide practical guidance to those subject to the duty of care, including small businesses, on how to discharge their obligations under the duty. The code of practice and an explanatory leaflet are available on the Department's website at: http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/management/doc/index.htm

Radioactive Material

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many sites in the United Kingdom specialise in the disposal of radioactive materials. [128106]

Mr. Morley: Disposal of radioactive waste in the UK is regulated by the Environment Agency in England and Wales, the Environment and Heritage Service of the Department of the Environment in Northern Ireland and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency in Scotland.

BNFL's Drigg site in Cumbria specialises in the disposal of low-level solid radioactive waste from Sellafield and other UK sites. Around 850 sites in England and Wales are authorised to dispose of low and very low-level radioactive waste under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993.

Abandoned Vehicles

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what initiatives her Department has introduced since 1997 to tackle the problems of abandoned cars. [129695]

Mr. Morley: Since its creation in June 2001, Defra introduced on 9 April 2002 regulations reducing the statutory notice periods after which local authorities can remove abandoned vehicles from the highway. Local authorities can now remove those vehicles that they consider merit destruction from the highway after the expiry of a 24 hour notice placed on them.

Defra is consulting on a proposal to reduce the statutory notice period whereby a landowner can object to the removal of a vehicle(s) abandoned on their land. The consultation closes on 24 October. We aim to introduce a Regulation in the new year to amend the Removal and Disposal of Vehicles Regulations 1986.

Animal Movements

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received on the proposed amendments to the EU maximum hours for movement of animals. [128387]

Mr. Bradshaw: The European Commission published proposals for new rules on animal welfare during transport on 16 July. On 17 July Defra launched a public consultation asking for the views of interested organisations. The consultation period ends on 8 October, after which copies of the responses will be made publicly available in accordance with Defra's policy of openness. Meetings will be held with interested organisations as part of the consultation process.

Bovine TB

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on levels of cases of bovine TB. [129496]

Mr. Bradshaw: In the period January to July 2003, there were just over 2,100[1] new bovine tuberculosis (TB) incidents in Great Britain. This represents an increase of approximately 2 per cent. over the same period in 2002 when 2,065 new incidents were recorded. To date, just over 1,000[1] of the new incidents recorded in 2003 have been confirmed, 840[1] are unconfirmed and just under 260[1] remain unclassified pending the results of tissue culture tests.

Defra is working hard to address the problem of bovine TB, and last year we spent £72 million on a programme of public health protection measures, cattle testing, cattle controls and extensive research. In February this year, we announced a review of the current TB control regime. We expect to consult on proposals for a long-term TB strategy for GB, and on short-term policy options, later this year.

[1] Provisional figures - subject to change as outstanding TB test and culture results become available.

Notes:

The TB testing and control programme was severely disrupted during the foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreak in 2001. Since testing resumed in 2002, resources have been concentrated on herds with overdue tests which would have had a longer period in which to contract the disease. Also, the proportion of high risk herds being tested post-FMD is greater than that prior to the outbreak. As result, the number of TB breakdowns being recorded post-FMD is not comparable to that prior to the FMD outbreak.

Carbon Savings

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether she estimates that the Government are on target to achieve carbon savings of 5 million tonnes by 2010. [129850]

Mr. Morley: The UK's target under the Kyoto Protocol is to reduce emissions of a basket of six greenhouse gases by 12.5 per cent. below base year levels by 2008–12. We estimate that this will equate to a reduction in emissions of around 26 MtC (million tonnes of carbon equivalent) by 2008–12. The UK's domestic target, to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide by 20 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010, is estimated to equate to a reduction of about 33 MtC by 2010.

Data for emissions of the basket of six greenhouse gases for 2001, submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in April 2003, show that emissions fell by 12.3 per cent., or 26 MtC, between the base year and 2001. Emissions of carbon dioxide fell by 5.3 per cent., or 9 MtC. Provisional data for 2002 show that total emissions fell by 14–15 per cent. between the base year and 2002, and carbon dioxide emissions fell by 8–9 per cent.

Progress that we have made to date and our latest projections to 2010 contained in the UK's Third National Communication to the UNFCCC indicate that we are well on course to meet our Kyoto commitment. This conclusion is supported by a recent independent assessment by the UNFCCC.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Department's strategy for combined heat and power will be finalised. [129851]

Mr. Morley: In keeping with the commitment made in the Energy White Paper published in February 2003, the Government will issue the final version of the Combined Heat and Power Strategy later this year. The Strategy will detail the measures we believe will help us achieve our challenging target of 10,000 MW of installed Good Quality CHP by 2010, incorporating the new support measures for CHP announced in the Energy White Paper.

Committee on Radioactive Waste Management

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what method she has adopted to determine membership of the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management; how many appointments have been made; if she will list those people already confirmed as members of the committee; and if she will make a statement. [129530]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 September 2003]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in a reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire), on 16 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 318–19W, stated we had advertised in March for Members of the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management, had received over 400 applications, and had appointed Katharine Bryan as Chair; Mrs. Bryan would help select the remaining members. We have since carried out interviews for the remaining posts and we shall make an announcement once the appointments have been agreed with the Devolved Administrations. Our method is to select candidates according to the criteria we published in March and following the Code of Practice of the Office for the Commissioner of Public Appointments, including the use of an independent assessor on the selection panel.

Conservation Sites

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what discussions have taken place with the Countryside Agency about the assessment of European sites designated under the Conservation (Natural Habitats Act etc) Regulations 1994; and whether sites in the south-east and central southern regions will be assessed before the commencement of access arising from the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 in the summer of 2004; [130427]

(2) what information the Countryside Agency has received from English Nature to enable it to make appropriate assessments of European sites in the south-east and central southern regions of England under the Conservation (Natural Habitats Act etc) Regulations 1994; when the information was received; and when the assessments will be completed. [130428]

Alun Michael: The Countryside Agency has worked closely with English Nature to adopt an agreed approach in relation to nature conservation and access land. This is embodied in a heads of agreement signed between the agency and English Nature on 10 July 2000, in which both organisations agreed to work together to facilitate improved access and safeguard nature conservation interests.

The agency and English Nature have agreed a detailed process to assess European sites designated under the Conservation (Natural Habitats Act etc.) Regulations 1994.

English Nature has undertaken audits of all European sites designated under these regulations in the south-east and central southern mapping areas and has provided advice to the agency, in July 2001 and February 2003, on 99 sites which contain features that are potentially vulnerable to public access under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

The agency will complete the assessments for these sites before access commences in these two mapping areas.

Correspondence

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Broxbourne of *(a)* 18 June, *(b)* 15 July, *(c)* 13 August and *(d)* 9 September relating to the contents of an article in the *Sunday Telegraph* dated 15 June, raised by one of her constituents. [129831]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 September 2003]:* I replied to the hon. Member's letters of 18 June and 13 August on 9 September.

Unfortunately, the Department has no record of receiving the hon. Member's letters of 15 July or 9 September. If the hon. Member will supply me with copies of her letters I shall ensure that they are dealt with speedily.

EU Legislation

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what further statutory responsibilities for collection and disposal will be placed upon local authorities as part of the implementation of the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive. [128371]

Mr. Morley: The Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Directive does not place direct responsibilities on local authorities for the collection and disposal of WEEE, but on producers and distributors. The Government are preparing the UK implementation of the Directive and are discussing with local authorities how best to involve them in maximising use of the existing waste collection infrastructure. Options for implementation will be presented in the next round of consultation, due to be published in the late autumn.

Fishing Fleets

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to compensate for any virement of moneys under the Objective One fisheries programme transferring financial aid for decommissioning to other sectors of the programme following her earlier announcement denying access to the English Decommissioning Scheme for vessels outside of the North Sea; and if she will make a statement. [129415]

Mr. Bradshaw: Whether decommissioning grant for fishing vessels is available in Cornwall under the EU structural fund for fisheries (FIFO) is determined by the Cornish Objective One programme monitoring committee. I understand that on the advice of the programme's fisheries representatives the decision has been taken not to plan for expenditure on decommissioning for the remainder of the 2000 06 structural funds programme, in order to provide funding for strategic projects to which they give priority.

The Government have made no decision to make other funds available for the decommissioning of vessels in the south-west fleet.

Flood Prevention

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made with regard to pre-feasibility studies to identify options for the alleviation of flooding in Medmenham and Marlow. [128952]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 September 2003]:* As part of a more extensive study in Medmenham, consultants to the Environment Agency are currently modelling various different options for reducing flood risk. This has taken longer than anticipated due to problems with the modelling, however, the pre-feasibility report will be concluded by the end of October 2003.

The Environment Agency is undertaking two pre-feasibility studies that are considering possible flood alleviation options for the Pound Lane and Firview Close areas of Marlow. The first study is due to be completed by the end of September and the second is due for completion in October 2003.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment has taken place of each area along the River Thames that has been designated as *(a)* flood plain and *(b)* at a high risk of flooding; and if she will make a statement. [128783]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency's Indicative Floodplain Map provides a general overview of areas of land in natural floodplains and, therefore, that are potentially at risk of flooding from rivers or the sea. The maps are created using the best available information, and are based on historical flood records and computer models. The Agency's Thames Region is able to answer queries relating to the source of the floodplain outline in a particular area. Data are available for the River Thames and all other main river catchments.

The Department's Flood Management High Level Target 5 requires operating authorities to make an overall assessment of the risk of flooding. The Environment Agency's Risk Assessment for Strategic Planning (RASP), combines information on the defence system, the Indicative Floodplain Map and the topography, to give an indication of the category of flood risk in a local area. The data are to be used by the Agency for national monitoring of risk from flooding; strategic prioritisation of investment in defence improvements or other flood management options (e.g. increased storage or diversion); targeting flood warning and emergency response; and highlighting priorities for monitoring and maintenance. The RASP

outputs have been supplied to the Association of British Insurers and can be made available to individuals on request. The Agency is planning on being able to put this information on their website by September 2004.

Fluoridation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research her Department has conducted into the effects of adding fluoride to water supplies; what recent meetings she has had with colleagues and others on the issue; and if she will make a statement. [128677]

Mr. Morley: The Government's public health advisers are the Department of Health who are responsible for water fluoridation policy. The national health service Centre for Reviews and Dissemination at the University of York published its Report, "A Systematic Review of Water Fluoridation", in September 2000. In keeping with comments in the Report that there was a need for more good quality research, the Department of Health commissioned the Medical Research Centre (MRC) to advise on how the evidence base might be strengthened. Its Report was published in September 2002. The Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Dental Officer were asked to examine these recent recommendations and to report on the implications for Government policy. Their Report is expected during the autumn. DoH have also commissioned a research study on the bio-availability (absorption) of fluoride.

There has been regular inter-departmental liaison between Defra and Department of Health Ministers and officials about amendments that have been included in the Water Bill to the water fluoridation provisions in the Water Industry Act 1991. The amendments were considered by Committee of the whole House of Lords on 9 July and we anticipate that water fluoridation will be considered in Committee in the House of Commons on 21 October. On the Government side there will be a free vote.

Gangmasters (Code of Practice)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she plans to publish a code of practice for gangmasters; what subjects it will cover; what legal status it will have; and which bodies will be consulted on it prior to publication. [129771]

Mr. Bradshaw: Work is currently going on to draw up a code of practice for gangmasters operating in the agriculture and fresh produce sectors, covering best practice in employing people and supplying labour to other businesses. The intention is that it should cover a range of issues relevant to employment and labour supply, such as health and safety, minimum wages, working hours, entitlement to work and VAT registration. Plans are being prepared to trial the draft code of practice on a voluntary basis with a number of gangmasters and businesses using gang labour during the autumn. Decisions on publication of the code and on its legal status will be taken in the light of this trial. A range of bodies and individual businesses, representing farmers, farm workers, packhouses, retailers and gangmasters, and the Ethical Trading Initiative are working in partnership with Government to develop and pilot the Code of Practice. Further bodies will be consulted once a draft version of the Code is available.

GM Birdseed

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what evidence she has that GM birdseed has been released into the UK environment and on what scale; what procedures are in place or planned to separate out GM lines in *(a)* canary seed, *(b)* linseed, *(c)* millet and *(d)* rape seed mixes that are imported; and what action she is taking to prosecute those who illegally contaminate the UK environment. [129757]

Mr. Morley: I have no evidence that any GM seeds are being sold as bird-seed in the UK.

The seeds of canary-grass, linseed, millet and oilseed rape are frequently sold as food for wild birds. However at the present time no GM varieties of these plants are permitted for this use. It is the responsibility of the supplier to comply with regulations on marketing of genetically modified organisms. One type of GM rape seed has authorisation for import into the European Union as grain, however it must be crushed and processed so cannot be used as whole grain in bird seed mixes.

We understand that oilseed rape used in UK bird seed mixes is typically sourced in the UK where no GM varieties are permitted for commercial cultivation.

If we were to become aware through existing inspection procedures that an importer was in breach of the law, we would consider prosecution.

GM Foods

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her discussions with the chief executive officers of ASDA, Tesco, Sainsbury and Safeway on 16 July regarding GM foods; and what plans she has to meet the chief executive officers of Marks and Spencer and Waitrose on this issue. [128868]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 September 2003]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met with the CEOs of ASDA, Tesco, Sainsbury and Safeway, the four largest supermarket chains, in a listening capacity, in particular to hear their views as part of the public dialogue on GM issues. During the course of discussion, she emphasised the Government's support for proportional and workable measures for the mandatory traceability and labelling of GM foods and crops.

The interests of other retailers, including those of Marks and Spencer and Waitrose, were represented at the meeting by the Director General of the British Retail Consortium.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions her Department has had with the European Commission to ensure that GM foods are labelled and traceable. [130096]

Mr. Morley: The Department, working closely with the Food Standards Agency, has had regular discussions with the Commission and other EU partners on this issue, both at official and ministerial level. Most recently these discussions have taken place in the context of negotiating the new EC Regulation on the traceability and labelling of GM products that was agreed in July 2003.

LANTRA

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list those industries which constitute the representative role of LANTRA; and what plans there are to include additional industries. [130591]

Alun Michael: Lantra represents the following 17 industries:

agricultural crops;
agricultural livestock;
animal care;
animal technology;
acquaculture;
environmental conservation;
equine;
farriery;
fencing;
fisheries management;
floristry;
game conservation;
land-based engineering;
landscaping;
production horticulture;
trees and timber; and
veterinary nursing.

Any proposals to extend coverage would be for discussion between Lantra and the Sector Skills Development Agency. Lantra has assured Ministers that it fully appreciates the importance to link to the work of other similar agencies to make sure that the needs of the diverse rural economy and communities are met. Discussions are currently taking place between Lantra, the Sector Skills Development Agency and this Department about a role for Lantra in coordinating the work of Sector Skills Councils with significant interests in rural areas.

Livestock Disposal

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effects of the on-farm burial ban; and if she will make a statement. [129789]

Mr. Bradshaw: No formal assessment has been made, although clearly the ban will have an impact on those farmers who had previously buried fallen stock on farm. That is why the Government have announced they are setting up a low cost voluntary national fallen stock scheme in conjunction with the livestock industry to assist farmers in adapting to the new requirements for disposal of fallen stock.

In the interim, the Fallen Stock helpline on 0845 8507070 can give advice to farmers on collection services in their area to enable them to dispose of their fallen stock now.

Royal Mail Deliveries

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate the Government have made of the change in CO_2 emissions arising from Royal Mail's decision to move mail from rail to road. [124150]

Mr. Morley: The Government have made no estimate of the impact on CO_2 emissions of Royal Mail's decision, which is a commercial and economic one for the Royal Mail to make. The Government encourage all businesses to adopt strategies that reduce emissions overall.

Rural Development Fund

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to propose detailed provisions on rural development fund payments and their application to tenant farmers. [R] [129635]

Alun Michael: The England Rural Development Programme was established in 2000 and measures under it are available to all farmers, including tenant farmers, on the same terms. Because the Government were keen to ensure that tenants are not disadvantaged in applying for farm diversification or agri-environment schemes, we asked the Tenancy Reform Industry Group to consider this issue. This group, which included representatives from all key industry stakeholder organisations, published its report in June 2003. TRIG has proposed a comprehensive package of legislative, fiscal and other changes that are intended to ensure both landlord and tenant have more flexibility to deal with the long-term nature of rural land management. These recommendations have the support of all TRIG members.

TRIG did not find sufficient evidence to warrant recommending a change to agricultural tenancy legislation to give tenants a greater ability to diversify or participate in agri-environment schemes. However, they have proposed that a new Code of Good Practice should be drawn up to help avoid disputes between landlords and tenants on consent for diversification into non-agricultural activities. The Group also recommended that if, after a period of years the Code of Good Practice was not seen to be working and there is evidence to show that the legislation is acting as a barrier to diversification, legislative change should be considered.

The Government's formal response to the Group's report has not yet been published. However we have asked TRIG to take work on a Code of Good Practice forward and a small working group will be working on this over the autumn.

Softwood

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what controls

there are on the import of softwoods into the United Kingdom to ensure that they originate from sustainable forests. [129661]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 September 2003]:* The UK Government support sustainable forest management and are committed to tackling illegal logging and its associated trade.

Under EU law, import controls on illegally logged timber, can only be imposed at EU level. We are therefore working actively within the EU, where this is now being considered. The Government have shown leadership in their strong encouragement of the European Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) process. The European Commission published a proposed FLEGT action plan on 21 May 2003. The plan includes a proposal to draft a new EU regulation to address imports of illegally logged timber in a way that is consistent with EU obligations to the World Trade Organisation.

The FLEGT action plan deals only with legality. The EU's wider objective is to encourage sustainable forest management. Since in many countries forest legislation is based on the premise of sustainable forest management, better law enforcement will in general lead to more sustainable forest management. Where this is not the case, the Commission propose that the EU should encourage a review of the legal framework.

The UK Government are working with other member states to ensure favourable Council conclusions inviting the Commission to proceed with this work as soon as possible.

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what records the Government have of United Kingdom softwood timber prices in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000, *(c)* 2001 and *(d)* 2002. [129663]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 15 September 2003]:* Average prices for softwood standing sales in Great Britain are presented in the table.

Financial year	*Average price per cubic metre (£)*
1999–2000	8.72
2000–01	8.15
2001–02	7.52
2002–03	5.74

Note:
The figures are taken from sales of standing timber on Forestry Commission land.

Waste Disposal

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the choice of waste disposal method by *(a)* waste disposal authorities and *(b)* businesses in the event of the introduction of an incinerator tax on the same basis as the landfill tax. [129253]

Mr. Morley: No assessment has been made. In this year's Budget, the Chancellor stated that a review of the environmental and health effects of all waste management and disposal options had been commissioned. The review has yet to be completed but we aim to report on its findings later in the year. The case for using economic instruments for incineration will be considered in light of this work, and in consultation with other stakeholders.

Water Pollution

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the problems caused by delays in enforcement action being taken against *(a)* companies and *(b)* households discharging pollutants into waterways. [129869]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency (the Agency) has powers to ensure that preventative or remedial action is taken to protect the environment or to secure compliance with relevant legislation such as the Water Resources Act 1991 (as amended by the Environment Act 1995), which makes provision regarding discharges to controlled waters. The enforcement action taken by the Agency will be proportionate to the risks posed to the environment and to the seriousness of any breach of the law. The Agency's powers for prosecution are used when it is satisfied that there is sufficient, admissible and reliable evidence that the offence has been committed and that there is a realistic prospect of conviction.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Criminal Justice and Trial Units

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what percentage of *(a)* magistrates' court cases and *(b)* Crown Court cases were dealt with by joint police and Crown Prosecution Service criminal justice units and trials units in 2002–03. [128715]

The Solicitor-General: By the end of 2002–03, 43.4 per cent. of the Crown Prosecution Service's magistrates' court caseload and 27.6 per cent. of its Crown Court caseload were dealt with in collocated Criminal Justice Units and Trial Units.

Crown Prosecution Service

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General in what ways the CPS is contributing to the CJS Case Preparation Project to reform case management in *(a)* magistrates' courts and *(b)* the Crown Court. [128725]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) is actively supporting this Project, and has been closely involved in its development. At a local level, CPS practitioners are playing a key role in local implementation teams at each of the five pilot sites, and on the Local Criminal Justice Boards responsible for overseeing the delivery of the pilots. At a national level, the CPS has two senior representatives on the project board, and others on the national stakeholder machinery. The CPS has also seconded a senior prosecutor to the project team who is leading the 'production' strand of the project.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what targets were set by the CPS in 2002–03 on *(a)* the presentation in court of prosecution cases, *(b)* the

testing of defence cases and (c) complying with the duties of disclosure; and what the performance results are of these targets. [128718]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) set a target in 2002–03 for Higher Court Advocates (HCAs) to undertake a minimum amount of advocacy in the Crown Court. The total national requirement was for HCAs to undertake 8,620 sessions; the outturn was 7,217 sessions or 83.7 per cent. No other targets were set in relation to the presentation of prosecution cases in court.

The CPS did not set any target in relation to testing the defence case.

The CPS does not set a target for compliance with disclosure requirements, but performance is monitored by Her Majesty's CPS Inspectorate (HMCPSI) as part of their regular cycle of inspections. The latest published annual data from HMCPSI, for 2001–02, shows that the percentage of cases where primary disclosure was handled properly was 80.4 per cent. and for secondary disclosure it was 75.3 per cent. From 1 April 2003, the CPS has been undertaking formal monitoring of performance on disclosure as part its internal Casework Quality Assurance programme.

Director of Public Prosecutions

Norman Baker: To ask the Solicitor-General (1) if she will list the (a) Ministers, (b) civil servants and (c) members of the judiciary consulted as part of the selection process which resulted in the appointment of Mr. Ken Macdonald QC as Director of Public Prosecutions. [129242]

(2) if she will make a statement on the appointment of Mr. Ken Macdonald QC as Director of Public Prosecutions; [129244]

(3) if he will list the members of the panels which (a) interviewed and (b) selected Mr. Ken Macdonald QC for the position of Director of Public Prosecutions. [129243]

The Solicitor-General: The appointment of Mr. Ken Macdonald QC as Director of Public Prosecutions was made following a process of fair and open competition.

Advertisements were placed in the national media and legal journals and, as part of the search process, a number of civil servants and members of the judiciary were approached in order to identify suitable candidates.

The selection panel was chaired by the independent First Civil Service Commissioner Baroness Prashar. The other members of the selection panel were Sir Hayden Phillips, Permanent Secretary at the Department for Constitutional Affairs, Sir David Omand, Permanent Secretary, Cabinet Office; and Sir Robin Auld, Lord Justice of Appeal. Ken Macdonald QC was recommended for appointment by the panel to the Attorney-General. No other Ministers, civil servants or members of the judiciary, apart from a referee nominated on a confidential basis by Mr. Macdonald, were consulted as part of this process.

In line with normal practice, the Attorney-General informed the Prime Minister's office that he intended to appoint Ken Macdonald.

Sports Events

Nick Harvey: To ask the Solicitor-General how many (a) prosecutions and (b) resulting convictions there have been arising from circumstances at British sports events in each of the last 10 years, broken down by type of (i) sport and (ii) offence. [129686]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) does not keep data on prosecutions or convictions arising out of incidents at British sports events. Any data that might be kept by operational units at the CPS could be obtained only by examination of live and concluded case files at disproportionate cost.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Advertising (Children)

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what figures her Department has collated on the (a) proportion of advertising during children's television scheduling that involves marketing of food products and (b) proportion of food advertising during children's television scheduling that involves promotion of food of low nutritional value. [129645]

Estelle Morris: The Department has not undertaken research on food advertising during children's television scheduling. However, figures relating to this issue have been provided to the Department by my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge and others.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions her Department has had in the last 12 months with the Department of Health on the issue of food and drink advertising to children. [129646]

Estelle Morris: The Department has had limited discussions with the Department of Health regarding this issue over the last 12 months, in the context of broadcast advertising, but will be represented at the forthcoming meeting of the Department of Health's Food and Health Action Plan Steering Group. The Department is fully supportive of Government initiatives to tackle the problem of child obesity and is working closely with the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills on these as well as developing its own health initiatives relating to increased physical activity, particularly in children.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received in the last 12 months on the issue of food and drink advertising to children from (a) the advertising industry, (b) the food and drink industry and (c) organisations concerned with providing public health. [129647]

Estelle Morris: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not received any formal representations from the advertising industry on the issue of food and drink advertising to children, but is aware of the industry's views. The Department has also had informal discussions with the food and drink industry regarding

the European Commission's consideration of proposals on broadcast advertising. In May 2003, the Secretary of State met my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge and representatives of several public health promotion organisations to discuss this matter.

Films (North-east England)

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps her Department is taking to promote film tourism in the North East of England. [130390]

Mr. Caborn: VisitBritain is funded by the Department to market Britain overseas and England to the domestic market. VisitBritain's movie map campaign and website have run continuously since 1996. Three sites in the North East where scenes from Elizabeth were filmed are featured: Alnwick Castle and Bamburgh Beach in Northumberland and Durham Cathedral. The map also features Newcastle where the films Purely Belter and The One and Only were set, Hulne Priory in Northumberland which appears in Robin Hood—Prince of Thieves, and Easington where Billy Elliott was filmed. Alnwick Castle, and the wealth of other attractions in its vicinity, is also featured in VisitBritain's 'The Magic of Britain' campaign which promotes Britain through the Harry Potter series of films. Future plans include building on the new Russell Crowe film Master and Commander in VisitBritain's 'SeaBritain 2005' campaign which, among other nautical and maritime locations, will feature HMS Trincomalee in Hartlepool.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many Questions directed to her remain unanswered. [130761]

Mr. Caborn: 24 written parliamentary questions tabled to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport for answer up to and including Monday 15 September 2003 remain unanswered. This includes 21 ordinary written questions tabled to the Department between 9–12 September.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Burma

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the relationship between his Department and the Burmese Government; and what recent discussions they have had about *(a)* the arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi and *(b)* human rights abuses against minority groups. [130300]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK has made numerous representations to the Burmese authorities concerning the arrest of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. I personally have spoken to the Burmese Deputy Foreign Minister and most recently the Burmese ambassador on 1 September, to register the UK's grave concern over the unacceptable violence and repression that has been inspired, organised and carried out by the military regime. This has been supplemented by representations by the British embassy in Rangoon who have been instrumental in pressing for and supporting demarches to the Burmese regime, including on human rights abuses against the ethnic groups.

International Student Visas

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many international student visas are issued each year. [129424]

Mr. Mullin: The table shows the number of student visas issued worldwide each year since 1998. Since 2001, statistics have been collated by financial year (1 April to 31 March) rather than calendar year.

	Student visas issued
1998	69,607
1999	75,607
2000	99,559
FY 2001–02	121,466
FY 2002–03	120,888

Afghanistan

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many ministerial visits have been made to Afghanistan in the last six months. [129464]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There have been two ministerial visits to Afghanistan in the last six months. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited between 30 June and 1 July, followed by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Rammell) between 22 and 27 July.

Algeria

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the European Parliament concerning human rights violations in Algeria under the European Union Algeria Association Agreement; and what plans he has to introduce measures to increase the level of aid to that country. [130616]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has not discussed with the European Parliament human rights violations in Algeria under the EU/Algeria Association Agreement. The Agreement was signed on 22 April 2002, but is not yet in force. Member states, the European Community and Algeria must all ratify the Agreement before it can come into force. When the Agreement does enter into force the EU will be in a position to monitor closely Algeria's adherence to the human rights principles laid out in the Association Agreement.

The European Parliament debated the conclusion of the EU/Algerian Association Agreement on 10 October 2002. The Parliament welcomed the plan to conclude the Agreement and hoped that the Agreement would give decisive impetus to the political and economic reforms required to improve the economic and social situation in Algeria. The European Parliament also highlighted its concerns over Algeria's human rights record.

The UK's bilateral development programme is focused on the poorest countries, particularly those of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. The Government have no plans to reintroduce a bilateral development programme in Algeria, which is a middle income country. Nor do we intend to press the EC to expand its development programme in the country.

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the ratification of the EU-Algeria Association Agreement. [130617]

Mr. MacShane: The Government have initiated the process for UK ratification of the EU/Algeria Association Agreement, the text of which is contained in Command Paper 5804, laid before Parliament on 9 May 2003. I anticipate that the agreement will be debated in Parliament in this session, and that the UK's ratification procedures will be completed by February 2004. The agreement will enter into force when all parties—EU member states, the European Community and Algeria—have ratified.

China

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the treatment of Pastor Gong Shengliang, held in Jingzhou prison, Hubei Province, China. [130569]

Mr. Rammell: We have been concerned about reports that Pastor Gong Shengliang has suffered ill treatment in Jingzhou prison, Hubei Province. We supported an EU demarche on this subject in Beijing on 18 July. The Chinese authorities said that the allegations of torture and ill-treatment were untrue and that Pastor Gong was in good health.

We have also raised Pastor Gong's case directly with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On 31 July the Chinese authorities told us that Pastor Gong had had stomach problems before he was imprisoned and that following treatment the problems had stabilised. His relatives have visited him four times.

Cyprus

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made about the provision of education for Greek children recently in the Turkish-occupied part of Cyprus. [129917]

Mr. MacShane: The British Government take the welfare of the Greek Cypriot community in the north of Cyprus seriously. Through our High Commission in Cyprus, and with the Turkish Cypriot authorities, the UN and the Government of Cyprus, we do what we can to ameliorate the situation.

Our High Commission is keeping a close eye on the situation concerning those students who have recently finished their primary education and are due to move to secondary education.

Nevertheless, this remains one of the many examples of the fact that Cypriots on both sides of the island suffer because of the lack so far of a comprehensive settlement in Cyprus. We are urging the parties to resume negotiations on the basis of the UN Plan, in time to allow a reunited island to accede to the EU on 1 May next year.

European Union

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many amendments were tabled by the right hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) at the Convention on the Future of Europe: and how many were agreed to. [129131]

Mr. MacShane: We estimate that, excluding the reiterations of amendments tabled more than once, the UK delegation submitted 154 amendments. Many of these were technical or legal drafting amendments. Even when not accepting amendments verbatim, the Convention frequently agreed on language which met our underlying concerns in whole or in part.

For that reason, it is not possible to put a precise figure on the number of UK proposals that were agreed to. The Convention's final draft text met the majority of the UK's objectives. As the Thessaloniki Council agreed it is 'a good starting point' for the discussions between 25 European nation states which will agree the next EU constitutional treaty.

Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action his Department is taking, in conjunction with the Department of Health, to encourage the ratification of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control by all EU member states. [130044]

Mr. MacShane: The UK signed the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in June and is currently preparing to ratify the Treaty. We will be aiming to encourage early ratification by other Member States too. The ratification timetable is likely to be discussed at the Council on 1–2 December.

Iraq

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what timetable is planned for elections in Iraq. [129613]

Mr. Rammell: We believe that it should be for the Iraqi people to determine the timetable for their elections, with appropriate international help as required. A Constitutional Preparatory Committee is due to report by mid-September with recommendations on drafting a constitution, a process which we hope will reach fruition by mid-2004, with the aim that national elections would be held shortly thereafter.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made since July regarding the involvement of other international bodies in Iraq. [130042]

Mr. Rammell: The Government remain committed to a vital role for the UN in Iraq, as provided for by Security Council Resolution 1483. The Security Council is currently considering a draft resolution which would encourage further participation by the UN and the international community in assisting Iraq, including in

the political processes leading to the formation of a representative government. The Secretary-General's report of 17 July (of which a copy has been placed in the Library of the House) identified further areas in which the UN could contribute to the initial effort in Iraq. The Government would support an increased UN contribution in these areas. Following the terrorist attack on the United Nations Headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August, the UN's efforts in Iraq have inevitably been scaled back. We are in discussion with the UN on the security measures needed to ensure that the UN is able to resume and expand its role in Iraq.

Since July, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have been active in Iraq producing first needs assessments for the reconstruction of Iraq. This in-country work was cut short by the outrage against the UN headquarters on 19 August, but finalisation of the assessments continues.

It is vital for Iraq that international NGOs continue their work on the ground. It is hoped that, as the security situation in Iraq improves, these organisations will continue with their humanitarian efforts. The Madrid Donors' Conference next month should give a significant boost to Iraq's reconstruction process.

ISAF

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with representatives of allied countries on extending the mandate of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [129075]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK has regular discussions with international partners at all levels on all matters relating to Afghanistan, including the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). NATO took over leadership of ISAF in August 2003 and is currently engaged in a review of ISAF's role. It would be inappropriate for us to second-guess the outcome of this review and any possible effect it might have on the ISAF mandate. But any change to ISAF's role would also require amendment of its mandate through the UN.

Microsoft (Licensing Fees)

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much was paid to Microsoft in licensing fees by his Department and its agencies in each of the last three years; and how much has been budgeted for *(a)* 2003–04 and *(b)* 2004–05. [130684]

Mr. Rammell: The amounts paid by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for Microsoft software licences over the past three years were: £0.12 million in 2000–01; £0.61 million in 2001–02; and £0.45 million in 2002–03. Projected spend for 2003–04 is £0.15 million. There is no specific budget for Microsoft software licences in 2004–05, although the overall software budget is £2.3 million.

Nepal

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Nepal. [129465]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The collapse of the ceasefire and peace talks between the Government of Nepal and the Maoists is a very disappointing development. It heightens the risk of renewed violence and suffering in Nepal which will benefit no-one.

It remains the firm belief of the UK Government that no military solution to the conflict is possible, and we welcome the Nepalese Government's expressed willingness to continue to pursue a peaceful solution. We strongly urge all parties to return to the negotiation table, and work together to find a lasting solution.

The UK Government stand ready to provide support for a renewed peace process. UK assistance to Nepal has included a £6 million Global Conflict Prevention Pool package this year to help tackle the root causes of the conflict. The Department for International Development is providing £22 million of development assistance this financial year.

Terrorism

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what studies have been received by the United Nations Security Council Counter Terrorism Committee from *(a)* academic sources, *(b)* think-tanks and *(c)* experts on terrorism; and what the policy is on the availability to the general public of submissions by the United Kingdom to the UNSCCTC. [130359]

Mr. Rammell: We are not aware that any reports from academic sources, think-tanks or experts on terrorism have been formally submitted to the UN's Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC). However, the CTC has an established body of experts advising it. In the course of their work, the Experts draw on all available sources of information to provide the most up-to-date and effective guidance to the Committee. The CTC makes available to the public all reports from member states by posting them on its official website www.un.org/sc/ctc. This includes the three reports that the United Kingdom has submitted to the CTC to date.

Uganda

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are taken at the British High Commission in Uganda to ensure fair access to the High Commission for those wishing to obtain visas for entry to the UK. [129639]

Mr. Mullin: Since October 2002, the Visa Section in Kampala has operated a same day service despite an unprecedented level of demand for visas. UK visas have allocated two extra Entry Clearance Officers to deal with this demand.

[redacted] aware of problems with the current queuing system. Applications are considered on a first come first served basis but applicants with medical conditions can make pre-arranged appointments to visit the Visa Section. The elderly, children and the infirm are also given priority.

To improve the situation, from December all applications will be submitted on paper via an outsourced courier service. Applicants will therefore not be required to visit the Visa Section to submit their applications in person.

UN Arms Embargoes

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response his Department made to the UN Panel of Experts Fowler Report on its recommendations for secondary sanctions against states that have been complicit in breaching UN arms embargoes. [129864]

Mr. Rammell: The UK supported the recommendation by the Fowler Report to place secondary sanctions against countries complicit in breaching the UN arms embargo against Angola (UNITA) (UNSCR 864(1993). But the UK recognised that there were a number of practical difficulties to overcome, not least gaining consensus amongst Security Council members that there would be sufficient proof to declare a State guilty of deliberate sanctions busting. Initially the issue was kept alive by UNSCR 1295(2000), passed subsequent to the Fowler Report on 18 April 2000. Paragraph 5 of the resolution expressed

> "its readiness . . . to consider appropriate action in accordance with the Charter in relation to States it determines to have violated the measures contained in those [ie sanctions] resolutions, and establishes 18 November 2000 as the deadline for an initial decision in this regard".

But when the Security Council considered the Monitoring Mechanism's (delayed) report in February 2001, Canada called for the Security Council to focus on imposing secondary sanctions, and did so again in November 2001; each time without success due to a lack of consensus.

United Nations Security Council

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has during the United Kingdom presidency of the United Nations Security Council to increase the transparency of the Council's activities; and whether he plans to increase public knowledge of the content and implications of UNSC resolutions. [130369]

Mr. Rammell: I presented the Government's programme of work for the UK Presidency of the UN Security Council (UNSC) during the debate on the UN held in Westminster Hall on 11 September. The Programme of Work can be viewed on the website of the UK Mission to the UN in New York www.ukun.org. Wherever possible, UNSC activities are transparent, and the UK's Presidency includes a number of open meetings. For example, there have been Open Briefings on the Middle East and on Liberia, and there will be an Open Meeting on Sierra Leone and an Open Debate on Justice and the Rule of Law.

Press statements, Presidential statements and all UNSC Resolutions are available to the public, most readily on the UN's official website www.un.org. I also refer my hon. Friend to the United Kingdom in the United Nations Command Paper (Cm 5898).

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Access to Learning Fund

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the *(a)* use, *(b)* development and *(c)* cost of the Access to Learning Fund. [129988]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Access to Learning Fund (ALF) is a new non-repayable discretionary Fund administered by institutions with HE students and aimed at providing additional support for those who need extra financial help to access or remain in Higher Education. Priority groups for assistance include: students with children (especially lone-parents); mature students; students from low income families; disabled students; care leavers and students from Foyers or who are homeless.

The ALF is being introduced following consultation with institutions' and students' representatives to ensure that awards are made on a consistent and transparent basis. The ALF is currently being piloted in approximately 50 institutions and subject to evaluation it is intended to be rolled out in all institutions from 2004–05.

In 2004–05 £65.5 million will be available through the Access to Learning Fund.

Adult Qualifications

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people aged *(a)* 19–30 and *(b)* over 30 in the working population have not achieved (i) a Level 2 qualification and (ii) a Level 3 qualification. [130719]

Alan Johnson: The following table shows analysis of the working population (i.e. economically active) for those aged *(a)* 19–30 and *(b)* over 30 who lack a Level 2 and Level 3 qualification. Data come from the Labour Force Survey in spring 2003 and cover England only.

	Age band 19 to 30	*Percentage*	*Age band Over 30*[1]	*Percentage*
Below Level 2	1,294,000	22	5,646,000	32
Below Level 3	2,629,000	44	9,234,000	53
Total work force	5,921,000	—	17,568,000	—

[1] This age band covers economically active males aged 31–64 and economically active females aged 31–59.

Apprenticeships

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the *(a)* current participation and *(b)* latest annual completion rates are for (i) foundation and (ii) advanced modern apprenticeships, broken down by proposed sector skills council areas. [129985]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) publish work based learning participation numbers and success rates by area of learning rather than by sector. The 14 areas of learning are used by the LSC, the Adult Learning Inspectorate and Ofsted. Numbers participating on advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA) and foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA) as at 1 November 2002 by area of learning are shown in the following table.

Learners on 1 November 2002 by area of learning

000s

Area of Learning	*AMA*	*FMA*
Business administration, Management and Professional	12.1	17.9
Construction	11.3	18.1
Engineering, Technology and Manufacturing	46.9	13
English, Languages and Communication	—	—
Foundation programmes	—	—
Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy	5.2	13.9
Health, Social Care and Public Services	11.1	12.5
Hospitality, Sports, Leisure and Travel	8.9	15
Humanities	—	—
Information and Communication Technology	4.1	4.1
Land based provision	1.6	3.2
Retailing, Customer Service and Transportation	10.2	22.1
Science and Mathematics	0.2	0.1
Visual and Performing Arts and Media	0.7	0.2
Unspecified area of learning	0.9	0.8
Total	113.3	120.8

Source:
Individualised Learner Record 2002/03

Success rates by area of learning for those who left a modern apprenticeship in 2001/02 were published on 24 July, 2003 by the LSC in the Statistical First Release ISR/SFR25. These are shown in the following table.

Success rates by area of learning and programme type 2001/02

	Framework (X per cent.)	*NVQ Only (Y per cent.)*	*Framework or NVQ (X plus y per cent.)*	*Total leavers numbers*
Advanced Modern Apprenticeships				
Business Administration Management and Professional	25	12	37	10,400
Construction	33	14	46	8,700
Engineering, Technology and Manufacturing	38	9	47	13,000
English, Languages and Communications	—	—	—	—
Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy	22	8	30	3,900
Health, Social Care and Public Services	22	13	35	7,400
Hospitality, Sports Leisure and Travel	19	6	26	8,400
Humanities	—	—	—	—
Information and Communication technology	31	9	40	1,800
Land-based provision	24	10	34	900
Other Foundation Programmes	—	—	—	—
Retailing, Customer Service and Transportation	16	9	24	10,400
Science and Maths	36	2	39	100
Visual & Performing Arts & Media	31	17	48	400
Unspecified AOL	11	11	22	100
Total	26	10	36	65,400
Foundation Modern Apprenticeships				
Business Administration Management and Professional	26	11	38	15,100
Construction	24	12	36	7,100
Engineering, Technology and Manufacturing	19	13	32	6,900
English, Languages and Communications	—	—	—	—
Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy	26	11	36	7,500
Health, Social Care and Public Services	15	13	28	9,000
Hospitality, Sports Leisure and Travel	19	12	31	13,900
Humanities	—	—	—	—
Information and Communication technology	46	8	54	4,200
Land-based provision	26	15	41	2,500
Other Foundation Programmes	—	—	—	—
Retailing, Customer Service and Transportation	19	11	30	25,000
Science and Maths	—	—	—	—
Visual & Performing Arts & Media	22	15	37	100
Unspecified AOL	0	2	2	500
Total	22	11	34	91,800

Source:
Individualised Learner Record 2001/02

Data Protection

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills under what powers a county council may keep a person's P45 details on file after they have been used as part of a student loan application; and for what length of time such details may be kept. [129628]

Alan Johnson: The basis for the county council processing the P45 derives from s. 22(2)(a) of the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998, and the relevant provision of the applicable Student Support Regulations (e.g. reg 6(3) of the Education (Student Support) (No. 2) Regulations 2002 which states:

"An applicant shall demonstrate his eligibility for support by providing such evidence as the Secretary of State may require.")

The basis for keeping a person's P45 details on file is firstly that this is a National Audit Office requirement and as such the NAO is entitled to audit the assessment and payment of loans and can request supporting documentation relating to main ledger financial transactions for a period of up to six years after after the end of the financial year in which the transaction took place. Secondly, the Limitation Act 1980, which applies

to proceedings by and against the Crown, and has the effect that proceedings to recover money must be instituted within six years of the money becoming due. Evidence used for the assessment is therefore required to be retained to support or defend any such action.

1. The four main acts of parliament from which the Comptroller and Auditor General and the NAO derive their authority are:

(a) The Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000

(b) National Audit Act 1983

(c) Exchequer and Audit Departments Act 1921

(d) Exchequer and Audit Departments Act 1866

Education Funding (Buckinghamshire)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the impact of the area cost adjustment on education funding in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire. [129888]

Mr. Miliband: The Area Cost Adjustment provides funding top-ups for areas where it costs more to recruit and retain staff. It uses the New Earnings Survey to calculate earnings differentials between different areas in the country. A threshold is set below which all authorities are given the same area cost adjustment factor. The area cost adjustment factor for Buckinghamshire is 1.0943. It is for Buckinghamshire local education authority to decide on the distribution of funding within Buckinghamshire, in consultation with its schools.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much money has been set aside for Individual Learning Accounts for *(a)* 2003–04, *(b)* 2004–05 and *(c)* 2005–06. [130721]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In order to meet remaining commitments under the original ILA Programme, a budget of £8.013 million has been set aside for 2003–04. The remaining funding originally set aside for Individual Learning Accounts has been re-deployed to support the implementation of proposals set out in the White Paper '21 Century Skills: Realising our Potential' published on 9 July 2003.

Key Stage 2 (Buckinghamshire)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of 11-year-olds in *(a)* the Chesham and Amersham constituency and *(b)* Buckinghamshire have achieved Key Stage 2 in each year since 1997 in (i) maths and (ii) English. [129885]

Mr. Miliband: The percentage of pupils achieving Level 4 or above at Key Stage 2 in *(a)* the Chesham and Amersham constituency and *(b)* Buckinghamshire local education authority (LEA) from 1997 to 2003:

	Chesham and Amersham constituency	*Buckinghamshire LEA*	*England*
English			
2003[1]	85	80	75
2002	86	79	75
2001	86	82	75
2000	85	81	75
1999	83	77	71
1998	78	73	65
1997	80	73	63
Mathematics			
2003[1]	81	77	73
2002	82	76	73
2001	81	76	71
2000	82	76	72
1999	81	73	69
1998	72	64	59
1997	75	69	62

[1] Provisional

Older Workers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the level of career advice available to workers over 50; what plans he has to improve the profile of the service; and if he will make a statement. [129039]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: During 2002 my officials instigated a project to gauge the career advice needs of the over 45 age group. The findings from this project are being used to improve services and to inform policy for the reform of the information, advice and guidance (IAG) service for adults. A copy of the report has been lodged in the Library. Part of the reform will be to improve the accessibility and visibility of services through development of an overarching identity for IAG services for adults.

Pupil Exclusions

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what powers he has to overturn the decision to *(a)* exclude a pupil and *(b)* reinstate an excluded pupil; and what effect legislation enacted since 1997 has had on the powers of his office in this respect. [127890]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Secretary of State has no powers to overturn the decision to exclude a pupil or to reinstate an excluded pupil. No legislation enacted since 1997 has had any effect on his powers in these respects.

School Exclusions and Suspensions (North Tyneside)

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many school *(a)* exclusions and *(b)* suspensions there were in North Tyneside in 2001–02. [130385]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In 2001–02 there were 56 permanent exclusions from maintained primary, secondary and all special schools in North Tyneside. The table shows how the number and percentage of excluded pupils in North Tyneside compares with regional and national figures.

Number of permanent exclusions by type of school 2001–2002 (provisional)

	Primary[1]		*Secondary*[1]		*Special*[2]		*Total*	
	Number of permanent exclusions	*Percentage of the school population*[3]	*Number of permanent exclusions*	*Percentage of the school population*[3]	*Number of permanent exclusions*	*Percentage of the school population*[3]	*Number of permanent exclusions*	*Percentage of the school population*[3]
England	1,451	0.03	7,741	0.24	343	0.36	9,535	0.12
North East	62	0.03	409	0.23	16	0.27	487	0.12
North Tyneside	5	0.03	49	0.35	2	0.30	56	0.18

[1] Includes middle schools as deemed.
[2] Includes Maintained and Non-Maintained Special Schools.
[3] The number of permanent exclusions expressed as a percentage of the number (headcount) pupils in Primary, Secondary and Special schools, excluding dualy registered pupils in special schools in January 2002.

The Department has recently started to collect information from Local Education Authorities on both fixed term and permanent exclusions on a termly basis. However, reliable findings from this data collection exercise are not expected to be available until next year.

Skills Acquisition and Accreditation

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action he is taking to support local technical agreements on skills acquisition and accreditation between employers and further education colleges below national Sector Skills Council requirements. [129983]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The aim of our recently published skills strategy, "21st Century Skills—Realising Our Potential", is to ensure that employers have the right skills to support the success of their businesses, and individuals have the skills they need to be both employable and personally fulfilled. As with "Success for All", the Department's strategy for the reform of further education, a key part of the strategy is to ensure that colleges and training providers are more responsive to the needs of employers, and those of individual learners. Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) will lead the drive to increase productivity and develop the required skills within their industry sectors. Through sector skills agreements they will work with their employers and with planning and funding agencies like the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to agree an action plan for addressing priority skills needs. However, further education colleges will continue to determine the specific range and volume of courses they offer and will need to continue to be responsive to their local employers, providing bespoke training based on local agreements as appropriate. The pattern of provision will continue to be agreed in discussion with the local LSC, reflecting national and regional priorities as well of those of the locality.

Student Finance

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information he collates on differences in the recovery of outstanding student loans from graduates who are *(a)* based in the United Kingdom and *(b)* resident abroad. [129731]

Alan Johnson: Student loans are available to students domiciled in the United Kingdom. Data are collected on the payment and repayment of student loans, separately for income contingent loans (which were introduced in September 1998 as part of the new student support arrangements) and mortgage style loans (mostly applying to those who entered higher education before academic year 1998/99). These data are split according to the domicile of the borrower at the point of entering HE.

Data on the current residence of the mortgage style loan borrowers are not available in the Department. The recovery regime for these loans is the same for all borrowers whether resident in or outside of the UK. These loans are repayable on a mortgage style basis over five or seven years, depending on the number of loans taken out. Borrowers may apply to defer repayments for up to a year at a time if their income is below the current deferment threshold, otherwise repayments will be collected, whether the borrower is overseas or not.

Repayments of income contingent loans from borrowers resident in the UK are reported at the time when the Student Loans Company are notified of the repayments by the Inland Revenue, which may be one or more years after the tax year they relate to. Due to the time lag in collecting the information from the Inland Revenue it is too early in the scheme to have robust data for either comparison or trend purposes.

The Student Loans Company operates a separate recovery regime for income contingent loan borrowers who are outside of the UK tax system. The mechanism for collecting repayments requires borrowers to declare their total annual income to the SLC who calculate the repayment due, mirroring the rules applying to borrowers within the tax system. Sufficient robust data are not yet available.

Teacher Workloads

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what meetings he has had with *(a)* the Secondary Heads Association, *(b)* the Local Government Association, *(c)* the National Union of Teachers, *(d)* National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers and *(e)* National Association of Head Teachers with regard to the teachers workload agreement since January. [127878]

Mr. Miliband: I have chaired several of the regular meetings of the Workforce Agreement Monitoring Group, which comprises representatives from the signatories to the Agreement. The group includes SHA, NAHT, NASUWT and the LGA.

The NUT chose not to sign the National Agreement and have therefore excluded themselves from those meetings. However, I recently met a delegation from the NUT to discuss their response to the statutory consultation on implementing the National Agreement.

which included changes to the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document, draft regulations to be made under section 133 of the Education Act 2002 and accompanying guidance.

Vocational Qualifications

Rob Marris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to improve the collection of data on the number of people who enter higher education on the basis of *(a)* vocational and *(b)* work-based learning qualifications. [129525]

Alan Johnson: The main source of data on the entry qualifications of HE students is the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) student record. This already identifies students with vocational qualifications and non-academic qualifications (such as accreditation of prior learning). The student record is reviewed regularly to ensure that it collects data which are relevant and fit for purpose, for instance the 2002/03 return has been enhanced to identify students funded by the University for Industry.

CABINET OFFICE

Information Technology

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how much the Cabinet Office spent on IT licences in 2002–03. [124425]

Mr. Alexander: The Cabinet Office spent £3,569,807 on IT licences in 2002–03.

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how much the Cabinet Office spent on *(a)* IT hardware, *(b)* software and *(c)* maintenance in 2002–03. [124432]

Mr. Alexander: The Cabinet Office spent £4,094,292 on IT hardware, £1,800,331 on software and £11,249,997 on maintenance in 2002–03.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Counter-terrorism

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will conduct counter-terrorism exercises with respect to *(a)* aviation and *(b)* shipping. [R] [129632]

Mr. Blunkett: Our current counter-terrorism exercise programme involves both aviation and maritime scenarios.

Acting Chief Constable Richard Thomas

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost was of the investigation into the alleged conduct of the acting Chief Constable Richard Thomas of Gwent police. [129868]

Ms Blears: Gwent police informs me that the West Mercia police conducted the investigation. The total of all invoices received and paid by Gwent police amounts to £20,476.66.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people in his Department deal with immigration and asylum issues, broken down by section; and what the function of each section is. [128755]

Beverley Hughes: The number of full-time equivalent staff in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate by business area, at 30 June 2003 was:

	Number
Immigration Service (including border controls and removals)	6,500
Asylum support, asylum casework and appeals	2,830
Managed Migration (applications for leave to remain, nationality and work permits)	1,690
Non-operational (includes policy development and corporate services)	1,880

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assistance is given to successful asylum applicants to help them integrate within their new community. [129108]

Beverley Hughes: Our strategy "Full and Equal Citizens", which we will be reviewing shortly, sets out the Government's cross-departmental strategy for the integration of refugees. It is monitored by the National Refugee Integration Forum, which I chair. In addition to the work of other Departments as set out in the strategy, the Home Office itself helps fund a number of community development programmes being taken forward by the leading national and regional refugee organisations. In addition, we fund small community groups working with refugees through the Refugee Community Development Fund. The Challenge Fund and the European Refugee Fund have also been established on the basis of providing a carefully evaluated programme of projects to identify what does work in integration.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children have been *(a)* refused and *(b)* granted asylum since March 2003. [129473]

Beverley Hughes: The table shows the outcomes of initial decisions made on applicants aged under-18 at the time of their decision. These figures exclude dependants, and are based on the claimed age of applicants. The figures will overstate the true number of initial decisions since some applicants aged 18 or over claim to be younger than that in their application. Initial decisions may relate to applications made in earlier periods.

Initial decisions outcomes for asylum applicants claiming to be aged under-18 at time of initial decision[1,2,3,4]

Principal applicants (cases)	*2002*	*Q1 2003 (January to March)*	*Q2 2003 (April to June)*
Total initial decisions	11,200	3,085	1,690
Granted asylum	960	210	85
Granted exceptional leave	6,620	1,835	n/a

Initial decisions outcomes for asylum applicants claiming to be aged under-18 at time of initial decision[1,2,3,4]

Principal applicants (cases)	*2002*	*Q1 2003 (January to March)*	*Q2 2003 (April to June)*
Granted humanitarian protection	n/a	n/a	10
Granted discretionary leave	n/a	n/a	925
Refused	3,625	1,040	670

[1] Figures are rounded to the nearest 5.
[2] Excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.
[3] Figures may overstate because some applicants aged 18 or over may claim to be younger on leaving their country of origin.
[4] Data are provisional.

Information on the number and outcomes of initial decisions is published quarterly on the Home Office website at: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Turkish citizens applied for asylum in the UK in 2001; and how many were successful in their application. [129479]

Beverley Hughes: 3,695 nationals of Turkey applied for asylum in the United Kingdom in 2001 (excluding dependants). In 2001, there were 7,825 initial decisions made on asylum applications from Turkish nationals, 210 grants of asylum, 275 grants of exceptional leave to remain (ELR), and 7,340 refusals. Data on initial decisions in 2001 may relate to applications made in earlier years.

During 2001, 1,840 appeals against Home Office decisions on Turkish asylum claims were determined by adjudicators of the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA). Of these, 485 were allowed, 1,295 were dismissed and 60 cases were withdrawn. Appeal outcomes in 2001 may relate to initial decisions made in earlier years. The figures exclude any further appeals (Immigration Appeals Tribunal, Court of Appeal, judicial review, House of Lords).

Information on the number of asylum applications and initial decisions is published quarterly on the Home Office website at: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

Charities

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the organisations that responded, and how they responded, to the idea of self-regulation contained within "Charities and Not-For-Profits: A Modern Legal Framework", giving the type of respondent. [129154]

Fiona Mactaggart: The recommendations on self-regulation in fundraising were made by the Strategy Unit in its review of charity law and regulation ("Private Action, Public Benefit", published September 2002).

In its response to the review ("Charities and Not-for-Profits: a Modern Legal Framework", published 16 July 2003) the Government supported the idea that self-regulation should be the first resort in improving fundraising standards.

The following people and organisations commented on the recommendations on self-regulation in fundraising:

Action on Disability and Development
Action for Street Kids
Agents for Change
Allen and Overy solicitors
Alzheimer's Society
Archbishops Council
Association of Charitable Foundations
Association of Charity Independent Examiners
Association of Charity Officers
Association of Charity Shops
Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations
Association of Corporate Trustees
Association of Fundraising Consultants
Association of Preservation Trusts
Baker Tilly accountants
Barnardo's
Bates, Wells and Braithwaite solicitors
Birmingham Voluntary Service Council
Birmingham Charities Council
Birmingham City Council
Black Training and Enterprise Group
Blandford Forum Town Council
Blue Cross
Bristol City Council
British Association of Settlements and Social Action Centres
British Heart Foundation
British Limbless Ex-Servicemen's Association
British Overseas Aid Group
British Red Cross
British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
Campaign for Protection of Rural Wales
Cancer Research UK
Caring Together
Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
Chantrey Vellacott DFK accountants
Charities Aid Foundation
Charity Check
Charity Commission
Charity Law Association
Charles Russell solicitors
Chartered Institute of Water and Environmental Management
Chesterfield and North-East Derbyshire Council for Voluntary Service
Children's Society
Christian Aid
Church in Wales
Community Matters
Consumers' Association
Countryside Agency
Craigmyle
Crossroads Association

Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council
Derby Mountain Rescue Team
Development Trusts Association
Dicky Tickers Heart Support Group
Diocese of St. Asaph, Church in Wales
Directory of Social Change
Disabilities Trust
Duke of Edinburgh's Award
Dyson Bell solicitors
Ethical Investment Research Service
Evelina Family Trust
Exeter Council for Voluntary Service
Fairbridge
Fifth Estate
Friends of the Earth and Friends of the Earth Charitable Trust
Fruitful Fundraising
Grant Thornton accountants
Great Ormond Street Hospital Children's Charity
Growing Place
Guideposts Trust
Guy's and St. Thomas' Charitable Foundation
Help the Aged
WH Henderson
Home Farm Trust
Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales
Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators
Institute of Fundraising
Jordans
Kingston Smith accountants
Law Society
Leonard Cheshire Foundation
Lichfield and District Council for Voluntary Service
LionHeart
Local Government Association
London Play
London Voluntary Service Council
RJA Lonsdale
Macmillan Cancer Relief
Marie Curie Cancer Care
Mazars accountants
Middle Temple Charitable Trusts
Roger Morton
Motability
Multiple Sclerosis Society
Muscular Dystrophy Campaign
National Association of Independent Schools and Non-Maintained Special Schools
National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations
National Council for Voluntary Organisations
National Library for the Blind
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
National Trust
Northamptonshire ACRE
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations
Oxfam
People's Dispensary for Sick Animals
PricewaterhouseCoopers
Public Fundraising Regulatory Association
Purbeck District Council
Raise
Regional Action West Midlands
Reigate and Banstead Borough Council
rethink
Rose Road Association
Royal British Legion
Royal College of General Practitioners
Royal National Institute of the Blind
Royal National Institute for Deaf People
Royal National Lifeboat Institute
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Runnymede Borough Council
Salvation Army
Emma Sambrook
St. Martins Housing Trust
St. Oswald's Hospice, Newcastle
Andrew Scadding and Adele Shaw
School Library Association
Scope
SPARKS
SSAFA Forces Help
Staffordshire Moorlands Council for Voluntary Service
Surrey Care Trust
Swindon Borough Council
University Hospital Birmingham Charities
Voluntary Action Camden
Voluntary Organisations' Network North East
War on Want
Warwick District Council for Voluntary Service
Welsh Assembly Government
Wessex Medical Trust
West Midlands Charity Trustees Forum
West Somerset District Council
Woking Borough Council
Women's Aid
Women's Royal Voluntary Service
Woodland Trust
Marnie Woodward
WWF-UK
Wychavon District Council
Julia Wylie solicitor
YMCA England
Yorkshire Rural Community Council

Levels of support by these respondents for the Strategy Unit's recommendations for self-regulation in fundraising, broken down by type of respondent, are shown in the table:

Type of respondent	*Clear support*	*Some support*	*Non-committal*	*Some opposition*	*Clear opposition*
Small charities	—	—	—	—	1
Independent schools	—	—	—	—	—
Large charities	17	28	1	5	2
Medium charities	7	3	—	—	1
Umbrella bodies	13	5	—	2	1
Others	—	—	—	—	—
Charity workers	3	2	—	1	1
Professional advisers	3	11	1	1	2
Special interest bodies	2	5	2	—	1
Government	—	4	1	3	6
Umbrella bodies for small charities	5	3	1	1	—
Voluntary organisations	3	—	—	—	—
Social enterprises	—	—	—	—	—
Professional bodies	—	4	—	—	—
Academics	—	—	—	—	—
Total	53	65	6	13	15

Child Trafficking

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment his Department has made of recommendations put forward in the UNICEF report, "Stop the Traffic", to assist victims of child trafficking in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [129086]

Beverley Hughes: The Government welcome the UNICEF report drawing attention to the heinous crime of trafficking. Work is already in hand to develop a better understanding of the scale of child trafficking, and the Home Office has sponsored research by the International Organisation for Migration that will be presented to a major EU conference later this month.

Work to develop intelligence and co-ordinate operations against trafficking is the responsibility of Reflex, the multi-agency response to organised immigration crime. Reflex has supported Operation Paladin Child which is profiling unaccompanied children arriving at Heathrow, as well as similar exercises at Gatwick and Dover.

The Sexual Offences Bill, currently before Parliament, introduces wide ranging criminal sanctions covering trafficking and sexual exploitation of children. We are committed to introducing legislation covering trafficking for other purposes when parliamentary time permits.

Responsibility for child protection falls to Social Services under the Children Act 1989. There are wide ranging proposals for changes to the child protection arrangements contained in the Green Paper, "Every Child Matters", published recently. In particular, co-ordination arrangements between social services and the police will be enhanced through greater clarity over the responsibilities of Area Child Protection Committees. The Home Office has developed a Trafficking Toolkit, published earlier this year, with practical advice around identifying and supporting victims of trafficking that is available to police and social services.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans his Department has to introduce a system whereby victims of child trafficking are given leave to stay in the UK for a period of reflection of up to six months; and if he will make a statement. [129087]

Beverley Hughes: There are no plans to introduce a blanket reflection period for the victims of trafficking, children or adults. Rather, each case is considered on its individual merits.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what resources his Department will make available to provide for specialist training for immigration officers and social workers in order to *(a)* help them identify cases of child trafficking and *(b)* provide them with the necessary skills to assist victims of child trafficking; and if he will make a statement. [129088]

Beverley Hughes: The Government are committed to protecting trafficked children, and have recently announced a Children's Commissioner for England and other measures to protect vulnerable children in the wake of the recommendations from the Laming Inquiry into the tragic death of Victoria Climbié.

All immigration officers are already trained to a high standard in interviewing skills. In addition to this, the Immigration Service is shortly to deliver specialist training to around 600 operational members of staff nation-wide. Central to the theme of the course will be that children arriving in the UK may be here as a result of coercion or criminal activity, including trafficking.

Immigration officers also receive regular intelligence bulletins and inter-agency briefings that highlight issues and trends in respect of trafficking so that they may make informed decisions. All UK immigration officers at ports of entry have been issued with a profile of potential child trafficking victims.

The Home Office has also recently published a 'trafficking toolkit', providing guidance for immigration officers on how to recognise a victim of trafficking and what to do if such a victim is encountered. A vice team consisting of specially selected immigration officers has also been established in London. The team is fully aware of the procedures for the identification of trafficked children.

It is for local councils to decide training priorities for social workers. However, the Government have made £6 million available in the Training Support Programme grant for post-qualification specialist training for social workers, with a target of 7,000 social workers awarded the Child Care Post-qualifying Award by 2006.

There is also new post-qualifying funding for social workers in the Human Resources Development Strategy grant at £0.5 million this year, rising to £13 million by 2005–06.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans his Department has to provide central funding for specialist care and protection for the victims of child trafficking in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [129090]

Beverley Hughes: Child victims of trafficking are referred to social services to receive assistance and support based on their particular needs. Social services have a duty under the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are in need by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's needs or, where appropriate, by arranging for the provision of services from other agencies. Child victims of trafficking are likely to be in need of welfare services and—in many cases—protection under the Children Act 1989.

There is no current specific earmarked funding for services of this nature. Instead, Government funding is allocated to councils with social services responsibilities on the basis of the needs of their populations. A weighted capitation formula is used to determine each body's target fair share of available resources. It is, therefore, for councils, working in partnership with relevant stakeholders, to determine their spending priorities on the basis of local needs.

Entitlement Card Scheme

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria he has set to evaluate the success of his Department's pilot entitlement card scheme. [128276]

Beverley Hughes: The Government have not announced that they will be piloting an entitlement card scheme. My hon. Friend is probably referring to press reports of a proposed UK Passport Service project to pilot the recording of facial recognition, fingerprint and iris image biometric information for passports and the proposed passport card. Discussions with short-listed suppliers are still continuing.

Fixed Penalty Notices

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many motorists who were served with a fixed penalty notice for speeding in 2002–03 as a result of information recorded on speed cameras were subsequently informed that a mistake had been made and that no prosecution would result. [129770]

Ms Blears: This information is not collected centrally.

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are in place for ensuring that motorists are not served with fixed penalty notices for speeding when the details of their vehicle are incorrectly recorded. [129782]

Ms Blears: Before the issue of a fixed penalty notice, officers analysing offences caught on film check the registration of the car against the DVLA record and the police national computer. A further check is made on the vehicle model and colour. Plans by a number of police forces to introduce in the near future automated viewing technology into the system should further reduce errors. Where an error is identified, the notice is withdrawn and the situation investigated to see whether further operative training or other remedial action is required.

The most likely reason for an innocent person to be sent a fixed penalty notice is that the vehicle detected had been stolen and given the registration of another registered vehicle to disguise it. The police take this type of criminal activity very seriously and investigate each case thoroughly. To help counter the problem, it has been a requirement since January to show proof of entitlement when buying a number plate; number plate suppliers have to be registered with DVLA and maintain records of transactions. DVLA are currently conducting a consultation exercise on the possible incorporation on number plates of additional features which would make it more difficult to display them on vehicles for which they were not intended.

Foreign Travel Documents

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the policy of the Passport Office is on advising members of the public about the travel documents required for foreign travel. [130245]

Beverley Hughes: The UK Passport Service (UKPS) has a comprehensive marketing and communications strategy that includes a range of initiatives to advise members of the public about the passport requirements for foreign travel. UKPS works closely with the travel trade and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to ensure that timely and relevant information is conveyed. UKPS advises travellers to check with relevant embassies about visa requirements and length of passport validity which must remain to travel to each country as these are matters for them to determine. UKPS also distributes its literature to a range of organisations including the Citizens' Advice Bureau and Registrars offices throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Media campaigns are normally planned to take place in early January and autumn each year to remind customers to think about their passport requirements and act as early as possible. Most recently UKPS and the FCO worked together to publicise the new requirements for travel to USA, about which there are ongoing discussions between the FCO and US.

The UKPS has a range of information channels, which it utilises to convey its messages. These include:

an established 24 x 7 Passport Adviceline on 0870 521 0410;

a comprehensive website at www.passport.gov.uk; and

a network of high street partners which include the Post Office and Worldchoice travel agents.

All these contact details are shown in media advertising.

The UKPS also produces contact cards, which are available via its website, to businesses, voluntary organisations etc. who wish to provide their clients with contact details for the UK Passport Service.

Forensic Science Service

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding the proposed privatisation of the Forensic Science Service; and if he will make a statement. [129627]

Ms Blears: In his statement of 17 July 2003, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary explained the reasons for the proposal that the Forensic Science Service should become a public private partnership. To date, representations about the future status of the organisation have been received from two trade unions, Prospect and PCS, from Brendan Barber, General Secretary of the TUC, and from 71 hon. Members.

Graffiti

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what initiatives his Department has introduced since 1997 to tackle the problems of graffiti. [129694]

Ms Blears: Graffiti and abandoned vehicles spoil our enjoyment of public places, and can increase fear of crime and produce an environment where crime and anti-social behaviour can thrive. They are a burden on businesses and the local authorities that are left to clean up graffiti on property and remove abandoned vehicles. The annual cost of graffiti clean up in London alone is £23 million.

We are introducing a package of measures to prevent graffiti and to ensure that it is removed swiftly when it does occur:

The Anti-Social Behaviour Bill contains proposals to give local authorities new powers to clean graffiti from certain types of private property, including cable boxes, post boxes, phone booths, and property associated with public transport.

The Bill also contains proposals to ban the sale of spray paints to under 19s. The sale of aerosols will be controlled in much the same way that the sale of glue and solvent are currently controlled. The bill also proposes to give local authorities power to issue Fixed Penalty Notices for graffiti and fly posting. Offenders would have to pay a £50 penalty or be prosecuted through the courts. Councils already use these powers to tackle littering.

The Criminal Justice Bill contains measures to close the loophole which prevents the police from searching for items which they suspect may be intended for use in causing criminal damage, such as spray paints.

It is estimated that 238,000 vehicles were abandoned in 2000–01. These nuisance vehicles become a magnet for arson and anti-social behaviour. Measures introduced to tackle this problem include:

In 2002 the period of notice that local authorities and the DVLA need to give before removing and disposing of nuisance vehicles was reduced. Local authorities now only need to give 24 hours notice of their intention to remove an abandoned vehicle of value. Abandoned vehicles of no value can be removed to a pound immediately—and local authorities now only need to wait seven days before disposing of them. We also made it possible for local authorities to take on DVLA powers to tackle unlicensed vehicles.

Continuous registration comes into to force from January 2004. From then, the keeper of a vehicle will be responsible for licensing it until DVLA is informed of its disposal. This will enable more rigorous enforcement action against those dumping vehicles.

There is a lot of good practice already taking place. The "Operation Cubit" model brings together agencies such as the police, local authorities and the DVLA to take action in an area blighted by nuisance vehicles. We will be looking in the coming months at how best to rollout these successes, in the context of our anti-social behaviour agenda.

International Student Visas

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what annual income his Department expects to gain from introducing charges for international student visas. [129427]

Beverley Hughes: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced in February 2002 in his White Paper: Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain, that he would be introducing charges in order to fund the modernisation of Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND). The regulations were laid on 10 July. IND already charges fee in respect of Nationality applications, for Travel Documents, and since 1 April this year for work permits.

We continue to welcome the many foreign nationals, who choose to study, work and live in the UK—they boost our economy and add to our thriving cosmopolitan society. Many apply to extend their stay each year, and it is right that they should meet the costs of that.

The Government have made significant investment in recent years to improve all aspects of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, including the standard of service people receive when they submit applications. Charging will help us to continue to improve the efficiency and the speed with which we process these applications, leading to ever-higher levels of customer service.

The estimated revenue from the introduction of charging for leave to remain applications is £90 million.

The estimated revenue from international students is approximately £21 million per annum.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will monitor charges for international student visas to see whether they have a deterrent effect. [129428]

Beverley Hughes: The fees are set under Treasury rules to recover the full administrative cost entailed in considering applications and no more. This is calculated by taking the overall costs of processing applications divided by the number of decisions we expect to make.

Treasury rules require us to undertake an annual fee review at which point we will monitor the level of applications that we have received.

However, there are many factors which affect the level of intake of applications so it would not be right to conclude without detailed analysis that any perceived decrease was solely due to the introduction of charging.

Leicestershire Police

Mr. Dorrell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many vacancies there are for uniformed officers in the Leicestershire Police Service; and what proportion this represents of the approved establishment in Leicestershire. [127273]

Ms Blears: The establishment figures for the end of 2003 was 2,127 officers. Leicestershire police estimate that they will take approximately 207 recruits in 2003–04; which they estimate will bring establishment up to 2,235 by the end of 2003–04. There are currently around 174 vacancies for new applicants (September figures) and recruitment is healthy. This represents approximately eight per cent. of expected establishment. These vacancies will vary on a day to day basis.

The Home Office does not set establishment figures for police forces and no central record is kept of vacancies. Decisions about the use of resources, including decisions about the number and deployment of police officers are matters for the police authority and the Chief Constable.

Open Prisons

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his strategy to minimise the number of prisoners who abscond from open prisons. [125809]

Paul Goggins: The Prison Service strategy to minimise the number of prisoners who abscond from open prisons contains a number of strands:

a thorough risk assessment process aimed at identifying prisoners suitable for the particular regime and nature of the open estate, including better collation of intelligence data and improved reception procedures;

physical security upgrades at individual establishments, subject to their own risk assessment process, including better lighting and patrols;

regular monitoring, on a monthly basis of abscond rates nationally, reported to the director of operations for onward dissemination to area managers;

analysis of trends, including the impact of population increases which will be fed into the current review of categorisation.

Organ Donors

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance his Department has given to electoral registration officers about allowing the annual registration process to be used as means of increasing organ donors; and if he will make a statement. [130203]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

My Department has issued no recent guidance to electoral registration officers (EROs) on this subject. I am aware, however, that the independent Electoral Commission issued advice to EROs on 22 July 2003 which, while recognising the independence and responsibility of individual EROs, set out the Commission's view that additional material unrelated to electoral issues should not be included with registration forms.

Police Standards Unit

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how performance will be measured for the Head of the Police Standards Unit in assessing his performance related pay. [130023]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 16 July 2003]:* In common with the principles in place for a number of members of the senior civil service across Government, the Head of the Police Standards Unit will be entitled to an annual bonus, of up to 15 per cent. of his basic salary, subject to his performance against a set of specific objectives and targets to be agreed at the start of each reporting period between himself and the Permanent Secretary, Crime, Policing, Counter-Terrorism and Delivery in the Home Office.

Publicly Funded Investigations

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will seek powers to ensure that the conclusions of all publicly funded investigations into the conduct of senior police officers are made public. [129718]

Ms Blears: The Secretary of State has no plans to do so.

The investigation into allegations against senior officers is a matter for the relevant police authority or where the senior officer has left the force and a criminal investigation takes place, the chief officer. They own the report into the investigation and are acquainted with the facts of the case and any decision on disclosure is a matter for them.

However, the new complaints system which is due to be introduced from April 2004, under provisions in the Police Reform Act 2002, will place a clear duty on those responsible for an investigation to keep the complainant properly informed during, and at the end of, an investigation. The presumption will be on openness, specifically allowing for the disclosure of the investigation report, subject to a sensitivity test.

Secondments (Iraq)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many British police officers are to be sent to Iraq; for how long they will remain there; how their pay and conditions will vary from that in the UK; on what criteria the selection is made; what risk assessment has been carried out; what assessment the Department has made of the effect on crime *(a)* prevention and *(b)* detection in the UK of sending officers to Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [128319]

Ms Blears: I have agreed to a request from my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary (Jack Straw) to ask the Association of Chief Police Officers to seek up to 200 volunteers to create a pool of United Kingdom police officers for potential deployment to Iraq. The pool is intended to sustain the deployment of up to 100 United

Kingdom officers at any one time. Some may be deployed to a third country to assist in the out of country training of the Iraqi police service.

If UK police officers are required they will be deployed for six to 12 month periods. The terms and conditions of service of police officers from English and Welsh police forces will be protected under section 26 of the Police Act 1996. Officers will be recruited according to experience and the skills required for the post. The preliminary selection procedure is a matter for each force. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office will conduct the final selection process following recommendations on applicants' suitability from forces.

Every effort will be made to ensure police officers' safety while on mission. Officers will be deployed only when conditions are right. The security position will be reviewed regularly. The advice of the two secondees from the Association of Chief Police Officers presently serving in Iraq will continue to inform any decision on the timing of a deployment of United Kingdom police officers to Iraq. When we judge that conditions are right for deployment, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will approach the Home Office with proposals to draw on the pool.

I have considered the demands on domestic policing resources. The deployment of 100 UK police officers to assist Iraq is within the contingency plans for overall police contributions to peacekeeping missions that have been agreed between the Government and the Association of Chief Police Officers. Chief constables and police authorities will take account of local policing requirements before deciding whether to release officers.

Security (Royal Family)

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to ensure that the security arrangements in place for members of the Royal Family *(a)* while travelling and *(b)* while in residence are appropriate; and what plans he has to review these. [129608]

Mr. Blunkett: Security arrangements for the Royal Family while travelling or in residence are subject to continual review.

It is policy not to comment in detail on such security measures, as to do so may compromise the safety of those for whom such measures have been taken.

Sexual Assaults

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Government will adopt the recommendations of the Home Affairs Committee on the liability of employers for sexual assaults committed by their employees. [128398]

Mr. Lammy: The Home Affairs Committee recommended that legislation should be introduced to overturn the House of Lords decision in Lister v Hesley Hall Ltd. in relation to the vicarious liability of an employer for sexual assaults by an employee. The Government do not propose to change the law in this area. The law on vicarious liability is wholly common law based, and has been developed by the courts over many years. It is not desirable or practicable to replace it by statute in one particular set of circumstances in which vicarious liability may be held to apply. It is preferable that the courts should continue to have the flexibility to consider all the circumstances of an individual case.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the sites of special scientific interest in the ownership of his Department or its agencies. [129346]

Fiona Mactaggart: The Home Office has seven establishments, which incorporate Sites of Special Scientific Interest. They are:

HMP Dartmoor;

HMP Frankland;

HMP Hewell Grange;

HMP and YOI Hollesley Bay;

HMP Leyhill;

HMP North Sea Camp; and

HMP and YOI Prescoed.

UK Passport and Records Agency

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are employed by the UK Passport and Records Agency; and what the figure was in each of the last three years. [130493]

Beverley Hughes: The number of employees within the UK Passport Service throughout the year varies to match the seasonal pattern of demand. August is traditionally a period when employment levels are at there highest. As at 31 August 2003 the UK Passport Service employed 2,429 full time equivalent employees.

In the last three financial years the average number of employees at the Passport Service has been:

2002-03—2,384

2001-02—2,426

2000-01—2,238

Work Permits

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all applications of Football League clubs for work permits for foreign players which have been refused in the last 18 months; what the grounds for issuing work permits to overseas footballers are; whether different criteria apply when considering applications from other professions; and if he will make a statement. [129109]

Beverley Hughes: The tables provide detail of the numbers of applications received from Premier and Football League Clubs in England and Scotland for overseas players. The information is broken down by season and includes, where applicable, the outcomes of any review panels held. It is not possible to provide detail of the individual applications refused for reasons of confidentiality.

Work permits are issued to international footballers of the highest calibre who are able to make a significant contribution to the development of the UK game at the highest level. A player must have played for his country

in at least 75 per cent. of its competitive 'A' team matches for which he was available for selection during the two years preceding the date of the application. Additionally, the player's country must be at or above 70th place in the official FIFA world rankings when averaged over the preceding two years. Where an application does not meet these criteria, the club may seek a review of this decision by an independent review panel of football experts.

The criteria for work permit applications for sportspeople are agreed, sport by sport, in consultation with the respective governing bodies and are reviewed on an annual basis. The criteria which apply to any given sport reflect the stage of development of that sport in the UK and are made public via the Work Permits (UK) website.

Professional football applications for 2002–03 season—summary

	Number
Applications received (England and Scotland)	61
Applications approved	35
Applications refused	25
Applications withdrawn	1
Reviews received	21
Successful reviews	13
Unsuccessful reviews	7
Reviews withdrawn	1
Total approvals	48
Total refusals	12
Total withdrawn	1

Professional football applications for 2003–04 season to 1 September 2003—summary*

	Number
Applications received (England and Scotland)	40
Applications approved	23
Applications refused	16
Applications withdrawn	1
Reviews received	14
Successful reviews	11
Unsuccessful reviews	3
Reviews withdrawn	
Total approvals	34
Total refusals	5
Total withdrawn	1

Note:
No applications were received from League of Wales or Northern Ireland

NORTHERN IRELAND

Autistic Spectrum Disorder

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what guidance he gives on the extent to which pre-school children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can benefit from appropriate pre-school education; whether the current main-stream nursery education classes are resourced to deal with children with ASD; and if he will make a statement about plans to provide specialist pre-school education for children with ASD. [118759]

Jane Kennedy: The Department of Education's Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (SEN) gives clear guidance to Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and schools (including mainstream nursery schools) on meeting the needs of children with special educational needs, including Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

The ELBs are resourced to support children with ASD in mainstream nursery schools in a variety of ways. Provision may include classroom assistance, or support from ASD Advisory Officers or peripatetic teachers. The boards also provide training in aspects of Special Educational Needs, including ASD.

The Northern Task Group Report on Autism endorsed early intervention for children with ASD. The Department of Education is working closely with the ELBs and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to prioritise the recommendations of the report, with a view to improving collaborative working and available provision.

Through existing Special Needs legislation ELBs have a qualified duty to secure education for children with SEN in a mainstream placement. The proposed Special Educational Needs and Disability legislation will strengthen the presumption to inclusion. However, the level and type of provision is assessed by the boards on an individual basis and ELBs continue to make specialist provision for children with ASD based on identified needs. The Department of Education and the ELBs are taking work forward to consider how best to enhance SEN provision in the pre-school sector.

Belfast Regeneration Office

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his policy is on an Action Plan round for the Belfast Regeneration Office in the financial year 2004–05. [130211]

Mr. Spellar: With the launch of the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy Government has begun to explore the possibility of reallocating Action Plan moneys towards neighbourhood renewal as Action Plan has suffered from sizeable under-spends in recent years. Until decisions have been taken on this issue however it is not clear whether there will be future calls for applications under the Action Plan.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Belfast Regeneration Office teams have issued letters indicating that they are now closed for applications; which teams issued such letters; and when they were issued. [130212]

Mr. Spellar: The four Belfast Regeneration Office Area Teams, including Inner West, Outer West, North and South & East Teams issued a letter on 29 July 2003, to all community groups on the BRO database. This letter indicated that each BRO Team would not be open to new applications from 1 August 2003, as Area Team budgets would shortly be fully committed for the 2003–04 financial year.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the budget for each of the Belfast Regeneration Office teams is in the current financial year; and how much of each team's budget *(a)* was spent, *(b)* was committed and *(c)* remained uncommitted when they closed for applications. [130213]

Mr. Spellar: The table shows the budget for each Belfast Regeneration Office (BRO) Team for 2003–04, in addition to *(a)* amount spent, *(b)* amount committed and *(c)* amount uncommitted at 29 July 2003, when the Teams indicated that they were closing to applications. It should be noted that although each Team had moneys uncommitted at 29 July, there existed applications in the system which had not yet been processed. Column *(d)* on the table shows the potential value of the applications currently under assessment.

£

BRO team	*Team budget 2003–04 (b + c)*	*(a) Amount spent*	*(b) Amount committed*	*(c) Amount uncommitted*	*(d) Potential value of applications currently under assessment*
Inner West	1,284,500.00	253,456.79	801,175.68	483,324.32	1,171,202.25
Outer West	1,045,500.00	128,529.99	300,554.22	744,945.78	1,560,711.35
South & East	978,500.00	166,922.56	501,222.46	477,277.54	942,216.38
North	1,207,000.00	116,252.00	356,833.00	850,166.00	1,400,000.00

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Belfast Regeneration Office Strategy will be launched. [130220]

Mr. Spellar: The Government's Strategy for the regeneration of Belfast will be articulated in two documents, namely:

The Neighbourhood Renewal Implementation Plan for Belfast which will be published in April 2004. This will follow consultation on the draft implementation plan which we will issue shortly.

The Belfast City Centre Policy Framework document which was the subject of consultation ending on 12 September 2003.

Belfast/London Flights

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received about the number of flights between Belfast and London. [124363]

Mr. Spellar: None. I understand any such representations have mainly been directed towards the airline operators.

Cross-border Health Care

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the total cost of providing health care within Northern Ireland for residents of the Republic of Ireland was over the last 12 months. [124693]

Angela Smith: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Budgets

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will publish the complete needs and effectiveness evaluations in respect of departmental budgetary matters. [123960]

Mr. Pearson: The Northern Ireland Executive initiated work on the needs and effectiveness evaluations in 2001. The main findings from the effectiveness report on financial assistance to industry have already been released on the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's website. Further release of the effectiveness studies will be made subject to agreement with appropriate Ministers. As far as needs assessment is concerned the Government have no plans to review the Barnett formula.

Departmental Reform Plans

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what reform plans have been produced by each Government Department; what assessment he has made of those plans; what Departments have not produced such plans; and if he will make a statement. [123959]

Mr. Pearson: All Departments have produced reform plans as part of their service delivery agreements (SDAs) which are available on departmental websites and can be accessed through the Northern Ireland administration website, www.northernireland.gov.uk. In addition, copies of each SDA have been placed in the Library. The reform plans constitute initial departmental responses to the Reform Agenda and reflect the importance of reform of public services to the work of both this Administration and the Northern Ireland Executive.

Departmental Under Spending

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being taken to address the underspending of Government Departments through more co-ordinated financial planning; and if he will make a statement. [123958]

Mr. Pearson: On the basis of underspends in previous years an action plan to address this issue was set out in a Statement to the Assembly on 1 July 2002 by the then Minister of Finance and Personnel. This included setting spending plans at a level which exceeded the actual spending power available by building in underspend assumptions, and the revised spending plans for 2003–04 to 2005–06, announced on 11 December 2002, built on that approach. Full details are set out in Section 2 of the Budget Document ("Building on Progress: Budget 2003–2006").

Disabled Housing Adaptations

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the waiting time for an assessment by an occupational therapist in respect of disabled housing adaptations is; and if he will make a statement. [126052]

Angela Smith: Information is not available on the current waiting time for an assessment by an occupational therapist in respect of disabled housing adaptations, as an assessment for housing adaptation can only be designated as such when the assessment is completed. In addition, waiting time varies according to

the complexity of the case and the availability of resources to carry out the assessment. The amount of time waited for assessment to commence is, however, recorded in respect of all persons assessed by community occupational therapists, according to time band. Figures for priority and non-priority cases are shown in the table and refer to assessments which commenced in the quarter ending 31 March 2003, the latest date for which such information is available.

Number of assessments commenced, by time waited for assessment, quarter ending 31 March 2003

Time waited	*Number*
(a) Priority cases	
Under 2 weeks	3,758
2 weeks—under 1 month	774
1 month and over	982
Total assessments commenced	5,514
(b) Non-priority cases	
Under 3 months	2,850
3—under 6 months	505
6 months and over	1,431
Total assessments commenced	4,786

Implementation of the recommendations of the joint Housing Executive/Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety review of the housing adaptations service, carried out in 2000–01, together with the additional 20 occupational therapy posts funded by the Department in 2001–02, is improving the efficiency of the service. Health and Social Services Trusts continue to strive to further improve the service.

Equality Commission

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will involve the Equality Commission in the review of the operation of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 2000 envisaged by paragraph 10 of Annex 3 to the Joint Declaration. [125921]

Mr. Spellar: The structure of the review is currently under consideration with the details to be announced by September 2003. The Equality Commission is an important stakeholder and we intend, as envisaged in the Joint Declaration, that it should be directly involved throughout the process.

Fishing

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when, and for what year, the last annual report of the Foyle Fisheries Commission was published; when the outstanding annual reports will be published; when the outstanding annual reports of the Loughs Agency relating to fisheries will be published; and what has been the reason for the delay in producing these reports. [121422]

Mr. Pearson: It was normal practice for the Foyle Fisheries Commission to publish the Annual Report of its operations together with its financial statements for the period in question. The last Annual report with Statement of Accounts for the Foyle Fisheries Commission was for the year 1996.

The Report and Statement of Accounts for the Foyle Fisheries Commission for the periods 1997–99 will be published in July this year.

During 1997, the Department of Finance and Personnel (NI) introduced new standards for the format and information to be presented in the accounts for Non Departmental Public Bodies, which caused significant technical difficulties for the Foyle Fisheries Commission in its completion of Financial Statements. This in turn resulted in significant delays during audit of the accounts for this period. The accounts and report for this period have since been finalised and are now ready for publication.

The operational report of the Loughs Agency for 2000 was provided and noted by the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) on 22 June, as required by the North South Co-operation (Implementation Bodies) (NI) Order, 1999. This report will be published later this year when the financial statements for that period have been certified by the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland and the Irish Comptroller and Auditor General.

The reports for 2001 and 2002 will be published upon the completion of the audit of the financial statements for those periods. These financial statements are currently with the Northern Ireland Audit Office who anticipate their completion by this autumn. The Annual Report and Accounts will be submitted to the NSMC and published following completion of the audit.

Gap Funding

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many successful gap funding applications there have been in each constituency in Northern Ireland. [123794]

Mr. Pearson: The number of successful Gap Funding applications by Parliamentary constituency in Northern Ireland is set out in the following table.

Table: Number of successful gap funding applications by Parliamentary Constituency in Northern Ireland

Constituency	*Successful gap funding applications (peace)*	*Successful gap funding applications (BSP)*
Belfast East	32	—
Belfast North	93	2
Belfast South	61	—
Belfast West	83	3
East Antrim	22	—
East Londonderry	19	2
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	29	1
Foyle	72	10
Lagan Valley	17	—
Mid Ulster	28	5
Newry and Armagh	33	1
North Antrim	23	1
North Down	6	—
South Antrim	7	1
South Down	20	—
Strangford	14	1
Upper Bann	22	3
West Tyrone	37	—
Unclassified	13	63
Total	631	93

Note:

Unclassified successful Gap funding Applications are those that clearly benefited two or more Parliamentary Constituencies, and therefore cannot be classified within any specific Parliamentary Constituency.

Health

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the death rates were from coronary heart disease in each Northern Ireland constituency in each of the last five years. [128283]

Mr. Pearson: The ischaemic heart disease death rate per 1,000 population is shown in the following table, for each Northern Ireland constituency and year between 1998 and 2002. The number of deaths due to ischaemic heart disease for each constituency and year is also shown. Areas with older populations generally have higher death rates and this will explain some of the differences shown as follows.

Ischaemic heart disease death rate per 1,000 population and number of deaths due to ischaemic heart disease by constituency and year (1998–2002)

	1998		1999		2000	
Parliamentary constituency	*Death rate*	*Deaths*	*Death rate*	*Deaths*	*Death rate*	*Deaths*
Belfast, East	2.7	215	2.6	208	2.6	210
Belfast, North	2.7	243	2.9	261	2.4	210
Belfast, South	2.0	186	2.2	210	1.9	181
Belfast, West	1.8	165	1.6	148	1.8	164
East Antrim	2.3	189	2.0	165	2.1	176
East Londonderry	2.2	193	2.1	187	2.1	181
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	2.3	211	2.5	228	2.3	204
Foyle	1.8	189	1.4	146	1.3	141
Lagan Valley	2.1	208	2.1	209	1.9	195
Mid-Ulster	2.0	171	1.6	140	1.9	167
Newry and Armagh	2.3	228	1.7	171	1.8	182
North Antrim	2.4	236	2.6	259	2.1	212
North Down	2.4	208	2.4	201	2.4	204
South Antrim	1.8	178	1.7	166	1.4	138
South Down	2.0	210	2.0	205	1.4	148
Strangford	2.0	188	2.0	190	1.7	164
Upper Bann	2.1	213	2.3	234	1.8	188
West Tyrone	2.2	187	2.3	201	1.7	146
Unallocated[1]	—	36	—	39	—	23
Northern Ireland	2.2	3,654	2.1	3,568	1.9	3,234

	2001		2002	
Parliamentary constituency	*Death rate*	*Deaths*	*Death rate*	*Deaths*
Belfast, East	2.5	202	2.4	187
Belfast, North	2.1	184	2.4	199
Belfast, South	1.8	173	1.4	131
Belfast, West	1.6	143	1.6	140
East Antrim	1.7	145	1.6	138
East Londonderry	2.0	177	1.6	141
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	2.3	210	1.9	177
Foyle	1.4	151	1.2	132
Lagan Valley	1.6	160	1.8	181
Mid-Ulster	1.7	149	1.6	143
Newry and Armagh	1.8	187	1.7	169
North Antrim	2.0	203	1.6	166
North Down	2.1	178	2.0	170
South Antrim	1.3	132	1.6	158
South Down	1.7	180	1.6	172
Strangford	1.7	172	1.6	154
Upper Bann	1.8	187	1.8	183
West Tyrone	2.1	179	2.0	172
Unallocated[1]	—	36	—	35
Northern Ireland	1.9	3,148	1.7	2,948

[1] Each year a small number of deaths cannot be allocated to a parliamentary constituency within Northern Ireland—these deaths have been included in the Northern Ireland total.

Hospital Admissions

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many hospital admissions there were on average per week in Northern Ireland during each of the last four quarters. [124689]

Angela Smith: The table sets out the average number of in-patients (ordinary admissions and day cases) admitted to hospital per week in the last four quarters.

Quarter	*Average number of inpatient admissions per week*
1 April 2002–30 June 2002	9,273
1 July 2002–30 September 2002	9,110
1 October 2002–31 December 2002	9,542
1 January 2003–31 March 2003	9,614

Note:

Data for 2002–03 are provisional and may change.

Source:

Hospital Inpatient's System.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many individuals were admitted to Northern Ireland hospitals in the last year who were not residents of the province. [124690]

Angela Smith: In 2002–03, a total of 3,992 patients whose address was outside of Northern Ireland were admitted to hospitals in Northern Ireland (ordinary admissions and day cases). The source of this information is the Hospital In-patient's System. Data for 2002–03 are provisional and may change.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the average cost was of hospital admissions in Northern Ireland in *(a)* 1982, *(b)* 1992 and *(c)* 2002. [130253]

Angela Smith: The information requested is provided as follows:

Average cost of hospital admissions
(In-patients including day cases)

£

	Average cost of an admission	
Year ended 31 March	*Actual price*	*Adjusted to 2002–03 prices*
1982	630	1,490
1992	918	1,223
2002[1]	1,126	1,159

[1] There may be small definitional differences between the year ended 31 March 2002 and earlier years due to differences in available sources of information.

Notes:

1. The figures provided exclude expenditure and activity information in relation to long stay and specialist hospitals.
2. It should be noted that a straight forward comparison of costs over a 20 year period is difficult, given the substantial changes in the range and nature of procedures undertaken in hospitals. In addition the lengths of stay and therefore costs will vary dramatically within one year, depending on the speciality and the patient's condition.

Housing Adaptations

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he plans to abolish the means test for housing adaptations in families with disabled children. [130268]

Mr. Spellar: The review group that was set up to look at the issue has just recently sent its report to me. I will write to the hon. Member for Strangford once I have had the opportunity to consider its recommendations.

Mental Health

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many elderly mentally infirm unit places there are in Northern Ireland. [130258]

Angela Smith: Information on the number of elderly mentally infirm unit places is not available. However, at 31 March 2003, there were approximately 700 elderly mentally infirm persons in residential homes and approximately 1,000 elderly mentally infirm persons in nursing homes, whose care was funded by Health and Social Services Trusts.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many individuals aged 18 and younger are receiving *(a)* antidepressants, *(b)* antipsychotics and *(c)* amphetamines in each health trust in Northern Ireland. [130265]

Angela Smith: The information requested is not available.

MOT Tests

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he intends to take to address the backlog of MOT appointments at the Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency. [124558]

Angela Smith: The principal causes of the current waiting time difficulties have been a significant increase in demand and the temporary closure of test centres for the installation of new test equipment.

The programme of refurbishment will be completed in September this year. In the meantime, a number of steps are being taken to alleviate the position. These include: continuing efforts to recruit additional staff; increased overtime working; the introduction of extended day working into additional centres to increase capacity; diverting technical staff from other duties to testing; working with the equipment supplier to secure higher levels of productivity; better public information and awareness, so that customers have the option of choosing centres with a lower waiting time; and relocating staff in order to match capacity and demand as closely as possible.

Physiotherapy

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the recruitment of physiotherapists. [130251]

Angela Smith: The recruitment of staff, including physiotherapists, is a matter for individual Health and Social Services Trusts taking into account factors such as service needs and available resources. The Department however has a role in ensuring that sufficient suitably qualified staff are available to meet the needs of the service throughout the health and personal social services.

The Department has looked at ways of improving regional workforce planning mechanisms and in August 2001 a series of comprehensive workforce reviews was launched. These reviews are across the main HPSS professional groups and the physiotherapy staff group is included in this initiative. The first report on the review of the physiotherapy workforce has been completed and its findings indicated that there are currently sufficient physiotherapists in training to meet the needs of the service.

The position however is being kept under review, particularly in light of probable increasing demand that will result from developments in physiotherapy services

Planning

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many enforcement notices were issued by each of the planning divisions in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years; how many were issued between 1 April and 9 May; how many are still in operation; and what the timescale is for the act of enforcement to be implemented. [116832]

Angela Smith: Although statistical records maintained by the Planning Service have historically taken account of enforcement procedures, it is only since 1999 that separate data specifically relating to enforcement action has been recorded. It is not possible to provide a breakdown of enforcement statistics by Division.

Presented in the table is the total number of enforcement notices issued for each year since 1999. These figures are published in the Agency Annual Report and Accounts for the years 1999–2002.

	Number
1999–2000	82
2000–01	54
2001–02	50
2002–03	40
1 April to 9 May 2003	8

Note:
The enforcement notices issued since 1 April 2003 remain in effect. Under Article 68(8) of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, each enforcement notice should specify the period for compliance. The period allowed for compliance depends on the circumstances of each case.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what financial resources were allocated to the implementation of planning enforcement cases in each of the planning divisions in each of the last five years; how many officers are employed to undertake enforcement work in each of the planning divisions in Northern Ireland; and how many there were in 1997. [116833]

Angela Smith: The Department of the Environment's Planning Service's annual expenditure on salaries for officers employed in enforcement work, during the last five financial years, was:

	£
1998–99	338,100
1999–2000	353,300
2000–01	369,200
2001–02	385,800
2002–03	403,200

There are currently 20 officers devoted to enforcement work. These officers are deployed by Divisional Planning Office as follows:

	Number
Belfast Division	3
Ballymena Division	3
Craigavon Division	3
Downpatrick Division	3
Londonderry Division	4
Omagh Division	4

The additional officers in the Londonderry and Omagh Divisions are based in the Coleraine and Enniskillen sub-offices.

This dedicated staffing complement was put in place in 1998. Prior to this, enforcement work was taken forward as an integral part of development control casework and it is therefore not possible to provide comparison figures for 1997.

A number of measures to enhance enforcement powers were included in the Planning (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, to simplify, streamline and strengthen the Department's existing enforcement powers.

Planning Service is also reviewing the resources dedicated to enforcement as part of the Modernising Planning Processes Implementation Plan, and is seeking substantial additional resources to address enforcement and other priority areas. Views on whether the costs of enforcement action should be recovered from planning fees will also be sought in a consultation paper on planning fees, which is due to be published shortly.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his policy is towards third party appeals in relation to planning applications in Northern Ireland. [130216]

Angela Smith: I am conscious of the potential implications that the introduction of third party appeals would have for the operation of Northern Ireland's planning system and economy. That is why I have commissioned a Regulatory Impact Assessment of the impact that third party appeals would have, if introduced. When complete, I will wish to give that assessment the most careful consideration before making a decision on how to deal with this important issue.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what criteria are applied in determining planning applications in areas of townscape character; [130217]

(2) what steps he has taken to ensure compliance with development guidance notes in relation to planning applications in areas of townscape character; [130218]

(3) if he will take steps to ensure that planning applications in areas of townscape character are carefully monitored pending the determination of policy on third party appeals. [130219]

Angela Smith: The Department of the Environment is obliged by law to have regard to the Development Plan, so far as it is material, and to any other material considerations in determining planning applications. In relation to Areas of Townscape Character, other material considerations includes the Regional Development Strategy, Planning Policy Statements in particular PPS1, PPS6 and PPS7 and advice in the form of supplementary planning guidance.

All proposals in Areas of Townscape Character are carefully assessed to ensure compliance with published policy and guidance taking account of any other relevant matters. As with all planning applications, proposals in Areas of Townscape Character are processed in an open and transparent manner. This allows an opportunity for the receipt of public representations and involves consultation with the relevant district council and other statutory bodies.

To afford additional protection for Areas of Townscape Character, I intend later this year to introduce control over demolition within these areas. When the relevant statutory provisions are concerned, I will publish an addendum to Planning Policy Statement 6, which will set out my Department's policy for the control of development in Areas of Townscape Character.

Police HQ, Armagh

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how extensive the asbestos contamination was at the regional police headquarters in Armagh; when the contamination occurred; and what the cause was of the contamination; [120307]

(2) what documents and how many case files were contaminated by asbestos at the regional police headquarters in Armagh; what percentage of these papers were destroyed; at what rank this decision was taken; what options were available for copying files; and from what bodies professional advice was sought; [120308]

(3) how many criminal prosecutions were dropped as a result of asbestos contamination at the regional police headquarters in Armagh; how many civil actions were affected; and what cost was incurred in meeting claims for damages as a result of failing to produce evidence. [120309]

Jane Kennedy: I have written to my hon. Friend, a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Police Property (Meetings)

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the policy is on the RUC GC Association and Welfare Associations meeting in police property across Northern Ireland; and if he will ensure that these facilities remain open to them as long as they are required. [123465]

Jane Kennedy: This is a matter for the Chief Constable. I understand that he has provided assurances that organisations such as the RUC GC Associations and Welfare Associations will continue to be granted the use of police premises. Any person or persons wishing to gain admission to any police establishment would be required to comply with any policies established by the organisation.

Police Service of Northern Ireland

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) whether there is a right of appeal for serving or former members of the Police Service of Northern Ireland when a request to use convalescent facilities on the mainland is refused by the Benevolent Fund Committee; and if he will make a statement; [130055]

(2) whether there is a ceiling on the number of times a serving or former member of the Police Service of Northern Ireland can use convalescent homes for respite purposes on the mainland. [130056]

Jane Kennedy: Each case made to the Benevolent Fund Committee is considered on its own merits. There is no ceiling on the number of times an officer or retired officer can use the benevolent fund facilities. However, all instances where a request is made for a third visit are referred to the Management Committee for approval. An applicant who has had their request refused can ask to have their case reviewed and may submit additional information or material to be considered as part of that review.

Radiographers

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many radiographers are employed in full-time posts in the NHS in Northern Ireland; how many vacancies exist; and what estimate he has made of how many will be required in total in 2006. [124673]

Angela Smith: The information is as follows:

(a) A breakdown of radiographers as at 31 March 2003 by employment status is shown in the following table:

Radiographers as at 31 March 2003 by employment status[1]

Employment status	*Headcount*	*WTE*[2]
Full-time	399	399.0
Part-time	159	89.50
Total	558	488.5

[1] Bank staff who cover for staffing shortfalls and fluctuating workloads in order to maintain service delivery have been removed from these figures.
[2] Whole-time equivalent.

(b) As at 30 September 2002 there were Radiography vacancies amounting to a whole-time equivalent of 26.5. Radiography vacancies detailed by trust are given in the following table:

Radiography vacancies detailed by trust as at 30 September 2002

Health and Social Services (HSS) Trust	*WTE*[1]
Sperrin Lakeland HSS Trust	1.0
United Hospitals Group HSS Trust	4.0
Altnagelvin Group HSS Trust	1.0
Royal Group of Hospitals HSS Trust	1.0
Craigavon Area Hospital Group HSS Trust	6.5
Green Park Healthcare HSS Trust	4.0
Down and Lisburn HSS Trust	6.0
Belfast City Hospital HSS Trust	2.0
Ulster Community and Hospitals Group HSS Trust	1.0
Total	26.5

[1] Whole-time equivalent

(c) The total required number of Radiographers in 2006 equates to 738 headcount when supply is profiled against the Demand Levels 1 and 2, as identified within the Comprehensive Review of the Radiography Workforce, April 2002.

Radiology

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many vacancies there are in Northern Ireland for *(a)* radiologists and *(b)* radiographers. [130001]

Angela Smith: The information is as follows:

(a) As at 30 September there were Consultant Radiologists' vacancies amounting to a whole-time equivalent of 8.0. Consultant Radiologists' vacancies detailed by Trust are given in the following table. The number of staff in post at this same date was 73 (68.25 WTE).

Consultant radiologists' vacancies detailed by trust as at 30 September 2002

Health and Social Services (HSS) Trust	*WTE*[1]
Sperrin Lakeland HSS Trust	2.0
United Hospitals Group HSS Trust	3.0
Belfast City Hospitals HSS Trust	1.0
Ulster Community and Hospitals HSS Trust	1.0
Craigavon Area Hospital Group HSS Trust	1.0

[1] Whole-time equivalent

As at 30 September 2002 there were Radiography vacancies amounting to a whole-time equivalent of 26.5. Radiography vacancies detailed by trust are given in the following table. The number of staff in post at this same date was 566 (496.3 WTE).

Radiography vacancies detailed by trust as at 30 September 2002

Health and Social Services (HSS) Trust	*WTE*[1]
Sperrin Lakeland HSS Trust	1.0
United Hospitals Group HSS Trust	4.0
Altnagelvin Group HSS Trust	1.0
Royal Group of Hospitals HSS Trust	1.0
Craigavon Area Hospital Group HSS Trust	6.5
Green Park Healthcare HSS Trust	4.0
Down and Lisburn HSS Trust	6.0
Belfast City Hospital HSS Trust	2.0
Ulster Community and Hospitals Group HSS Trust	1.0
Total	26.5

[1] Whole-time equivalent

Regional Cancer Centre

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on recruitment of staff for Northern Ireland's new regional Cancer Centre. [124686]

Angela Smith: The Belfast City Hospital Trust developed a workforce plan for the new Cancer Centre as part of the submission of the Outline Business Case. The Trust is keeping the plan under review. The Regional Medical Services Consortium is currently considering a substantial additional revenue investment of approx £1.6 million per annum to enable a phased build-up in staff numbers towards the opening of the new Centre.

Respite Care

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many respite care beds there are in each health board area in the Province for *(a)* young adults older than 18 and *(b)* those aged 18 and younger. [130266]

Angela Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Road Tax

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action has been taken to reduce the number of vehicles being driven on Northern Ireland's roads without road tax; and how many prosecutions have resulted in the past 12 months as a result of enforcement action. [124186]

Angela Smith: A range of measures is in place to tackle Vehicle Excise Duty (road tax) evasion in Northern Ireland, including ongoing detection by the police and traffic wardens, wheel clamping; Automated Number Plate Reading cameras; Statutory Off Road Notification (SORN); and special joint exercises by DVLNI, PSNI and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

The most recent period for which enforcement information is available is the year from 1 June 2002 to 31 May 2003. In that year enforcement action was taken against 15,171 offenders. 13,281 settled out of court and 1,890 were prosecuted in court.

Roadworks

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which contractors working for the Roads Service had their contracts terminated in each year since 1999; and what the reasons were in each case. [119468]

Angela Smith: I have asked the Chief Executive of Roads Service to write to you in response to your question. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the total length broken down by classification of road is in each council area in Northern Ireland. [123925]

Mr. Spellar: I have asked the Chief Executive of Roads Service to write to the hon. Gentleman in response to this question. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost was of repairing public *(a)* roads and *(b)* footpaths in Northern Ireland following work carried out by (i) electricity and (ii) gas companies in each year since 1997. [119462]

Angela Smith: I have asked the Chief Executive of Roads Service to write to you in response to your question. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many surgical operations were performed in 2002 at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children. [130270]

Angela Smith: There were 4,260 surgical operations performed in the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children during 2002–03.

Schools

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many temporary classrooms there were in each Education and Library Board area in each of the last three years. [128286]

Jane Kennedy: The number of temporary classrooms in controlled schools[1] in each Education and Library Board area in each of the last three years is as follows:

Education and Library Board	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03
Belfast	119	119	103
Western	172	177	172
North-Eastern	325	343	358
South-Eastern	509	452	394
Southern	262	252	240

[1] Information on temporary classrooms in other sectors is not currently available. However, the Department of Education will be carrying out a survey of maintained, voluntary grammar and grant maintained integrated schools before the end of the financial year to ascertain the exact number of temporary classrooms in these sectors. This information will be supplied to you when the results of the survey are available.

The increased investment in new schools, together with a £25 million programme specifically to remove temporary classrooms, spanning the financial years 2002–03 to 2005–06, should result in a substantial reduction in these classrooms over the next 3 years.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many schools requiring *(a)* high priority maintenance work and *(b)* major works there were in each Education and Library Board area in each of the last three years. [128287]

Jane Kennedy: The information requested is as follows:

(a) Number of schools requiring high priority maintenance work[1]

Education and Library Board Area	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03
Belfast	156	155	163
Western	238	215	188
North-Eastern	139	157	127
South-Eastern	222	207	184
Southern	240	262	234

[1] Figures cover controlled, maintained and Irish-medium schools. Maintenance work in voluntary grammar grant maintained integrated schools is met by the schools themselves from their annual LMS budgets. Data is held centrally by the Department on the extent of the maintenance requirements in these schools.

(b) Number of schools requiring major works[2]

Education and Library Board Area	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03
Belfast	16	15	28
Western	22	20	29
North-Eastern	26	28	37
South-Eastern	14	13	14
Southern	29	32	30

[2] Figures cover all schools included in the Department's Schools' Capital Priorities list as published on its website.

Senior Citizens (Concessionary Travel)

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been issued with senior citizen smart passes for free travel on public transport, broken down by post code area. [125839]

Mr. Spellar: Translink advise that the information is not readily available in exactly the form requested. However, the table shows the total number of Smartpasses in issue by Northern Ireland postcode area as at 16 July 2003. Over 160,000 of the 164,596 Smartpasses in circulation are Senior Smartpasses, the remainder being made up of Smartpasses for those registered blind and the war disabled. Translink do not have the postcodes for 1,080 pass holders.

Postcode	Count
BT1	41
BT2	76
BT3	6
BT4	3,511
BT5	5,774
BT6	4,476
BT7	1,358
BT8	3,078
BT9	2,759
BT10	1,520
BT11	3,453
BT12	2,635
BT13	3,313
BT14	3,667
BT15	3,550
BT16	1,936
BT17	2,170
BT18	1,815
BT19	4,023
BT20	4,210
BT21	1,115
BT22	1,795
BT23	4,879
BT24	1,292
BT25	986
BT26	877
BT27	2,650
BT28	3,451
BT29	624
BT30	2,627
BT31	524
BT32	2,001
BT33	1,292
BT34	4,420
BT35	2,994
BT36	4,751
BT37	3,421
BT38	4,187
BT39	2,112
BT40	3,138
BT41	2,901
BT42	3,322
BT43	2,196
BT44	1,528
BT45	2,078
BT46	591
BT47	4,438
BT48	3,827
BT49	1,465
BT51	2,221
BT52	1,671
BT53	1,945
BT54	629
BT55	1,097
BT56	863
BT57	462
BT60	2,098
BT61	1,345
BT62	2,933
BT63	1,970
BT64	45
BT65	371
BT66	3,064
BT67	1,575
BT68	70
BT69	187
BT70	1,250
BT71	2,688
BT74	1,568
BT75	292
BT76	128
BT77	80
BT78	2,044
BT79	1,572

Postcode	Count
BT80	1,396
BT81	527
BT82	1,979
BT84	6
BT92	929
BT93	692
BT94	963
BT95	1
BT96	1
BT98	1
No postcode available	1,080
Total	164,596

Strategic Investment Body

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are on the Board of the Strategic Investment Body; and how many are women. [125909]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Strategic Investment Board has five directors, none of whom is a woman.

Teachers

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on teacher recruitment in Northern Ireland. [129824]

Jane Kennedy: The level of intakes to teacher education courses is determined annually by the Department of Education, with the aim of maintaining a reasonable match between the numbers being trained and the projected numbers of teaching vacancies. Currently these courses are oversubscribed with around five applications for each available place.

Research has been commissioned by the Department to test the proposition that there is or will be a shortfall in the recruitment of teachers in any subject area in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland. The research findings are expected in October.

Teachers

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many teaching vacancies there are in North Belfast in *(a)* the primary and *(b)* the secondary sector. [126498]

Jane Kennedy: The number of vacancies, as indicated by the employing authorities in all school sectors in the North Belfast area at the beginning of the new school year, is seven in the primary sector and nine in the secondary sector as set out in the following.

Responses from employing authorities and North Belfast voluntary grammar and integrated schools on teaching vacancies as they apply at the beginning of the new school year 2003–04.

1. *Belfast Education and Library Board*
Currently the Board is not aware of any vacancies in the primary or secondary controlled sectors in North Belfast.

2. *Council for Catholic Maintained Schools*
Seven vacancies and nine secondary vacancies are expected to be filled in the near future.

3. *Integrated Primary Schools*
Hazlewood Integrated Primary School, 242 Whitewell Road—no teaching vacancies.

4. *Voluntary Grammar and Integrated Secondary Schools*
Belfast Royal Academy—no teaching vacancies.

Dominician College, 38 Fort William Park—no teaching vacancies.

Hazelwood Integrated College, 70 Whitewell Road—no teaching vacancies.

St. Malachy's College, 36 Antrim Road—no teaching vacancies.

Transport

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the quality bus corridor on the Newtownards Roads is likely to open. [122367]

Mr. Spellar: I have asked the Chief Executive of Roads Service to write to the hon. Gentleman in response to this question. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the plans to upgrade the Westlink. [122370]

Mr. Spellar: I have asked the Chief Executive of Roads Service to write to the hon. Gentleman in response to this question. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the status is of each road scheme in the Road Service Major Works preparation. [122372]

Mr. Spellar: I have asked the Chief Executive of Roads Service to write to the hon. Gentleman in response to this question. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Transport Infrastructure

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much has been invested in improving the *(a)* roads and *(b)* transport infrastructure in (i) North Belfast and (ii) Northern Ireland in each year since 1997. [119466]

Angela Smith: I have asked the Chief Executive of Roads Service to write to you in response to your question. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Unadopted Main Sewers

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many households in East Belfast have unadopted main sewers. [122550]

Mr. Spellar: I have asked the Chief Executive of Water Service to write to the hon. Gentleman in response to this question. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Vehicle Licensing

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with the

Secretary of State for Transport about extending to Northern Ireland measures to improve vehicle licensing in line with those announced by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport in the written ministerial statement of 22 May 2003, *Official Report*, columns 45–46WS. [116807]

Angela Smith: I can confirm that the proposals announced by the Minister for Transport will apply in Northern Ireland. My officials in Driver and Vehicle Licensing Northern Ireland are working with their counterparts in DVLA and DfT on the operational details.

Waiting Times/Lists

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many patients in the Province are waiting for *(a)* CT scans, *(b)* MRI scans and *(c)* X-rays; and what the longest time is that a patient has had to wait for each of these appointments. [130250]

Angela Smith: The information requested is not routinely collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much has been invested in improving the *(a)* water and *(b)* sewerage infrastructure in North Belfast in each year since 1997. [119467]

Angela Smith: I have asked the Chief Executive of Water Service to write to the hon. Lady in response to this question. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Water Bill

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs Ministers to extend the Water Bill to Northern Ireland. [130400]

Angela Smith: I have had no discussions with Defra Ministers about extending the Water Bill to Northern Ireland. The Water Bill applies only to England and Wales and, as such, its proposed measures relate largely to the privatised water industry which does not reflect the arrangements currently in place in Northern Ireland. However, my officials have been monitoring the progress of the Bill through its various stages to consider what, if any, implications there are for future policy development in Northern Ireland.

Water Services

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* households and *(b)* public sector offices in Northern Ireland have been fitted with hippo bags; and if he will make a statement on the estimated savings made by their introduction. [121934]

Mr. Spellar: I have asked the Chief Executive of Water Service to write to the hon. Lady in response to this question. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the Water Service met its targets in respect of domestic water efficiency in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2002 and *(c)* since January. [121932]

Mr. Spellar: I have asked the Chief Executive of Water Service to write to the hon. Lady in response to this question. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last met the EAGA Partnership to discuss water efficiency proposals; and if he will make a statement. [121933]

Mr. Spellar: I have asked the Chief Executive of Water Service to write to the hon. Lady in response to this question. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what comparative studies have been undertaken by the Water Service in Northern Ireland with water authorities in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales regarding water efficiency by (i) domestic premises, (ii) small businesses and (iii) public sector offices; and if he will make a statement on the results. [121935]

Mr. Spellar: I have asked the Chief Executive of Water Service to write to the hon. Lady in response to this question. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what evaluation has been made by the Water Service regarding the distribution of hippo bags in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the results. [121936]

Mr. Spellar: I have asked the Chief Executive of Water Service to write to the hon. Lady in response to this question. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his plans to improve water efficiency in *(a)* low income households, *(b)* small businesses and *(c)* public sector offices. [121937]

Mr. Spellar: I have asked the Chief Executive of Water Service to write to the hon. Lady in response to this question. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

HEALTH

Abortions

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to reduce the number of abortions in the London borough of Havering; [129048]

(2) how many abortions were performed in the London borough of Havering in each year from 1997 to 2002. [129051]

Mr. Hutton: The Government are taking a number of steps through the National Strategy for Sexual Health and HIV and the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy to help

reduce the number of abortions. We are also working to improve access to contraceptive services and the range of methods of contraception that are available and will be making £1 million available this year to support this. We are also working with the Department for Education and Skills to improve sex and relationships education.

The number of abortions performed on residents of Havering local authority is shown in the table. The data are not available by local authority prior to 1995 and have therefore been shown by health authority, district health authority, and health district which includes data for residents of neighbouring local authority areas. Data for 2002 will be available from autumn 2003.

Numbers of abortions to residents of Havering local authority, 1995–2001[1,2]

Year	*Number*
2001	862
2000	828
1999	838
1998	815
1997	757
1996	737
1995	691
1994	[3]1,288
1993	[3]1,350
1992	[4]1,557
1991	[4]1,703
1990	[4]1,777
1989	[4]1,839
1988	[4]1,750
1987	[4]1,618
1986	[4]1,435
1985	[4]1,477
1984	[4]1,435
1983	[4]1,308
1982	[5]769
1981	[5]708
1980	[3]1,220
1979	[3]1,245
1978	[3]1,029
1977	[3]989
1976	[3]933

[1] Prior to 1995 records were allocated by postcode to ward and then stored by health authority or district health authority. Data for 2002 will be available from autumn 2003.
[2] The information provided for 1976–94 is for areas that include abortions performed on residents of Havering local authority.
[3] Barking, Havering and Brentwood district health authority.
[4] Barking and Havering health authority.
[5] Havering health district.

Accident and Emergency Treatment

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines he has issued on the target for no patient to be waiting for more than four hours in accident and emergency, with special reference to patients with a clinical need to remain for over four hours. [129682]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The NHS Plan established the target that by December 2004 accident and emergency (A&E) patients should wait no more than four hours between arrival and discharge, admission to hospital, or transfer to another facility.

There are exceptional circumstances in which an A&E department remains the safest clinical environment for a patient even though four hours have elapsed. The Department of Health has been engaged in constructive discussions with the British Association for A&E Medicine, the Faculty of A&E Medicine and the Royal College of Nursing about how these cases should be defined and monitored.

The product of these discussions is a paper that was published for wider consultation on 11 September. The paper is available on the Department's website, at www.doh.gov.uk/emergencycare/clinical-exceptions.htm. The consultation period runs until 31 October 2003. After consultation we will publish the final version of the paper and develop a process for excluding these patients from the monitoring of NHS trusts' performance against the A&E target.

Acute Hospitals (Performance)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to support NHS managers in improving performance following the recent Audit Commission reports into acute hospitals. [127729]

Mr. Hutton: The Government have a range of measures in place to support national health service managers in improving performance:

we have invested significant additional resources in the five-year period 2003–04 to 2007–08. Over this period the average real terms increase will be 7.4 per cent. a year over and above inflation;

we have set up the NHS Modernisation Agency to support NHS organisations and their front-line staff to improve services for patients; and

we have put in place a range of recruitment and retention initiatives.

For the first time, health communities have developed comprehensive local programmes with action across health partnerships to improve health, tackle inequalities and modernise NHS. Alongside the significant increase in funding, these will help the NHS and social services plan for the future with confidence.

Further details of the Government's support to the NHS in improving performance are detailed in my letter to the hon. Member, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Advocacy Scheme

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how the funding for mental health advocacy announced in the White Paper 'Valuing People' has been spent; and how much underspend there is from this fund *(a)* in England and *(b)* in each region. [128933]

(2) how many volunteer advocates have joined the mental health advocacy scheme announced in the White Paper 'Valuing People' *(a)* in England and *(b)* in each region. [128934]

(3) what progress has been made towards the target set out in the White Paper 'Valuing People' for one citizen advocacy group in each local authority area; and which local authorities do not yet have a citizen advocacy group. [128935]

Dr. Ladyman: The importance of advocacy for people with learning disabilities is a theme running throughout the White Paper "Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century" (Cm 5086)

published in March 2001 which sets out our proposals for improving services for people with learning disabilities, their families and carers.

"Valuing People" announced the creation of two new funds, the Implementation Support Fund and the Learning Disability Development Fund, to support key aspects of its proposals. Two organisations, Values Into Action (VIA) and the British Institute of Learning Disabilities (BILD), are distributing money from the Implementation Support Fund to support the development and expansion of self- and citizen advocacy respectively. By the end of the third year of the funding programme in March 2004, £3 million will have been distributed to advocacy organisations. That figure includes the additional £140,000 which my hon. Friend, the Member for Redditch, announced in February 2002 was being made available from April that year following representations from the Learning Disability Task Force and self advocates. There has been no underspend in the first two years, and funding for the third year has already been allocated.

Our most recent information is that 449 volunteers have been recruited to citizen advocacy schemes; as a result 394 people with learning disabilities now have advocates who otherwise would not.

Information on the geographical distribution of citizen advocacy schemes is not available in the form requested, as many schemes cover more than one local authority area. In 2002–03, the first full year of the funding programme, advocacy schemes in twenty four new geographical areas received support.

The Government's report on learning disability, "Making Change Happen" (HC514), published in April 2003, announced that the Implementation Support Fund would continue until March 2006 and that the Learning Disability Task Force would be consulted on its use.

The draft Mental Health Bill published for consultation in June 2002 included the proposal for a statutory duty on the Secretary of State to provide for specialist mental health advocates to be available for every patient treated under the formal powers of the Bill and their nominated person.

At the request of the Department of Health, Durham University has undertaken a study of current mental health advocacy services to assist the Department in developing this new specialist advocacy service. A separate report on mental health advocacy was also published for consultation in June 2002. It contained a number of recommendations for good practice. The responses from both consultation exercises are being carefully evaluated and will be taken into account in developing plans for implementing the new specialist service, including the funding arrangements.

Autism

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will implement the recommendations of the Charter for Persons with Autism adopted as a written declaration by the European Parliament on 9 May 1996. [129443]

Dr. Ladyman: The rights of all citizens of the United Kingdom, including those who have autism, are set out in the Human Rights Act 1998. We are making sure that human rights principles are kept at the heart of services and policies, in particular through national standards, performance assessment and quality management and in taking forward, for example, the social services modernisation agenda and the implementation of the NHS Plan. We will continue to put human rights at the heart of health and social care policy and the delivery of services for everyone, including people with autism.

Brent and Harrow Health Authority

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS dentists there are in the Brent and Harrow Health Authority area; what steps he is taking to increase the number of NHS dentists in the Brent and Harrow Health Authority area; and if he will make a statement. [128753]

Mr. Hutton: Brent and Harrow Health Authority dissolved on 1 April 2002 and North West London Strategic Health Authority is now the local headquarters of the national health service. However the latest available figures show that there were 221 general dental services dentists whose main work was in Brent and Harrow HA at 30 September 2002.

The proposals in the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill, currently before Parliament, will underpin a modernised high-quality primary dental service provided through contracts between primary care trusts and dental practices properly integrated with the rest of the NHS.

North West London SHA will ensure that as new primary care centres are developed locally, dentistry will be part of the consideration of which services can be brought together for the convenience of patients.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the prescribing budget was for the Brent and Harrow Health Authority for the financial years *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [128759]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not held centrally. Information from North West London Strategic Health Authority is shown in the following tables. Brent and Harrow Health Authority was dissolved on 1 April 2002 and Brent Primary Care Trust and Harrow PCT now have responsibility for setting prescribing budgets in Brent and Harrow respectively.

Prescribing budget for Brent and Harrow Health Authority

£000

	Actual	Budget
2000–01	45,702	45,344
2001–02	49,960	49,538

Combined prescribing budget for Brent PCT and Harrow PCT

£000

	Actual	Budget
2002–03	58,722	56,055

Each year the Department of Health issues guidance to the national health service containing advice about factors that should be taken into account in setting prescribing budgets. However it is for individual primary care trusts to set their prescribing budgets.

Bureaucracy

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many bureaucracy-busting champions have been appointed as part of the Government's anti-bureaucracy drive; and where they are located. [129588]

Mr. Hutton: No new appointments have been made as a result of this initiative. Each strategic health authority has identified an existing senior member of staff who will be responsible for ensuring that action is taken locally to reduce the burden placed on front-line national health service staff. This will complement the action already being taken by the Department.

Child Protection

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the NHS trusts which have not yet appointed a designated nurse for child protection. [127011]

Dr. Ladyman: According 10 the child protection sell-audit returns submitted to the Commission for Health improvement, by the end of May 2003, the following National Health Service trusts, including primary care trusts, acute trusts, and mental health trusts, did not have a named nurse in post when they made their return.

Tendring Primary Care Trust
Blackwater Valley and Hart Primary Care Trust
Colchester Primary Care Trust
Dudley South Primary Care Trust
Dudley Bencon and Castle Primary Care trust
Knowsley Primary Care Trust
Cheimslord Primary Care Trust
Waveney Primary Care Trust
Brent Primary Care Trust
Witham, Bramiree and Halstead Care NHS Trust
Cardiothoracic Centre Liverpool NHS Trust (The)
Walton Centre 1or Neurology & Neurosurgery NHS Trust
East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust
Rotherham General Hospitals NHS Trust
West Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust
Whittington Hospital NHS Trust
Five Boroughs Partnership NHS Trust
Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnerships NHS Trust
Calderstones NHS Trust
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust
East London and The City Mental Health NHS Trust
Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Trust
North Cumbria Mental Health and Learning Disabilities NHS Trust
North East London Mental Health NHS Trust
Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust
Worcestershire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust

However, 13 of these 26 trusts noted in their return that they were in the process of recruiting a named nurse, or that recruitment would start shortly, and a further four said that they had made alternative arrangements such as access to specialist advice Irom another trust or organisation, a shared team across the whole county, or a combined designated/named nurse post.

The following primary care trusts did not have a designated nurse in post at the time that they made their return:

Hensmere Primary Care Trust
West Cumbria Primary Care Trust
Rugby Primary Care Trust
Wafiord and Three Rivers Primary Care Trust
Tower Hamlets Primary Care Trust
Redbridge Primary Care Trust

However, three of these trusts noted in their return that they were in the process of recruiting a designated nurse, and another noted that it had made alternative arrangements for staff to access specialist advice.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff, previously employed by the community health councils, have left their jobs in the last six months. [127518]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Figures on Community Health Council (CHC) staff leavers, which have been available since February 2003 when clearing houses were introduced, indicate that to end of June 2003, 100 CHC staff have left their jobs.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he estimates the last community health council will cease to function. [130319]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the Written Ministerial Statement made by my hon. Friend, the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Mr. Lammy) on Wednesday 4 June 2003, *Official Report*, columns 22–23WS. It is still our intention to abolish community health councils on 1 December 2003.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the staffing levels of community health councils; and what estimate he has made of their likely staff levels on 1 November. [130711]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* The Department is working closely with the employing authorities of community health council (CHC) staff and is regularly monitoring the staffing level of CHCs in the run up to the abolition date of 1 December. It is estimated that on 1 November there will be approximately 380 CHC staff.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements are being put in place to ensure that those community health councils which have to move from their premises prior to 1 December remain fully operational. [130712]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* Each community health council (CHC) has an exit strategy. In the case of those CHCs who have to move premises prior to 1 December the CHC lead will consult and discuss fully with the chair, members and staff the arrangements that will be in place for the operation of that CHC.

Dental Work

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are in place to ensure that unnecessary dental work is not carried out on patients by dentists for profit. [127984]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Dentists providing general dental services under the national health service are remunerated through fees set out in the Statement of Dental Remuneration. The fees are uprated annually in the light of recommendations from the Doctors and Dentists Remuneration Body. For treatments not listed on the Statement of Dental Remuneration and for courses of treatment where total gross lees are above a specified limit set out in regulations dentists are required to obtain prior approval from the Dental Practice Board.

The board continuously monitors treatments provided under the General Dental Service (GDS) to identify outlying prescribing patterns. The dental reference service of the Dental Practice Board undertakes random patient examinations of proposed treatment plans and completed treatments provided under the GDS to ensure that these meet patients clinical needs and are provided to appropriate standards. When providing general dental services a dentist's terms of service require that he or she "shall not provide care and treatment in excess of that which is necessary to secure and maintain oral health". A breach of these terms of service can result in a financial withholding.

Under the provisions of the Health and Social Care Bill currently before Parliament, Primary Care Trusts will commission dental services from April 2005 and will be given the resources to do so. Dentists who contract with a PCT will have a secure income in return for making a longer-term commitment to the NHS.

In response to the Office of Fair Trading report on private dentistry the Government has published an action plan. This is available at www.dti.gov.uk/topics2/dentists.htm. The plan commits the Government to support the development of evidence based clinical care pathways in the NHS to aid dental professionals in improving clinical and cost effective treatment planning of appropriate patient care. The Department of Health will explore with the General Dental Council how clinical pathways can inform its 'Maintaining Standards' guidance and thus be extended to private dentistry.

Diabetes

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures the Department has taken to reduce the number of people with diabetes. [128893]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Some risk factors for developing diabetes, such as family history, increasing age or ethnic origin cannot be modified. However it is possible to reduce other risk factors, such as being overweight, having an adverse distribution of body weight or being physically inactive. The Government have a range of actions under way to tackle these risk factors.

Two new initiatives will be key in fostering healthier lifestyles. The Department of Health is leading on the development of a cross-government food and health action plan. The Plan will pull together all the issues that influence what we eat and will address food production, manufacture and preparation, access to healthier food choices and providing information for consumers about healthy eating and nutrition. This is complemented by wide ranging action to increase mass participation in physical activity and sport, which will be progressed by a cross-government activity co-ordination team, jointly led by the Department of Health and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people had diabetes in *(a)* Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, *(c)* Tyne and Wear and *(d)* the UK *(a)* in 1980, *(b)* in 1990, *(c)* in 2000 and *(d)* on the latest date for which figures are available. [128892]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information is not available in the form requested. However, based on information from the Health Survey for England, the following figures may be estimated.

	Number of people with diabetes in the United Kingdom
1994	1,378,707
1998	1,684,111

Dialysis Treatment

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are receiving dialysis treatment in *(a)* Crosby, *(b)* the North West of England and *(c)* England. [129482]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The latest figures are from the 1998 Renal Survey commissioned by the Department of Health. This shows there were 13,405 patients in England receiving dialysis in 1998 of these 1,586 were being treated in the North West. Equivalent figures for the Crosby area are not available from this source.

Drug Addiction

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to increase the training available to GPs in the treatment of drug dependency. [129142]

Mr. Hutton: The Government do not specify the content of the General Practitioner training curriculum. This is the job of the Joint Committee on Postgraduate Training for General Practice (JCPTGP), which is the competent authority for general practice training in the United Kingdom. The JCPTGP is an independent professional body, and it is required by section 9(3) of the Vocational Training Regulations 1997 to determine and publish the curriculum to be followed by a GP registrar (for example a trainee GP).

The Regulations do specify seven competencies which must be tested, and which the curriculum must therefore teach:

factual medical knowledge sufficient to enable the doctor to perform the duties of a GP;

the ability to apply factual medical knowledge to the management of problems presented by patients in general practice;

effective communication, both orally and in writing;

the ability to consult satisfactorily with general practice patients;

the ability to review and critically analyse the practitioner's own working practices and to manage any necessary changes appropriately;

clinical skills; and

the ability to synthesise all the above competencies and apply them appropriately in a general practice setting.

GPs are expected therefore to be trained in the skills needed to deal with all their patients.

Failing Hospitals

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which organisations are included on the Department's list of possible franchisees for the management of failing hospitals; and which organisations have been awarded franchises for running failing hospitals. [129746]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 September 2003]:* The National Health Service Franchising Register of Expertise was published in December 2002. All current three star NHS organisations are on the register along with Trent strategic health authority and eight private sector organisations who are:

BMI Healthcare, BUPA Hospitals Ltd., Capio Healthcare UK Ltd., Hospitalia activHealth gmbh, Interhealth Canada Ltd., Quo Health, Secta Group Ltd. and Serco Health.

Prior 10 December 2002, six NHS trusts were franchised as a result of their performance in 2000–01, and recruited new chief executives who were already working in the NHS.

Good Hope Hospital NHS Trust was given a zero star rating for their performance in 2001–02. Following a rigorous competitive tender, Secta won the franchise to run the trust. The new chief executive started on 1 September 2003.

Falls

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of admissions to care homes of people over the age of *(a)* 50 years and *(b)* 65 years in each of the last five years for which figures are available were as a result of a fall. [127349]

Dr. Ladyman: Information on the reason for admission to care homes is not collected centrally.

The number of admissions to care homes supported wholly or in part by local authorities is provided in the table for the years 1997–98 to 2001–02.

Number of admissions to care homes 1997–98 to 2001–02

	All ages	*18–64*	*65+*
1997–98	402,025	133,000	269,025
1998–99	403,110	133,555	269,555
1999–2000	397,905	135,765	262,140
2000–01	367,350	130,075	237,275
2001–02	374,925	133,140	241,785

Note:
Data includes permanent and temporary admissions.
Source:
SR1, Table S2

Fertility Treatment (Havering)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many individuals resident in the London borough of Havering are on a waiting list for fertility treatment. [129049]

Mr. Hutton: This information is not collected centrally. Information from the North East London Strategic Health Authority is that there are currently 30 Havering residents waiting for national health service funded in-vitro fertilisation treatment at Bart's and the London NHS Trust. This does not include those patients that are funding their treatment privately either at a NHS trust or through a private clinic.

GP Lists

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 1 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 936W, on GP lists, what the average list size was in each year since 1992. [129720]

Mr. Hutton: Data on the number of general practitioners and patients are published annually. The latest edition, Statistics for General Medical Practitioners in England: 1992–2002, is available at http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0303.pdf

The table shows the average GP list size from 1992–2002.

The average list size continues to fall and is 4 per cent. lower in 2002 than it was in 1992.

Unrestricted Principals and Equivalents (UPEs)[1] average list size 1992–2002

England — *Numbers (headcount)*

	UPEs	*Average list size*
1992	25,968	1,922
1993	26,280	1,902
1994	26,567	1,900
1995	26702	1,887
1996	26,855	1,885
1997	27,099	1,878
1998	27,392	1,866
1999	27,591	1,845
2000	27,704	1,853
2001	27,843	1,841
2002	28,031	1,838

[1] UPEs include GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs and PMS Salaried GPs.
Note:
Data as at 1 October 1992–99 and 30 September 2000–02.
Source:
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

GP Recruitment

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GPs have been recruited through the *(a)* GP Returner scheme and *(b)* Golden Hello scheme; and how many GPs have delayed their retirement through the Delayed Retirement scheme. [128917]

Mr. Hutton: The flexible careers scheme has received 198 applications from doctors wishing to return to general practice. 59 of these are already back in general practice and a further 139 are being processed.

Application forms received by the Department indicate that over 2,900 general practitioners have received the golden hello payment.

No information is held centrally on those doctors who delay their retirement.

Health Organisations (Romford)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with health organisations in Romford during the past 12 months. [129045]

Mr. Hutton: I met with the North East London Strategic Health Authority on 5 February 2003.

Histopathology

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on assisting NHS trusts to recruit histopathology consultants. [129111]

Mr. Hutton: The Department ot Health has a number of national initiatives in place to assist National Health Service trusts to recruit consultants, including histopathologists.

Under the Department International Fellowship programme, twenty Histopathologists have been recruited and accepted others of employment from NHS trusts. A further nine have been recruited under the global scheme.

In addition, we are taking forward a programme of work to address key issues of concern to the medical profession as part of the Improving Working Lives initiative. The Flexible Careers Scheme, which is partially centrally funded, allows consultants to strike a better balance between work and other aspects of their life outside work. The scheme enables consultants to work flexibly such as working round the school holidays and job-sharing.

Hospital Patients (Homeless People)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients whose address was listed as no fixed abode were admitted to NHS hospitals between January and June. [129489]

Mr. Hutton: Data are not yet available for January to June, 2002 or 2003. Information shown in the table is for January to June 2001. Due to the nature of homelessness, it may not always be possible to accurately record information. The figures quoted in the response are likely to significantly undercount the 'true' values. This is because in many cases people of no fixed abode may be admitted from temporary accommodation such as a hostel or be sleeping at a friend's home and are coded accordingly.

Finished Admissions into NHS hospitals where place of residence is listed as no fixed abode

	Number
January 2001 to June 2001	3,267

Notes:
Data in this table are ungrossed
Data exclude all healthy newborn babies.
Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Hospital Trust Deficits

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the underlying deficit was in 2002–03 of each of the hospital trusts which he has authorised to proceed with application for foundation status. [129299]

Mr. Hutton: Audited financial information in respect of the 2002–03 year for all national health service trusts is published in their individual annual accounts. This information will not be available centrally until the end of October 2003.

Hospital Waiting Lists/Times

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to cut waiting lists in the London borough of Havering. [129050]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service is working to reduce waiting times so that by the end of March 2004, the maximum waiting time for in-patient treatment will be cut to nine months and the maximum waiting time for an out-patient appointment will be cut to 17 weeks.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* cancer, *(b)* heart disease, *(c)* hip replacement and *(d)* liver complaint patients resident in the London borough of Havering are on a waiting list for treatment. [129052]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected in the requested format.

Hospital Wards

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mixed-sex wards have been divided into single-sex bays at *(a)* Darent Valley Hospital, Dartford and *(b)* West Middlesex Hospital, London since 1 January 2002; and if he will make a statement. [128768]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information is not available in the format requested. Ward level data are not collected centrally.

The Department of Health set three objectives to support the elimination of mixed-sex accommodation with a deadline of December 2002, designed to deliver separate sleeping areas, separate toilet and washing facilities and safe facilities for the mentally ill. Compliance is measured at trust level, and both Dartford and Gravesham National Health Service Trust and West Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust are meeting these objectives.

Infection Transmission

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are being taken to minimise the risk of transmission of infection via ambulances. [130313]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In 2000, the Department of Health issued advice on the management and control of hospital infection (Health Service Circular 2000/02). All national health service trusts, including ambulance trusts were required to take action to:

strengthen prevention and control of infection;

secure appropriate health care services for patients with infection; and

improve surveillance of infection.

Measures taken on infection control are a matter for individual trusts. Each trust will have an infection control policy which should comply with current best practice and have access to local advice.

Medical Students

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total intake of United Kingdom medical schools was in each year since 1990. [128930]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

United Kingdom Medical School Intake per Academic Year between 1990 and 2002

1990–91	4,311
1991–92	4,320
1992–93	4,449
1993–94	4,531
1994–95	4,778
1995–96	4,699
1996–97	4,833
1997–98	5,062
1998–99	5,069
1999–2000	5,302
2000–01	5,610
2001–02	6,115
2002–03[1]	6,740

[1] Figures are provisional until November 2003 when a final figure will be reported.

Source:
HEFCE

Note:
By 2005, UK medical school intakes are planned to be around 7,300

Mental Health Services for Deaf People

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many graduate primary care mental health workers there are in each NHS region. [129488]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The NHS Plan set out that one thousand new graduate primary care workers trained in brief therapy techniques of proven effectiveness will be recruited to help general practitioners manage and treat mental common mental health problems. The target date set for local services through priorities and planning guidance is December 2004; training courses have just been established and arrangements to monitor recruitment are currently in hand. This means that the information requested about the employment by specialised trusts of new graduate workers is not yet available.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps the Government are taking to improve mental health services for deaf people; and when he expects to see the results from these improvements; [130031]

(2) what action the Government are taking with regard to the consultation document, "A Sign of the Times"; [130032]

(3) what steps he plans to take to implement the proposals in the consultation document, "A Sign of the Times"; and how he plans to measure the effectiveness of the changes; [130033]

(4) what steps the Government are taking to monitor the impact of the National Services Framework for mental health services on deaf and hard of hearing patients; and what the results are. [130035]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* The Government's strategy for mental health services in England is set out in the "National Service Framework for Mental Health" which specifies seven standards that people should be able to expect from services. The National Service Framework standards apply to all people of working age who have mental health problems including those who are deaf or hard of hearing.

"A Sign of the Times", a consultation document on modernising mental health services for people who are deaf, sought the views of all stakeholders on a number of proposals to improve services for deaf and deafblind users of mental health services through a consultation exercise which ended in April. The Department will publish implementation guidance later in the year that will take all responses to "A Sign of the Times" into account.

It is envisaged that the implementation guidance will set out comprehensive arrangements for performance management of the implementation process.

Methylphenidate

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children have been prescribed methylphenidate in the last year. [127098]

Dr. Ladyman: Information is not available in the form requested. However the figures in the following table show the total number of prescription items of Methylphenidate Hydrochloride dispensed in the community in England in each of the last five years. The majority of prescription items of Methylphenidate Hydrochloride are for the brand Ritalin.

Number of prescription items of Methylphenidate Hydrochloride dispensed in the community in England, 1998 to 2002

Prescription items (thousand)

	Total
1998	126.6
1999	158.0
2000	186.2
2001	208.5
2001	254.0

Source:
Prescription Cost Analysis data from the Prescription Pricing Authority

In 2002, around 91 per cent. of the 254,000 prescription items were dispensed in the community to children (children under 16 and young people aged 16 to 18 in full time education). An estimated 1 per cent. of the items were dispensed to people aged 60 and over with the remainder being dispensed to other adults. These proportions have been similar in recent years.

Negligence Claims

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was paid to cover professional negligence claims on London hospitals in each year since 1992–93; what proportion each sum represented of those hospital budgets; and if he will make a statement. [128764]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the amounts paid to cover professional negligence claims is not collected centrally.

NHS (Public Health)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* public health tutors and *(b)* regulatory affairs managers are employed by the NHS. [128678]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of public health tutors and regulatory affairs managers employed by the National Health Service is not collected centrally.

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were waiting to be registered by NHS dentists in *(a)* Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, *(c)* Tyne and Wear, *(d)* the North East and *(e)* England in each year since 1997. [128888]

Ms Rosie Winterton: This information is not held centrally. Registrations remain broadly stable in these areas and are shown in the following table.

General Dental Service: Number of registrations with a GDS dentist since 1997

Health Authority/Primary Care Trust	*1997*[1,2]	*1998*[2]	*1999*[2]	*2000*[2]	*2001*[2]	*2002*[3]	*2002*[4]	*2003*[4]
England (million)	26.8	23.5	23.5	23.7	23.6	23.5	23.5	23.4
Northern and Yorkshire Region (thousand)	3,850.6	3,451.9	3,447.8	3,486.1	3,484.3	3,439.1	—	—
Gateshead and South Tyneside HA (thousand)	213.2	188.6	191.4	190.5	193.6	190.2	—	—
Newcastle and North Tyneside HA (thousand)	278.8	241.5	245.5	245.0	239.5	239.3	—	—
Sunderland HA (thousand)	169.8	147.0	147.0	148.8	150.8	152.3	—	—
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear SHA (thousand)	—	—	—	—	—	—	743.1	751.6
Newcastle PCT (thousand)	—	—	—	—	—	—	139.2	140.6
Gateshead PCT (thousand)	—	—	—	—	—	—	101.1	99.1
South Tyneside PCT (thousand)	—	—	—	—	—	—	84.3	86.1
North Tyneside PCT (thousand)	—	—	—	—	—	—	101.8	103.3
Sunderland Teaching PCT (thousand)	—	—	—	—	—	—	150.3	153.1

[1] Registration numbers are not consistent with numbers for later dates because the 1997 numbers partly reflect the previous 24 months registration period (now 15 months).
[2] September
[3] August
[4] Responsibilities were transferred from HAs to PCTs from 1 October 2003.
Source:
Dental Practice Board

NHS Staff (E-mail Access)

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what targets have been set for NHS staff to have access to email; what the baseline was for the target; in which document the target was published; and what progress has been made towards the target. [128910]

Mr. Hutton: The Government's strategy document "Building the Information Core—Implementing the NHS Plan" published in 2000 set the target of March 2003 for all National Health Service staff to have access to email. This target is now reflected in the National Programme for Information Technology in the NHS that provides a new approach to delivering IT in the NHS.

At 31 March 2003 NHS trusts reported via the information for health tracking database that 79 per cent. of all NHS staff (822,000 of a total of 1,037,000) had access to email and web browsing. Priority had been given to staff directly involved in the patient care process, so that 98 per cent. of consultants (28,600 of 28,700) and 82 per cent. of clinical staff (602,000 of 732,000, including consultants) had connectivity by that date.

The new centrally provided NHS national email service is now available to all staff, although take-up is a matter for local priorities. The NHS Directory (electronic address book) is one of the largest in the world and today holds 930,000 entries. The simple mail transfer protocol relay service through which internal NHS messaging, including e-mail, is handled, carried over 30 million messages in August 2003.

Nurses

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses have been recruited by the NHS from South Africa in each of the last five years. [130037]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* The information requested is not collected by the Department. Information about the number of nurses admitted to the Nursing and Midwifery Council register is published by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (www.nmc-uk.org).

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS nurses were *(a)* suspended and *(b)* on gardening or special leave, at the latest date for

which figures are available; for how long they were suspended; what the total cost was to the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [128932]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health does not collect any information centrally on the numbers of National Health Service nurses that are suspended or on special leave.

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses are in training; and how many were in training in 1997. [130543]

Mr. Hutton: In 1997–98 there were 38,412 nurses and midwives in pre-registration training. In 2002–03 there were 60,189 nurses in pre-registration training, an increase of 57 per cent.

Obesity Reduction

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps have been taken in the last two years in *(a)* the London borough of Richmond upon Thames, *(b)* Inner London and *(c)* Greater London to reduce obesity; and if he will make a statement. [128774]

Mr. Hutton: Local strategies on reducing obesity are being developed as part of the national service framework for coronary heart disease and national service framework for diabetes. These programmes include a range of initiatives aimed at promoting healthy eating and increasing levels of physical activity. As part of the national school fruit scheme, over 300,000 children in London are receiving a piece of free fruit every school day. 32 schools in the London borough of Richmond upon Thames (primary and secondary) are part of the healthy schools scheme (launched nationally in 1999 as the national healthy school standard). In addition Richmond and Twickenham Primary Care Trust has delivered two healthy eating support programmes to tackle obesity and related diseases.

Ongoing initiatives have a role in obesity prevention including the reform of the welfare food scheme, various school based initiatives such as the national school fruit scheme, the five-a-day community programme and the local exercise action pilots.

Activity to tackle obesity in London is being delivered by a wide range of organisations and initiatives through a variety of funding sources, examples of these are:

approximately 15 healthy living centres situated within communities with high levels of deprivation and health needs, have a focus on tackling obesity;

nine five-a-day projects in London have been established in the most 20 per cent. deprived of primary care trusts;

the national school fruit scheme has 90 per cent. coverage in London in all local education authority maintained primary and infant schools;

a school sport co-ordinators programme that aims to promote physical activity in out of school hours learning is also in place across London.

Overseas Nurses

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what efforts his Department is making to enforce the ban on the recruitment of nurses from developing countries. [129116]

Mr. Hutton: The code of practice for national health service employers involved in the international recruitment of health care professionals was published in October 2001.

The code states that developing countries should not be targeted for recruitment, nor should NHS employers contract with agencies, which do not comply with the code. Workforce development confederations are working closely with NHS employers in their area to ensure their compliance.

The Department has established a list of recruitment agencies that are operating in line with the code. The list appears on the Department website www.doh.gov.uk/international-recruitment.

Overseas Visitors (NHS Treatment)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent on treatment on the NHS for overseas visitors who are fully or partially exempt from the National Health Service (Charges to Overseas Visitors) Regulations 1989, in each of the last five years. [128702]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 September 2003]:* This information is not available centrally. Once it has been established that an overseas visitor is exempt from charges, they are dealt with in the same way as any other patient and national health service trusts are not required to keep a separate record of the cost of their treatment.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many named day written parliamentary questions tabled to him between 1 February and 1 July received *(a)* a substantive answer on the named day and *(b)* a holding answer; [127498]

(2) how many named day written Parliamentary questions were tabled to him between 1 February and 1 July; and how many of those which received a holding answer were given a substantive answer *(a)* within three days, *(b)* within seven days, *(c)* within 14 days, *(d)* within 28 days and *(e)* over 28 days. [127511]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department received 549 named day written Parliamentary Questions between 1 February and 1 July 2003. Of these, 146 were answered on the day named, and 403 received substantive replies after being given a holding answer. The breakdown of days within which answers were given is shown in the table.

Interval (calendar days after the holding answer) within which a substantive answer was given	*Number of PQs*
1–3	150
4–7	117
8–14	66
15–28	53
Over 28	17
Total	403

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many written Parliamentary Questions he received

in each Parliamentary year since May 1997; how many received no answer due to the information not being collected or held centrally; and what proportion of the total number of written questions received this represented in each year. [127506]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Using Table Office information for previous years, the number of parliamentary Questions received in each Parliamentary year since 1997 is shown in the table:

	Number
1997–98	4,316
1998–99	2,769
1999–2000	3,864
2000–01	1,798
2001–02	9,314
2002–03	[1]6,970

[1] To 1 July 2003

Information is not collected centrally on the number of PQs that received no answer and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Written Questions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many ordinary written Parliamentary questions were tabled to him between 15 October 2002 and 1 July 2003; [127517]

(2) how many ordinary written questions that were tabled between 15 October 2002 and 1 July 2003 received a substantive answer *(a)* within three days, *(b)* within seven days, *(c)* within fourteen days, *(d)* within 28 days and *(e)* over 28 days. [127436]

Ms Rosie Winterton: A total of 5,637 ordinary written Parliamentary Questions were tabled between 15 October 2002 and 1 July 2003.

The breakdown by days within which answers were given, based on a 10 per cent. sample of the total, is shown in the table.

Interval (calendar days) after the question's due date in which an answer was given	*Number of PQs*
0–3	80
4–7	201
8–14	165
15–28	116
Over 28	46
Total	608

Patient Readmissions

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of discharged patients were readmitted within one month as emergencies in each quarter of the past five years. [130327]

Dr. Ladyman: The Department of Health collects quarterly monitoring information on emergency readmissions within 28 days of discharge for patients of all ages. This information has been collected since 2002–03 and the information is set out in table 1.

Prior to 2002–03, the target for emergency readmissions related only to those patients aged 75 and over. Table 2 also includes the quarterly information for patients aged 75 and over prior to 2002–03.

Table 1

Financial year	*Quarter*	*Number of people of all ages discharged from hospital*	*Number of people of all ages readmitted as an emergency within 28 days of discharge*	*Rate of 28 day emergency readmission for people of all ages (percentage)*
2003–04	Q1	2,402,573	135,153	5.6
2002–03	Q4	2,501,481	138,742	5.5
2002–03	Q3	2,429,606	131,704	5.4
2002–03	Q2	2,334,696	124,176	5.3
2002–03	Q1	2,313,818	125,085	5.4

Table 2

Financial year	*Quarter*	*Number of people aged 75 and over discharged from hospital*	*Number of people aged 75 and over readmitted as an emergency within 28 days of discharge*	*Rate of 28 day emergency readmission for people aged over 75 (percentage)*
2001–02	Q4	437,034	31,493	7.2
2001–02	Q3	429,124	31,427	7.3
2001–02	Q2	422,143	30,083	7.1
2001–02	Q1	408,817	29,878	7.3
2000–01	Q4	409,335	31,538	7.7
2000–01	Q3	411,137	29,896	7.3
2000–01	Q2	406,761	28,820	7.1
2000–01	Q1	390,010	28,735	7.4
1999–2000	Q4	377,277	28,611	7.6
1999–2000	Q3	368,244	26,523	7.2
1999–2000	Q2	368,329	26,758	7.3
1999–2000	Q1	346,079	26,702	7.7
1998–99	Q4	365,801	29,933	8.2
1998–99	Q3	361,266	29,110	8.1
1998–99	Q2	357,275	28,839	8.1
1998–99	Q1	342,787	29,213	8.5
1997–98	Q4	343,170	24,435	7.1
1997–98	Q3	335,188	23,771	7.1
1997–98	Q2	333,781	22,385	6.7
1997–98	Q1	326,996	23,557	7.2
1996–97	Q4	339,389	23,625	7.0

Patients Forums

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of patient forums will be fully *(a)* operational and *(b)* staffed by 1 December. [130714]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* All patients' forums will be in place and fully operational by 1 December 2003. Staff support for all patients' forums has been in place since 1 September 2003.

Post-operative Death Rates

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on post-operative death rates at the Queen Alexandra Hospital, Portsmouth. [129667]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* In the 2003 Performance Ratings, covering patients treated in the calendar year 2002, Portsmouth Hospitals national health service trust was assessed as having a 28 day post-surgical mortality rate that was not statistically different from the England average. In earlier years' performance assessments, Portsmouth has always done as well as or better than the England average.

Prescribing Budget

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* 2002–2003 prescribing budget as notified to the Prescriptions Pricing Authority, *(b)* most recent forecast out-turn of prescribing expenditure for 2002–03, *(c)* projected (i) overspend and (ii) underspend, and *(d)* projected (i) overspend and (ii) underspend as a percentage of the prescribing budget were. [103767]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the prescribing budgets notified to the Prescription Pricing Authority (PPA) by each Primary Care Trust has been placed in the Library. They are practice level prescribing budgets. They do not necessarily reflect the total resource set aside locally for prescribing as Primary Care Trusts may hold contingency reserves. Information is now available for the entire financial year (up to and including March 2003) so the outturn and overspend figures are actual figures, not forecasted ones.

Prescriptions

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions have been issued by GPs in each of the last five years; and what steps have been taken to modernise the system. [128703]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 September 2003]:* Information on the number of prescriptions dispensed in the community in each of the last five years is shown in the table.

In June 2002, three pilot exercises commissioned by the Department of Health commenced to examine the electronic transmission of prescriptions (ETP). The pilots explained options for linking computerised general practitioner practices to local community pharmacies and the Prescription Pricing Authority using the NHSnet. The pilots, which formally closed at the end of June 2003, were independently evaluated and have helped to identify the benefits, risks and costs associated with ETP. These findings will be used to inform the development of a sustainable, national prescription service which is an integral part of the national health service information technology strategy.

Number of prescription items[1], forms[1], and average items per form of all drugs dispensed in the community in England, 1998–2002

	Total items[1]	*Forms[1]*	*Average items per form*
Number of prescription items and forms[1], excluding dispensing doctors			
1998	467.1	268	1.74
1999	481.9	270.9	1.78
2000	500.5	276.2	1.81
2001	533.1	290.4	1.84
2002	560.7	299.8	1.87

Number of prescription items[1], forms[1], and average items per form of all drugs dispensed in the community in England, 1998–2002

	Total items[1]	*Forms[1]*	*Average items per form*
Number of prescription items and forms[1], including dispensing doctors			
2001	597.4	319.3	1.87
2002	617	325.5	1.9

[1] Millions

Notes:

1. The data are based on all prescription items dispensed in the community in England, i.e. by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors, and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered in England.
2. The data do not cover drugs dispensed in hospital or private prescriptions.
3. Prior to 2001, items dispensed by dispensing doctors and personal administration prescriptions are excluded.
4. Each single item written on the form is counted as a prescription item.

Source:

Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) data from the Prescription Pricing Authority

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been given in the last year to primary care trusts regarding the time limits for prescriptions. [130024]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* We have not issued guidance on the time limits for, or duration of, prescriptions. However, it is common practice nowadays for general practitioner prescriptions to be issued for one month or 28 days at a time.

Suicide

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaf people have committed suicide in each of the last five years. [130034]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* This information is not collected centrally.

Tooth Decay

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the incidence of tooth decay in children was in *(a)* Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, *(c)* Tyne and Wear and *(d)* the UK (i) in 1980, (ii) in 1990, (iii) in 2000 and (iv) the latest date for which figures are available. [128894]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information shown in the table on the average number of decayed, missing and filled teeth in children aged five has been extracted from reports of surveys conducted by the British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry.

BASCD Survey of the dental caries experience of 5-year-old children

(Mean number of decayed, missing or filled teeth)

	Year of study				
	1985–86[1]	*1987–88[1]*	*1989–90[1]*	*1991–92[1]*	*1993–94[1]*
United Kingdom	—	—	—	—	1.96
Great Britain	—	1.88	1.80	1.86	1.92
England and Wales	—	—	—	—	—
England	—	1.73	1.62	1.66	1.74

BASCD Survey of the dental caries experience of 5-year-old children

(Mean number of decayed, missing or filled teeth)

	Year of study				
	1985–86[1]	*1987–88*[1]	*1989–90*[1]	*1991–92*[1]	*1993–94*[1]
Northern Region	1.97	1.60	1.69	1.71	1.99
Gateshead	1.70	1.62	1.09	1.32	2.31
Newcastle	—	1.20	1.28	1.37	1.47
North Tyneside	2.11	1.04	1.46	1.35	1.40
South Tyneside	2.23	2.03	1.80	1.87	2.42
Sunderland	2.28	1.64	1.98	1.90	2.13
Northern and Yorkshire Region	—	—	—	—	—
Gateshead and South Tyneside HA	—	—	—	—	—
Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	—	—	—	—	—
Sunderland HA	—	—	—	—	—
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear SHA	—	—	—	—	—
Gateshead PCT	—	—	—	—	—
Newcastle PCT	—	—	—	—	—
North Tyneside PCT	—	—	—	—	—
South Tyneside PCT	—	—	—	—	—
Sunderland Teaching PCT	—	—	—	—	—

	Year of study			
	1995–96[2]	*1997–98*[2]	*1999–2000*[1,2]	*2001–02*[1,3]
United Kingdom	1.84	1.68	—	—
Great Britain	1.79	1.64	1.57	—
England and Wales	1.68	1.53	1.47	1.52
England	1.63	1.47	1.43	1.47
Northern Region	2.08	—	—	—
Gateshead	1.85	—	—	—
Newcastle	1.52	—	—	—
North Tyneside	1.13	—	—	—
South Tyneside	2.30	—	—	—
Sunderland	2.84	—	—	—
Northern and Yorkshire Region	2.12	1.90	1.80	—
Gateshead and South Tyneside HA	2.05	1.32	1.23	—
Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	1.35	1.35	1.20	—
Sunderland HA	2.84	2.14	1.93	—
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear SHA	—	—	—	1.68
Gateshead PCT	—	—	—	1.31
Newcastle PCT	—	—	—	1.60
North Tyneside PCT	—	—	—	1.17
South Tyneside PCT	—	—	—	2.05
Sunderland Teaching PCT	—	—	—	2.05

[1] The survey was not carried out for Northern Ireland in 1985–86, 1989–90, 1991–92, 1999–2000 or 2001–02. The survey was not carried out for Scotland in 1985–86 or 2001–02. The survey did not cover all of England in 1985–86. The combined results for England and Wales were not published from 1985–86 to 1993–94.

[2] Following the transfer from Family Health Service Authorities (FHSAs) to Health Authorities (HAs) in 1996, the results from the surveys from 1995–96 onwards were published by HA rather than by FHSA.

[3] Following the transfer from Health Authorities (HAs) to Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) in 2002, the 2001–02 survey results were published by Strategic Health Authority (SHA) and PCT rather than by region and HA.

Urology/Gastrointestinal Surgery (Children)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what level of support is routinely offered to children discharged from hospital after complex urology and gastrointestinal surgery received in primary care; [129292]

(2) if he will make a statement on the current situation whereby acute unit nurses are travelling from regional centres to primary care trusts in order to support children who have had urology and gastrointestinal surgery. [129294]

Dr. Ladyman: The successful transition of care for a child in these circumstances is reliant on preparations made by the regional centre in close liaison with local primary health care staff and the community nursing team. Levels of support will accord with the child's degree of dependency and transitional arrangements will include input from the regional centre appropriate to the child's recovery.

A national service framework (NSF) for children is currently under development. This will set standards aimed at raising the quality of the health and social care

services that children receive. The first part of the NSF, relating to hospital standards, was published in April. Successive parts of the NSF will be published next year, and will include consideration of the best means to support children post-discharge following complex surgery.

Vehicles (London)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* frontline ambulances, *(b)* patient transport vehicles, *(c)* fast response cars, *(d)* medical motorbikes, *(e)* medical cycles and *(f)* special baby care units are available for London; and if he will make a statement. [128767]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 8 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 185W.

TREASURY

Air Passenger Duty

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of the total cost of the changes to air passenger duty announced in the March 2000 Budget for each year from 2000–01 to 2005–06; and if he will make a statement. [130124]

John Healey: The estimated cost to the Exchequer of the changes made to the air passenger duty at Budget 2000 are published in Table 1.2 of that year's FSBR (HC346) as:

	£ million
2000–01	5
2001–02	80
2002–03	90

No estimates have been made for other years.

All-employee Share Plan

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of the total annual cost of the all-employee share plan introduced in the March 2000 Budget for each year from 2000–01 to 2005–06; and if he will make a statement. [130135]

Ruth Kelly: Estimates of the cost of Share Incentive Plan (SIP) are published annually in Inland Revenue Statistics and the Tax Ready Reckoner. The latest estimates are:

			£ million
	2000–01	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Income tax	10	45	150
National insurance	5	30	90
Total	15	75	240

No estimates have yet been made for subsequent tax years.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what his estimate is of the revenue yield from abolishing capital gains tax and taxing capital gains at the marginal rate of income tax; and if he will make a statement; [130140]

(2) what his latest estimate is of the cost of capital gains tax exemptions, excluding that relating to the disposal of the only or main residence, broken down in cash terms by each income decile; [130550]

(3) what his estimate is of the effect on the revenue yield from capital gains tax of simultaneously abolishing the *(a)* taper relief, *(b)* annual exempt amount and *(c)* gains accrued but unrealised at death, in each year from 2003–04 to 2005–06, broken down to show the cash effects on each income decile; and if he will make a statement. [130551]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates of the cost, on an accrual basis, of capital gains tax exemptions and reliefs for 2001–02 and 2002–03 are published in Table A3.1 in the Budget Report 2003.

There are no estimates of the revenue yield from abolishing capital gains tax and taxing capital gains at the marginal rate of tax, except at a disproportionate cost.

There are no estimates on the revenue yield of a simultaneous abolition of taper relief, annual exempt amount and gains accrued but unrealised at death, except at a disproportionate cost. The total cost of these reliefs and exceptions in Table A3.1, referred to above, does not take account of any interaction between the abolition of one relief or exemption and subsequent changes in the cost of the others.

Figures for later years are not available; breakdown of reliefs/exemptions by income decile is only available at a disproportionate cost.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what his estimate is of the revenue yield of *(a)* abolishing the capital gains tax annual exempt amount for (i) individuals and (ii) trustees and *(b)* reducing to £2,000 per annum the capital gains tax annual exempt amount for (A) individuals and (B) trustees; and if he will make a statement; [130149]

(2) what his estimate is of the revenue which would be raised by reducing the capital gains tax exempt amount to the level of the personal income tax allowance for *(a)* 2003–04 and *(b)* 2004–05; and if he will make a statement. [130233]

Dawn Primarolo: The total estimated yield on an accruals basis from abolishing capital gains tax annual exempt amount for individuals and trusts in 2001–02 and 2002–03 is published in Table A3.1 in the Budget Report 2003. They exclude any behavioural response to the tax change.

The total estimated yield on an accruals basis from reducing individuals capital gains tax annual exempt amount to £2,000 or setting it to the personal income tax allowance in 2003–04 and 2004–05 is set out in the following table,

Yield, £ millions	*2003–04*	*2004–05*
Individuals AEA set to £2,000 per annum (Trust AEA = £1,000)	190	240
Individuals AEA set to Personal Income Tax Allowance (Trust AEA = half the Personal Allowance)	70	90

The figures are consistent with the assumptions made in the Budget 2003 on future asset prices, and take into account the likely taxpayer behavioural responses to the tax change. The Annual Exempt Amount for Trusts is assumed to be half that of individuals.

The model used to cost CGT changes of this type links the AEA for individuals and trusts according to current practice. It is not possible to separately model the Annual Exempt Amount for individuals and trusts.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he is taking to prevent avoidance activities in relation to capital gains tax; and if he will make a statement. [130555]

Dawn Primarolo: This Government are committed to tackling avoidance of tax and have introduced a number of anti-avoidance measures relating to capital gains tax. We continue to monitor the position and shall not hesitate to introduce further legislation to protect the tax base when it is necessary to do so.

Changing Jobs

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to assist those for whom a move to new employment would impose cash flow problems. [129858]

John Healey: The Government recognise that the transition from welfare to work can be difficult for many. Consequently it has developed a range of measures to ease the move to new employment. The Job Grant offers £100 to longer-term benefit claimants who move into work. From October 2004 eligibility for the Job Grant will be extended and a new higher rate of £250 for households with children will be introduced.

These enhanced arrangements will replace the Back to Work Bonus and the lone parent Income Support run-on.

They will also be complemented by further changes to additional support. From April 2003, access to the Adviser Discretion Fund (ADF) has been extended to all those who have been claiming benefits for six months or more to meet essential costs of moving into work. In addition, from April 2004 a series of measures to simplify the administration of Housing Benefit will be introduced. These will include ending the requirement for claimants to submit a new claim each time they return to work. Instead they will only need to report their change in circumstances, making the move into work easier and smoother.

Further details of all these measures can be found in the 2002 Pre-Budget Report and 2003 Budget Report.

Child Trust Fund

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will publish the proposals for the Child Trust Fund. [130746]

Ruth Kelly: The Child Trust Fund is intended to encourage parents and children to develop the savings habit. It will ensure that every child, whatever their family background, will have access at the age of 18 when they begin their adult life, to a stock of assets which they can invest in their future.

It will also help children and their parents to understand the benefits of saving and investment and how to engage with financial institutions.

Detailed proposals covering the nature of the Child Trust Fund, how it will operate and the information and guidance that will be provided will be published shortly.

Corporation Tax

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the cost of abolishing the small companies rate of corporation tax and the main rate of corporation tax and replacing them with a single rate of 25 per cent. levied above the starting rate threshold. [130547]

Dawn Primarolo: This is not an option that the Government have considered, so no thorough analysis of the potential cost is available. All taxes are kept under review and decisions on tax rates are made as part of the normal Budget process. I refer the hon. Member to the Tax Ready Reckoner for indicative figures on the direct effects of illustrative tax changes.

Delays (Travellers)

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to reduce delays caused to bona fide travellers at customs entry points in the United Kingdom. [129605]

John Healey: The great majority of people entering the UK at ports and airports are not physically stopped by Customs. Customs use intelligence information and risk-profiling techniques to try to ensure that their checks inconvenience as few legitimate travellers as possible.

When Customs do undertake physical checks, their aim is always to take no longer than necessary to fulfil their anti-smuggling responsibilities.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has held with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on encouraging greater use of energy-saving practices in homes. [129751]

John Healey: Treasury Ministers and officials hold regular discussions with Defra on all policies including domestic energy efficiency.

In August this year, the Treasury and Defra launched a joint consultation document, "Economic Instruments to Improve Household Energy Efficiency: Consultation Document on Specific Measures".

Income Tax Rates

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people paid (*a*) income tax, (*b*) income tax

at the lower rate of 10 per cent, *(c)* income tax at the basic rate and *(d)* income tax at the upper rate in each year from 1990–91 to 2003–04; and if he will make a statement. [130558]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to National Statistics table 2.1 on the Inland Revenue's website:

http://www.inlandrevenue.aov.uk/stats/income tax/it t01 l.htm.

Life Insurance

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will receive a reply to the letter from the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling of 7 March 2003 to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury on the provision of life insurance against loss of life through acts of terrorism. [129755]

Ruth Kelly: I have done so.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of the cost of the March 1999 Budget decision to remove the income tax charge on mobile phones for each year from 1999–2000 to 2004–05; and if he will make a statement. [130136]

Dawn Primarolo: Latest figures for the income tax liability on private use of employer provided mobile phones for the two years before the charge was removed are £30 million for 1997–98 rising to £40 million for 1998–99. These figures are based on information supplied by employers on P11D returns after the end of those years. With effect from 1999–2000, when the charge was removed, employers no longer had to report this information and so no updated estimates, following those given in the 1999 Financial Statement and Budget Report, have been made.

Pension Provision

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what his estimate is of the revenue effect of introducing an earnings cap on the earnings for which pension provision may be made with income tax relief of £50,000 per annum; and if he will make a statement; [130137]

(2) what his estimate is of the revenue effect of introducing a maximum level of earnings for which pension provision may be made with income tax relief of *(a)* £40,000, *(b)* £50,000, *(c)* £60,000, *(d)* £70,000, *(e)* £80,000, *(f)* £90,000, *(g)* £100,000 and *(h)* £150,000; and if he will make a statement. [130559]

Ruth Kelly: Due to the uncertainty of the behavioural effects resulting from such changes, estimates are not available.

Pensions

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of the cost of income tax relief on approved pension schemes, in cash terms, broken down by each income decile; and if he will make a statement. [130549]

Ruth Kelly: Available estimates of the cost of tax relief on private pensions are contained in table T7.9 of Inland Revenue Statistics. The latest version is on the Inland Revenue website; http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/pensions/p_t09_l.htm. It is not possible to break these estimates down by income decile.

Recovering Money (Court Action)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evaluation his Department has carried out of *(a)* the effectiveness of court action in recovering money owed to private finance companies and *(b)* the value for money of bringing proceedings in such cases. [130049]

John Healey: The Government keep all aspects of procurement policy under review in order to ensure that high quality public services are delivered on the basis of value for money.

Stamp Duty

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what his estimate is of the cost of the Pre-Budget Report 2000 decision to abolish stamp duty on property transactions in deprived areas for each year from 2000–01 to 2005–06; what assessment has been made of the effects of this policy on urban regeneration; and if he will make a statement; [130134]

(2) what his estimate is of the total annual cost of the stamp duty exemption on commercial property in deprived areas; what assessment has been made of the economic benefits of this relief; and if he will make a statement. [130238]

John Healey: The cost of abolishing stamp duty on property transactions under £150,000 in deprived areas from 30 November 2001 was £10 million in 2001–02 and £70 million in 2002–03. Estimates for later years are not yet available. The annual cost of exempting commercial properties prior to Budget 2003, included in the above amounts, was under £1 million.

The estimate of the additional cost from lifting the £150,000 cap for commercial property in deprived areas, as published in table A1.1 of this year's Financial Statement and Budget Report [HC 500], was £90 million in 2003–04 and £50 million thereafter.

This measure creates an incentive for purchasers of residential and non-residential property to invest in areas that they might not previously have considered. The social and physical benefits that follow when such areas are occupied by residents and businesses will provide a boost to the regeneration of these areas. We are committed to ensuring the effectiveness of the measure and are currently considering a range of options to evaluate the measure in time for the first report to the European Commission in 2004.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the revenue cost of restructuring stamp duty on residential property sales so as to charge marginal rates of *(a)* 0 per cent. on property sales of £100,000 or less, *(b)* 2 per cent. on sales revenue of between £100,000 and £200,000, *(c)* 3 per cent. on sales revenue of between £200,000 and £400,000, *(d)* 4 per

cent. on sales revenue of between £400,000 and £750,000 and *(e)* 5 per cent. on sales revenue of over £750,000; and if he will make a statement. [130150]

Ruth Kelly: The revenue cost of restructuring stamp duty on residential property sales according to the scheme described above is estimated to be £1.1 billion in 2004–05. This does not include any allowance for behavioural changes.

Tax Credits

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assistance is available to help low income families with their tax credit claims. [125353]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 15 July 2003]:* A range of measures is available.

Personal callers to Inland Revenue offices can make a claim to tax credits, as well as getting face-to-face help and advice, from any inland revenue inquiry centre. Jobcentre Plus customers can also get help, advice and make claims through Jobcentre Plus offices.

For those customers who prefer to make a paper claim, there is a single simple form for claiming both working tax credit and child tax credit supplemented by comprehensive—plain language—guidance.

A telephone helpline (GB: 0845 300 3900; NI: 0845 603 2000) is available 8am to 8pm every day (except Christmas Day, Boxing Day, New Years Day and Easter Sunday). A dedicated helpline is available for those with hearing or speech difficulties.

A range of explanatory leaflets is available covering the tax credits scheme in general, other help that may be available and further information about help with child care costs. These leaflets—and the paper claim form and guidance are available in large print and Braille versions as well as in a number of languages other than English.

By visiting the Inland Revenue website (www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/taxcredits), families—whatever their income or circumstances—can quickly establish whether they qualify for tax credits and obtain an indication of the amount of any potential award. Claims, and subsequent changes of circumstances, can be submitted online and answers to a wide range of frequently asked questions are also available on the site.

The Inland Revenue is also piloting new ways of working with intermediary organisations and local community groups to provide assistance with claims. At the same time, Jobcentre Plus offices are making sure their customers are aware of the help they can get, through the working tax credit, as they move into work.

Tax Credits Computer

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions since January 2003 the tax credits computer system has stopped working. [125404]

Dawn Primarolo: IT system supporting the new tax credits did not work initially as well as we expected and there was unscheduled down time as a result. The Inland Revenue worked urgently with their IT partners to improve the system's availability, speed and stability, and it has been performing much better for a number of months.

Unpaid Taxes

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of the annual revenue cost of removing the Crown's preferential right to recover unpaid taxes, in each year from 2001–02 to 2005–06; and if he will make a statement. [130122]

Dawn Primarolo: The latest estimate of the annual revenue cost of removing the Crown's preferential rights in respects of taxes etc in insolvencies is:

	£ million
2001–02	nil
2002–03	10
2003–04	65
2004–05	70
2005–06	70

Removal of Crown preference was one of a number of measures introduced in the Enterprise Act 2002 to make the insolvency regime more supportive of enterprise, and is designed to bring real benefits to unsecured creditors, including many small firms.

VAT (Historic Buildings)

Lady Hermon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to exempt the cost of restoring historic buildings from VAT; and if he will make a statement. [129836]

John Healey *[holding answer 15 September 2003]:* Our long-standing formal agreements with out European partners allow us to keep our zero rates as they currently stand, but do not allow us to extend them or to introduce new ones.

The Government are particularly concerned about the position of listed places of worship. That is why we asked the European Commission to bring forward proposals to extend the categories of permitted reduced VAT rates to include their repair, maintenance and improvement. We are continuing to press this case during the current EU review of reduced rates and have, in the meantime, introduced the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme to provide an equivalent reduction in the cost of these repair projects.

HOUSE OF COMMONS PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD) ● 2002-03

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Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 18 September 2003

PRIME MINISTER

Appointments

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to announce new appointments to the Committee on Standards in Public Life; and if he will make a statement. [131638]

The Prime Minister: I am pleased to announce that I have appointed four new members to the committee.

Sir Alistair Graham and Professor Hazel Genn will take up appointment from 1 October 2003 in succession to Ann Abraham, who stood down from the committee on appointment as the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Health Service Commissioner for England, and Professor Alice Brown, who resigned from the committee on appointment as the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

Patricia Hodgson and Brian Woods-Scawen will take up appointment from 1 January 2004 in succession to Frances Heaton and Sir Anthony Cleaver, who will both step down from the committee at the end of this year, on completion of their second terms of office.

All four appointments are for three years in the first instance, and were made fully in line with the Guidance of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

I am very grateful to Ann Abraham, Alice Brown, Frances Heaton and Sir Anthony for their work on the committee and for the significant contribution they have made to standards in public life.

Engagements

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to meet the Prime Minister of Sweden. [130879]

The Prime Minister: I expect to next meet Prime Minister Persson at the opening of the EU Intergovernmental Conference in Rome on 4 October.

EU Reform

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister what progress has been made on the Reform Agenda in the EU. [130880]

The Prime Minister: Reforms which will be discussed in the forthcoming Intergovernmental Conference include the creation of a full-time Chair for the European Council and streamlining of the Union's structure and decision making. The European Council agreed in Seville last year to reform the way it works so it can better set the EU's strategic agenda. Progress, albeit not yet enough, has been achieved in the economic reform agenda agreed at Lisbon. Significant reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy were made in June this year. Alongside these, the EU is implementing the changes agreed in the Treaty of Nice in order to incorporate 10 new members in May next year.

Iraq

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister when the Iraq Communications Group has met since 1 September 2002; who the members of the group are; who chairs the group; and from which budget its resources are drawn. [128598]

The Prime Minister: The Iraq Communications Group was formalised on 5 December 2002 and met on a weekly basis thereafter. Prior to that, its members met on an ad hoc basis. Meetings have become less frequent since the end of the conflict in Iraq. There have been approximately 19 meetings in total.

Membership varies, but it would normally include the FCO, MOD, Cabinet Office and DfID. Alastair Campbell chaired the ICG, but chairmanship has now passed to the FCO. There were no specific resources allocated to the ICG.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister whether he communicated with all members of the Intelligence and Security Committee about the content of the September 2002 dossier on Iraq. [130731]

The Prime Minister: The chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, with my approval, accepted an invitation from the Intelligence and Security Committee to brief all members on the content of the September dossier at their meeting on the morning of 24 September 2002.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what his reasons were for communicating with the chairman of only the Intelligence and Security Committee rather than Select Committees about the content of the September 2002 dossier on Iraq. [130732]

The Prime Minister: In addition to the chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee, the chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, with my approval, briefed the chairmen of the Defence and Foreign Affairs Select Committees on the content of the September dossier. All three briefings took place on 19 September 2002. The leaders of the two main Opposition parties were briefed on the previous day.

Tony Wright: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish the intelligence assessment contained in the Joint Intelligence Committee report, "International Terrorism: War with Iraq", of 10 February. [130992]

The Prime Minister: Joint Intelligence Committee intelligence assessments are exempt from disclosure under exemption 1(a) and 1(c) of Part 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

David Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister what the Government's policy is on a Security Council resolution that would give a political involvement in Iraq's future to the Security Council. [131041]

The Prime Minister: The Government believe that it is for the Iraqi people to determine their own political future. This view is shared by other members of the Security Council and was stated in Security Council Resolution 1483.

Joint Intelligence Committee

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what official channels exist for members of the security services to flag up concerns over the interpretation of raw intelligence data to the chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee. [128805]

The Prime Minister: There are established procedures by which the views of members of the intelligence and security agencies are relayed to the JIC. Before a paper is taken by the JIC, it is discussed at working level and then considered more formally during inter-departmental meetings (called Current Intelligence Groups or CIGS) at which representatives reflect the agreed views of their agencies and Departments. If outstanding issues remain, staff are expected to raise the matter with their representative on the JIC who will bring it to the attention of the committee when appropriate. Additionally, staff in the security and intelligence agencies are able to take any concerns or grievances they have, and which they have been unable to resolve within their internal management chain, to the staff counsellor who acts as an independent adviser.

Mongolia

Mr. Gray: To ask the Prime Minister if he will receive an official visit from the Prime Minister of Mongolia. [131179]

The Prime Minister: The Mongolian Prime Minister, Mr. Nambaryn Enkhbayar, will visit the UK as a guest of Her Majesty's Government from 23–25 October this year.

Sweden (Euro Referendum)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with the Prime Minister of Sweden on the result of the Swedish euro referendum; and if he will make a statement. [130878]

The Prime Minister: I am in regular touch with Prime Minister Persson on a range of issues. We spoke most recently on 12 September.

We respect the decision made by the people of Sweden on 14 September. The UK policy remains as before as I set out in my answers to the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) at Prime Minister's Questions on 17 September 2003, *Official Report*, columns 851–52.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Female Entrepreneurs

20. **Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Minister for Women what steps the Government are taking to encourage more women to start up small and medium-sized enterprises. [130838]

Jacqui Smith: The Government are committed to creating an environment and a culture that encourages more women to start or grow businesses and provides the necessary help and support. This is why we launched a national Strategic Framework for Women's Enterprise in May this year to provide a co-ordinated and long-term approach to the development of women's enterprise.

We are now working with our partners nationally and in the regions to take forward the recommendations of the Framework.

We are, for example, already engaged with regional development agencies, the Business Link Network and women's enterprise networks to ensure that the need of enterprising women everywhere are properly met.

Information and Communications Technology

21. **David Taylor:** To ask the Minister for Women what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on strategies to increase the number of women entering the information and communications technology profession; and if she will make a statement. [130839]

Ms Hewitt: The DTI and DfES are working together to reverse the under-representation of women in ICT. I announced in April a new strategy to improve the participation of women in science, engineering and technology careers. The Government Skills Strategy is creating new opportunities for women to develop the skills they need.

Women's Refuges

22. **Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Minister for Women what plans she has to increase funding to women's refuges. [130840]

Jacqui Smith: The Government are committed to increasing the full range of accommodation options for victims of domestic violence, including more refuges and better help to support victims to stay in their own homes if appropriate. The Government is investing through the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister £8.9 million this financial year in refuges provision and the Housing Corporation has allocated an additional £9.9 million.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Minister for Women how many questions directed to her remain unanswered. [130768]

Ms Hewitt: Of those questions tabled for answer up to and including 17 September 2003, there is one question remaining unanswered.

Public Appointments

Vera Baird: To ask the Minister for Women what steps she is taking to encourage more women to apply for public appointments. [130834]

Jacqui Smith: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has set a target of between 45 to 50 per cent. women in public appointments made by our Department. This target is supported by a number of initiatives my right hon. Friend has led over the past two years; for example, a national outreach campaign targeted at over 2,000 women from diverse backgrounds. These women are well represented at local and regional level, and have many skills needed to be successful when applying for national appointments.

Our Department also produced a practical guide to enable others to carry on this outreach work and over 3,000 have been distributed. As part of the outreach programme, we have also commissioned research to learn more about what barriers women face when applying for public appointments.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Manufacturing Output

12. **Laura Moffatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent reports she has received on the impact of trends in manufacturing output in the UK upon the economy in the south-east. [130828]

Mr. Sutcliffe: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State receives regular reports from a variety of sources on manufacturing output at both the national and regional level.

Coal Industry Investment Aid Scheme

13. **Mr. Kevin Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects the first payments to be made under the Coal Industry Investment Aid Scheme. [130829]

Mr. Timms: Applications for first period aid are being assessed at the moment. First payments to successful projects will be made as soon as possible after the decisions have been made.

Small Businesses

14. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with the Inland Revenue on the taxation position of small businesses run by married couples. [130830]

Nigel Griffiths: The DTI has regular contact with the Inland Revenue on the taxation of small businesses generally including those run by married couples.

Advertising

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further measures she is planning to prevent the publication of misleading advertising; and if she will list those advertisers issued with court orders in each year since 2000 to prevent the continued publication of misleading advertising. [129937]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Non-broadcast advertising is controlled mainly by self-regulation under which the Advertising Standards Authority is responsible for ensuring compliance with the British Code of Advertising, Sales Promotion and Direct Marketing. Providing legislative backing to the Code is the Control of Misleading Advertising Regulations 1988, which empowers the Office of Fair Trading to investigate complaints about misleading advertisements, and where necessary, to seek injunctions against further publication. OFT also have powers under the Enterprise Act (previously under the Stop Now Orders (EC Directive) Regulations 2001) to take action against misleading advertising that harms the collective interests of consumers. These powers are shared by Trading Standards Services. I have no plans to introduce any further measures in relation to misleading advertising.

During the period 2002–03, OFT obtained written assurances/undertakings in 25 cases. OFT obtained no Court Orders in 2000 or 2001. Court Orders obtained during 2002–03 were as follows:

	Court Order	*Advertiser*
6 March 2002	Interim Injunction CMARS	Planet Telecom plc 192enquiries.com Ltd. Peter Hutcheon John Tonge
30 May 2002	Final Injunction CMARS	Data Protection Agency Services Ltd. Michael Sullivan
25 June 2002	Interim Injunction CMARS	DPARS Ltd. Gary McNeish (both also trading as Data Protection Act Registration Service)
10 July 2002	Court Order (Stop Now Orders (EC Directive) Regulations 2001)	John Christopher Ineson Blake Hamilton Ltd. Property Associates (UK) Ltd.
22 July 2002	Final Injunction CMARS	Planet Telecom plc Peter Hutcheon John Tonge
12 November 2002	Final Injunction CMARS	DPARS Ltd. Gary McNeish (both trading as Data Protection Act Registration Service)
7 August 2003	Interim Injunction CMARS	Christopher Yewdall

Manufacturing Advisory Service

15. **Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what analysis has been conducted of the effect of the Manufacturing Advisory Service on small and medium-sized companies. [130832]

Ms Hewitt: We receive regular reports of the impact of the Manufacturing Advisory Service on the companies it helps, most of whom are SMEs. These reports are very impressive. We are seeing substantial improvements in the productivity of companies that are taking advantage of its in-depth consultancy service.

Broadband

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the latest figures are for coverage by broadband in *(a)* urban and *(b)* rural areas. [130568]

Mr. Timms: Some 80 per cent. of UK households have access to a mass-market broadband solution targeted at residential or small business customers. The most recent statistics giving the breakdown for urban and rural areas are from June 2003. At that point national coverage was 76 per cent., urban and suburban areas, 92 per cent. and rural areas, 28 per cent.

Chemical Exports

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under what circumstances chemicals banned for use in the UK can be manufactured in this country and exported outside the EU. [126693]

Mr. Browne: I have been asked to reply.

There is no absolute prohibition on the export to non-EU countries of chemicals banned for use in the UK.

However, arrangements to ensure that recipient countries are aware of the potential hazards of imported chemicals are provided by EC Regulation 304/2003 (copy in the Library). This regulation implements the Rotterdam Convention on Prior Informed Consent (PIC) for certain hazardous chemicals and pesticides in international trade. The PIC procedure gives importing countries the opportunity to refuse, or apply conditions to, imports of certain dangerous chemicals.

Company Contracts

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information her Department gathers on the placement of contracts with United Kingdom companies by *(a)* US and *(b)* US/UK business partnerships; and if she will make a statement. [130406]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: This information is not collected in this form.

Consumer Credit Legislation

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will set out her timetable for reforming consumer credit legislation. [131256]

Mr. Sutcliffe: I intend to publish a White Paper on consumer credit this autumn. This will include the timetable for reforming consumer credit legislation.

Copyright

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the extent of infringement of copyright in the downloading of music from the internet; and what further action she proposes to prevent it. [130196]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson), on 15 September 2003, *Official Report*, columns 538–39.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans her Department has in cases where Her Majesty's Customs and Excise seize imported goods for inspection to limit recovery of their costs to businesses which are subsequently found to be importing counterfeit and illegal goods. [129386]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Department has no plans to seek changes to the EC Regulation applying to seizure of counterfeit and pirate goods at the border which governs activity in this area. The policy in and operation of this Regulation is for Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, which in turn, is the responsibility of my colleagues in the Treasury.

Debt Management

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many licensed debt collectors operate in the UK; how many complaints have been received regarding the conduct of debt collectors, in each year since 2000; how many complaints have been upheld in each year since 2000; how many debt collectors have been banned from practising in each year since 2000; and if she will place in the Library a list of banned debt collectors. [129938]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Office of Fair Trading is responsible for licensing and investigating complaints regarding debt collectors and other bodies involved in the consumer credit market.

The current consumer credit licence categories do not distinguish between debt collection and certain other forms of licensed lending. However, a recent survey by the Credit Services Association, a major trade body for the sector, suggests there are approximately 400 debt collection businesses in the UK, 206 of whom are its members.

Separate debt collection complaint data have not been recorded over the full period in question.

In January 2003, the OFT set up a specialist team to deal with complaints regarding debt collection; issuing debt collection guidance in July 2003, which sets out practices affecting fitness to hold a consumer credit licence. There are currently 82 complaints under investigation.

In 2000, the OFT issued 20 debt collectors with notices that it was minded to revoke, refuse or vary licences; 10 in 2001 and five in 2002 to March 2003.

Data on adverse determinations have not been recorded over the period in question by industry type, and it is not possible to provide a comprehensive list of debt collectors that have had their licence refused or revoked at this time.

Where there is insufficient evidence to recommend formal action, the OFT also issues warning letters to companies. This activity helps to secure compliance and enables prompt action if future evidence of breaches is received.

Data on how many debt collectors have been banned in each year since 2000 have not been collated and this could be done only at disproportionate cost. The Consumer Credit Public Register includes details of everyone holding a licence, everyone who has applied for one, or had one revoked, suspended or varied. It is held by the Office of Fair Trading, and the public can search the public register by telephone or visit in person.

Electricity Supply (Subsidies)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what public subsidies have been made available to electricity suppliers in each year since 1983. [128301]

Mr. Timms: There have been no public subsidies to electricity suppliers since privatisation. I am not aware of any subsidies before privatisation, but confirmation of this could be made only at disproportionate cost.

The Government have, of course, made a credit facility available to British Energy while the company agrees and implements its restructuring plan.

Singapore Issues

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment she has made of the attitude of the developing countries to the EU's Singapore issues. [131253]

Ms Hewitt: The EU does not have exclusive ownership of the Singapore issues, all WTO Members agreed to include it as part of the Doha Development Agenda in 2001.

Although we have supported the EU in its mandate on the Singapore issues, we have always made clear that concerns of developing countries need to be taken into account—especially in respect of negotiating capacity. I myself have for some time made it clear, both publicly and privately, that while I strongly support more foreign direct investment going to developing countries, it is not a priority of this government to launch negotiations on an investment agreement.

At Cancun, the Commission were made aware of developing country concerns on the proposed WTO agreements on investment and competition. On the final day of the Ministerial Conference, Commissioner Lamy, with the backing of the EU delegations, offered to drop the proposal to start negotiations on WTO investment and competition agreements completely.

Foreign Workers

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures her Department is taking to prevent the exploitation of foreign workers on low wages by *(a)* British companies and *(b)* foreign companies doing business in the United Kingdom. [129393]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The minimum wage was introduced to help prevent the exploitation of workers. It applies to nearly all workers with contracts in the UK, regardless of their nationality or that of their employers, and it is enforced by the Inland Revenue on this basis.

In addition, where the DTI becomes aware of a potential problem in connection with an employment agency, steps are taken to address it. For example, when DTI became aware of allegations about the mistreatment by agencies of Portuguese agricultural workers in the UK, contact was made immediately with the Portuguese Government to offer help in ensuring Portuguese agricultural workers en route to the UK are fully aware of their rights under EU and British law and know where to go to present any evidence of improper practice or abuse. UK and Portuguese officials and the Citizens Advice Bureau are currently working together on the production and distribution in the UK and Portugal of a leaflet in Portuguese giving guidance on employment rights under UK and EU law, and advising of sources of support and advice for workers.

Holiday Companies

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures are in place to ensure that holiday companies provide accurate information about the holidays they provide; and if she will make a statement. [129151]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Package tour organisers or retailers are required under The Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992 to provide specific information on various elements of a package holiday. Failure to provide such information is a criminal offence. Tour operators who provide misleading information in their brochures may also be prosecuted under the Trade Descriptions Act 1968.

In addition, members of the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) are required to meet certain standards, which are specified in the ABTA Code of Conduct.

Iraq

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to the answer of 17 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 127W, on Iraq, if she will press the European Commission to include goods from Iraq in the Generalised System of Preferences as soon as possible. [129780]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK has made representation to the European Commission on Iraq's eligibility under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP), conveying the UK Government's wish to re-instate GSP in Iraq as soon as possible.

A key requirement for GSP to be re-instated in Iraq is for administrative co-operation to be restored in the country. The situation with respect to authorities in Iraq continues to be unclear. The UK Government will continue its dialogue with the commission to move this matter forward.

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many contracts have been secured by British companies in connection with the reconstruction of Iraq; and what their approximate value is. [128945]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 11 September 2003]:* According to the latest information we have from the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Iraq, British companies have so far secured 18 per cent. of sub-contracts awarded by Bechtel, worth approximately £10 million. UK companies have also secured contracts from other organisations funding reconstruction projects in Iraq but we do not have details of the value of these contracts.

Manufacturing Industry

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she is taking to improve the skills base of manufacturing industry. [130825]

Jacqui Smith: My Department published a manufacturing strategy in May 2002; it sets out seven areas of activity for manufacturing success of which one was raising skills and education levels.

My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Trade and Industry and for Education and Skills have since set out in the Governments Skills Strategy launched in July 2003 how we are putting employers centre stage, ensuring they have the right skills to support their businesses and organisations.

This Skills Strategy applies to the manufacturing industry as to other industries and all areas of UK business.

OFCOM

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the Cabinet Office on updating Schedule 2 of the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967 to make OFCOM subject to the jurisdiction of the Parliamentary Commissioner; and when an appropriate order will be made to amend Schedule 2 of the Act. [127200]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 8 September 2003]:* The intention was to make an order by the date on which the Communications Act received Royal Assent. In the event, however, the process could not be completed before the summer recess, owing to the need for various interested parties to be consulted on certain points of detail that arose during drafting. Arrangements are now in hand to make an order in good time to ensure that OFCOM is within the Parliamentary Commissioner's jurisdiction before it acquires its new functions.

Office for Civil Nuclear Security

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many requests for information on the Office for Civil Nuclear Security were received from the media between April 2002 and March 2003; how many requests were refused; what the reasons for refusal were in each case; and if she will make a statement. [123656]

Mr. Timms: The Department does not keep this information.

Oil Pipelines (Caucasus)

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she discussed with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs the environmental impacts of the Baku Tbilisi Ceyhan Oil Pipeline Project; and if she will make a statement. [130027]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* My officials are in regular contact with DEFRA officials regarding the ETC project.

Cover will only be provided if ECGD are satisfied that the relevant environmental, social and human rights impacts have been addressed and that the financial and project risks are acceptable.

Omega Site (Warrington)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the future impact on employment in Warrington of the development of the Omega site; and if she will make a statement. [129927]

Ms Hewitt: Omega South is one of the North West Development Agency's strategic regional sites. It has the potential to create some 12,000 jobs and it is essential that a development of this scale and significance is consistent with both national and regional planning policies.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many questions directed to her remain unanswered. [130752]

Ms Hewitt: Of those questions tabled for answer up to and including 17 September, there are 90 questions remaining unanswered.

Personnel Administration

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many staff were employed in personnel administration within the Department in each year since 1997. [130815]

Nigel Griffiths: Given the changes to the structure and organisation of the Department since 1997, I am unable to provide comparative figures immediately. I will write to the hon. Member giving her what information we have available.

Postal Services

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the closure of the post office at Priors Park, Tewkesbury. [129527]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 15 September 2003]:* Consultation on a proposal to close Priors Park post office was announced by Post Office Ltd. on 4 July. Their decision to proceed with closure was notified on 22 August, and I understand that the office is due to close on 29 September.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on post office closures in the south-east. [130375]

Mr. Timms: Post office closures are an operational matter for Post Office Ltd. I understand from them that in the year to end March 2003, there were net closures of 39 post-offices in south-east England, of which 19 were under the urban reinvention programme. In the quarter to end June 2003, there were 56 net closures of which 50 were under the urban reinvention programme.

Property Ownership Rights

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment her Department has made of the impact of delays in establishing property ownership rights in developing countries upon British companies trading in such countries. [129429]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have not made an assessment in these terms.

Renewable Obligation Certificates

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to reform the arrangements for renewable obligation certificate trading, with specific reference to the protection of traders affected by losses caused by a supplier going out of business. [130585]

Mr. Timms: I am aware of the concerns of traders likely to affected by the potential shortfall in the Renewables Buy-Out Fund, as a consequence of TXU's going into administration.

However since the extent of any possible shortfall will not be clear until 1 October, it is too early at this stage to assess the impact on the renewables market or to assess whether there is a need to make any changes to the renewables obligation.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to ensure compliance under arrangements for renewable obligation certificate trading. [130586]

Mr. Timms: Under the Renewables Obligation Order 2002, Ofgem have responsibility for monitoring compliance with the Renewables Obligation. Licensed electricity suppliers must demonstrate compliance to Ofgem by 1 October either through redeeming Renewable Obligation Certificates or paying the buy-out price.

Thorp

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the value of investments in Thorp. [129396]

Mr. Timms: An assessment of the economics of Thorp was published in 1993 as part of the public consultation process concerning operation of the plant. This assessment may be found in the Library of the House. It states that the costs associated with constructing Thorp amounted to £5.5 billion. It also explains that the contracts for the baseload period of the plant's operation provide for recovery of full capital costs as well as the on-going operating costs and provide for the operator, BNFL, to make a profit. Details of BNFL's financial performance—including the performance of its spent fuel management business—are provided in the company's annual reports which are also in the Libraries of the House.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received from the Irish Minister for the Environment on projected closure dates for the Thorp nuclear plant at Sellafield. [128808]

Mr. Timms: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry received a letter dated 26 August from Ireland's Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government which seeks information about the future operation of Thorp in the light of extensive recent media reports on this matter in Ireland.

Unsecured Loans

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what powers there are to restrict young adults in borrowing large amounts of money in unsecured loans; and what plans she has for further action to limit the amount of money young adults are allowed to borrow in unsecured loans; [129752]

(2) whether financial services companies are required to assess a young adult client's ability to repay loans before allowing a loan; [129753]

(3) how many people under 25 are being prosecuted for non-payment of loans. [129754]

Mr. Sutcliffe *[holding answer 17 September 2003]:* There are currently no powers to restrict the access of any individual over the age of 18 to credit.

Lenders, who have signed up to voluntary codes of practice such as the British Banking Code or the Finance and Leasing Association Code, provide the majority of credit. These require them to assess a consumer's ability to repay any credit they are seeking to borrow. I intend to publish a White Paper on consumer credit this autumn, which will include proposals to require all lenders lend responsibly.

Figures are not collated centrally for how many individuals are prosecuted for non-payment of loans and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

World Trade Negotiations

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she is taking to promote the interests of developing countries in world trade negotiations; and if she will make a statement. [130821]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry made a statement to the House on Wednesday 17 September 2003, *Official Report*, columns 861 63 and I refer the hon. Member to that statement.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she will make at Cancun with respect to improving property ownership structures and recognition in developing countries. [130036]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* The Government have always made clear that the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) should provide real benefits for developing countries. We took the opportunity of the World Trade Organisation Ministerial talks in Cancun to press for progress in the various trade and development issues contained in the DDA.

I refer my hon. Friend to the oral statement made in the House on 17 September.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether *(a)* the EU Commissioner and *(b)* she asked the Chairman to reconsider the closure of the WTO meeting at Cancun. [131246]

Ms Hewitt: I and a number of EU colleagues asked Commissioner Lamy at a meeting of the EU Council on Sunday to urge the Chairman to reconsider the closure

of the conference. The EU along with other WTO members felt that with more time, it would have been possible to reach an agreement which would have benefited both developing and developed countries.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the United Kingdom tried to change the EU policy at the Cancun Summit in the light of the views of developing countries. [131247]

Ms Hewitt: The UK played a major role in supporting the EU's negotiating mandate at Cancun. We were able to use our particular links with Commonwealth countries and others to understand their concerns and to explain to them the EU position and vice versa. We and others were able to relay to the Commission the concerns which some developing countries had on some issues e.g. the Singapore issues. I myself have for some time made it clear publicly and privately that, while I strongly support developing countries receiving more foreign direct investment, it is not a priority of this government to launch negotiations on an investment agreement.

It was Commissioner Lamy who took the decision, with agreement of all EU members states to drop the proposal to launch negotiations on the WTO agreements on investment and competition.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the United Kingdom delegation to the Cancun Summit departed from the EU line during the plenary sessions. [131248]

Ms Hewitt: No. We fully supported the EU position during the plenary sessions at Cancun.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she had with the EU Trade Commissioner during the course of the Cancun Summit. [131249]

Ms Hewitt: I met Commissioner Lamy at two European Councils. I also had informal discussions with him.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the cost to the UK economy of the recent collapse of the talks at the World Trade Organisation Fifth Ministerial in Cancun. [131254]

Ms Hewitt: The lack of progress at Cancun was disappointing, but it does not mean that the Doha Development Round of trade liberalisation is over.

The benefits to developing and developed world economies from a successful round which achieves real liberalisation are considerable.

A number of studies have attempted to quantify these gains. The size of the estimated gains vary significantly depending on, among other things, the scale of liberalisation assumed to be implemented, the timing of liberalisation and the range of benefits taken into account.

These studies do not separately identify the effects on the UK economy, but they do suggest that the EU as a whole would benefit from trade liberalisation. A study by the European Commission[1], for example, estimated the gains to the EU from a global 50 per cent. cut in protection would be in the region of $92 billion. A reasonable assumption is that the gains to the UK would be roughly proportional to our share of EU GDP and external trade (around 17 per cent.). This would imply annual income gains in the region of $16 billion. Another study by Michigan University[2] suggests that global elimination of trade barriers could increase EU incomes by as much as $500 billion. Again, assuming the UK gains proportionately, this could mean an annual boost to UK incomes of over $70 billion. The benefits would feed through gradually as liberalisation is implemented in many scenarios taking over a decade.

In addition, a successful round of trade liberalisation is likely to have a more immediate effect by providing a boost to global economic confidence. The scale of this benefit is impossible to predict but would certainly be considerable.

[1] The Millennium Round: An economic appraisal by Nigel Nagarajan 1999.
[2] "CGE Modelling and Analysis of Multilateral and Regional Negotiating Options" Drusilla Brown, Alan Deardoff and Robert Stern Michigan Discussion Paper number 468 2001.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her attendance at the Fifth World Trade Organisation Ministerial held recently in Cancun. [131255]

Ms Hewitt: I made a full statement to the House, on my attendance at the recent 5th World Trade Organisation Ministerial Conference held in Cancun, on Wednesday 17 September.

TRANSPORT

Airport Consultation

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what reports he has received on prospective promoters in respect of *(a)* the Cliffe airport proposal and *(b)* other North Kent estuarial airport proposals. [130995]

Mr. McNulty: In response to "The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: South East" consultation, a number of proposals for new airport capacity that are alternatives to, or variants of, options set out in the Government's consultation document, have been submitted. These include two sites in North Kent and the Marinair proposal for an airport on an island in the Thames estuary.

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the identification and recommendation of airport sites for further development in the air transport White Paper will be based on *(a)* commercial viability and *(b)* availability of private sector funding to meet the full cost. [130996]

Mr. McNulty: We are currently analysing the many thousands of responses received to "the Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom" consultation. Ministers will take decisions based on the factual appraisal and views expressed by interested parties, which will help Ministers come to a view on what weight they should attach to different considerations, and how to balance these. Commercial and financial viability are considerations specified in the published SERAS appraisal methodology.

The Government intends to publish its conclusions in a White Paper later this year.

Biofuels

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport by what date under the EU Directive 2003/30/EC Article 4 he is required to set a target for biofuel use in the UK by the end of 2005. [130869]

Mr. Jamieson: The Directive must be implemented in full by 31 December 2004, but the European Commission has asked member states in advance of this to submit targets for biofuel use in 2005 by July 2004. We will be consulting stakeholders on possible UK targets in early 2004, before deciding on the UK targets.

Commercial Flights

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many commercial flights were made from British airports in each of the last five years; and what percentage were *(a)* four hours or longer and *(b)* four hours or less. [129800]

Mr. McNulty: The available information is as follows:

Commercial air transport movements[1]: United Kingdom

		Percentage	
	Number (thousand)	*Short haul[2]*	*Long haul*
1998	1,504	88.6	11.4
1999	1,580	88.6	11.4
2000	1,663	88.7	11.3
2001	1,690	89.0	11.0
2002	1,683	89.2	10.8

[1] Landings and take-offs of aircraft engaged in commercial air transport. Includes all scheduled movements (loaded or empty) and loaded charter movements, but excludes empty positioning flights.

[2] Domestic flights, flights between the UK and Europe or North Africa, and flights to/from oil rigs.

Source:
Civil Aviation Authority

Deep Vein Thrombosis

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will seek amendments to the Warsaw Convention to permit claims for compensation by air travellers who suffer deep vein thrombosis. [130975]

Mr. McNulty: The Warsaw Convention will be subject to no further amendment or reform. The 1999 Montreal Convention, which is due to come into force internationally later this year, will consolidate, update and eventually replace all previous international agreements on air carrier liability, including the 1929 Warsaw Convention.

The purpose of the Warsaw Convention is to cover risks inherent to travelling by air, not damage occurring co-incidentally while in flight. For this reason, claimants must show that an "accident" had occurred. This question has been considered by the English High Court within the context of Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) and it concluded that such an occurrence does not fall within the accepted understanding of an "accident". I believe the legal framework for establishing liability to be satisfactory and that it is for the courts to decide specific cases within that framework.

London Underground

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last travelled by London Underground on official business. [130948]

Mr. Darling: I last travelled by London Underground on official business on 17 September 2003.

M6

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what reports he has received from the Highways Agency about the options for widening the M6 motorway between junctions 11 and 20; and what arrangements he intends to make for public consultation on his plans for this widening. [130978]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Agency is currently examining options for widening the M6 motorway. This has raised some complex issues and the Agency expects to bring forward further detailed advice early in 2004. Once a scheme has been approved for inclusion in the Targeted Programme of Improvements there would be further statutory and non-statutory procedures including consultation. In the meantime the Highways Agency has been liasing with both affected local authorities and with the Statutory Environmental Bodies in progressing their work.

Mayor of London

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the Mayor of London. [130949]

Mr. McNulty: Ministers have regular meetings with the Mayor at which a wide range of transport matters are discussed. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport last met the Mayor on 7 September at the Osiris II exercise at Bank station.

Microsoft

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much was paid to Microsoft in licensing fees by his Department and its agencies in each of the last three years; and how much has been budgeted for *(a)* 2003–04 and *(b)* 2004–05. [130682]

Mr. McNulty: Since 2000 there have been two Machinery of Government changes affecting what is now the Department of Transport. As a result the number of staff has changed considerably. It is not possible to analyse the total cost of licensing to identify where the costs were incurred on behalf of what is now DfT. Therefore the figures given for DfT(c) reflect spend by the Department as it was at the time.

The amount paid to Microsoft for the last three years is:

Spend (£)

Organisation	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Centre of the Department			
DETR	171,300		
DTLR		198,400	
DfT			307,500

Organisation	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
	Spend (£)		
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	n/a	459,900	489,400
Driving Standards Agency	7,900 over two years		81,000
Highways Agency	640,000	580,000	175,000
Maritime and Coastguard Agency	0	0	291,000
Vehicle Certification Agency	3,170	3,260	9,380
Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (Previously Vehicle Inspectorate and Traffic Area Network)	100,000	100,000	136,400

Budgets for spend in the current year, 2003–04, and future years are withheld on the grounds of commercial confidentiality.

Motorways

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many motorway service areas there are in England; and, of these, how many have CCTV cameras installed in public parking areas to guard against thefts of, and from, vehicles. [130976]

Mr. Jamieson: There are 69 motorway service areas (MSAs) in England.

Close Circuit Television coverage of the public parking areas is provided at 14 MSAs. Most MSA operators offer full CCTV coverage of the commercial areas of their sites. In instances where MSA operators are aware of a problem of theft from parked vehicles, particularly within the lorry compounds, they have taken separate action.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it a condition of all future licences to operate motorway service areas that CCTV cameras be installed in public parking areas. [130977]

Mr. Jamieson: Motorway service areas (MSAs) are private sector enterprises, subject to the normal planning processes. It is for them to decide on the most appropriate form of security measures at each site. The Government do require certain minimum requirements as a condition of their signing and access from the motorway. It would be inappropriate for these to include a stipulation on how security at each site should be provided.

Redhill Aerodrome

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what analysis he has made of the air safety aspects of plans to develop Redhill Aerodrome, with special reference to provisions for missed approach procedures; and if he will make a statement; [130691]

(2) what estimate he has made of the height above the M23 of incoming aircraft if the proposal to develop Redhill Aerodrome were to proceed. [130692]

Mr. McNulty: In response to "The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: South East" consultation, a proposal for the development of Redhill aerodrome has been submitted. This proposal is being considered in the on-going analysis of responses to the consultation.

Transport Infrastructure

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much transport infrastructure maintenance cost the Government in each year from 1990 to 2003. [130455]

Mr. McNulty: Transport infrastructure maintenance is taken to encompass maintenance on Road and Rail only, and is detailed as follows.

Table 1 shows the cost of maintenance from 1991–2002 road maintenance. Numbers are as detailed in the National Road Maintenance Condition Survey (NRMCS) annual report. These numbers are also given as cash prices.

Rail figures are detailed in Table 1 for the years 1996–2003, and have been taken from the Railtrack 2001 Network Management Statement (2001), and the 2003 Network Rail Annual Return. These have also been shown in cash prices. It is important to note that these figures also may include non-Government expenditure, but it is not possible to disaggregate this out.

Rail figures prior to 1996 are not immediately accessible and to obtain these numbers would present a disproportionate cost.

	Rail maintenance		Road maintenance			
			2001-02 prices[2]		Cash prices[2]	
	2001-02 prices[1]	Cash prices[1]	Non-trunk roads	Trunk roads[3]	Non-trunk roads	Trunk roads[3]
1991–92	—	—	2,401	741	1,803	556
1992–93	—	—	2,379	796	1,844	617
1993–94	—	—	2,409	838	1,913	665
1994–95	—	—	2,387	841	1,921	677
1995–96	—	—	2,225	665	1,842	550
1996–97	840	739	1,970	595	1,683	508
1997–98	780	707	1,793	648	1,578	571
1998–99	747	696	1,742	655	1,575	592
1999–2000	702	670	1,834	716	1,699	664
2000–01	725	698	1,907	757	1,807	717
2001–02	—	950	2,168	668	2,105	649
2002–03	—	1,184	—	—	2,515	741

[1] 1996–97 to 2000–01 taken from Railtrack 2001 Network Management Statement. 2000–01 to 2002–03 Cash prices taken from Network Rail 2003 Annual Return.
[2] 2001–02 prices taken from the National Road Maintenance Condition Survey (NRMCS) for road maintenance.
[3] Including motorways.

US Warship Disposal

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the environmental impact of towing former US naval ships off the North East coast on their way to be broken up. [130727]

Mr. Jamieson: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) are aware of proposals to bring ships from the US reserve fleet to the UK for dismantling at a facility in Teesside.

Accessible pollutants will be removed from the ships before transit, as required by the Basel Convention on the control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes. The MCA monitors the standards of vessels entering UK waters and co-ordinates any response to pollution outside of harbour areas via the National Contingency Plan for Pollution from Shipping

and Offshore Installations. It is empowered to take action should any pollution incident occur within the UK Pollution Control Zone.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether UK agreement to a passage plan for the proposed tow of former US naval ships to the UK is required in advance of the vessels leaving the US. [130728]

Mr. Jamieson: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) is in close liaison with the US Government and the companies involved with these ships. A formal passage plan will be agreed prior to the ships leaving the US and will also be agreed with the French and Belgian Governments.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he intends to extend reduced rates of vehicle excise duty to cars converted to LPG/autogas that were registered before March 2001; and if he will extend the powershift programme of grants to cars that are more than five years old. [130726]

Mr. Jamieson: Rates and structure of vehicle excise duty are a matter for the Chancellor in his budget. In deciding these rates he weighs a large number of social, economic, environmental and other factors.

The Chancellor announced in Budget 2003 that the Government would be consulting stakeholders on how best to ensure that future support for road fuel gases continued to reflect environmental and other policy objectives, with a view to announcing decisions on future duty rates and other forms of support in the 2003 Pre-budget Report. A joint Department for Transport, Treasury and Customs and Excise consultation document "Road fuel gases and their contribution to clean low-carbon transport: Establishing a consistent and durable framework of Government support" discussed the issues and invited comments by 17 September. The Government are now considering the responses received.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he has made with implementing the 48 hour working week for workers in the transport sector. [130973]

Mr. McNulty: On 1 August 2003, the Department of Trade and Industry implemented "The Working Time (Amendment) Regulations 2003". These apply the 48 hour average working week to non-mobile workers in the transport sector and drivers of vehicles subject to domestic drivers' hours rules in the road transport sector.

Mobile workers who are affected by the EU drivers' hours rules, will be subject to the average 48 hour week from March 2005, under the sector specific road transport directive (2002/15/EC). The Department for Transport has consulted and received comments from key stakeholders in the road transport industry. We will also publish a partial regulatory impact assessment and consultation document shortly, on our plans to implement the directive into UK law.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what the Government are doing to equip hospitals in Afghanistan. [129446]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The Afghanistan Transitional Administration (ATA) has asked donors to concentrate on a few key areas of the reconstruction effort where they can have most impact. In response to this and after consultation with the ATA and other donors, the UK is concentrating on building the capacity of the Afghan Government, humanitarian aid and programmes to support the development of income generation.

Healthcare is not currently one of DFID's focus areas in Afghanistan, and we are therefore not involved in equipping hospitals. Nevertheless, we have funded a consultant that has worked with the Ministry of Health on hospital management.

We also fund Afghanistan's reconstruction effort through multi-lateral channels. The UK is the fourth largest donor to UNICEF and provided £44 million overall funding in 2002. We provide 19 per cent. of the European Union's £282 million package of reconstruction support for Afghanistan for 2003–04, of which £17.5 million is programmed for the health sector to help reduce infant and maternal mortality by providing a basic healthcare package. We are also contributing towards the World Bank's Afghanistan Health Sector Emergency Reconstruction and Development Project, which aims to help expand delivery of basic health services and works to ensure equitable access, particularly for women and children.

Since April 2002, the European Commission has worked with the United States to rebuild 72 hospitals, clinics and women's healthcare centres, revise the national curriculum for midwives and vaccinate £4.3 million children against measles. Over 2003 and 2004, the EC will channel support through the Government to deliver health services to three million people and help to reduce the unacceptably high levels of child and maternal mortality.

UNICEF has supported Emergency Obstetric Care services in 20 districts and refurbished Malalai hospital, the largest maternity hospital in Kabul, with 15,000 deliveries every year. UNICEF plans to launch other facilities in Kandahar, Herat and Jalalabad to build up the maternal health infrastructure.

AIDS/HIV

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what the Government is doing to help those suffering from AIDS and HIV in the developing world. [129059]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The Department for International Development (DFID) recognises that the HIV/AIDS epidemic is one of the most important development challenges. In recognition of this DFID has increased HIV/AIDS related bilateral expenditure from £38 million in 1997–98 to over £270 million in 2002–03.

Intensive bi-lateral action on HIV/AIDS is under way including in Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. At a global level, the UK Government makes significant contributions to support HIV/AIDS programmes of multilateral organisations, including the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations in a coherent effort to combat this disease.

The UK has pledged US$280 million to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, up to the year 2008 and has committed £14 million to the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative and £16 million to the Medical Research Council's Microbicides Development Programme.

Arms Proliferation

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development whether there is a consensus among European partners on the proliferation of small arms in developing countries. [129854]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Over the last five years European states, through the European Union and its accession countries, have consistently demonstrated a commitment to support efforts to tackle the proliferation of small arms in developing countries through [illegible]uing EU programmes. Currently these programmes are enacted as part of the Joint Action on the European Union's contribution to combating the destabilising accumulation and uncontrolled spread of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), adopted on 12 July 2002 by the European Council.

The EU aims to strengthen the efforts to reduce the availability and supply of SALW to areas of conflict or potential conflict, to contribute to the development of a range of international measures to limit the demand for SALW in such areas, and to help governments to cope with the problems these weapons cause.

The EU currently supports programmes in Cambodia, in central America through the UN Regional Centre in Lima and in conjunction with UNDP in south eastern Europe (the South Eastern Europe Clearinghouse on Small Arms in Belgrade). EU supported projects in South Ossetia and Albania have recently been completed. In the last three years, the EU has committed around €7.5million to these programmes, through the Common Foreign and Security Policy Budget.

In June 2003, EU member states agreed a Joint Position on brokering activities which requires members states to enact legislation to regulate activities of brokers, including brokering of small arms and light weapons.

Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline

Adam Price: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what representations the Department has received about human rights violations relating to the construction of the Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan pipeline. [129199]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID and other Government Departments have received representations from several international and local NGOs about the human rights implications of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline. Officials have held meetings to discuss this issue with NGOs. We have also received correspondence from Members of Parliament and members of the public.

Adam Price: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will make a statement on the latest discussions with regard to the use of public money via the *(a)* World Bank, *(b)* European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and *(c)* Export Credits Guarantee Department for the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline. [129200]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID's interest in the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) project is as a shareholder in the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the World Bank Group. As a shareholder, DFID has a responsibility to ensure that these institutions have properly assessed this project, including possible social and environmental impacts. EBRD and the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank Group are currently carrying out their normal thorough screening and safeguards procedures on the project. Once these procedures are completed, it is anticipated that they will present formal project proposals to their Executive Boards for discussion. As is standard procedure, DFID will make its decision on how to vote on the BTC project once it has received these formal proposals.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, is responsible for the Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD). ECGD is currently undertaking its due diligence process for the BTC project. The project sponsors are seeking cover from ECGD for the supply of UK goods and services, and for UK investments related to the project. Cover would only be given if the Department were satisfied that the relevant environmental, social and human rights impacts had been properly addressed, and that the financial and project risks were acceptable.

Central Africa

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development how much assistance he gave to *(a)* Rwanda, *(b)* Uganda and *(c)* Angola in each of the last five years, broken down by subject under which the assistance was allocated; and if he will make a statement. [130659]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID has a policy of focusing its resources in Africa. Rwanda and Uganda are both countries where we have strong development partnerships. We are currently developing our plans for Angola now that the war has ended there.

	£
Rwanda	
2002–03	
Direct Budget Support	22,032,000
Technical Co-operation	6,723,000
Grants & Aid in Kind	1,423,000
Project or Sector Aid	2,348,000
	32,526,000

	£
Rwanda	
2001–02	
Direct Budget Support	18,586,000
Technical Co-operation	6,373,000
Project or Sector Aid	1,488,000
Grants & Aid in Kind	741,000
	27,189,000
2000–01	
Direct Budget Support	25,400,000
Technical Co-operation	5,589,000
Project or Sector Aid	1,052,000
Grants & Aid in Kind	837,000
	32,878,000
1999–2000	
Direct Budget Support	10,000,000
Technical Co-operation	2,440,000
Humanitarian Assistance	1,170,000
Grants & Aid in Kind	784,000
	14,394,000
1998–99	
Direct Budget Support	10,000,000
Technical Co-operation	1,356,000
Grants & Aid in Kind	1,281,000
Humanitarian Assistance	1,005,000
	13,642,000
Uganda	
2002–03	
Direct Budget Support	17,500,000
Technical Cooperation	15,537,000
Project or Sector Aid	13,846,000
Grants & Aid in Kind	5,736,000
	55,142,000
2001–02	
Direct Budget Support	35,000,000
Technical Co-operation	14,679,000
Project or Sector Aid	13,974,000
Grants & Aid in Kind	4,563,000
	68,476,000
2000–01	
Direct Budget Support	45,000,000
Project or Sector Aid	17,856,000
Technical Co-operation	15,844,000
Grants & Aid in Kind	7,323,000
	86,342,000
1999–2000	
Project or Sector Aid	41,467,000
Direct Budget Support	16,000,000
Technical Cooperation	17,287,000
Grants & Aid in Kind	5,910,000
	81,206,000
1998–99	
Direct Budget Support	17,000,000
Technical Co-operation	11,928,000
Grants & Aid in Kind	5,500,000
Project or Sector Aid	17,785,000
	52,574,000
Angola	
2002–03	
Technical Co-operation	3,970,000
Grants & Other Aid in Kind	184,000
Humanitarian Assistance	5,734,000
	9,888,000
2001–02	
Technical Co-operation	1,[illegible]93,000
Grants & Other Aid in Kind	5[illegible],000
Humanitarian Assistance	1,825,000
	3,754,000
2000–01	
Technical Co-operation	1,827,000
Grants & Other Aid in Kind	371,000
Humanitarian Assistance	2,240,000
	4,438,000

	£
Rwanda	
1999–2000	
Technical Co-operation	1,243,000
Grants & Other Aid in Kind	625,000
Humanitarian Assistance	3,236,000
	5,104,000
1998–99	
Technical Co-operation	623,000
Grants & Other Aid in Kind	1,185,000
Humanitarian Assistance	2,500,000
	4,308,000

Economic Activity Development

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment the Department has made of *(a)* the extent of extra-legal activity in developing countries and *(b)* the impact of extra-legal activity on economic development in these countries; and what assistance the Government are offering to increase legal economic activity in developing countries. [129313]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: We are not aware of any comprehensive assessment of the scale of extra-legal activity in developing countries. The impact of crime, in particular corruption, transnational organised crime and money laundering, is undoubtedly profound.

The Department provides a wide range of support to developing countries to help them address these areas. These include developing strong enforcement action against corruption and money laundering, such as strong and effective anti-corruption agencies and financial intelligence units, and establishing the full range of necessary preventive measures, such as strengthening capacity for public sector budgetary and financial management, procurement, accounting and audit; reforming civil service management, enhancing public oversight through strengthened parliamentary committees, developing measures to reduce judicial corruption and supporting civil society to promote transparency and accountability in public life. Helping countries to develop sustained improvements in the climate for productive domestic and foreign investment and facilitating greater private sector development also forms an important part of the Department's work.

We are pleased that negotiations for the United Nations Convention Against Corruption are nearing completion. This instrument will reflect a global consensus on the importance of tackling corruption and improving international co-operation, including the return of corruptly-acquired assets to the country of origin. The UK has played an active role in these negotiations.

Export Control Act

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development pursuant to his answer of 18 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 241W, on the Export Control Act, whether the Department made an assessment of how the secondary legislation on export controls would *(a)* affect demands on departmentally-funded projects and *(b)* affect stability in developing countries. [129803]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: A specific separate assessment was not undertaken but clearly a strengthening of controls on the trade in arms will reduce the availability of arms, which fuel conflicts, erode security and stability and undermine sustainable development, thereby making it easier for development goals to be reached.

Immunisation Programmes

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what recent discussions the Department has had with the World Health Organisation regarding the availability of vaccinations for immunisation programmes in developing countries. [129447]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The Department of International Development (DFID) works closely with the World Health Organisation (WHO) across a wide range of health issues. This includes working with WHO on the generic issues of improving access to health commodities and to supporting specific programme needs. DFID was also until recently a Board member of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI). GAVI is a public-private partnership focused on increasing children's access to vaccines in poor countries and discussions focus on issues around the availability of vaccinations in developing countries. The World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF also participate in that Board. The UK contribution to GAVI lasts till 2005 and amounts to £35 million.

Iraq

Adam Price: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment the Department has made of the conditions of the temporary prison outside Baghdad International Airport run by the coalition forces. [130345]

Hilary Benn: DFID has made no such assessment.

Adam Price: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development how many Iraqi children the Department estimates have been detained at the temporary prison outside Baghdad International Airport run by coalition forces. [130346]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID does not hold such information.

Kosovo

Adam Price: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what recent humanitarian assessment the Department has made of the aftermath of the Kosovo conflict in 1999. [130349]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID has aimed to assess the post-conflict situation in Kosovo in partnership with other international agencies, and with the Kosovo authorities. In December 2001, we worked with the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, the International Organisation for Migration, the Dutch Government and the Statistical Office of Kosovo to produce Kosovo's first comprehensive poverty assessment. This showed that approximately 50 per cent. of Kosovo's population was living in poverty, with 12 per cent. in extreme poverty. The assessment has since been used to assist the design and monitoring of social services and benefits.

Since then, we have focused on building the capacity of the Kosovo institutions to monitor social service delivery and poverty outcomes. We remain in discussion with other agencies on possible implementation of a second poverty assessment, and on the support needed by the Kosovo authorities to enable them to monitor poverty and deliver services effectively.

Pakistan

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what recent initiatives have been taken to help fund and encourage the education of girls in Pakistan. [129060]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: All of DFID's education projects in Pakistan have a strong equity focus.

At the national level, DFID is supporting improvements to education management information systems so as to better monitor girl's education, through for example:

the Northern Areas Education Project (£6 million) supports increased female enrolment and participation in management and delivery through improved sector management and the development of community schools. Girls' enrolment in the Northern Areas at primary level has increased from 29,438 in 1996–97 to 52,538 in 2002–03 (an increase of 78 per cent.);

the North West Frontier Province Education Project (£6.5 million) includes support for public-private-community partnerships which are shown to increase the participation of girls; and

the planned Azad Jammu and Kashmir community education project (£650,000) aims to sustain improvements in access to and the quality of schooling, particularly for girls.

The EC is also supporting education sector reform with a programme of €59 million over the period 2002–06. The UK contributes approximately 19 per cent. of the EC programme resource.

Poverty (Middle East)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what recent assessment he has made of how many people are living in poverty in *(a)* the West Bank, *(b)* Gaza and *(c)* East Jerusalem. [129057]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Poverty in the Palestinian Occupied Territories has increased dramatically since the intifada started in September 2000. According to the most recent World Bank assessment, 60 per cent. of Palestinians, 1.9 million people, are living on less than $2 a day. In the Gaza Strip, the level is as high as 75 per cent.

Property Ownership Rights

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what support the Department gives to developing countries to improve the systems they operate to establish property ownership rights. [129302]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Over the last five years, DFID has supported developing countries to establish effective and equitable policies in relation to land and property, together with fair and efficient systems to establish and administer property rights, especially in Africa. Since this is invariably costly and long term, we seek to do this in partnership with others such as the international and regional development banks and the European Union. In Ghana and Malawi we are working alongside the World Bank and others to help establish practical, low-cost, and locally managed systems for land administration. In Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda we have supported inclusive processes of debate and consultation leading to new policies and laws on land and property and implementation plans. We are about to embark on a similar process in Kenya and are in the process of identifying how best to assist in South Africa. In India and Bangladesh we have sponsored the development of new alliances and partnerships to secure the tenure of vulnerable groups, the regularisation and improvement of informal low-income urban settlements, assistance to low-income households in accessing land, and the piloting of a community led finance facility for poor communities to manage upgrading, resettlement and infrastructure projects in partnership with local authorities and the banking sector. In Guyana we are about to complete a project for and the establishment of the regularisation of a new Lands and Surveys Commission and the associated regularisation of tenure rights.

Globally, DFID supports efforts by the World Bank to establish and implement coherent and inclusive policies to secure and administer property rights in the developing world, and the Department is supporting UN-Habitat in the development of its monitoring system for MDG Target 11 'Improving the lives of 100 million slum dwellers by 2020', for which one indicator is secure tenure.

My Department is also funding research into the promotion of intermediate forms of tenure in urban areas, effective systems for the management of common property, and the improvement of administrative procedures so as to reduce the costs of legal and appropriate shelter for the urban poor.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment the Department has made of the ability of poor people in developing countries to realise the value of property which they own; and what assessment the Department has made of the impact that property ownership regulations and systems in their country have on the ability of poor people in developing countries to release the capital in their property. [129303]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: has found that in many developing countries poor people cannot realise the value of property they own. Their property rights are often informal and there are legal, administrative and financial barriers to poor people securing formal rights to land and property. However the department has also found that the promotion of property and private land titling and universal markets in land, as practised in developed countries, is not always appropriate. In many cases property ownership systems fail to recognise legitimate customary rights established over generations including those held by community groups. Standard models for titling land and property can sometimes marginalise the rights of the poor while favouring the better off.

The links between property rights and the ability to access credit and financial services are complex and context-specific. The department has found that the ability of the poor to accumulate assets, maintain their homes and make investments may not be greatly affected by their tenure status, depending primarily on their income earning and employment opportunities. As a result, whilst there may be good justification for extending formal property rights and simplifying property systems, financial service mechanisms need to be put in place that do not depend on the availability of titled property as collateral.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment the Department has made of the time it takes to establish property ownership rights in developing countries and what impact this has on economic development in these countries. [129316]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: has found that property ownership rights in developed countries have been established as a result of economic and social change over long periods. The establishment of systems to administer and regulate property rights has also been a long-term process, although in many circumstances legitimate rights may exist on the ground. In practice, formal procedures established in law for registering and transacting in property rights can be lengthy, complex, costly and inaccessible to the poor. The result is that informal rights and transactions are not recognised, reducing economic opportunities and increasing disputes.

The department has assessed the strengths and limitations of intermediary forms of tenure and the opportunities to regulate land rights at local and community levels—both of which are procedurally and politically quicker, more practical and less costly than ambitious programmes to establish universal land titles. The department accepts that establishment of appropriate systems of property rights requires the pursuit of coherent objectives by governments over many years.

South Africa

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what recent assessment he has made of the impact of HIV/AIDS on the humanitarian situation in South Africa. [129056]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: All agencies active in responding to the humanitarian crisis in Southern Africa recognise that the high HIV/AIDS infection rates there are both affecting the crisis and being affected by it. In countries such as Zimbabwe, where one in four adults is HIV-positive, current rates of malnutrition and mortality are closely related to the underlying AIDS pandemic. An estimated 2,500 deaths per week in Zimbabwe are due to AIDS.

We are still learning how HIV/AIDS affects the crisis, including recovery. Evidence from Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe shows that households affected by chronic

illness plant fewer crops and can afford fewer inputs like fertiliser. In some cases, households are shifting production to less labour intensive but also less nutritious crops. In addition, governments' capacity to respond to the crisis is undermined by the loss of public sector workers due to AIDS and other factors.

DFID is taking steps to integrate HIV/AIDS in its humanitarian programmes. Regionally, DFID is working to ensure that HIV prevention is integrated with food distribution, and that AIDS affected households receive food and care. We are also working closely with Governments, UN and non-governmental agencies to ensure that there is better understanding of the impact of HIV/AIDS on hunger and vulnerability. We are exploring how best to support longer-term safety nets for households affected by chronic illness. We also have a substantial programme of support for HIV/AIDS prevention and care, working with national AIDS councils and others to ensure appropriate multi-sectoral responses to the epidemic.

UN Aid Target

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development when he expects the Government to meet the UN target of 0.7 per cent. of gross national product in their contribution to overseas aid. [129249]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The Government remain firmly committed to the 0.7 per cent. target. Although there is no timetable for reaching the target, the trend in the UK oda/GNI ratio has been upward since 1997, when it was 0.26 per cent. By 2006, the ratio will be 0.4 per cent., the highest since 1981. The rate of progress thereafter will depend on decisions to be taken in the next Spending Review.

US Overseas Development Assistance

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what representations he has made to the US Administration calling for them to raise overseas development assistance to 0.7 per cent.of GNI. [129448]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The US Government does not accept the 0.7 per cent. target. However, it has subscribed to the Monterrey Consensus on increasing assistance to developing countries and before Monterrey announced increases in ODA worth $5 billion over three years, followed more recently by President Bush's announcement of significant new funds for HIV/AIDS. It is the world's largest donor in terms of volume.

The UK continues to press all donors to increase their contributions to developing countries in line with the Monterrey Consensus and has recently proposed an International Finance Facility (IFF) which would allow donors, including the US, to mobilise increased resources for international development.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Health and Safety

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the health and safety environment within which fruit and vegetable packhouse operators and growers operate; and what regulations apply to these sectors to take account of the particular needs of the casual and foreign labour they use. [129777]

Mr. Browne: The potential hazards at fruit and vegetable packhouses and growers typically include: transport; machinery; manual handling; noise; slips, trips and falls; and dermatitis. These hazards are common across a range of industries.

The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 requires all employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of all their employees. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to assess the risks to the health and safety of their employees, and to provide them with information on the risks and measures introduced to protect them.

The risk assessment should identify those employees that may be particularly at risk because they do not speak, read or understand English. Employers should make special arrangements to safeguard the health and safety of these employees. This may include providing translations, using interpreters or replacing written health and safety notices with clearly understood symbols or diagrams. An increased level of supervision and monitoring of work activities may also be appropriate.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many Health and Safety Executive full-time inspectors there are; and how many there were in each of the previous three years [130576]

Mr. Browne: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given to the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) on 7 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 1269W.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what reasons underlie the policy of the Health and Safety Executive *(a)* to allocate further staff to accident investigations and *(b)* not to allocate staff to preventative work. [130577]

Mr. Browne: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has not adopted a policy of allocating further staff to accident investigations, at the expense of staff allocated to preventative work.

HSE has recently reviewed the balance of resource applied to preventive inspections and investigation of incidents and complaints. HSE has decided to realign its resource to focus more on preventive work; allocating more staff time to preventive inspections, while concentrating the resource applied to investigation on the most serious incidents and complaints. This approach will enable more effective delivery of its mission to ensure that risks to people's health and safety from work related activities are properly controlled. This is in response to the fact that more cases of ill health caused by work are occurring and there has been a levelling off in the incidence of serious and fatal injuries.

The policy of selecting a proportion of accidents and complaints for investigation, with the most serious being investigated, to ensure lessons are learnt to prevent recurrences has not changed. Accidents and complaints are selected for investigation using criteria set out in its incident selection and complaints procedures.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the Health and Safety Executive's annual budget was in each year since 1997. [130910]

Mr. Browne: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) on 14 July, *Official Report*, column 75W.

Workplace Stress

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what guidance the Government have issued to employers on combating stress in the workplace. [130107]

Mr. Browne: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has published a range of guidance on tackling work-related stress. Further guidance is due to be published over the coming year.

"Tackling Work-Related Stress—a Manager's Guide to Improving and Maintaining Employee Health and Well-Being", was published on 25 June 2001. It sets out a risk assessment approach to tackling stress in the workplace. It clearly outlines possible hazards and risks, and offers practical advice to managers.

"Work-Related Stress—a short guide", was published in November 2001. This guide offers similar information but is aimed at small and medium-sized enterprises. HSE has developed new guidance in response to informal consultation that identified the need for further help for organisations in developing solutions to problems with stress. The new guidance, to be launched by HSE in October, is based on case studies of successful solutions employed in a range of organisations. The case studies have been derived from an extensive range of HSE-commissioned research into good practice in stress prevention. HSE plans to launch the new guidance at a conference on 30 October 2003. It will help employers work with employees to develop solutions in response to issues identified by their risk assessments.

HSE also publishes information on stress on its website (www.hse.gov.uk/stress). This includes resources to help employers begin to tackle stress and provides access to further sources of help.

Advertising

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what *(a)* TV advertising and *(b)* other costs are involved in the promotion of new arrangements for state pensions, benefits and tax credits to be paid directly into the bank accounts of claimants. [130029]

Mr. Pond: A budget of up to £25 million is available for the Direct Payment campaign, spread over a three-year period (2002–03 to 2004–05). The campaign raises

awareness of all account options for Direct Payment; including bank, building society and Post Office accounts.

TV advertising media costs from the start of the campaign to date total £1,799,000.

Other costs total £4,932,000. This figure breaks down as follows:

	£
Radio media	1,239,000
National press media	1,111,000
Regional press media	1,257,000
Magazines	322,000
Ambient media	189,000
Production across all media	814,000

Note:

Figures exclude VAT and apply to the campaign in England, Scotland and Wales only.

Benefit Applications

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff *(a)* from his Department and *(b)* not from his Department are available to undertake home visits to deal with (i) pension credit applications and (ii) all benefit applications. [128744]

Malcolm Wicks: Latest data show that there are 1,867 (whole time equivalent) field staff in The Pension Service local service who are available to undertake home visits. They handle applications for all benefits relating to older people, including pension credit. There are varying numbers of staff from organisations with whom we have partnering arrangements who are able to provide information about pension credit and other benefits.

Benefit Repayments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the amount of money that is not repaid as a result of benefits sent to people who have subsequently died; and what steps he is taking to reform the system. [128704]

Mr. Pond *[holding answer 15 September 2003]:* As part of our modernisation programme, measures are underway to provide greater focus and specialisation in benefit debt management through the establishment of dedicated benefit debt centres. We are already seeing improvements in increased debt recovery and reduction in outstanding debt.

At 31 March 2003, the total outstanding overpaid benefit paid for a period following the death of a benefit recipient was estimated to be £7.73 million. We normally seek to recover this type of overpayment, but where recovery is not possible, the overpayment is written off.

Source:

Department for Work and Pensions Debt Management System

Benefits Agency

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will establish individual e-mail addresses for each benefit office so that MI12 forms can be e-mailed to the Benefits Agency. [129874]

Mr. Pond: All benefit offices do have e-mail addresses. However, due to the insecure nature of normal e-mail and the need to guarantee the security of personal data we cannot use this method to exchange information relating to individual benefit claims.

Business Insurance

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the follow up report on Business Insurance. [130929]

Mr. Browne: In the Autumn.

The First Stage Report on Employers' Liability insurance was published by the Department in June. Action in relation to Employers' Liability includes both immediate initiatives and longer-term policy choices. In the timing of our further report, we have to strike a balance between a desire to report immediate action quickly and allowing time to reflect longer-term developments.

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will work more closely with trade bodies representing the insurance and construction trades on issues relating to insurance. [130930]

Mr. Browne: As part of our work on Employers Liability insurance, Ministers and officials have met a range of insurance and construction industry interests. These have included: the Association of British Insurers, individual insurance companies, the British Insurance Brokers Association, the Federation of Master Builders, the Construction Confederation, the Federation of Small Builders, Scottish Building, and the National Federation of Roofing Contractors. Further meetings are planned.

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action his Department plans to take as a result of his assessment of the effect on small and medium-sized enterprises of large increases in insurance premiums. [130931]

Mr. Browne: The First Stage Report into Employers' Liability Insurance published by my Department in June identified a number of areas for further consideration and action. These included: renewals and risk-related premiums; long-tail occupational disease; the cost of resolving claims; rehabilitation; and enforcement. Both the Government and stakeholders have continued to work on these issues and the Government will report in the autumn on the progress that is being made and any further steps we intend to take. We continue to work closely with the Small Business Service and representatives of small and medium-sized businesses on these issues.

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will bring forward the planned publication date of the Department's report on business insurance by the construction industry. [130932]

Mr. Browne: Davis Langdon Consultancy undertook a scoping study for the Construction Sector Unit of the Department for Trade and Industry looking at the difficulties construction contractors face in obtaining insurance. This report was published in January 2003.

The aim of the study was to provide DTI with a clear understanding of the nature and extent of the difficulties facing contractors in obtaining and maintaining adequate insurance. The report aimed to provide perspective on construction specific aspects of the issue and to add value to the work of other studies in this area such as the DWP Employers' liability review.

We are not currently undertaking any further construction specific reports. However, the Government will be reporting in the autumn on the progress that has been made more generally on Employers Liability insurance (in which there is a keen construction sector interest) and on the further steps it intends to take.

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the effect of long-tail insurance on the levels of employers' liability compulsory insurance. [130933]

Mr. Browne: The issue of 'long-tail' risks was considered as part of the First Stage Report into Employers' Liability insurance published by the Department in June. The report found that concerns about long-tail risks were clearly keenly felt by insurers and might have an impact on decisions about capital provision but it was not able to translate these concerns into quantifiable impacts on pricing. Recent price increases appear to relate most closely to accident risk.

We understand that the Association of British Insurers has separately commissioned work that will attempt to quantify the impacts of long-tail risks on the market. They expect to complete this study later this year. The Government will consider this with interest.

Claimant Data Files

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many departmental files holding data on claimants went missing *(a)* temporarily and *(b)* permanently from filestores managed (i) by his Department and (ii) by private sector contractors in each year since 1995. [127187]

Mr. Browne: The Department do not hold the information in the manner requested.

The available data relating to files lost or temporarily missing in the Department for Work and Pensions cannot be used to establish a national picture of the numbers lost or missing in the Department's file-stores.

There is no consistent counting of files lost in file-stores. Some stores, including the central store at Heywood managed by Iron Mountain, keep records of the numbers of files that cannot be traced. In these cases there is no way of distinguishing files actually missing in store, from those that could not be traced because they were never held in the store, or are in transit, or are held elsewhere in the organisation.

Contracted-out Rebates

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 17 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 531W, to the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), on contracted-out rebates, to what causes he ascribes the assumed reduction in the number of people receiving contracted-out rebates from 2001-02 to 2051-52. [131058]

Mr. Pond: The projection reflects two main assumptions:

1. A reduction in the membership of contracted-out personal pension schemes, as a result of the introduction of age-related rebates in April 1997; and

2. Changing membership of contracted-out occupational persion schemes, reflecting among other things, changing patterns of pension provision.

As the Green Paper and earlier answers made clear these are only illustrative assumptions made for the purpose of long-term financial projections and not firm predictions of future experience. The appropriateness of the assumptions will be reviewed as increased data on the number of individuals contracted-out become available.

Source:
Government Actuary's Department

Death Registration

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the *(a)* operation of and *(b)* level of compliance with the White Form arrangements linked to the registration of death. [129978]

Malcolm Wicks: The Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages completes a "White Form" (form BD8 the free death certificate) which is handed to the person registering the death.

If the BD8 is forwarded to the Department, and payment is still being made, arrangements will be made to cancel payment. The Registrar also notifies the Department automatically.

There are no statistics available to show level of compliance.

Deprived Areas

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the support his Department gives to *(a)* areas suffering from high levels of unemployment and *(b)* areas suffering from low average wages. [129158]

Mr. Browne: The level of employment has reached record levels, up by over 1.5 million since 1997. The underlying trend remains upwards and recent unemployment figures are the best since the 1970s. The improvement in the labour market has been spread right across the country, and since 1997, unemployment rates have fallen fastest in the areas with the highest unemployment.

Jobcentre Plus provides everyone of working age with advice and guidance on the full range of support available to help them move into work, including programmes such as our New Deals. In areas of the country with higher levels of worklessness and concentrations of people who are disadvantaged in the labour market, we have introduced specialist programmes such as Action Teams for Jobs and Employment Zones. By the end of July 2003, they had been successful in helping more than 116,000 people into work. The Government have also introduced measures to help make work pay such as the national minimum wage and tax credits.

From April 2004, we are also introducing a programme of intensive support in neighbourhoods with very high concentrations of worklessness. Local worklessness pilots will operate in 12 of the most deprived neighbourhoods and will run for two years. The pilots will test a new approach to offering intensive support to local residents to help them overcome barriers to employment.

Disability Living Allowance

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many fraudulent cases have been discovered by the Disability Living Allowance Periodic Enquiry process since June 1999; and if he will make a statement. [127127]

Mr. Pond: Periodic Enquiry was not designed as a fraud prevention measure. The information requested is not available.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether he intends to extend the threshold for disability living allowance to people of pensionable age and over. [130725]

Maria Eagle: There are no plans to change the rules governing the upper age limit for claims to disability living allowance.

Employer Documentation

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the documentation issued by his Department that an employer must complete when he or she takes on his or her first employee, in order to be fully compliant; and if he will make a statement. [128688]

Mr. Browne: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary for Employment Relations, Competition and Consumers on 11 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 388W.

Employers' Liability Insurance

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what information his Department has collated on the number of small and middle-sized enterprises which have stopped trading in the past 12 months as a result of increases in employers' compulsory liability insurance premiums. [130901]

Mr. Browne: While we have received representations about businesses being forced to close as a direct result of increases in their employers' liability insurance premiums, conclusive or comprehensive evidence has proved very difficult to obtain. A particular obstacle is the difficulty of disaggregating premium increases as a cause from other factors. For vulnerable companies with low profit margins or debt problems, premium costs might well have been another contributory factor to business failure, but no definitive figures exist.

Forestry

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what representations he has received from representatives of *(a)* the Forestry Commission and *(b)* private operators in the forestry industry about the level of employers' compulsory liability insurance premiums. [130425]

Mr. Browne *[holding answer 17 September 2003]:* The Department has received representations about the level of employers' liability compulsory insurance premiums from:

the Aboricultural Association;

the United Kingdom Forest Products Association; and

a private operator in the forestry industry.

We have discussed the representations with officials in the Forestry Commission.

The representations will inform the second stage of the review of employers' liability compulsory insurance, which is due to report in autumn.

Holidays (Benefit Recipients)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to make it easier for those drawing benefit to take a holiday; and what research his Department has undertaken into the number of families that do not take holidays because of poverty. [130575]

Mr. Pond: We have taken action to raise the incomes of families, especially for those on the lowest incomes. To help children out of poverty, we have provided more support than ever before to enable parents to work, and to ensure that they are better off in work. As a result of our personal tax and benefit reforms since 1997, from April 2003, families with children are, on average, £1,200 a year better off, while those in the poorest fifth of the population are, on average, £2,500 a year better off in real terms.

There are different rules and regulations for each of the various benefits, for example, relating to the length of the holiday and whether the holiday is taken within the UK or abroad. Some information is provided in leaflet GL29 "Going abroad and social security benefits", a copy of which is available in the Library.

The Family and Children Study provides research into this specific area. Further details can be found in Vegeris S. & Perry J., *Family and Children 2001: Living Standards and the Children*, DWP Research Report 190, available in the House of Commons Library. In addition, my Department recently published Farrell C. & O'Connor W., 2003, *Low Income families and household spending*, DWP Research Report 192, also available in the House of Commons Library, that includes some analysis of the affordability of holidays for people in receipt of benefit.

Income Support

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many complaints the Benefits Agency has received about the application process for income support benefits available for home improvement. [129873]

Mr. Pond: Representations are dealt with by Jobcentre Plus and The Pensions Service on an individual basis with regard to the circumstance of each case. It is not possible to identify how many are specifically about the application process for income support benefits for home improvement.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what steps he is taking to improve the response time to applications for income support contributions for home improvements. [129875]

(2) what targets have been set for the processing of MI12 forms in the Benefits Agency; and what penalties there are if the Agency does not meet these. [129876]

Mr. Pond: We have not set specific, separate targets for the clearance of MI12 forms. As form MI12 is actioned after the initial claim to benefit has been processed it is treated as a change of circumstance. As part of the Key Management Indicators for Jobseeker's Allowance and Income Support clearance targets for changes of circumstances are currently set at four days.

Iron Mountain

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what criteria led him to award a contract for the management and storage of departmental records to Iron Mountain; and if he will make a statement. [127185]

Mr. Browne: The Department for Work and Pensions has not awarded a contract for the management and storage of departmental records to Iron Mountain. DWP has a contract with Hays IMS for the storage and retrieval of some departmental records. Iron Mountain acquired Hays IMS in August 2003 and the DWP contract with Hays IMS is being novated to Iron Mountain accordingly.

Learning Disability

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many adults with a learning disability were *(a)* in paid employment in England and *(b)* known to social services in England in each year since 1997; what percentage of adults with a learning disability known to social services were in paid employment; and if he will make a statement. [127124]

Maria Eagle: The available information is in the tables.

The Department of Health collects limited information from individual councils with Social Services Responsibilities (CSSR) on the number of their clients with learning disabilities who are in paid employment. This is based on those known to the CSSR as part of a care package following a community care assessment. It is not possible to use this data to produce a robust estimate for the whole of England of the percentage of adults with a learning disability known to social services who were in paid employment.

Number of adults in England with a learning disability who are in employment

Year	*Number*
1998	30,000
1999	40,000
2000	40,000
2001	30,000
2002	50,000
2003	60,000

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10,000 and are subject to sampling error.
2. "People with a learning disability" are all persons in employment and all other men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59 who said that health or disability problems limit the kind of paid work they can do whose main health problem was a severe or specific learning problem.
3. Paid Employment includes employees and self-employed who were paid for at least one hours work in the survey reference week for people of working age (16-years-old to state pension age). It does not include those on Government employment and training programmes as not all people on these schemes are paid.

Source:

Labour Force Survey, Spring Datasets.

Estimated number of clients with learning disabilities receiving services following assessment

	2000–01	*2001–02*
All ages	110,000	115,000
18–64	101,000	101,000
65+	8,000	14,000

Notes:

1. The data are England estimates grossed up to the nearest thousand to allow for missing data and refer to the reporting year 1 April to 31 March.
2. Adults in this context are people aged 18 and over.
3. The "All ages" totals for 2000–2001 include the number of clients whose age was not known.
4. Figures may not add up because of rounding.

Source:

Department of Health, Referrals, Assessments and Packages of Care (RAP) returns for 2000–01 and 2001–02.

Low Incomes

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will introduce a system of short-term loans for those on low incomes when they change jobs; [129856]

(2) what research his Department has conducted on the disincentives caused to those on low incomes when they change jobs; [129857]

(3) pursuant to his answer of 15 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 245W, on employment assistance, whether similar incentives are available for those in low paying jobs seeking a move to a similar position. [131175]

Mr. Browne: This Department has not conducted research into disincentives caused to low income households when people change jobs. We are, however, committed to making work pay for all those who are able to work, and to supporting households, including low-income households, in sustaining employment.

Most people moving from one job to another will be able to manage until they receive payment from their new job, as wages are paid in arrears. For those in receipt of Working Tax Credit, continuity of payment will be maintained when people move from one job to another, as long as the gap between jobs is no more than seven days. The new Working Tax Credit has been extended to people aged 25 and over without children. If people receive the Child Tax Credit, this continues to be paid direct to the main carer throughout any changes in employment. People in low paid employment may also be entitled to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

People who are unable to manage whilst waiting for payment of wages, leading to a serious risk to their or their family's health or safety, may be able to get an interest free Crisis Loan. Repayment of a Crisis Loan does not start until the period of crisis is over and the rate of repayment takes account of a person's income and other commitments to avoid hardship.

New Deal

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much the New Deal for Young People has cost in each year, broken down into expenditure on *(a)* subsidies to employers, *(b)* payments to external providers, *(c)* payments to participants *(d)* employment service costs and *(e)* other economic categories. [114555]

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of New Deal expenditure was spent on *(a)* subsidies to employers, *(b)* payments to external providers, *(c)* payments to participants, *(d)* Jobcentre Plus costs and *(e)* other costs, broken down by programme, in each year since the programme began; and if he will make a statement. [122468]

Mr. Browne: The information is in the tables.

New Deal for Young People

Spend (£ million)

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Subsidies to employers	—	19	27	16	14	14
Payments to external providers	[1]12	98	174	214	159	166
Payments to participants	—	45	81	63	46	69
Departmental administrative costs	31	98	88	119	89	90

New Deal 25 Plus

Spend (£ million)

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Subsidies to employers	0	5	42	14	12	13
Payments to external providers	0	12	28	24	99	123
Payments to participants	0	0	2	5	28	45
Departmental administrative costs	0	17	26	18	73	73

New Deal 50 Plus

Spend (£ million)

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Subsidies to employers	0	0	0	0	0	0
Payments to external providers	0	0	0	2	2	2
Payments to participants	0	0	1	43	80	99
Departmental administrative costs	0	0	2	11	5	5

New Deal for Lone Parents

Spend (£ million)

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Subsidies to employers	0	0	0	0	0	0
Payments to external providers	0	0	2	3	1	4
Payments to participants	0	1	9	12	8	15
Departmental administrative costs	0	17	27	29	37	61

New Deal for Disabled People

Spend (£ million)

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Subsidies to employers	0	0	0	0	0	0
Payments to external providers	0	0	15	6	1	14
Payments to participants	0	0	0	0	3	0
Departmental administrative costs	0	1	7	7	6	12

New Deal for Partners

Spend (£ million)

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Subsidies to employers	0	0	0	0	0	0
Payments to external providers	0	0	0	1	1	0
Payments to participants	0	0	0	0	0	0
Departmental administrative costs	0	1	5	10	6	6

[1] Information is not available on the breakdown of spend across these categories.

Notes:

1. Due to rounding differences, and changes in allocation, figures provided may not sum to previous figures given.
2. No money was allocated to other economic categories.

Source:

Jobcentre Plus.

Operation Gangmaster

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what costs have been incurred since the inception of *(a)* Operation Gangmaster and *(b)* the Gangmaster Working Group; what funds remain unallocated in each case; and if he will make a statement. [128785]

Mr. Pond: It is not possible to identify separately how much is spent on Operation Gangmaster activity.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment has been undertaken of Operation Gangmaster; and what plans there are to make an assessment. [128787]

Mr. Pond: A hearing on gangmasters by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee took place before the summer recess. The report was published on 18 September 2003. Operation Gangmaster will be reviewed in the light of the Committee's recommendations.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 17 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 554W, on Operation Gangmaster, if he will list the members of the west Midlands forum under the Operation Gangmaster initiative. [129783]

Mr. Pond: When Operation Gangmaster began in 1998, forums were set up at Walsall and Cambridge to cover the west and east Midlands respectively. In September 2002 these forums were amalgamated into one forum, which sits at Peterborough.

The organisations represented at the forum are listed.

Department for Work and Pensions (Chair and Secretariat)
Inland Revenue
United Kingdom Immigration Service
National Asylum Support Service
H.M Customs and Excise
Uniform and plain clothes police officers
Department for Environment, Rural Affairs and Agriculture
Department for Trade and Industry
Health and Safety Executive

Pension Forecasts

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many retirement pension forecasts have been distributed to the self-employed, and at what cost; and what is the average entitlement that is forecast. [128748]

Malcolm Wicks: The total number of state pension forecasts issued to the self-employed to date (5 September 2003) is 397, 409.

The cost of the exercise to date is £2.72 million; this includes both staff and non-staff costs.

The figures for the average cash amount for each component that makes up the forecast for the self-employed are as follows:

	£	Information
Average amount of Basic Pension	73.61	Forecasted Basic Pension at State Pension Age
Average amount of payable Additional Pension	6.49	This figure is based on contributions paid and is the actual amount to be paid, this is unlikely to change unless the self-employed recipient reverts to employed status.
Average amount of Graduated Retirement Benefit	1.20	—
Average amount per forecast letter	81.29	[1] —

[1] The discrepancy of 1p is due to rounding.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many questions directed to him remain unanswered. [130765]

Maria Eagle: As at the rising of the House for the conference recess, 24 questions for answer today or earlier have not yet been answered.

Pension Investment

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what assessment he has made of the effects of the propensity for those aged 25 to 34 to view property rather than other savings products as a vehicle for pension investments; [131126]

(2) what assessment he has made of the likely effects of increased use of equity release as a savings vehicle for retirement. [131125]

Malcolm Wicks: Individuals of all ages have different preferences and it is right that people are free to choose to save for retirement in a variety of different ways. However, the Government believes that the best way to provide a secure income in retirement—in excess of that provided by the state—is through saving in a private pension during an individual's working life. In general, buying a house and putting money into a pension should not be seen as substitutes for each other. By saving in a pension individuals benefit from risk pooling and diversification, favourable tax treatment and over the longer term can expect strong returns to private pension investment. Furthermore, at the point of retirement, housing wealth is generally much more illiquid than any accrued private pension benefits and the market for equity release products is relatively small and trading down incurs high transaction costs.

People will want to take account of the relative risks of investing in different savings vehicles, particularly if these savings are for the long term. Above all, the Government are committed to seeking to provide individuals with information so that they can make informed choices about how and when to save to achieve the level of income in retirement that they expect.

Pensioner Benefits

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in Monmouthshire benefited from *(a)* the winter fuel allowance, *(b)* the £100 allowance for the over 80s and *(c)* free TV licences in the last year for which figures are available. [130368]

Malcolm Wicks: The number of people in Monmouthshire who received a winter fuel payment for winter 2002–03 was 19,625. Of that figure 3,970 were over age 80 and would be entitled to an additional amount of winter fuel payment from the winter of 2003–04. The extra amount will depend on the composition of the household, but generally most households will receive an extra £100.

The information in respect of people in receipt of free TV licence in Monmouthshire is not available. However, the number of people in Monmouthshire aged 75 or over receiving a social security benefit as at 30 November 2002 was 7,700. These people would be eligible to receive a free TV licence.

Notes:

1. Figures taken from the Matching Intelligence Data Analysis Service winter fuels payment 2002–03 exercise and the Pensions Strategy Computer System: 30 September 2002.
2. 100 sample figures are rounded to the nearest five.
3. Figures based on 5 per cent. data taken from the Client Group Analysis of the population over state pension age as at 30 November 2002, and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling variation. These figures are expressed in thousands and rounded to the nearest hundred
4. Social security benefits are attendance allowance, disability living allowance, severe disablement allowance, incapacity benefit, minimum income guarantee and state pension.
5. As only one TV licence is required per household, the number of free TV licences issued may be lower than the number of people entitled to one. Some households may contain more than one person aged 75 and over and not all households with a person aged 75 and over will have a television.

Source:

IAD Information Centre 100 per cent. sample and 5 per cent. sample.

Pensions

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will assess the benefits to consumer financial education of including figures showing average healthy life expectancy in government pension statements. [129855]

Malcolm Wicks: Previous customer research conducted on the information contained in state pension forecasts has not highlighted the need to include information on average healthy life expectancy.

The inclusion of such information will be assessed in future customer research conducted into pensions education material.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many retirement pensions in payment continue after the death of the beneficiary; what the cost to public funds was in the last year for which figures are available; and what proportion of these payments was recovered. [129979]

Malcolm Wicks: In 2002–03, 48,946 cases were identified with a value of £9.848 million for State Pension paid after death. £1.606 million of this was recovered. The balance is in the process of recovery. In addition, a further £5.928 million was recovered in 2002–03 against debts identified in previous years.

Source:

Central Debt Management System

Sign Language

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the answer of 17 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 527W (1) what progress the British Sign Language working group has made towards distributing the money his Department has allocated to the recognition of British Sign Language; and if he will make a statement on how this programme of initiatives will increase access to services and the number of BSL interpreters; [130769]

(2) if he will make a statement on his Department's continued support for the implementation of the recognition of British Sign Language further to the money allocated on 18 March. [130723]

Maria Eagle: The British Sign Language working group, which is an advisory group, has met twice to consider priorities for allocating the additional £1 million we have made available, and to consider draft specifications for initiatives which would best support the 18 March statement. We have received the working group's recommendations which involve action to promote access for BSL users through awareness raising, and action which will contribute to establishing a framework to support BSL tutors. Over time this will result in an increase in the number of BSL interpreters. Officials will shortly start a formal tendering exercise.

The working group will also be doing some longer-term strategic thinking and we will receive their advice in due course on policies and initiatives which would, over time, further increase access for deaf people who use BSL.

Social Security Funding

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much social security funding was distributed to *(a)* local authority welfare rights units, *(b)* Citizens Advice Bureaux and *(c)* other voluntary or private agencies in each local authority in England in each of the last 10 years. [130415]

Malcolm Wicks: Direct funding of outside bodies by the Department for Work and Pensions is confined to a small number of grants, the details of which can be obtained from the Department's annual Accounts, copies of which are available in the Library. The grants enable the voluntary sector to work with the Department in: helping people with disabilities to live more independently in the community; providing mobility related assistance; and free help and advice to members of the public regarding their company, stakeholder or personal pension scheme.

However, the voluntary sector is a key partner of the Department's and a number of organisations receive funding under contract to the Department for the delivery of specific services. For example, assisting in the Department's efforts to help people back into work, particularly those facing the greatest disadvantages, by delivery of a range of employment and training programmes, including elements of the New Deal.

Unclaimed Benefits

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate the Department has made of the amount of unclaimed benefits, broken down by type of benefit, in each of the last 10 years. [130050]

Mr. Pond: Estimates of the amount of additional income-related benefits payable if everyone entitled took-up their entitlement for the full period, broken down by benefit, can be found in the statistical report "Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take-Up", which is published annually by the Department. Copies of the publications are available in the Library.

Winter Heating Allowance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the total value of the winter heating allowance for each year from 1998–99 to 2005–06; and if he will make a statement. [130142]

Malcolm Wicks: The information in respect of winter fuel payments, which were introduced in 1997, is in the table.

£ million

	Winter fuel payments
Expenditure	
1997–98	191
1998–99	194
1999–2000	759
2000–01	1,749
2001–02	1,692
Estimated expenditure	
2002–03	1,712
Forecast expenditure	
2003–04	1,891
2004–05	1,911
2005–06	1,933

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Abattoirs

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she plans to publish the action plan to support small and medium-sized abattoirs and slaughterhouses. [128331]

Mr. Bradshaw: The steps we are taking to help ensure there is a network of abattoirs and meat cutting plants complement our wider "Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food" which was published on 12 December 2002. Currently, in co-operation with the Meat and Livestock Commission and the Meat Hygiene Service, we are compiling data on the slaughtering and meat supply industry to help us develop a strategic approach. Compilation and analysis is expected to be complete by mid October and data suitable for the public domain will be published thereafter.

Bluetongue Disease

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the risk of an outbreak of bluetongue disease in the United Kingdom; and what discussions she has had with her colleagues in the Northern Ireland Office to prevent the spread of this disease to Northern Ireland. [130404]

Mr. Bradshaw: My officials have consulted experts at the Institute of Animal Health on the risk of an outbreak of Bluetongue in the UK. The Institute of Animal Health is both the National and European Union reference laboratory for the disease. At present the risk is considered to be very low.

Bluetongue is active in countries around the Mediterranean basin. It is transmitted by midges of Culicoides species. However, the disease has recently spread a little further north and the possible causes of this move are being investigated. The main vector of disease (Culicoides imicola) has not been found in the UK.

A Bluetongue Control Strategy for the United Kingdom is already in place and is available on the Defra website at http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/notifiable/disease/bluetongue_control_strategy.PDF Defra staff have worked closely with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Northern Ireland (DARDNI) on the preparation of contingency plans as required under Directive 2000/75/EC. These Contingency Plans can be obtained from:

Defra—

via the Defra website—

http.V/www:defra.gov.uk/animaih/diseases/notifiable/disease/bluecontin.PDF and a copyhas been placed in themain Defra library.

DARDNI—

from the Animal Disease Control Branch, Dundonald House, Belfast.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made in reforming the Common Agricultural Policy during the last six months. [129495]

Mr. Bradshaw: On 26 June EU Agriculture Ministers agreed an historic reform of the Common Agricultural Policy which will provide a more sustainable basis for European agriculture, as well as reducing some of the damaging impacts of the CAP on developing countries.

The agreement breaks the link between farm subsidies and production in order to reconnect farmers to their markets, reduce damaging environmental impacts and reduce bureaucracy, this is at the heart of our approach to sustainable food and farming. Subsidies will also be dependent on farmers meeting standards in areas like environmental protection, and animal health and welfare. For the first time there will be an EU wide switch of money from production subsidies to environmental and rural development objectives, and there is a new financial discipline which will trigger action to reduce subsidies if CAP expenditure is in danger of exceeding the agreed budget ceilings.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the latest estimate is of the cost to the average family of the Common Agricultural Policy through higher consumer prices and levels of taxation. [129439]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 11 September 2003]:* The consumer cost of the CAP can be estimated by examining the difference between UK and world prices for agricultural food products. The notional taxpayer contribution to CAP expenditure can also be estimated though, in practice, UK taxpayers contribute to the whole EU budget rather than to specific components. Our latest provisional estimates for 2002 show a cost of the CAP to a notional family of four from higher consumer prices and levels of taxation of approximately £8 to £9 a week.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many claimants received a direct grant or subsidy under the Common Agricultural Policy in the latest year for which information is available; and of the payments made, how many were *(a)* under £1,000, *(b)* between £1,000 and £2,500, *(c)* between £2,500 and £5,000, *(d)* between £5,000 and £10,000, *(e)* between £10,000 and £100,000, *(f)* between £100,000 and £500,000, *(g)* between £500,000 and £1 million and *(h)* in excess of £1 million. [129441]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 11 September 2003]:* The number of claimants who received direct grants or subsidies under the Common Agricultural Policy in England was 93,542 in the 12 month period to 31 August 2003. This is broken down into the requested payment bands in the following table. We are unable to identify the total payments received by any individual or business making applications using more than one name. The payment of direct grants and subsidies in that period in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland was the responsibility of the devolved authorities in Scotland and Wales and the Northern Ireland Administration.

Direct subsidy payments in the 12 month period to 31 August 2003

Band	*Total value of payments in period*	*Number of claimants*
(a)	Under £1,000	22,740
(b)	Between £1,000 and £2,500	12,578
(c)	Between £2,500 and £5,000	11,226
(d)	Between £5,000 and £10,000	12,048
(e)	Between £10,000 and £100,000	32,884
(f)	Between £100,000 and £500,000	2,027
(g)	Between £500,000 and £1,000,000	28
(h)	In excess of £1,000,000	11
Total number of claimants		93,542

Commercial Whaling

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with representatives of the Icelandic Government to try to prevent them from resuming commercial whaling. [130567]

Mr. Bradshaw: When Iceland rejoined the IWC in October 2002, its application for renewed membership contained a declaration in which Iceland undertook (under certain conditions) not to resume commercial whaling until 2006 at the earliest.

When the Icelandic Ambassador to London called on me on 3 September, I stressed that the Government (and the UK public) was highly critical of Iceland's unjustified and unnecessary plan to kill 38 minke whales this year, (and possibly larger numbers of minke, sei and fin whales next year).

On 10 September the British Ambassador to Reykjavik delivered a demarche on behalf of the Governments of the UK and 22 other countries, urging the Icelandic Government to rescind its decision to start so-called "scientific" whaling.

Construction Industry (Magnesium Carbonate)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the letter from the former Minister of State for Environment of 16 September 2002 (171977/JW), what action has been taken since April 2003 on the use of magnesium carbonate in the construction industry. [128414]

Mr. Morley: BRE (formerly known as the Building Research Establishment) submitted a successful bid in the 2002 DTI Partners in Innovation competition round to carry out an independent assessment of the potential benefits, including those of carbon sequestration and low embodied energy, reported for novel cements such as magnesium carbonate. The research work is due to commence shortly with a completion date of March 2006. The outcome will be a report assessing the technical and environmental performance of novel cements, their cost competitiveness compared to conventional cements, and, if appropriate, their potential use in the UK construction industry.

EU Enlargement

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of enlargement of the European Union and the rights of nationals of the applicant countries to work in other member states on English farming and horticulture. [129772]

Mr. Bradshaw: After accession on 1 May 2004 nationals from the new member states and members of their families will have the right to work in the United Kingdom on the same basis as those from existing member states. While this will significantly increase the potential pool of workers able to work in English farming and horticulture, a number of independent studies looking at the scale of migration flows into the EU after enlargement suggest that there are likely to be only relatively small inflows into the UK. Predictions of migration flows are difficult to make, even at national level, so the impact on a particular sector such as farming and horticulture is even more uncertain.

Farm Incomes

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average income of individual farms and farm businesses was for those in the top and the bottom deciles in the past 12 months; and what the average percentage of total income subsidies represented in both groups. [129867]

Mr. Bradshaw: The average net farm income, output and subsidies received by farms in the top and bottom deciles in England in 2001–02 is given in the table:

£ per farm

	Bottom decile	*Top decile*
Net farm income	-37,600	98,500
Total farm output	212,800	476,500
Total subsidies	37,300	42,500
Subsidies as a percentage of output	18	9

Note:
These data refer to farms not subject to compulsory cull of livestock during the Foot and Mouth Disease crisis in 2001.
Source:
Farm Business Survey.

The table provides data only for farms with an economic size of at least eight European Size Units (ESUs), the minimum considered necessary to occupy a full time farmer. Although nearly half the farms in England fall below this size threshold, they account for only 2 per cent. of agricultural output.

Net farm income is defined as the return to the principal farmer and spouse for their labour and on the tenant-type capital of the business.

Farming Industry

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research her Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the effect on the various sectors of the UK farming industry of (i) the legislative burden and (ii) the exchange rate of continental European competitors; and if she will make a statement. [130206]

Mr. Bradshaw: No specific research has been commissioned or evaluated by the Department which compares the total level of legislative burden on the farming industry in the UK with the rest of the European Union. However, as set out in the "Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food" the Government are committed to better regulation. This means legislating only where necessary, doing so in a light touch way and deregulating and simplifying existing legislation wherever possible. While some regulation is unavoidable if the Government are to safeguard public and animal health, environmental matters or public funds, modern regulations must not only be effective and efficient, but must also deliver improvements in ways which minimise the burden of compliance on the industry.

The euro-sterling exchange rate is an important determiner of UK farm incomes. A provisional assessment of the impact of the recent recovery in the euro and medium term prospects for UK farm incomes if this is sustained is published on the Defra website (http://statistics.defra.gov.uk/esg/reports/repfi.pdf).

Fisheries

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made in dealing with diseases among fish living in restricted cage accommodation. [128820]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 10 September 2003]:* Most farming of fin fish in cages takes place in the Scottish marine environment. The health status of farmed fish in the UK including those held in caged systems is closely monitored by the Fish Health Inspectorates reporting to the different administrations in the UK to ensure full compliance with the EU fish health regime as laid down in Council Directives 91/67/EEC and 93/53/EEC and implementing national legislation. The UK has a high fish health status and is currently free from the most serious fish diseases, Infectious Salmon Anaemia (ISA), Viral Haemorrhagic Septicaemia (VMS) and Infectious Haematopoietic Necrosis (IHN). Stringent control programmes operate to maintain freedom from these diseases and to control other serious diseases which may be present in some farmed fish populations such as Infectious Pancreatic Necrosis (IPN) and Bacterial Kidney Disease (BKD).

In March this year the Scottish Executive published "A Strategic Framework for Scottish Aquaculture" which outlines a range of issues which are being addressed to help protect the health and welfare of fish farmed in caged and other systems including better management techniques to help reduce the incidence of sea lice infestation.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will grant a full aid package for the South West Fishing Fleet and a decommissioning programme following the proposal by the European Commission for a recovery programme for the northern hake stock including associated stocks of megrim and anglerfish; and if she will make a statement. [129414]

Mr. Bradshaw: Grant aid for the fishing industry in south-west England is available under the EU FIFG structural fund programme. The current decommissioning scheme for fishing vessels in England is targeted to the sectors of the fleet which are subject to limits on their time at sea under the interim EU requirements for effort control to conserve cod.

The Government will consider whether there is a need for additional funds to be made available to the south-west fleet in the light of the outcome of EU negotiations on the Commission's proposal for a recovery plan for Northern hake.

Food Consumption

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the percentage of food consumed in the United Kingdom that was sourced in the United Kingdom in the last five years, broken down by sector. [128247]

Mr. Bradshaw: The following table shows the level of UK self-sufficiency in specified commodities for each of the last five years (1998–2002).

Production as percentage of total new supply for use in UK

Commodity	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Total Cereals	115	109	113	97	99
Oilseed rape	97	97	83	66	86
Sugar	72	71	71	67	63
Potatoes	88	90	89	84	87
Vegetables	71	72	71	66	66
Fruit	9	12	10	10	9
Beef and veal (home fed)	83	80	79	72	72
Mutton and lamb (home fed)	101	104	100	78	84
Pork (Home fed)	112	100	92	73	76
Poultrymeat	93	90	89	91	91
Processed Liquid Milk[1]	99	100	100	100	100
Butter	78	71	64	63	69
Cheese	64	63	63	66	68
Cream	151	146	137	134	148
Hen eggs	97	93	91	88	87

[1] Processed liquid milk is the product following separation and treatment suitable for the drinking milk market.

Note:
2002 data are provisional and subject to amendment.
Source:
Agriculture in the United Kingdom 2002—Data prepared by Statistics (Commodities and Food) Accounts and Trade, ESD, DEFRA.

Illegal Meat Imports

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's progress in preventing illegal meat from entering the United Kingdom. [129494]

Mr. Bradshaw: Progress against the Government's Action Plan on illegal imports in the financial year 2002–03 is reported in the Annual Review of Controls on Imports of Animal Products. Copies have been placed in the House Libraries.

The 2003–04 Action Plan is appended to the Review, and we are working with HM Customs and other responsible parties to implement it. Progress will be reported in the next Annual Review to be published after the end of this financial year.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many spot checks have been carried out on illegal meat imports at each designated port of entry into the UK since December 2002. [129498]

John Healey: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on 8 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 99W. Customs carry out their anti-smuggling controls on the basis of risk assessment and intelligence.

Lantra

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list research projects that Lantra has undertaken over the last two years. [130590]

Alun Michael: I understand that Lantra carries out projects on behalf of a range of clients, and so comprehensive information is not available within the Department. As an example of work commissioned by my Department, Lantra recently completed a study of the training and development needs of rural businesses to inform Defra's Learning Skills and Knowledge Review.

Milk

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much milk was produced surplus to requirements by UK farmers; and how much milk was imported in each of the last 10 years. [128259]

Mr. Bradshaw: It is difficult to determine how much milk is produced that is "surplus to requirements". This will depend on whether one considers the requirements of UK processors and food manufacturers, both for products intended for domestic consumption or export, or the requirements of UK consumers. Nevertheless, I hope the data tabulated as follows on UK imports, exports, production, domestic use and self-sufficiency for the major milk products since 1991 gives an indication of the position.

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
UK imports[1]						
Unprocessed liquid milk[2]					186	114
Processed liquid milk[3]	37	67	54	68	89	65
Butter	103	129	110	121	114	114
Cheese	192	232	189	212	210	239
Cream	3	3	2	3	4	6
Condensed milk	10	13	10	13	12	10
Milk powder (full cream)	3	5	6	7	8	10
Skimmed milk powder	8	26	13	12	14	13

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
UK exports[1]						
Unprocessed liquid milk[2]	72	70	92	133	191	178
Processed liquid milk[3]	3	3	3	4	5	5
Butter	39	51	52	53	53	51
Cheese	51	48	57	59	55	59
Cream	38	41	69	84	79	96
Condensed milk	47	57	50	52	65	58
Milk powder (full cream)	67	84	57	65	77	75
Skimmed milk powder	71	45	55	61	56	20
UK production[1]						
Unprocessed liquid milk[2]	14,778	14,679	14,742	14,981	14,683	14,680
Processed liquid milk[3]	6,903	6,980	7,008	6,966	7,128	7,041
Butter	132	127	141	148	133	130
Cheese	309	332	338	341	362	377
Cream	254	240	255	274	281	281
Condensed milk	198	206	191	196	181	206
Milk powder (full cream)	79	84	71	83	90	83
Skimmed milk powder	143	106	132	142	117	108
UK domestic use (disappearances)[1]						
Unprocessed liquid milk[2]	14,706	14,610	14,650	14,848	14,678	14,616
Processed liquid milk[3]	6,937	7,044	7,059	7,030	7,212	7,101
Butter	206	207	228	231	201	189
Cheese	458	512	466	500	522	557
Cream	220	202	187	194	207	191
Condensed milk	164	160	151	155	130	160
Milk powder (full cream)	14	7	19	26	20	19
Skimmed milk powder	86	91	88	89	82	75
UK self sufficiency[4]						
Unprocessed liquid milk[2]	100	100	101	101	100	100
Processed liquid milk[3]	100	99	99	99	99	99
Butter	67	62	71	69	69	68
Cheese	69	64	72	69	70	68
Cream	116	119	136	142	136	148
Condensed milk	123	128	127	125	141	130
Milk powder (full cream)[5]						
Skimmed milk powder[6]	179	121	148	152	157	107

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002 (provisional)
UK imports[1]						
Unprocessed liquid milk[2]	132	133	115	108	65	74
Processed liquid milk[3]	63	57	38	36	31	26
Butter	111	105	114	118	115	101
Cheese	240	257	277	255	273	267
Cream	11	11	8	10	18	12
Condensed milk	13	13	14	14	14	11
Milk powder (full cream)	10	10	10	11	8	10
Skimmed milk powder	13	11	14	13	23	14
UK exports[1]						
Unprocessed liquid milk[2]	299	384	479	458	426	433
Processed liquid milk[3]	6	5	7	7	3	4
Butter	74	65	56	45	41	37
Cheese	53	55	62	58	68	77
Cream	92	101	96	82	84	95
Condensed milk	63	64	51	31	22	30
Milk powder (full cream)	106	106	92	102	86	113
Skimmed milk powder	45	34	60	112	30	23
UK production[1]						
Unprocessed liquid milk[2]	14,848	14,640	15,020	14,496	14,715	14,906
Processed liquid milk[3]	6,949	6,939	7,056	6,969	6,961	6,956
Butter	139	137	141	132	126	141
Cheese	377	366	368	340	395	396
Cream	268	266	275	270	263	257
Condensed milk	214	192	177	162	161	149
Milk powder (full cream)	96	97	102	105	83	105
Skimmed milk powder	109	107	102	83	71	71

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002 (provisional)
UK domestic use (disappearances)[1]						
Unprocessed liquid milk[2]	14,681	14,388	14,656	14,146	14,335	14,547
Processed liquid milk[3]	7,006	6,991	7,087	6,998	6,989	6,978
Butter	182	172	187	209	200	196
Cheese	561	577	583	536	596	584
Cream	187	176	188	198	197	174
Condensed milk	166	141	138	146	150	131
Milk powder (full cream)	—	1	20	15	2	3
Skimmed milk powder	59	57	68	50	56	45
UK self sufficiency[4]						
Unprocessed liquid milk[2]	101	102	102	102	103	102
Processed liquid milk[3]	99	99	100	100	100	100
Butter	79	78	71	64	63	64
Cheese	67	64	63	63	66	65
Cream	144	151	146	137	134	140
Condensed milk	130	136	127	111	105	114
Milk powder (full cream)[5]						
Skimmed milk powder[6]	141	127	180	-527	111	115

[1] Thousand tonnes except figures for liquid milk, which are expressed in million litres.
[2] Unprocessed liquid milk is milk in its natural state prior to any form of separation or processing and may be destined for either the drinking or manufacture market.
[3] Processed liquid milk is the product following separation and treatment suitable for the drinking milk market.
[4] Production as percentage of total new supply.
[5] As the UK only makes negligible use of full cream milk powders the self sufficiency calculation is meaningless.
[6] Self sufficiency rate for 2000 is not representative of other years because of the sale of intervention stocks of skimmed milk powder.
Source:
Agriculture in the United Kingdom (2002).

Organic Farmers

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what grants are available to organic farmers from her Department. [130102]

Mr. Bradshaw: Support for farmers converting to organic farming, as well as on-going post-conversion aid to encourage the continued management of the land in an environmentally beneficial way, is available under the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS), which is part of the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP). The rates of aid under the OFS are as follows:

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Conversion option						
Land eligible for Arable Area Payment Scheme and land in permanent crops (except top fruit orchards)	225	135	30	30	30	450
Top Fruit orchards (cherries, pears, plums and apples—other than cider apples)	600	600	600	30	30	1,860
Other improved land	175	105	23	23	23	349
Unimproved grassland, rough grazing and "managed land"	25	10	5	5	5	50
Maintenance option						
Land eligible for Arable Area Payment Scheme and land in permanent crops (except top fruit orchards)	30	30	30	30	30	150
Top Fruit orchards (cherries, pears, plums and apples—other than cider apples)	30	30	30	30	30	150
Other improved land	23	23	23	23	23	115
Unimproved grassland, rough grazing and "managed land"	5	5	5	5	5	25

The Department also provides free advice to prospective organic farmers through the Organic Information Conversion Service (OCIS) and the Department's R&D programme includes a large component dealing with research on organic farming.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many Questions directed to her remain unanswered. [130757]

Alun Michael: I and my ministerial colleagues attach great importance to answering hon. Members' questions promptly. I am afraid that it is not always possible to do so, if questions, for example, ask for historical or detailed information.

At 16 September, hon. Members had tabled 4,059 parliamentary questions to my Department; 313 questions were either transferred to another Department or withdrawn by Members.

Of the remaining 3,746 questions, 57 are in the process of being drafted.

Phytophthora Ramorum

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many enforcement notices have been issued to destroy trees or shrubs infected by phytophthora ramorum. [130537]

Mr. Bradshaw: As at 16 September 2003, Enforcement notices have been issued for the destruction of trees and shrubs in respect of 305 confirmed outbreaks of phytophthora ramorum in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many inspectors are employed to prevent the import of *(a)* trees and *(b)* shrubs infected with phytophthora ramorum. [130609]

Mr. Bradshaw: 76 inspectors from Defra's Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate continue to monitor trees and shrubs imported from other member states or from third countries to ensure they meet import requirements and are not carrying the disease. This work forms part of their other duties including the survey work for this disease and a wide range of activities related to other plant pests and diseases. Similar action is being taken by the devolved Authorities and the Forestry Commission.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cases of infection by phytophthora ramorum have been identified in national parks. [130615]

Mr. Bradshaw: Seven cases of infection by phytophthora ramorum have been identified at garden centres and nurseries located within the national parks.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cases of infection by phytophthora ramorum have been identified in trees or shrubs on Forestry Commission land. [130618]

Mr. Bradshaw: No cases of infection by phytophthora ramorum have been identified in trees and shrubs on Forestry Commission land.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many laboratory tests have been carried out in the last three months on plant material suspected of being infected with the phytophthora ramorum fungus; and what proportion has proved positive. [130643]

Mr. Bradshaw: During June, July and August 2003, 2,192 individual laboratory tests have been carried out on samples of plant material suspected of being infected with phytophthora ramorum fungus in the United Kingdom. 11.8 per cent. of these samples were confirmed as being infected with this pathogen.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will place in the Library a list of the *(a)* parks, *(b)* gardens and *(c)* other premises in England in respect of which enforcement notices have been issued to destroy trees or shrubs infected with phytophthora ramorum; [130644]

(2) if she will take steps to ensure that the public is aware of the identity of the premises of *(a)* wholesalers and *(b)* retailers of plants and shrubs where infections of phytophthora ramorum have been discovered. [130645]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 16 September 2003]*: The Government believe the public should have as much information as possible about this disease and is happy to meet all reasonable requests for information. However, the information obtained specifically in relation to individual premises, has been gathered in pursuance of the Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate's statutory powers and on the basis of this information, where necessary, enforcement notices are issued to ensure compliance. In the absence of a statutory obligation to publish details identifying individual premises, to publish such details without consent could seriously jeopardise our ability to work with business in relation to the reporting and control of phytophthora ramorum.

Sea Defences (Tendring)

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total investment in sea defences along the coast of the Tendring Peninsula was *(a)* from 1992 to 1997 and *(b)* since 1997. [129560]

Mr. Morley: Operational responsibility for coastal defences (against erosion and flooding from the sea) along the Tendring Peninsula rests with Tendring District Council and the Environment Agency. Spending by those bodies on capital improvements and maintenance of coastal defences was *(a)* 9.6 million from 1992–93 to 1996–97 and *(b)* 15.1 million from 1997–98 to 2002–03. Much of the expenditure has been supported by Central Government funding through Defra grants on capital works and Revenue Support Grant from ODPM.

Softwood

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what volume of softwood was imported into the United Kingdom originating from *(a)* the EU, *(b)* Norway, *(c)* the Baltic countries and *(d)* Russia in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000, (iii) 2001 and (iv) 2002. [129659]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 15 September 2003]*: The figures for softwood imports are presented in the following tables.

Thousand m³ underbark

	1999	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Roundwood				
EU	73	85	165	273
Norway	4	4	2	0
Baltic countries[1]	50	29	27	38
Russia	2	25	54	52

Thousand m³

	1999	2000	2001	2002
Sawn wood				
EU	3,566	3,804	3,937	4,082
Norway	115	106	104	87
Baltic countries[1]	1,989	2,347	2,298	2,441
Russia	404	499	583	701

[1] Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what volume of softwoods was imported in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000, *(c)* 2001 and *(d)* 2002. [129660]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 15 September 2003]:* The figures for softwood imports are presented in the following table.

	Roundwood (Thousand m³ underbark)	*Sawn Wood (Thousand m³)*
1999	165	6,642
2000	190	7,338
2001	256	7,221
2002	366	7,585

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what volume of softwoods was harvested in the United Kingdom in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000, *(c)* 2001 and *(d)* 2002. [129662]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 15 September 2003]:* The figures are presented in the following table:

	Thousand m³ underbark
1999	6,867
2000	6,926
2001	6,997
2002	6,832

Note:
The figures are based on delivery volumes to wood processing industries.

Sudden Oak Death Disease

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in what species of plant sudden oak death disease has been identified in the UK within the last year. [130612]

Mr. Bradshaw: As at 16 September 2003, phytophthora ramorum (the cause of the syndrome sudden oak death in the USA) has been confirmed in the following species:

Family	*Species*
Caprifoliaceae	Viburnum davidii
	Viburnum farreri (syn. Viburnum fragrans)
	Viburnum lantana
	Viburnum opulus
	Viburnum plicatum
	Viburnum tinus
	Viburnum x bodnantense (Viburnum farrerii x Viburnum grandiflorum)
	Viburnum x burkwoodii (Viburnum carlesii x Viburnum utile)
	Viburnum x carlcephalum x Viburnum, utile
	Viburnum x pragnense (Viburnum rhytidophyllum x Viburnum utile)
Ericaceae	Kalmia latifolia
	Leucothoe fontanesiana
	Pieris formosa var. forrestii
	Pieris formosa var. forrestii x Pieris japonica
	Pieris japonica
	Rhododendron augustinii
	Rhododendron balfourianum
	Rhododendron brachycarpum
	Rhododendron ferrugineum
	Rhododendron ponticum
	Rhododendron hybrids—hybrids found infected have been derived from crosses involving Rhododendron arboreum, Rhododendron campylocarpum, Rhododendron catawbiense, Rhododendron campylocapum, Rhododendron caucasicum, Rhododendron dichroanthum, Rhododendron facetum, Rhododendron forresti, Rhododendron fortunei, Rhododendron galactinum, Rhododendron geraldii, Rhododendron grande, Rhododendron griffithianum, Rhododendron griersonianum, Rhododendron mscimum, Rhododendron ponyivum, Rhododendron dmitnoeii, Rhododendron strigillosum. Rhododendron viscidifolium, Rhododendron wardii, Rhododendron yakushimanum and possibly other species
Oleaceae	Syringa vulgaris
Taxaceae	Taxus baccata
Theaceae	Camellia japonica, Camellia reticulata, Camellia x williamsii (Camellia saluenensis x Camellia japonica)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people are being employed by her Department *(a)* directly and *(b)* on a sub-contractual basis to survey gardens and nurseries for sudden oak death disease; and at what cost. [130613]

Mr. Bradshaw: About 85 inspectors from Defra's Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate, the Horticultural Marketing Inspectorate and the Central Science Laboratory are employed directly to survey gardens and nurseries for phytophthora ramorum in England and Wales.

Five people from outside the Department have been employed on a contractual basis for the period July to October 2003.

The cost of employing staff working directly on survey work and of those employed on a contractual basis since 1 January 2003 is estimated at about £400,000.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cases of sudden oak death disease have been reported to her Department in the last year. [130614]

Mr. Bradshaw: Nine confirmed reports from private nurseries and other independent consultants have been received by the Department in the last year.

Sugar

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received on the proposed reform of the sugar regime [129636]

Mr. Bradshaw: Although the European Commission have said that they are considering the future of the EU sugar regime, no specific proposals for reform have so far been tabled.

We have, however, received representations from a range of interests within the UK industry including beet growers, beet processors, cane refiners and companies who use sugar in the manufacture of their products, as well as from our traditional overseas cane sugar suppliers and organisations concerned with developing country issues.

There appears to be a general consensus that the current sugar regime is unsustainable, although there are differing views on the best way forward. We shall take account of all the views expressed to us as discussions proceed.

Sustainable Development

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she has taken to make available to the general public information on the work of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development. [130358]

Mr. Morley: The work of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) is communicated comprehensively through the United Nations1 own website http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/index.html and wider communications programme. Our own UK Government Sustainable development website http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/ contains a link to this site. Non-governmental stakeholders are consulted by HMG officials prior to the UK's attendance at these meetings, and are usually represented on the Government delegation. CSD's work is also included in Command Paper 5898 "The United Kingdom in the United Nations" published this month http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/Cm5898.pdf, copies of which were deposited in the HoC Library on Friday 5 September.

Varroa Mites

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to combat the spread of Varroa mites; and if she will make a statement. [130356]

Mr. Bradshaw: Defra funds a range of measures to assist the beekeeping sector in England through its bee health programme, which is delivered by the National Bee Unit (NBU), part of the Central Science Laboratory. In 2003–04, the programme will cost £1.235 million Under these measures, the NBU provides a free diagnostic and inspection service to beekeepers for varroa as well as training and technical advice to help them become more self-reliant in controlling the pest through improved bee husbandry. The NBU is also carrying out routine screening throughout England for varroa mites that are resistant to authorised pyrethroid-based treatments, having first detected them in August 2001. This year Defra also expects to spend around £248,000 on research and development to support our bee health work. This includes a three-year project that extends an earlier MAFF-funded investigation by Horticulture Research International on the use of entomopathogenic fungi as a biological control of varroa.

Arrangements for bee health matters in Scotland and Wales are the responsibility of the Scottish Executive and Welsh Assembly respectively.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what percentage of offenders subject to an antisocial behaviour order have subsequently been arrested *(a)* once, *(b)* one to five times and *(c)* more than five times. [129099]

Ms Blears: Information on the number of persons who have been issued with an antisocial behaviour order and have subsequently been arrested is not collected centrally.

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of individuals in the age groups *(a)* 12 to 14, *(b)* 15 to 17, *(c)* 18 to 21 and *(d)* 21 plus, who have been found guilty of breaching an antisocial behaviour order received (i) a custodial sentence and (ii) a detention and training order; and if he will make a statement. [129114]

Ms Blears: The available information, relating to England and Wales for the years 1999, 2000 and 2001 is contained in the table.

Data for 2002 will be available in December 2003.

Persons found guilty of breaching an Anti-Social Behaviour Order and the percentage given custodial sentences, England and Wales, 2000 and 2001

Year and age group	*Total found guilty*	*Percentage receiving detention and training order*	*Percentage receiving other forms of immediate custody*[1]
2000			
Age 12–14	10	40	10
Age 15–17	21	38	—
Age 18–21	5	—	20
Age 21 plus	30	—	70

Persons found guilty of breaching an Anti-Social Behaviour Order and the percentage given custodial sentences, England and Wales, 2000 and 2001

Year and age group	*Total found guilty*	*Percentage receiving detention and training order*	*Percentage receiving other forms of immediate custody*[1]
2001			
Age 12–14	34	29	—
Age 15–17	92	43	—
Age 18–21	42	—	43
Age 21 plus	90	—	51

[1] Includes secure training order, young offender institution and immediate imprisonment.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions there have been in the last six months for breach of an antisocial behaviour order in the north-west of England. [129470]

Ms Blears: Statistics of court proceedings for 2003 will be published in the autumn of 2004.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many unaccompanied minors sought asylum in the UK in each of the last three years. [127863]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is given in the table. The data relate to applicants aged 17 or under. The data for 2002 are from new, more reliable, electronic sources, and are not fully comparable with data for previous years obtained from manual counts.

Unaccompanied children[1,2,3] *aged 17 or under, applying for asylum in the United Kingdom, 2000 to 2002*

	Total	*Applied at Port*	*Applied in Country*
2000[4]	2,735	1,395	1,340
2001[4]	3,470	1,645	1,820
2002[5,6]	6,200	1,240	4,955

[1] Figures are rounded to the nearest 5.

[2] Unaccompanied at point of arrival, aged (or if no proof) determined to be 17 or under and not known to be joining a relative or a guardian in the UK

[3] Figures exclude age dispute cases.

[4] May exclude some cases fodged at Local Enforcement Office and postal applications.

[5] Figures not comparable with manual counts data prior to 2002.

[6] Provisional figures.

Information on asylum applications from unaccompanied asylum seeking children is published annually in the statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom", a copy of which is available in the Library, and from the RDS web site:

http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what support and advice he is giving to refugee and asylum support organisations to assist asylum seekers with travel to Croydon to lodge an asylum application; [128201]

(2) what support he is giving to asylum seekers to enable them to travel to Croydon to lodge an asylum application. [128202]

Beverley Hughes: Those seeking asylum should claim on arrival in the United Kingdom or as soon as practicable thereafter. If their claim is post arrival it should be made at an Asylum Screening Unit (ASU). The three ASUs are in Croydon, Liverpool and Solihull.

There is no provision to fund the travel of those seeking to lodge an application for asylum.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the operation of section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. [128203]

Beverley Hughes: Section 55, which came into force on 8 January 2003, is one of a package of robust Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act measures to restore credibility to the UK asylum system.Since February 2003, a number of test cases have been before the Courts. The most recent Court of Appeal hearing was on 27 August and the judgement is expected shortly. Statistics on the operation of section 55 have been published in the Home Office Asylum Statistics for the first and second quarters of 2003. We will continue to monitor its impact closely.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on how the European legislation on immigration will affect the amount of money the Government spends on financial aid for asylum seekers. [128682]

Beverley Hughes: As part of the package of measures designed to establish minimum standards on asylum foreseen by the 1999 Tampere European Council, the Council Directive laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers (2003/9/EC) contains provisions for financial aid for asylum seekers. This lays down minimum standards for the material reception conditions of asylum seekers and their dependants.

Member states are required to transpose the Directive by the 6 February 2005 and work to take this forward is continuing. This will have a limited effect as the UK already meets the directives' provisions relating to financial allowances for asylum seekers.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to ensure that asylum seekers who come to the United Kingdom as children do not stay for a period longer than that to which they are permitted once they turn 18 years of age. [128683]

Beverley Hughes: Unaccompanied asylum seeking children who are permitted to stay solely because of a lack of reception and accommodation arrangements in their country are not granted leave beyond their 18th birthday. Once they turn 18 they must leave or apply for an extension of their leave. If that application is refused, or they do not submit any such application, their details are passed to the relevant local enforcement office for removal action. Removal action in these cases is undertaken as a matter of priority.

Mr. Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum applications were *(a)* accepted and *(b)* rejected in (i) 2002 and (ii) 1997. [128727]

(2) what percentage of asylum applications were rejected in each year since 1997. [128728]

Beverley Hughes: The table shows the outcomes of initial decisions made by the Home Office since 1997. These statistics relate to initial decisions only and exclude the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions. Initial decisions in any given year may relate to applications made in earlier years.

Overall, it is estimated that 42 per cent. of the applications in 2002 resulted in grants of asylum (10 per cent.) or of exceptional leave to remain (23 per cent.), or in allowed appeals (10 per cent.). Comparable data are not available for 1997, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost by examination of individual case files. Exceptional leave to remain has now been replaced by Humanitarian Protection or Discretionary Leave with a much tighter set of criteria.

Information on the number of asylum applications and initial decisions is published quarterly on the Home Office website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Initial decisions[1,2] on applications received for asylum in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, 1997 to 2002

	Initial Decisions[3]											
	Cases considered under normal procedures								*Backlog clearance exercise*			
Year	*Total decisions*		*Recognised as refugee and granted asylum*		*Not recognised as refugee but granted exceptional leave*		*Total Refused*		*Granted asylum or exceptional leave under backlog criteria[5,6]*		*Refused under backlog criteria[5,7]*	
		[4]		[4]		[4]		[4]		[4]		[4]
1997	36,045	(100)	3,985	(11)	3,115	(9)	28,945	(80)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1998	31,570	(100)	5,345	(17)	3,910	(12)	22,315	(71)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1999	33,720	(100)	7,815	(36)	2,465	(12)	11,025	(52)	11,140	(90)	1,275	(10)
2000	109,205	(100)	10,375	(11)	11,495	(12)	75,680	(78)	10,325	(89)	1,335	(11)
2001(R)	120,950	(100)	11,450	(9)	20,190	(17)	89,310	(74)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2002(P)	83,540	(100)	8,270	(10)	20,135	(24)	55,130	(66)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

[1] Decisions do not necessarily relate to applications received in the same period.
[2] Figures (other than percentages) rounded to the nearest 5.
[3] Information is of initial decisions, excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.
[4] Percentages for cases considered under normal procedures and those within the backlog clearance exercise are calculated separately.
[5] Cases decided under measures aimed at reducing the pre 1996 asylum application backlog.
[6] Includes cases where asylum or exceptional leave has been granted under the backlog criteria.
[7] Includes some cases where the application has been refused on substantive grounds.
(P) Provisional figures.
(R) Revised figures.
n/a Not available.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will outline the procedure used in deciding where to place asylum seekers. [128734]

Beverley Hughes: The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) is responsible for accommodating and supporting destitute asylum seekers and their dependants. Asylum seekers who request that accommodation be provided to them will be dispersed on a "no-choice" basis to one of the cluster areas around the UK. Cluster areas are ideally based in towns and cities where suitable accommodation is available and where there is potential to provide a link with existing multi-cultural communities and where the support of local voluntary and community groups is available.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much individual asylum cases cost *(a)* central and *(b)* local government in each year from 1997 to 2002. [128735]

Beverley Hughes: The Immigration and Nationality Directorate within the Home Office assumed responsibility for the direct costs of supporting asylum seekers from April 1999. The average costs per week for the years 1999–2000 to 2001–02 are as follows.

	Singles	*Families*
1999–2000 (estimated)	150	220
2000–01	134	287
2001–02	122	278

The costs include payments made to local authorities for accommodation, as well as those made to the private sector. Further information on any other costs to local or central government, specifically related to asylum seekers, is not currently available.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans to provide transport to allow asylum seekers held at the proposed Bicester centre to travel to Aylesbury and other towns; and what his estimate is of the cost of such a service to public funds. [129397]

Beverley Hughes: As a requirement of planning approval the operating contractor of the accommodation centre at Bicester will run a minibus service, principally for the use of staff and visitors, to provide an alternative means of travel to the private car. The service will operate between the accommodation centre and the towns from which it is anticipated that the centre's employees will be drawn; these are expected to be Bicester, Oxford,

Aylesbury and Banbury. Asylum seekers supported at the accommodation centre will be allowed to use the minibus service subject to capacity, as well as compliance with reporting and residence requirements.

We are in the process of appointing a contractor to design, build and operate the accommodation centre. Therefore the estimated cost of the minibus service is commercially confidential.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers are detained under immigration law; and of these how many are awaiting removal from the UK. [130018]

Beverley Hughes: As at 28 June 2003 (the latest date for which information is available) there were 1,355 asylum seekers detained solely under the Immigration Act. Information on the number of these who were awaiting removal would be available only by examination of individual case-files at disproportionate cost.

Information on the number of asylum applicants detained solely under the Immigration Act is published quarterly on the Home Office website: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html. Data for those detained at the end of September 2003 will be published at the end of November.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children of asylum seekers have been held in detention in each of the last 12 months; and what the average length of time is for which each child is held. [130019]

Beverley Hughes: Information on the number of children of asylum seekers detained in each of the last 12 months and the length of time for which they were held could be collated only at disproportionate cost. However, we are reviewing the quality of data on all immigration detainees to assess whether more data can appropriately be published and, if so, how.

Cigarette Lighters

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Cigarette Lighter Refill Gas Regulations; what plans he has for *(a)* increasing the age limit and *(b)* introducing a licensing system; and if he will make a statement. [128344]

Caroline Flint: The Cigarette Lighter Refill (Safety) Regulations 1999 prohibit the sale or supply of such refills to anyone under 18 years. The Regulations came into force on 1 October 1999 and are enforced by local authority trading standards officers. Local Trading Standards departments have a key public protection role, carrying out surveys within their areas to find out whether shops are selling lighter refills to under age persons, and investigating possible legal breaches.

Although the number of deaths resulting from the abuse of butane gas refills and other volatile substances has remained fairly stable since 1991, the Government remain very concerned about any young person who dies in this way. We do not believe, however, that increasing the age limit to which the Regulations apply would help to any significant degree. Nor do we think a licensing system would add significantly to the controls which are already in place.

In partnership with other Government Departments including DfES, Home Office and DTI, the Department of Health is putting together a comprehensive action plan, within the context of wider substance misuse policy, covering key areas such as prevention, manufacturing, research and legislation. A first draft should be available in autumn 2003.

Country Policy and Information Unit

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the *(a)* content and *(b)* use made of the country information produced by the Country Policy and Information Unit. [129766]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Office published research "Country of Origin Information: A User and Content Evaluation" on 1 September 2003. The full text of the research is available at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/r211.pdf.

The research was commissioned by the Country Information and Policy Unit and conducted by the Research Development and Statistics Directorate (RDS) in 2001. The findings of the research relate to the position at that time and many of the report's recommendations have since been addressed.

In particular, the Nationality Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 provided for an independent Advisory Panel on Country Information to be established to provide recommendations on the content of Home Office country information, to help ensure the content of Home Office country information, to help ensure that it is as objective as possible. The advisory panel will also meet the report's recommendations that an expert panel of topic and country specialists should be set up to review CIPU's material and that steps should be taken to improve consultation with external stakeholders.

The Home Secretary is satisfied that the country of origin information produced by the Home Office is accurate and objective and the expert input of the advisory panel can only serve to enhance the quality of CIPU's material.

The advisory panel is chaired by Professor Stephen Castles, Director of the Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford and held its first meeting on 2 September 2003. The minutes of the panel's meetings will be published in due course.

Depleted Uranium

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the dangers to those who come into close proximity to depleted uranium stolen from a site in Thurrock during July; and if he will make a statement. [126315]

Mr. Browne: I have been asked to reply.

A container made from depleted uranium was in a van stolen from inside a warehouse on 7 July 2003. The container was part of the normal emergency equipment carried in case there should be a problem with a source of ionising radiation that had not yet been loaded into the van. The Health and Safety Executive investigated the incident and concluded that the container would be safe to approach and handle. Even if it was mistreated,

such as by fire or explosion, only very extreme conditions would result in the possibility of airborne radioactivity that could lead to low level internal exposure.

There is no reason to believe that the theft of the van was other than opportunistic.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to extend the introduction of the one year period of reflection rule in cases of domestic violence to asylum seeking women, and to women and children who are victims of trafficking for sexual purposes. [127281]

Beverley Hughes: There is provision in the Immigration Rules to assist those who have sought leave to enter based upon marriage, whose marriage subsequently breaks down during the probationary period as a result of domestic violence, to settle in the UK, providing they meet certain criteria. There are no plans at the moment to extend this provision to asylum seeking women, or to women and children who are victims of trafficking for sexual purposes. We believe there are already adequate safeguards in the system for their protection, and that decisions on each case should be made on the basis of individual circumstances.

Essex Police Force

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the approved strength of the Essex police force is; and how many vacancies there are. [129666]

Ms Blears: The Home Office does not set approved strengths for police forces. Essex police had 2,995 police officers on 31 December 2002, a record number. The force employed 1,571 police staff on 31 March 2002, the latest date for which figures are available.

I understand that the force intends to take on 105 officers during the remainder of 2003–04.

Experience Corps Scheme

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the Experience Corps Scheme. [130722]

Fiona Mactaggart: The experience corps has been a useful project, which has enabled us to learn a number of lessons about attracting older volunteers. The experience corps were recently evaluated and the findings suggest that there were concerns surrounding their figures on volunteer recruitment. While they have attracted a significant number of volunteers, they are likely to fall short of their target.

Our current funding agreement with the experience corps comes to an end in March 2004. We have decided not to continue to fund the experience corps beyond that date. We are still, however, committed to encouraging older people to volunteer.

Hoax Telephone Calls

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals suspected of making hoax calls to the emergency services have *(a)* been arrested and *(b)* had their telephones disconnected in the last two months for which figures are available. [129480]

Ms Blears: Information on the number of persons arrested for making false calls in order to cause annoyance is not collected centrally.

Immigrants (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the Scottish Executive on attracting immigrants to Scotland. [127209]

Beverley Hughes: Discussions between Home Office and Scottish Executive Ministers take place regularly on a number of issues, and these have included the Scottish Executive's interest in UK managed migration policies.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff there were in each office of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate in the last year for which figures are available; and what the remit of each office is. [127206]

Beverley Hughes: The number of full-time equivalent staff in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate by business area, at 30 June 2003 was:

	Number
Immigration Service—(including border controls and removals)	6,500
Asylum support, asylum casework and appeals	2,830
Managed Migration (applications for leave to remain, nationality and work permits)	1,690
Non-operational (includes policy development and corporate services)	1,880

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set up an Immigration and Nationality Directorate office in Scotland. [127210]

Beverley Hughes: The Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) has a Public Enquiry Office (PEO) in Glasgow. In May 2003, responsibility for this office transferred from UK Immigration service to the IND. Since this transfer, the Glasgow office has expanded their services and now deal with all types of straightforward applications for leave to remain and settlement. Applicants are required to make an appointment prior to attending. There are no plans for any further offices to be opened in Scotland.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many items *(a)* deposited at and *(b)* posted to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate have been (i) lost at and (ii) stolen from each office in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [128770]

Beverley Hughes: Information dating back to 1993 for each of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate's buildings is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. I would refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 12 June 2003, *Official*

Report, column 1053W, and would add that as at 4 September this year, 2,872 requests for the return of documents had been received and 571 lost passport letters issued. A range of measures including the setting up of secure handling areas and the early return of sponsors' passports are currently being put in place to improve significantly IND's ability to find and return documents at the time of request.

Immigration

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 11 July, *Official Report*, column 1068W, on immigration, how long it takes on average to perform the checks to which he refers. [128518]

Beverley Hughes: When the decision is taken by an immigration officer to release a person on temporary admission the number of checks undertaken depend upon the individual circumstances of the case.

The average time taken to perform the checks varies in view of this. However, given that some checks, such as the computerised Warnings Index, involve using information readily to hand to the Immigration Service they can be carried out immediately. Where the information has to be obtained from an outside agency, such as the police national computer or electoral registrar, the checks can take longer, but should still ordinarily be completed within a matter of hours.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce British citizenship tests for immigrants; how long they would take to complete; who will oversee the testing; and if those who fail will be deported. [129106]

Beverley Hughes: The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act received Royal Assent on 7 November 2002. Section One, which relates to these requirements, will come into force by Commencement Order once its new requirements have been finalised.

The "Life in the UK" advisory group, appointed by my right hon. friend the Home Secretary to look at the content, conduct and implementation of programmes of study, published its final report on 3 September. A copy has been placed in the Library. The Government are considering their recommendations and no firm conclusions have yet been made about the nature of tests and who will oversee them.

Naturalisation applicants must have indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom. They will not therefore be liable to removal solely on the basis of their lack of language skills or knowledge of life in the UK. As now, naturalisation applicants will be able to re-apply if they are unsuccessful.

Independent Documentation Centre

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the outcome was of the consultation in 1998 on the establishment of an independent documentation centre to provide country of origin information in assessing the cases of asylum seekers; [129767]

(2) if he will make it his policy to establish an independent documentation centre. [129768]

Beverley Hughes: The Consultative Group on Country Information reported in December 1998. It recommended, inter alia, that an independent documentation centre should be established to provide country of origin information for use in the asylum process.

Home Office Ministers considered this recommendation, but at that time IND's priority was to support the recovery of asylum decision output through the expansion and improvement of advice to caseworkers, including implementing other Consultative Group recommendations about the format and content of country of origin information material produced by the Home Office's Country Information and Policy Unit (CIPU).

In 2001, the Home Office commissioned research into the production and use of its country of origin information material. By this time, the CIPU had established a track record for accurate research, with its reports being widely used as source documents by other countries and for material produced by non-governmental organisations. It was therefore decided to await the outcome of the research before proceeding with a feasibility study on the Independent Documentation Centre proposal.

The research, which was published on 1 September 2003 in a report entitled "Country of Origin Information: a user and content evaluation", noted the on-going debate about whether an independent documentation would be the best way to assure the objectivity of the country of origin material used in the asylum process. The report suggested that if it was decided not to proceed with the independent documentation centre, measures should be taken to ensure country of origin information produced by CIPU was impartial and objective. The full text of the research is available at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/r211.pdf

Rather than establishing an independent documentation centre, it was decided to build upon CIPU's existing structures and strengths, and introduce measures to ensure the quality and accuracy of the country information products used in the asylum process. The Nationality Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 provided for an independent Advisory Panel on Country Information to be established to provide recommendations on the content of Home Office country information and help to ensure that it is as objective as possible. The Advisory Panel will also meet the report's recommendations that an expert panel of topic and country specialists should be set up to review CIPU's material and that steps should be taken to improve consultation with external stakeholders.

The Advisory Panel is chaired by Professor Stephen Castles, Director of the Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford and held its first meeting on 2 September 2003. The minutes of the panel's meetings will be published in due course.

Iraq

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with *(a)* the Secretary of State for Defence and *(b)* the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth

Affairs on allowing British police officers to volunteer to go to Iraq to help train the Iraqi Police Force; and if he will make a statement. [129326]

Ms Blears: I have agreed to a request from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to ask the Association of Chief Police Officers to seek up to 200 volunteers to create a pool of United Kingdom police officers for potential deployment to Iraq to assist in the reform of the Iraqi Police Service. The pool is intended to sustain the deployment of up to 100 United Kingdom officers at any one time.

Officers will be deployed only when conditions are right. The security position will be reviewed regularly.

Leave to Remain

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what basis the figures of *(a)* £155 and *(b)* £250 were set for charges for in-country applicants wishing to extend their stay in the UK. [127102]

Beverley Hughes: Fees are set under Treasury rules to recover the full administrative cost entailed in considering applications and no more. This is calculated by taking the overall costs of processing applications divided by the number of decisions we expect to make.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the estimated revenue per year is from the introduction of charges for in-country applicants wishing to extend their stay in the UK; what estimate he has made of the impact in the UK; and if he will consider applications for the fee to be waived. [127106]

Beverley Hughes: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced in February 2002 in his White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain", that he would be introducing charges in order to fund the modernisation of IND. The regulations were laid on 10 July. IND already charges fees in respect of Nationality applications and for Travel Documents, and since 1 April 2003 for Work Permits.

We continue to welcome the many foreign nationals who choose to study, work and live in the UK—they boost our economy and add to our thriving cosmopolitan society. Many apply to extend their stay each year, and it is right that they should meet the costs of that. The Government have made significant investment in recent years to improve all aspects of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, including the standard of service people receive when they submit applications. Charging will help us to continue to improve the efficiency and speed with which we process these applications, leading to ever higher levels of customer service.

I have decided that all those who can legally be charged will be. Therefore, the only exemptions to this are EU nationals (and third country nationals who are their dependants); those making a claim for asylum or for protection under Article 3 of the ECHR; people applying for Indefinite Leave to Remain on the grounds of domestic violence where, at the time of making of the application, the applicants appear to be destitute; and those exempt from immigration control.

Any further exemptions would leave an unfair burden on the general taxpayer or threaten the much needed service improvements which will be facilitated by charging.

The estimated revenue for introducing charging for leave to remain applications is £90 million.

Merseyside Police Force

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* civilian support staff were employed by Merseyside Police in (i) 2000, (ii) 2001 and (iii) 2002. [129472]

Ms Blears: The information is given in the table.

Merseyside Police[1]

	Police officers	*Police staff*
31 March 2000	4,085	1,458
31 March 2001	4,081	1,418
31 March 2002	4,125	1,532
31 December 2002	4,180	—

[1] Figures are full time equivalents

Source:
Home Office Statistics

National Crack Plan

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the impact of the National Crack Plan. [130492]

Caroline Flint: The National Crack Plan, which was published in December 2002, recognises the particular harm done by the supply and use of crack cocaine. It requires action under all four aims of the Updated Drug Strategy and focused particularly on the 37 areas that have been identified as high crack areas.

Examples of resulting activity include; the introduction of legislation to fast track the closure of crack houses; the introduction, in collaboration with overseas Governments, of measures to reduce the supply of cocaine from the Caribbean; the piloting and evaluation of crack treatment services to expand provision and determine what works best, and the extension of diversionary activity programmes for young people to 31 high crack areas.

There is still much to do to combat the harm caused by crack cocaine, but we are determined, through the National Crack Plan, to make a difference.

Operation Ulysses

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what financial and administrative support his Department provides to Operation Ulysses concerning control of migration to Europe. [130020]

Beverley Hughes: The Government have provided no direct financial support to Operation Ulysses. Contributions have instead been made in kind to both phases of the operation.

The UK adopts a multi-agency approach to combating illegal immigration. For the first phase, HM Customs and Excise committed a Cutter vessel; and for the second phase the Ministry of Defence provided a Nimrod aircraft for surveillance purposes. All the travel and subsistence costs incurred by the crews involved will be reimbursed through European Community funding. Additionally, the Home Office and the British embassy in Spain have provided administrative assistance.

Passports

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to protect the United Kingdom from the use of illicit passports. [128663]

Beverley Hughes: The United Kingdom has a range of measures aimed at preventing people using forged or improperly obtained documents entering the country. These include a network of Airline Liaison Officers overseas, a comprehensive visa strategy, international co-operation, development of expertise within the Immigration Service and special exercises.

In the UK, the lead is taken by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate National Forgery Unit (NFU) who have links with other agencies including the police. The NFU provides equipment, training and intelligence to immigration officers in the UK, and to those serving abroad, including Airline Liaison Officers. Immigration officers, specially trained in forgery detection work, are based at all UK ports. 9,664 fraudulent documents were detected at UK ports in 2002, an increase of 46 per cent. over 2001.

The NFU organises regular exercises targeting specific documents, which show a high rate of recorded abuse, and these have proven particularly effective. NFU also have a permanent presence at IND's main offices in Croydon, where they examine documents submitted in support of applications for leave to remain. In 2002, a total of 461 fraudulent documents was detected there.

As part of its external borders policy, the UK maintains a network of 25 Airline Liaison Officers at key locations abroad. They offer advice, training and expertise to airlines, to help prevent the carriage of inadequately documented passengers to the UK. British immigration officers are now working alongside their French counterparts in Calais, offering advice on the validity of travel documents. The UK also works closely with the EU and G8 states, exchanging information and expertise to combat passport abuse.

Visa Requirements

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will lift the visa requirement on Slovak citizens for entry into the United Kingdom. [129435]

Beverley Hughes: I would refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) on 13 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 160W.

Work Permits

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many work permits have been granted to people seeking to work in the British information technology industry in each of the past five years. [128313]

Beverley Hughes: The number of work permit approvals in respectof the computer services industry in each of the past five years is as follows:

	Number
1998	5,786
1999	7,266
2000	17,288
2001	23,203
2002	19,877

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons the India Business Group was asked to join the Work Permits Panel; and if he will make a statement on the balance of its membership *(a)* inside and *(b)* outside the UK. [128314]

Beverley Hughes: Work Permits (UK) seeks to ensure that the membership of the Information Technology, Communications and Electronic Sector Advisory Panel is balanced and represents all those stakeholders which have a direct interest in the operation of the work permit arrangements in this area and which are able to provide WPUK with advice on labour market conditions in this area. The membership of the panel comprises employer and employee groups, as well as other Government Departments and non-governmental organisations. The India Business Group was invited to join the Panel on the basis that it represents businesses located in the United Kingdom which are users of the work permit arrangements.

Yarlswood

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will widen the terms of reference of the inquiry by Mr. Stephen Shaw into the Yarlswood fire to include the conduct of Group 4 *(a)* in the period leading up to 14 February 2002 and *(b)* on the night of 14 February 2002. [129675]

Beverley Hughes: There is no need to do so. Stephen Shaw's terms of reference are such as to allow him to consider matters leading up to the events on 14 and 15 February last year.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will urge Mr. Stephen Shaw to take evidence in public during the inquiry into the events surrounding the fire at the Yarlswood Removal Centre on 14 February 2002. [129676]

Beverley Hughes: No. In view of the interest shown in the events at Yarlswood last February, we concluded that it would be preferable for the outcome of the investigation to be fully independent. Stephen Shaw was asked to take overall responsibility for the investigation. A full public inquiry would not be appropriate.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the report presented to him in September 2002 by Mr. Stephen Moore about events leading up to, and including, the fire at Yarlswood on 14 February 2002. [129681]

Beverley Hughes: No. The material gathered by Stephen Moore must be regarded as work in progress, which Stephen Shaw will draw on as part of his inquiry.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 8 September 2003, ref.128526, on Afghanistan, if he will make a statement on *(a)* the strategic importance of the Afghan National Army in promoting stability in Afghanistan and *(b)* the development of the Afghan National Army. [130695]

Mr. Ingram: The Bonn Agreement of 5 December 2001 acknowledges that responsibility for security in Afghanistan lies with the Afghans themselves, but seeks international assistance in establishing and training new security forces. The creation of an effective and representative Afghan National Army is therefore an essential component in ensuring the future security and stability of Afghanistan. Development of the Afghan National Army continues.

Aircraft Carriers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how the revised costing for the carrier programme will be accommodated within his Department's budget; and if he will make a statement. [128341]

Mr. Ingram: As announced by the Secretary of State for Defence in January this year, our estimate of the cost of the Demonstration and Manufacture (D and M) of the future carriers is around £3 billion. This estimate will be refined further during the remainder of the Assessment phase prior to establishing D and M contracting arrangements currently planned for Spring 2004.

Funding for this project has been already been set aside within the defence budget and is allocated to the Equipment Plan as is the case with all defence equipment projects.

Commissioned Ship Logs

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions in the last 10 years logs of commissioned ships have been lost overboard. [130941]

Mr. Ingram: Ships logs, which are produced by all units on a monthly basis, are occasionally lost. This may be for a variety of reasons. There is however, no central record which could provide details of missing or lost logs. That information could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Defence Exhibition

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total cost of holding the Defence Systems and Equipment International exhibition in September was to *(a)* the Ministry of Defence, *(b)* the Department of Trade and Industry, *(c)* Trade Partners UK and *(d)* other government departments and agencies; and if he will make a statement. [129776]

Mr. Ingram: In reply to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) on 20 May 2003, *Official Report*, columns 677–78 W, I provided an estimate of the direct cost of the exhibition to the Ministry of Defence. The final cost remains to be established, but we do not expect it to exceed the estimated figure.

The Metropolitan police estimate a total of £1.48 million in additional pay and other costs associated with policing the event. British Transport Police estimate their cost of policing the event as £250,000. As above, the final cost remains to be established.

Neither the Department of Trade and Industry nor Trade Partners UK incurred costs.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the incidents involving Argentinian military personnel and *(a)* British troops and *(b)* Falkland Islands residents in the past six years. [129906]

Mr. Ingram: The armed forces of the United Kingdom and Argentina participate in a range of joint activities as part of a bilateral defence relations programme. We are unaware of any significant incidents between Argentinian military personnel and our own armed forces or residents of the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* fisheries protection vessels and *(b)* maritime patrol aircraft have been operational in the Falkland Islands in each of the past six years. [129908]

Mr. Ingram: Fisheries Protection Vessels are provided by the Falklands Islands Government. In addition, the Falkland Islands Patrol Vessel is permanently stationed in the Falkland Islands, with the exception of short absences for visits and maintenance periods in South America. Maritime air patrol tasks are undertaken by assets permanently stationed in the Falkland Islands (currently a C-130 and a VC-10), and on various occasions over the past six years specialist maritime patrol aircraft have also been deployed to the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the strength of *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Royal Navy and *(c)* the Royal Air Force in the Falkland Islands has been in each of the last six years. [129910]

Mr. Ingram: Force level in the Falkland Islands for each of the past six years, broken down by service, are shown in the following table. All figures are rounded to the nearest 10, and, due to rounding methods used, totals may not equal the sum of the individual components.

	April 1997	April 1998	April 1999	April 2000	April 2001	April 2002	October 2002
Naval Service	260	100	50	270	40	40	40
Army	620	600	640	580	680	640	480
RAF	900	850	860	770	740	670	670
Total	1,790	1,550	1,550	1,620	1,460	1,350	1,200

Force Readiness

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Naval service and *(c)* RAF units, required to be rapidly available, are at (i) very high, (ii) high and (iii) medium states of readiness. [125605]

Mr. Ingram: Data on forces at very high, high and medium states of readiness were collected in support of the Spending Review 2000 Public Service Agreement (PSA) target that by 2005 a minimum of 90 per cent. of rapidly available military units (described as those held at very high, high or medium readiness) should be at the required states of readiness. Information against this PSA target was last collected for the quarter ending 31 March 2003. Performance for that quarter was:

Percentage of Rapidly Available Elements at Required Readiness States (quarter ending 31 March 2003)

Service	Proportion at very high, high and medium readiness (%)
Royal Navy and Royal Marines	91
Army	[1]29
Royal Air Force	91

[1] Army data excludes forces deployed in the Gulf or recovering from emergency fire-fighting activities as these were not rapidly available for alternative tasks.

In order to provide a more comprehensive view of military preparedness, performance against Spending Review 2002 PSA Target 3 is assessed on the basis of the readiness state of all forces. Details of the basis for the assessment are set out in the Technical Note to the 2002 PSA targets, available on the Department's website http://www.mod.uk. At the end of the first quarter of financial year 2003–04, the first time when performance was measured against Spending Review 2002 targets, 77 per cent. of force elements were assessed as meeting their readiness requirement with no critical weakness. These figures reflect the impact of both Operation FRESCO and Operation TELIC.

I am withholding more detailed information about the readiness of our armed forces under Exemption 1 the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (1997).

Future Rapid Effects System

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will incorporate TRACER technology in Future Rapid Effects System; and what assessment he has made of the possibility of incorporating TRACER technology in Future Rapid Effects System under an open international competition for Future Rapid Effects System development and manufacture. [130625]

Mr. Ingram: The Future Rapid Effect System project is currently in the Concept Phase. We are reviewing procurement options and no decision has yet been made on how to take the programme forward. It is too early to state what technologies might be incorporated in the eventual solution but where possible we shall look to exploit past development activity.

HMS Sheffield

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answers of 9 September 2003, ref 127274 and to the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) of 4 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 174W, on HMS Sheffield, what the reasons are for the difference between the cost of operating HMS Sheffield in 2001–02 and the cost of operating ships in the same class in the same year; and if he will make a statement. [130315]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave on 4 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 174W. There was a misprint in *Hansard* and the figure for HMS Sheffield's annual operating costs should have read £35 million. The average annual operating costs for Batch 3 Type 22 Frigates I gave in my answer of 9 September 2003, ref 127274 was £11.9 million.

The apparent discrepancy arose because the cost for HMS Sheffield included an element for depreciation and cost of capital, but excluded annual maintenance, while the costs provided for Batch 3 Type 22 Frigates included maintenance but excluded depreciation and cost of capital.

When compared on a "like-for-like" basis, the average annual operating costs, based on direct costs charged to FY01-02, including costs for manpower, fuel, stores and other costs (such as port visits) were £8.1 million for HMS Sheffield and £8.3 million for Batch 3 Type 22 Frigates.

Iraq

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the source was for the allegation at Paragraph 2, Page 19, of the dossier on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction of September 2002, that the Iraqi military were able to deploy chemical or biological weapons within 45 minutes of an order to do so; what attempts were made to verify the source of this information prior to deciding to include it in the dossier; on what date this information became available to British intelligence sources; whether details were passed on to the intelligence agencies of the United States and other allies for comment prior to publication; and whether protection has been offered or provided to the source since receipt of the information. [128519]

Mr. Rammell: I have been asked to reply.

As the ISC has reported, based on the evidence of the Chief of SIS, the source of the report was a senior military officer in a position to comment on the deployment of chemical and biological weapons. The

source was regarded as reliable. The report was issued on 30 August 2002. The dossier which included the information about the 45-minute claim was passed for comment to the US Government. It has been the practice of successive Governments not to comment on issues relating to the validation or protection of intelligence sources. The security and intelligence agencies are not within the scope of the Code of Practice to Government Information.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the basis for the assertion made by the Director of the Joint US-UK Iraq Survey Team, that Saddam Hussein had given orders for his commanders to fire chemical shells at forces invading Iraq. [128806]

Mr. Ingram: It is not the Department's policy to comment on remarks allegedly made in a classified briefing to United States Congressional Committees. Coalition forces continue actively to pursue intelligence leads, documentation and individuals connected with Iraq's WMD programmes through the Iraq Survey Group.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what total additional amount has been spent by his Department on operations in Iraq in each month since 1 January; [130282]

(2) what the cost was of deployment of troops to Iraq's neighbouring countries in the build up to the invasion of Iraq; [130281]

(3) if he will estimate the total additional monthly cost of British operations in Iraq; [130280]

(4) if he will estimate the extra monthly cost of one member of personnel in the occupation force in Iraq. [130277]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence identifies the costs of Operations in terms of the net additional costs it has incurred. The costs which the MOD would have incurred had the operation not been undertaken—expenditure on wages and salaries or on conducting training exercises, for example—are deducted from the total costs of the operation.

Calculating all the costs of military action will take some time since they will include the cost of ammunition, bombs and guided weapons consumed in excess of peacetime levels and the cost of repairing and replacing equipment destroyed and damaged. We do however estimate the cost of preparatory activities in 2002–03 at around £700 million, less than the £1 billion set aside at Spring Supplementary Estimates 2002–03. This estimate includes the procurement or modification of equipment, increased maintenance and stock consumption, civil sea and air charter and provision of infrastructure in-theatre. A figure for total costs in 2002–03 including the cost of operations up to 31 March 2003 will be published in the Ministry of Defence's Resource Accounts.

It is too early to estimate the costs likely to arise in 2003–04. Once these are known, additional funding will be sought in the normal way through Supplementary Estimates.

Accounting records and costs are not maintained on a daily basis while force levels have fluctuated considerably during 2003–04. As a result, to provide daily or per person average costs would be misleading.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of how long it will take to clear unexploded ordnance in Iraq. [129863]

Mr. Ingram: The United Kingdom and other Coalition Armed Forces and Non-Governmental Organisation teams have been engaged in Explosive Ordnance Disposal tasks since before the end of the conflict in Iraq. To date, UK and other Coalition Explosive Ordnance Disposal Teams in the UK Area of Operation have completed over 1,500 tasks and destroyed over 500,000 individual munitions. Those munitions include not only those dropped or fired by Coalition Forces, but also many from the Iraq-Iran war as well as mines laid, ordnance fired or dropped, and stores of ammunition and other ordnance left by Iraqi military and paramilitary forces. It is not yet possible to say either what percentage of unexploded munitions have been cleared nor when all the work will be completed.

Logistical Support

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what effects he expects the changes proposed in the Government's review of logistic support to the armed forces to have on the jobs of those employed in providing this logistical support. [130785]

Mr. Ingram: The review team recently reported on the delivery of logistic support and made recommendations for improved effectiveness and efficiency. The proposed changes will have implications for Service and civilian personnel, but it is too early to say what the effects will be. These will be addressed in detail during the next phase of work, where some of the review's recommendations will be piloted and trialled. Any changes with significant investment or civilian employment implications will be subjected to thorough investment appraisals and trades union consultation before decisions are made. Personnel who are potentially affected will be kept closely in touch with developments. No changes will be made until we are confident that they can deliver better and more cost-effective logistic support to the front line.

Manning Control Review

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers since 1997 who were subject to Manning Control *(a)* submitted a redress to the Army Board and were still dismissed and *(b)* had their redress rejected by the Board, but were retained. [130007]

Mr. Caplin: None.

Medical Personnel

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* main battle tanks and *(b)* other armoured fighting vehicles, broken down by type, were deployed to Iraq for the purposes of military operations there; what proportions of each of these (i) were destroyed or seriously damaged in action, (ii) were

rendered unserviceable through other causes and (iii) were operationally available at the conclusion of the fighting. [112088]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is as follows.

116 Challenger 2 Main Battle Tanks (CR2) were deployed to theatre.

982 other armoured fighting vehicles were deployed on OP TELIC broken down as follows:

Vehicle type	*Number*
Challenger Armoured Recovery Vehicles (CRARRV)	26
WARRIOR—Medium Armoured Fighting Vehicles	239
CVR(T)—Light Armoured Fighting Vehicles	212
FV 430—Light Armoured Fighting Vehicles	430
AS90—155mm Artillery Piece	32
AVLB—Armoured Vehicle Launching Bridge	12
AVRE—Armoured Vehicle Royal Engineer	12
CET—Combat Engineer Tractor	19

Of the vehicles listed in the previous table, five were destroyed as follows:

Vehicle type	*How destroyed*
CR2	Tank Battle
CVR(T) SCIMITAR	Air Land Battle
CVR(T) SCIMITAR	Air Land Battle
CVR(T) SCIMITAR	Rolled Vehicle
CVR(T) SULTAN	Drowned Vehicle

Availability of armoured vehicle types fit for combat between the beginning of the deployment and the conclusion of decisive combat operations on 30 April varied as shown:

Vehicle type	*% Availability*
CR2	73–97
CRARRV	81–100
WARRIOR	74–96
CVR(T)	78–100
FV430	75–98
AS90	88–100
AVLB	75–100
AVRE	67–100
CET	11–83

Availability of armoured vehicles fit for combat at the conclusion of decisive combat operations is listed.

Vehicle type	*% Availability*
CR2	73
CRARRV	95
WARRIOR	78
CVR(T)	80
FV430	84
AS90	100
AVLB	100
AVRE	100
CET	53

These figures were compiled under operational conditions and may therefore be subject to further revision.

Project Isolus

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to select the final short-list for Project Isolus; what the extent of *(a)* public and *(b)* local authority consultation will be; and if he will make a statement. [130525]

Mr. Ingram: We expect to short-list those companies to be invited to undertake more detailed negotiations with the Ministry of Defence on Project Isolus by spring 2004. The public consultation, which will inform our evaluation of outline proposals to determine this short-list, will comprise a number of focus groups in areas near to proposed sites. A citizen's panel, made up of random members of the public and representatives from the areas affected, will also be convened. In addition, the dedicated project website will be refreshed with unclassified versions of the proposals and will provide a discussion forum for the public to express their views.

Consultation with local authorities affected by the outline proposals will be carried out and a stakeholder's group, to include representatives from local authorities and NGOs, will be convened. Lancaster University, who are running the consultation process on our behalf, are also contacting the local authorities to arrange a series of local access events such as drop-in centres or public meetings.

It is expected that detailed negotiations with short-listed companies will take up to three years to complete, and that a preferred bidder, solution and location will be selected in 2006. There will be further public consultation during this time.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consents would be required by a private company wishing to use a site in Scotland for *(a)* breaking up decommissioned nuclear submarines and *(b)* storing nuclear waste. [130993]

Mr. Ingram: Any private company involved in breaking up or storing the radioactive waste from decommissioned nuclear submarines on sites in Scotland would be subject to regulation by the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate, and would require consent from the Department of Transport if the radioactive waste were to be moved by land. The break-up site would also be subject to regulation by the Chairman of the Naval Nuclear Regulatory Panel who follows the principles laid down in the Nuclear Reactors (Environmental Impact Assessment for Decommissioning) Regulations 1999. With regard to radioactive waste management, both regulation and policy are devolved and, as such, are matters for the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and the Scottish Executive respectively. Planning consents are similarly devolved.

Low-Flying

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what his policy is in respect to low-flying RAF aircraft over tourism-dependent towns in coastal areas; [130458]

(2) whether the RAF training sorties are instructed to avoid coastlines. [130462]

Mr. Caplin: RAF Flying training sorties are not instructed to avoid coastlines as flying in such areas can be considered a normal part of training. However, in order to reduce the danger of bird strikes from concentrations of seabirds or waterfowl, pilots are advised as a general rule to cross coastlines obliquely, and at a minimum altitude of 500 feet. In addition they are advised to avoid crossing the coast over resorts and holiday beaches. It is not possible to completely avoid all tourist-dependent towns as to do so would increase the impact of low-flying on other nearby areas.

Rosyth Dockyard

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the role of Rosyth dockyard in the *(a)* construction and *(b)* equipping of the (i) Type 45 and (ii) new aircraft carrier; [130664]

(2) whether Rosyth dockyard will be *(a)* the whole ship integration yard for the new aircraft carrier and *(b)* involved in the block construction of the new aircraft carrier. [130665]

Mr. Ingram: As the Secretary of State for Defence announced on 30 January, our view at this stage of the assessment process is that the future aircraft carriers should be built by a combination of four UK shipyards. In addition to the Babcock BES facility at Rosyth, we would envisage construction work being carried out by: BAe Systems Naval Ships yard at Govan; Vosper Thornycroft at Portsmouth; and Swan Hunter on Tyneside. The involvement of other United Kingdom shipyards has not, however, been ruled out. No final decisions on the allocation of work—including the construction of blocks and final assembly site—will be made until the Demonstration and Manufacture contract is let in Spring 2004.

We envisage no involvement for Rosyth dockyard in either the construction or the equipping of the Type 45 Destroyer.

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the role of Rosyth dockyard as a strategic asset for the Naval Fleet. [130666]

Mr. Ingram: Capacity within United Kingdom industry is kept under review to ensure that the requirements of the Navy for surface warship refit and repair work can be met. Rosyth dockyard has provided a significant element of that capacity for many years, both before and since privatisation, and should continue to do so as we move towards increased competition. In addition, Rosyth dockyard is one of four yards named earlier this year as having the potential for involvement in the construction and assembly of the new future aircraft carriers.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Costs

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost was to her Department for *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers, *(b)* taxis, *(c)* train travel, *(d)* the use of helicopters, *(e)* airline tickets and *(f)* chartered aeroplanes in each year since 1997. [123085]

Mr. Caborn: With regard to the cost of ministerial cars and drivers and the cost of planes chartered for ministerial travel, the Chief Executive of the Government Car and Despatch Agency (Mr. Nick Matheson) wrote to the hon. Member with the information yesterday, 17 September 2003. Copies of the letter have been placed in the Libraries of the House. The following table shows Departmental expenditure on travel by *(a)* taxis and *(b)* train and air combined. An analysis of expenditure on travel by train and various modes of air travel is not recorded on the Department's accounting system and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

All official travel is undertaken in accordance with the rules contained in the Department's staff handbook and all ministerial travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

£

Financial year	*Taxis*	*Rail and Air travel*
2002–03[1]	16,109.08	518,549.28
2001–02	20,811.56	433,910.61
2000–01	26,414.81	456,909.51
1999–2000	21,685.66	421,189.86
1998–99	15,890.53	317,802.36
1997–98	12,967.23	289,035.97

[1] Costs shown in 2002–03 are provisional pending finalisation of the Department's annual accounts.

Digital Satellite Television

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will take steps to seek to ensure that ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 can continue to be received free of charge by digital satellite television. [130011]

Estelle Morris *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has written to the chief executives of ITV, Channel Four and Five to ask them how they intend to solve this very serious issue. Their responses indicate they are considering various options. We are very closely monitoring their discussions, which I understand are making progress, and while it will not be appropriate to comment on current commercial negotiations, I will place details of their outcome on our website www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk.

Films (North East England)

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what financial support her Department has given to film making in the North East of England in each of the last five years. [130391]

Estelle Morris: The following table shows the level of Government and National Lottery support through the UK Film Council and its predecessors for film in the North East of England in the last five years.

	Government funding (£)	Lottery (£)	Total
1998–99	[1]764,579	169,467	934,046
1999–2000	[2]778,245	8,400	786,645
2000–01	[3]452,800	0	452,800
2001–02	280,000	323,530	603,530
2002–03	400,000	405,026	805,026
Total			3,582,047

[1] This figure includes £445,800 from the British Film Institute.
[2] This figure includes £417,405 from the British Film Institute.
[3] This figure includes £272,274 from the British Film Institute.

Notes:

1. In 1998–99 and 1999–2000, the Regional Arts Board (funded by the Arts Council of England) was responsible for supporting filmmaking in the English regions.
2. Since April 2000, the UK Film Council has been responsible for providing Government and lottery funding to the English regions through its Regional Investment Fund for England Fund. Northern Film and Media, established in October 2002, is the regional screen agency for the North East of England.

Free-to-view Broadcasting

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with broadcasters on the retention of free-to-view broadcasting on digital satellite. [130582]

Estelle Morris: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has written to the chief executives of ITV, Channel Four and Five to ask them how they intend to solve this very serious issue. Their responses indicate they are considering various options. We are very closely monitoring their discussions, which I understand are making progress, and while it will not be appropriate to comment on current commercial negotiations, I will place details of their outcome on our website www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with OFCOM on free-to-view broadcasting on digital satellite. [130584]

Estelle Morris: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not had any formal discussions with OFCOM on this matter, as OFCOM has not yet been transferred any relevant functions. But this is a very serious issue which my Department as well as the ITC are monitoring.

Gaming Board

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) whether the Gaming Board has concluded its investigations into the Lottery operations of charities linked to Solutions RMC; and if she will make a statement; [130538]

(2) what *(a)* audits and *(b)* other checks the Gaming Board carried out between 1996 and 2002 concerning the gaming operations of (i) Breast Cancer Relief, Manchester and (ii) Breast Cancer Research, Scotland. [130539]

Mr. Caborn: I understand from the Gaming Board for Great Britain that it has completed its investigations into these matters. It intends to cancel their registrations to promote society lotteries under the terms of the Lotteries and Amusements Act 1976 and to write to the receivers who have been appointed to administer the two charities accordingly.

The Gaming Board registered Breast Cancer Relief Manchester (BCRM) on 23 March 2000. It received BCRM's audited accounts in 2000 and 2001 and 13 returns relating to individual lotteries. The Gaming Board's inspectors visited BCRM on four occasions between 31 November 2001 and 16 December 2002.

The Gaming Board registered Breast Cancer Research Scotland (BCRS) on 12 August 1999. It received BCRS's audited accounts in 1999, 2000 and 2001 as well as 17 returns relating to individual lotteries. The Gaming Board's inspectors visited BCRS in February 2003

Libraries

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what progress she has made towards the goal of putting all libraries online. [129080]

Mr. Caborn: The £100 million Lottery funded People's Network programme has enabled all but 20 of the libraries in England to be connected to the internet, including all the libraries in my hon. Friend's constituency. This represents well over 3,000 libraries, a very fine achievement. The remaining libraries will go online after refurbishment or technical programmes have been completed. All libraries in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are online.

Microsoft

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much was paid to Microsoft in licensing fees by her Department and its agencies in each of the last three years; and how much has been budgeted for *(a)* 2003–04 and *(b)* 2004–05. [130677]

Mr. Caborn: This Department paid licensing fees to Microsoft of £17,500 in 2000–01, £9,500 in 2001–02 and £234,000 in 2002–03.

Future year payments are still under review and no decision has yet been taken on whether to continue with Microsoft or to look at other potential vendors including open source.

Television Advertisements

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the monitoring of the extent to which television channels increase the volume of transmissions during advertisements; and if she will make a statement. [130396]

Estelle Morris *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* None. Responsibility for advertisements broadcast on television rests with the broadcasters and the organisation which regulates broadcast advertisements—the Independent Television Commission (ITC). The ITC is independent of the Government and responsible for safeguarding the public interest in broadcast television advertising.

The ITC's licensees are obliged, as a condition of their licences, to comply with the terms of the ITC's Advertising Standards Code which states that advertisements must not be excessively noisy or strident and that studio transmission power must not be increased from normal levels during advertising breaks. Responsibility for monitoring compliance with these terms rests with the licensees.

In addition, the ITC monitors individual services as necessary. The ITC investigates all complaints of excessive advertising loudness and are able to take action against broadcasters who breach the conditions of the code.

Under the Communications Act 2003 the Office of Communications (OFCOM) will have similar responsibilities for broadcast advertisements from the end of this year.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Capita

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many local authorities use Capita and their software package Academy; [129173]

(2) how many local authorities who use Capita and their software package Academy for Housing Benefit have made complaints to the Department. [129171]

Mr. Pond: I have been asked to reply.

The seven local authorities who contract out their benefit administration with Capita are Bexley, Blackburn with Darwen, East Cambridgeshire, Havant, Mendip, West Devon and Westminster. A further 65 local authorities have stated that they use Capita's Academy software package.

We have received no complaints from local authorities using Capita or their Academy software. Local authorities have complete autonomy to select and contract with the provider of their choice.

Civil Service

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many jobs under the remit of his Department in *(a)* the core Department, *(b)* non-departmental public bodies, *(c)* executive agencies and *(d)* independent statutory bodies, organisations and bodies financially sponsored by his Department and other such organisations, are located in (i) Scotland, (ii) each region in England, (iii) Wales, (iv) Northern Ireland and (v) overseas, broken down by (A) whole-time equivalent jobs and (B) the percentage per individual department, body or organisation. [127310]

Yvette Cooper: In response to parts *(a)* and *(c)*, I refer the hon. Member to Table D of the annual publication "Civil Service Statistics", which covers permanent staff numbers (FTE basis) for each Government Department and their respective executive agencies. Table D shows civil servants by regional distribution.

Copies of the publication are available in the Libraries of the Houses. The last edition, based on April 2001 data, was published in June 2002. The next edition, based on April 2002 data, was published on 24 July 2003.

Alternatively, this information is available at the following address on the Cabinet Office Statistics website: http://www.civil-service.gov.uk/statistics/css.htm.

In response to part *(b)* Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Executive NDPBs.

Audit Commission for local authorities and the NHS in England and Wales

Government Office region	*Whole-time equivalents*	*Percentage*
London	593	23.3
South East	270	10.6
South West	378	14.9
West Midlands	189	7.4
East Midlands	145	5.7
Eastern	144	5.7
North East	105	4.1
North West	279	11
Yorkshire and Humber	249	9.8
Wales	192	7.5
Total	2,544	—

Castle Vale Housing Action Trust

79 posts all in West Midlands Region

English Partnerships

	Number	*Percentage*
London	86	19.6
South East	146	33.3
North East	78	17.8
North West	112	25.5
West Midlands	17	3.9
Total	439	—

Housing Corporation

	Number	*Percentage*
East Midlands	58.26	10.2
London	324.95	57.1
Yorkshire and Humberside	41.16	7.2
North West	61.10	10.7
South West	42.74	7.5
West Midlands	40.74	7.2
Total	568.9	—

Liverpool Housing Action Trust

79 posts all based in North-West Region

Standards Board for England

96 posts based in London (96 per cent.), 4 people based in Yorkshire and Humberside—4 per cent.

Stonebridge Housing Action Trust

74 posts all based in London Region

Tower Hamlets Housing Action Trust

12 posts all based in London Region

In response to part *(d)* independent statutory bodies, organisations and bodies financially sponsored by Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Residential Property Tribunal Service

83 whole time equivalents (a regional breakdown is problematic as the Rent Assessment Panel areas do not correspond with the Government Office regions)

Valuation Tribunals

	Number	*Percentage*
East	18	12
East Midlands	11	7
London	25	17
North East	10	7
North West	21	14
South East	17	12
South West	16.5	11
West Midlands	17	11
Yorkshire and Humberside	13	9
Total	148.5	—

Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England

15 posts, all full-time and all based in London

Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales

3.6 whole-time equivalent posts and all based in Wales

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's other financially sponsored bodies

	Number	*Percentage*
Groundwork		
East of England	23	1.2
East Midlands	257	13.5
London	128	6.7
North East	101	5.3
North West	535	28.1
South East	99	5.2
South West	55	2.9
West Midlands	318	16.7
Yorkshire and the Humber	253	13.3
(i) Wales	98	5.7
(ii) Northern Ireland	22	1.1
Total	1,899	99.7

Note:
The figures are for headcount not whole-time equivalent jobs

LEASE (The Leasehold Advisory Service)

12 whole time equivalent posts all based in London

Climate Change

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on climate change talks he has had since January 2003. [129450]

Phil Hope: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister discusses a wide range of issues, including climate change, in meeting foreign visitors, colleagues and others.

Election Costs

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much it cost to run the European elections in Scotland in 1999. [130461]

Mrs. McGuire: I have been asked to reply as the conduct and funding of parliamentary elections in Scotland is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Scotland. The estimated cost of the European parliamentary election in Scotland in 1999 was £6.7 million.

Fire Service

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), 30 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 33W, whether his statement that there will be no reduction in response to 999 calls as a result of modernisation of the Fire Service applies to all fire brigades. [130693]

Mr. Raynsford: The statement made by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister applies to all fire brigades.

Housing

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his Department's latest estimate is of the number of people in housing need and accepted as such by their local housing authority in each London borough. [130021]

Keith Hill: Local authorities in England report the numbers of households on their waiting lists (excluding tenants awaiting a transfer) as at 1 April on their Annual Housing Investment Programme returns. Their activities under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) are reported on their quarterly PIE housing returns to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The latest available information reported by London boroughs is in the table.

London boroughs	*Households on the Housing Register 1 April 2002*	*Statutorily homeless households—number accepted as eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need April to June 2003*
Barking and Dagenham	2,668	155
Barnet	7,030	301
Bexley	3,487	104
Brent	14,746	304
Bromley	3,592	236
Camden	8,147	331
City of London	623	10
Croydon	6,890	261
Ealing	8,289	348
Enfield	7,264	318
Greenwich	6,876	[1]
Hackney	8,930	[1]
Hammersmith and Fulham	6,044	[1]
Haringey	12,585	[1]
Harrow	3,992	85
Havering	1,888	[1]
Hillingdon	6,041	216
Hounslow	6,369	179
Islington	8,161	[1]
Kensington and Chelsea	8,294	127
Kingston upon Thames	3,971	95
Lambeth	14,228	364
Lewisham	15,368	368
Merton	4,361	54
Newham	13,942	417
Redbridge	5,671	203
Richmond upon Thames	3,763	92
Southwark	6,164	425
Sutton	1,653	81
Tower Hamlets	7,837	438
Waltham Forest	10,283	300
Wandsworth	3,923	241
Westminster	3,709	316

[1] Data not reported.

Notes:
As local authorities have different practices for compiling and managing housing registers/waiting lists, direct comparisons between authorities can be misleading.
Sources:
ODPM: Housing Investment Programme (HIP) annual returns
ODPM: P1E housing activity quarterly returns

Bob Russell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 15 September 2003, ref 129308, when he expects to allocate funds to Colchester's Arms Length Management Organisation; and how much will be allocated. [131011]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will confirm the funding for Colchester's Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) once the Housing Inspectorate notifies us that it has awarded the ALMO at least a 2* (good) rating. The inspection is currently planned to begin in February 2004. The conditional allocation for 2003–05 is £13.44 million.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the local authorities which are six months or more behind paying Housing Benefit; and how many local authorities who are six months or more behind payment use Capita and their software package Academy. [129172]

Mr. Pond: I have been asked to reply.

We collect average processing times, by local authority, for Housing Benefit claims. The data provided by local authorities for the year ended 31 March 2003, and published on the our Housing Benefit website, www.dwp.gov.uk/housing benefit, show that on average no local authority took longer than six months to process new claims.

Average processing times for local authorities whose Housing Benefit administration is contracted out to Capita and who use Academy software, range from 26 days to 131 days. Actual clearance times for individual cases within the average are not collected centrally.

Local Rates

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what legal responsibilities local authorities have for new build houses with respect to maintaining *(a)* drains, *(b)* play areas that are incomplete and *(c)* roads which are unfinished. [129176]

Keith Hill: When granting planning permission local authorities may impose conditions to secure the completion of elements of the development. Both the imposition of conditions and their subsequent enforcement if not implemented is at the discretion of the local authority. Any decision to assume responsibility for streets which are not maintainable at public expense is entirely a matter for the relevant local highway authority. The sewers that serve developments are normally adopted by means of an agreement under section 104 of the Water Industry Act 1991. After an acceptance period the sewers will be maintained by the sewerage undertaker. Drains to groups of houses may not be adopted, but the extent of such systems has been limited to 10 connections under a protocol produced jointly by Government, the water industry and house builders in March 2002. The protocol should limit the extent of drainage systems that are maintained by householders.

Postal Ballots

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the average voter participation rate was in the areas where a postal ballot was *(a)* held and *(b)* not held in local elections. [130459]

Phil Hope: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Electoral Commission published their evaluation of the 2003 local electoral pilots on 31 July. According to their report, the average voter turnout across all local elections in 2003, including results from elections held on a pilot basis, was 34.9 per cent. The average turnout at elections where all-postal voting pilots were held was 49.4 per cent.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many trial postal ballots have been conducted in local elections; where they were held; and how much each one cost. [130460]

Phil Hope: Sixty-eight all-postal elections have been held since May 2000.

In the May 2000 local elections, seven all-postal ballots were held in Bolton, Doncaster, Gateshead, Norwich, Stevenage and Swindon.

In the May 2002 local and mayoral elections, 13 all-postal ballots were held in Chorley, Crawley, Gateshead, Greenwich, Hackney, Havering, Middlesbrough, North Tyneside, North West Leicestershire, Preston, South Tyneside, Stevenage and Trafford.

In the May 2003 local elections, 33 all-postal ballots were held in Blackpool, Blyth Valley, Bolton, Brighton and Hove, Chesterfield, Copeland, Corby, Darlington, Doncaster, East Staffordshire, Gateshead, Guildford, Herefordshire, Hyndburn, King's Lynn and West Norfolk, Lincoln, Newcastle, North Lincolnshire, North Shropshire, Redcar and Cleveland, Rotherham, Rushcliffe, Salford, Sedgefield, St. Edmundsbury, St Helens, Stevenage, Stockton-on-Tees, Sunderland, Trafford, Telford and Wrekin, Wansbeck and Derwentside, Chester-le-Street and Wear Valley who held a joint pilot.

In addition, Hackney and Stoke-on-Trent held all-postal ballots in their mayoral elections in October 2002, whilst all-postal ballots took place in 13 local authority by-elections during this period. These were: Aberdeenshire, Caldicot, Doncaster, Durham, Eden, Hackney, Kerrier, King's Lynn and West Norfolk, Newcastle, Stirling, Telford and Wrekin, Trafford and West Wiltshire.

No central funding has been given to authorities conducting all-postal ballots.

Travellers/Gypsies

Andrew Selous: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the definition is of *(a)* a traveller and *(b)* a gypsy as far as planning law is concerned. [130435]

Yvette Cooper: For the purpose of planning, a gypsy is a person of nomadic habit of life, whatever their race or origin, who wanders or travels for the purpose of making or seeking their livelihood. Members of other

groups who do not meet these criteria are not treated as gypsies for planning purposes. For the purposes of planning law, there is no definition of traveller.

Water Supplies

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the impact on the future level of water supply in the South East of the projected increased numbers of houses to be built; and if he will make a statement. [130470]

Keith Hill: The South East Regional Assembly is responsible for regional planning for the South East and as such is working with the Environment Agency and also water companies on the impact of future development on both water supply and water quality.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister understands that the Environment Agency is currently assessing the business plans of water companies in the region and will be providing advice to the Assembly on investment requirements and impact on future development in due course.

SCOTLAND

Boundary Commission

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to change the remit of the Boundary Commission for Scotland. [129700]

Mrs. McGuire: The proposed legislation to retain the present number of MSPs will require to include provisions on the review by the Boundary Commission of the Scottish Parliament constituencies and regional boundaries.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many departmental staff are not based in Dover House; and where they are located. [128025]

Mrs. McGuire: At 18 September, 47 staff were in post in Edinburgh (including 28 staff of the Office of the Advocate General) and 29 staff were in post in Glasgow.

Ministerial Visits

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the *(a)* foreign and *(b)* UK visits he has made since 1 April; what the cost was to public funds of each trip; who he met; and what gifts were received [126986]

Mrs. McGuire: The Government publish the overall costs of all ministerial overseas travel and a list of all visits overseas by Cabinet Ministers costing in excess of £500 on an annual basis. The list for the period 1 April 2002 to March 2003 was published by my right. hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 16 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 327W. The next list for the period 1 April 2003 to March 2004 will be published at the end of the financial year.

In respect of gifts received, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 14 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 482W.

The information on UK travel is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

National Lottery

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to discuss the allocation of lottery funds to Scotland. [128009]

Mr. Darling: I have regular discussions with ministerial colleagues on a wide range of issues affecting Scotland.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions between 31 March 2002 and 31 March 2003 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [126667]

Mrs. McGuire: Between 31 March 2002 and 31 March 2003, one of the special advisers in the Department travelled abroad on one occasion, at a cost of £1,000.40. This was to Madrid and Segovia to accompany the Secretary of State at an intergovernmental conference on 'European enlargement, decentralisation and institutional reform' and at bilateral meetings with Spanish Government and regional Government Ministers.

All travel by special advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code, and the Civil Service Management Code.

TREASURY

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of the yield of Capital Gains Tax in each year from 1990–91 to 2005–06; and if he will make a statement. [130548]

Dawn Primarolo: The yield from Capital Gains Tax on a receipts basis, from 1990–91 to 2001–02 is published in IRS 2002 on the Inland Revenue website in Table 1.2. The link to this table is: http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/tax_receipts/g_t02_1.pdf

Estimates of Capital Gains Tax on a receipts basis, for 2002–03 and 2003–04 are published in Table C8 in the Budget Report 2003. Figures for later years are not available.

Customs and Excise

Ms Atherton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many *(a)* unauthorised persons, *(b)* illegal imports of cigarettes, *(c)* illegal imports of alcohol, *(d)* illegal imports of prohibited drugs and *(e)* illegal imports of meat were seized in each of the last five years by customs teams based in (i) Cornwall, (ii) Devon and (iii) Dorset; [127299]

(2) what drugs were seized from yachts in the South West in the last five years; and whether each seizure was made by *(a)* static officers by routine inspection in each of the last five years and *(b)* officers acting on received intelligence. [127300]

John Healey: HM Customs and Excise has made four drugs seizures in the last five years from all types of non-commercial vessels in the area covering the Bristol Channel to the Isle of Wight including the Scilly Isles and the South West approaches, totalling 400 kilos of cocaine and 10 tonnes of cannabis.

The intended landing points may have been elsewhere in the UK.

Customs use intelligence information and targeted risk-profiling techniques to help determine how and when to deploy resources. Experience demonstrates that this flexible approach allows Customs to deploy in larger numbers, less predictably and with greater impact anywhere in the UK.

In accordance with exemption 4 (law enforcement and legal proceedings) of the Open Government Code Customs do not normally reveal whether or not they were acting on received intelligence in individual cases. Customs do not keep information on seizures delineated by county boundaries.

Personal Income Tax Allowance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the cost of raising the personal income tax allowance to *(a)* £5,000, *(b)* £6,000, *(c)* £7,000 and *(d)* £7,500 per year; how many people would cease to pay income tax as a consequence; and if he will make a statement. [130560]

Dawn Primarolo: The full-year cost of making these tax changes in 2003–04 are set out in the following table.

Raising the under 65 personal income tax allowance in 2003–04 to	*Cost (£ billion)*	*Number of people cease to pay income tax (thousand)*
(a) £5,000 per year	2.4	500
(b) £6,000 per year	8.3	1,800
(c) £7,000 per year	13.9	3,000
(d) £7,500 per year	16.6	3,500

These estimates exclude any behavioural response to the tax change and are based upon the 2000–01 Survey of Personal Incomes and consistent with Budget 2003.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the cost of raising the personal income tax allowance to £10,000 per year for people aged 65 years and over; and if he will make a statement. [130566]

Dawn Primarolo: The estimated full-year cost of raising the personal income tax allowance to £10,000 per year for those age 65–74 and 75 plus in 2003–04 is £2 billion.

This estimate excludes any behavioural response to the tax change and is based upon the 2000–01 Survey of Personal Incomes and consistent with Budget 2003.

Road Fuels

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will quantify in pence per litre the value given to each of the main *(a)* environmental and *(b)* other benefits of road fuel gases which make up the rebate applied to such fuels. [130868]

John Healey: I refer the right hon. Lady to the answer I gave on 8 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 102W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard).

Savings Income

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what his estimate is of the cost of abolishing income tax on *(a)* all savings income and *(b)* all savings income up to the start of the higher rate threshold; and if he will make a statement; [130562]

(2) what his estimate is of the cost of abolishing the existing capital gains tax and savings tax regimes, and taxing capital gains and savings as income under the existing income tax regime; and if he will make a statement. [130563]

Dawn Primarolo: The current tax yield from taxation of interest on savings in 2003–04 is set out in the following table.

The current tax yield in 2003–04 from taxation	*£ billion*
(a) All savings income	2.5
(b) All savings income up to the start of the higher rate threshold	1.4

Note:
This estimate is based the 2000–01 Survey of Personal Incomes and consistent with Budget 2003.

This yield would be lost if no tax was charged, but we are not able to provide the full cost of such a change as other behavioural effects will substantially distort the impact on costs of such a move.

Departmental Annual Report

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what procedures are used by his Department to brief officials appearing before select committees; [131381]

(2) if he will make a statement about the production of his Department's Annual Report; [131382]

(3) what accounting standards his Department used in producing the 2003 HM Treasury Annual Report; [131383]

(4) whether he plans to use an external auditor to audit the Treasury's Annual Report. [131386]

John Healey: The Treasury's annual report sets out the performance of the department against its Public Service Agreement targets. It includes the same standard information as all departmental reports.

As with all departments, the financial data for previous years contained in the report are based on the Treasury's accounts, which are prepared in accordance with United Kingdom generally accepted accounting principles (UK GAAP), modified as necessary for the public sector

following advice from the independent Financial Reporting Advisory Board (FRAB). These requirements are reflected in the resource accounting manual (RAM) (available at www.resource-accounting.gov.uk).

The Treasury's accounts are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General. Accounts for the financial year 2002–03 (HC 999) were laid before Parliament on 16 July, and are available on the Department's website.

The financial data for future years are based on the agreed departmental expenditure limit for the department, and compiled using the same accounting treatment.

Briefing for officials appearing before select committees is provided by a range of people across the Department.

Tax/NIC (South Gloucestershire)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the amount of *(a)* income tax and *(b)* national insurance contributions paid by South Gloucestershire residents in the latest year for which figures are available. [130380]

Dawn Primarolo: South Gloucestershire residents paid an average of about £3,300 in income tax in 2000–01.

Data on National Insurance contribution paid in this area are not available.

Transport Infrastructure

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps are being taken actively to manage demand for transport infrastructure through tax increases. [130452]

John Healey: The Chancellor decides taxation policy after considering all relevant economic, social and environmental factors, including the implications for demand for transport infrastructure.

VAT (Church Repairs)

Helen Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made on his proposal to reduce VAT on church repairs to 5 per cent.; and if he will make a statement. [130927]

John Healey: The Government are particularly concerned about the position of listed places of worship. That is why we asked the European Commission to bring forward proposals to extend the categories of permitted reduced VAT rates to include their repair, maintenance and improvement.

We are continuing to press this case during the current EU review of VAT reduced rates and have, in the meantime, introduced the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme to provide an equivalent reduction in the cost of these repair projects.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of differential rates of vehicle excise duty on promoting the manufacture and sale of vehicles with improved pollution characteristics; and if he will make a statement. [130545]

John Healey: The Government have introduced a range of measures to encourage the use of cleaner vehicles and technologies, including graduated vehicle excise duty, vehicle labelling and graduated company car tax.

The effectiveness of all these policies are being evaluated including an assessment of graduated VED by the Department of Transport and the results will inform future policy advice.

HEALTH

Deep Vein Thrombosis

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will bring forward amendments to legislation to allow registered midwives to *(a)* sell or supply and *(b)* administer a range of medicines in the course of their professional practice, with particular reference to the provision of compression hosiery for pregnant women considered at particular risk of deep vein thrombosis. [127592]

Mr. Hutton: There are already provisions under medicines legislation which allow registered midwives to sell or supply and administer a range of medicines in the course of their professional practice. Midwives can also supply certain non-medicinal products including compression hosiery for varicosis during pregnancy at national health service expense.

Departmental Agencies

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the need for each departmental agency. [124698]

Mr. Hutton: The Department conducts reviews of its executive agencies in accordance with Cabinet Office guidance, amended following the 2002 Agency Policy review. It has merged the Medical Devices Agency and Medicines Control Agency to form the Medical and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency. There are no current plans to change the role of the three remaining agencies but they will be reviewed as the Department's strategic needs are reassessed.

ADHD

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what benefits are available to individuals and their families, following a diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. [130263]

Maria Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is a developmental disorder in children. In Great Britain, a child with this disorder may be entitled to disability living allowance if the symptoms impair the child's normal functioning to the extent that they amount to a severe disability and the normal entitlement conditions are met. The additional benefits which, subject to the normal entitlement conditions, are available to families

in Great Britain with disabled children who qualify for disability living allowance are shown in the table. The Family Fund Trust, which is funded by government, also provides grants to families of severely disabled children in order to ease the stress of their day-to-day life.

Benefits available to families in Great Britain with children who qualify for disability living allowance

Disability living allowance component and rate	*Additional benefits available*
Care component (all rates) and mobility component (all rates)	Disabled child premium in income related benefits[2], or the disability element of child tax credit
Highest rate care component	Enhanced disability premium and the disabled child premium in income related benefits, or the disability element and severe disability element of child tax credit.
Highest or middle rate care component	Carer's allowance[3]
Higher rate mobility component	Access to the Motability, "Blue Badge" and Vehicle Excise Duty Exemption schemes

[1] Entitlement to disability living allowance depends on the effects that a severe physical or mental disability have on a person's need for personal care and/or their ability to walk. It is the overall picture of need in the individual case, rather than the specific diagnosis that is important. Children under 16 years of age with a severe disability can qualify for any rate of the the care component arid the lower rate mobility component of disability living allowance if they are so severely disabled that their need for attention, supervision or watching over by another person is substantially in excess of that normally required by children of their age. Those who qualify for the highest rate of the care component may also qualify for the higher rate of the mobility component if they exhibit extreme and unpredictable disruptive behaviour as the result of arrested or incomplete development of the brain.
[2] Income support, jobseeker's allowance (income related), housing benefit and council tax benefit.
[3] Entitlement to carer's allowance can also give entitlement to the carer premium in income related benefits.

The benefits available to individuals and their families in Northern Ireland, following a diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, are a matter for my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Budgets

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health *(a)* how many staff are employed and *(b)* what the total budget in 2003–04 is for the (i) Commission for Health Improvement, (ii) National Institute for Clinical Excellence, (iii) Food Standards Agency, (iv) National Care Standards Commission, (v) General Social Care Council and (vi) Health and Safety Executive. [128332]

Mr. Hutton: The Health and Safety Executive is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Work and Pensions. The other information requested is shown in the following table:

Body	*Number of staff*	*Total budget for 2003–04 (£ million)*
Commission for Health Improvement	347	35
National Institute for Clinical Excellence	43	17.8
Foods Standards Agency	738	119
Meat Hygiene Service	1,597	28
National Care Standards Commission	2,400	133.3
General Social Care Council	115	52.6

Notes:

(i) The staff numbers are the latest available figures expressed as whole-time equivalents.

(ii) The Total Budgets shown are estimated plan forecasts.

(iii) The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is a non-Ministerial Department, governed by a Board, and accountable to Parliament and the devolved administrations through Health Ministers. The Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) is an executive agency of FSA.)

(iv) The total budget of the FSA includes £8.277 million from the devolved administrations and payments to the MHS in respect of specified risk material (SRM)

(v) FSA staff figures are on a UK basis and include all workers (eg temporary contract workers).

Cancelled Operations

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were cancelled in NHS hospitals in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [127495]

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were cancelled for non-clinical reasons in each of the last six years. [127321]

Mr. Hutton: Quarterly data are collected on the number of operations cancelled by the hospital for non-clinical reasons (i) at the last minute (i.e. on the day patients are due to arrive, or after arrival in hospital, or on the day of their operation), and (ii) the number of patients not admitted within 28 days of a 'last minute' cancellation as part of the NHS Plan cancelled operations guarantee.

Cancelled operations data at England level and at national health service trust and strategic health authority level are available in the Library and on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity/data requests.htm

Departmental Computer Security

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been *(a)* budgeted and *(b)* spent by his Department since April 2002 on combating (i) computer fraud, (ii) preventing theft of computers and (iii) safeguarding the security information held on computer; and if he will make a statement. [128771]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health does not have specific financial budgets for combating computer fraud, computer theft or protecting its information. These areas are subsumed within a wide variety of other budgets. Responsibility, from 1 April 2002 to 1 April 2003, for countering fraud and corruption in all its forms within the Department of Health fell to the National Health Service Counter Fraud Service. From 1 April 2003 this responsibility was transferred to a newly formed special health authority, the Counter Fraud and Security Management Service.

The Department of Health takes the protection of its computers and information systems very seriously and complies with Her Majesty's Government's Manual of Protective Security. Security measures are kept constantly under review and the Department employs a dedicated and professional security unit as part of this commitment. The Department's information technology network achieved compliance with the British Standard 7799 which covers best practice for information security management at the end of 2002. In 2002 the Department of Health awarded a new service support contract to Computer Sciences Corporation and their security expertise was significant in them winning this bid.

Diagnostic and Treatment Centres

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the organisations which *(a)* have been awarded and *(b)* are being considered for franchises for operating private diagnosis and treatment centres, indicating the location of each centre. [129747]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 September 2003]*: The Department of Health announced the shortlist of preferred bidders on 12 September 2003 that will provide new treatment centres to contribute to the Government's drive to cut waiting times for patients. The 26 areas covered by the new scheme along with the shortlist of companies is set as listed. These include two mobile units, which will deliver services to patients in towns across England. All likely preferred bidders are subject to final contract negotiation and agreement and schemes will only proceed if they provide the required level of value for money for national health service commissioners. This represents about two thirds of the total programme. Further announcements will be made in due course.

The treatment centres will be based at the following locations:

South West Peninsula (Mercury Health Ltd.)

Lincolnshire (Mercury Health Ltd.)

Horton Hospital, North Oxford (Mercury Health Ltd.)

North East Yorks (Mercury Health Ltd.)

Southampton (Mercury Health Ltd.)

Northumberland (Mercury Health Ltd.)

East Berkshire (1. Slough 2. Bracknell 3. Maidenhead and 4. Windsor/Ascot) (Mercury Health Ltd.)

Didcot, Oxfordshire (Mercury Health Ltd.)

Ashford, Surrey (Mercury Health Ltd.)

Maidstone (Care UK Afrox)

Barlborough Links, Nottinghamshire (Care UK Afrox)

Derriford, Plymouth (Care UK Afrox)

Chase Farm, Barnet, London (Anglo Canadian)

King George Hospital, Redbridge (Anglo Canadian)

Royal National Throat Nose and Ear Hospital, Kings Cross (Anglo Canadian)

Bradford (Nations Healthcare)

Burton (Nations Healthcare)

Daventry (Birkdale Clinic)

Trafford, Greater Manchester (Netcare UK)

Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital, Stanmore (New York Presbyterian)

Shepton Mallet, Somerset (New York Presbyterian).

There will be two mobile units offering ophthalmology services in the following areas:

Cheshire and Merseyside (Netcare UK)

Cumbria and Lancashire (Netcare UK)

Horton, Oxfordshire (Netcare UK)

Wycombe, Bucks (Netcare UK)

North Tyneside (Netcare UK)

South West Oxfordshire (Netcare UK)

North West Peninsula (Netcare UK)

Dorset/Somerset (Netcare UK)

Kent/Medway (Netcare UK)

Hants and Isle of Wight (Netcare UK)

Surrey and Sussex (Netcare UK)

Thames Valley (Netcare UK)

The preferred bidders to run the schemes are:

Netcare UK (South Africa)

Mercury Health Ltd (UK)

Care UK Afrox (South Africa)

Anglo Canadian (Canada)

Nations Healthcare (USA)

Birkdale Clinic (UK)

New York Presbyterian (USA).

Disability Legislation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce legislation on disability; what representations he has received over the need for such legislation; and if he will make a statement. [130208]

Maria Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

On 1 July, Parliament approved Regulations which will make significant changes to the employment provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act. Ending various employment and occupational exemptions will bring within scope of the Act over one million additional employers and around seven million jobs, in which 600,000 disabled people already work. These Regulations implement the main employment recommendations of the Disability Rights Task Force that were supported by the Government in our document "Towards Inclusion". As we have said, we shall be laying further Regulations in due course—such as on occupational pensions—which will make further changes to the DDA's employment provisions. All these regulations will come into force in October 2004.

Later this year we will publish a draft Disability Bill which will contain proposals on other measures recommended by the Task Force and outlined in "Towards Inclusion", such as changes to the DDA affecting the public sector, transport and premises, some widening of the definition of disability and covering membership of larger private clubs.

We intend that the draft Bill should undergo pre-legislative scrutiny. We continue to receive a wide range of representations from disability organisations, business, trade unions, employers, disabled people and others on civil rights legislation for disabled people.

Health Conferences

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of sending *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* civil servants to health conferences in (i) the UK and (ii) overseas in each of the last five years. [127378]

Mr. Hutton: Information is not available in the form requested.

Health Vacancies

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies there are for *(a)* nurses, *(b)* doctors and consultants and *(c)* radiographers and other technical positions, broken down by NHS trust. [106626]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service vacancy survey collects information on the number of posts which trusts are actively trying to fill which have been vacant for three months or more. The available information has been placed in the Library.

Hip Replacements

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in England with hip replacements had to undergo a hip revision within *(a)* three years, *(b)* five years and *(c)* 10 years in the last 12 months. [127539]

Mr. Hutton: The Department is unable to provide this information, as the Hospital Episode Statistics data do not identify individual patients.

In 2000, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence published guidance on the selection of prosthesis and set a benchmark that no more than 10 per cent. of patients should require revision surgery within 10 years, or evidence from at least three years follow up which when extrapolated, implies an equivalent performance.

The Department established a National Joint Registry (NJR) for total hip and knee replacements in April 2003. This collects data on hip and knee replacements carried out in the national health service and private sector in England and Wales. The NJR will look at the performance of hip and knee implants, and will over time be able to provide this information.

Hospital Bed Occupancy

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the average bed occupancy rate, as a percentage, for each NHS hospital trust in England from April 2001 to April 2003. [127496]

Mr. Hutton: Data on average bed occupancy rates are available on an annual basis, at national health service trust level and for England, for the years 2000–01 to 2001–02 on the Department of Health's website at: www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity/data_requests/beds_open_overnight.htm

Data for 2002–03 are not yet available.

The latest available statistics for 2001–02 show that the number of general and acute beds increased by over 1,500 to 136,583 over the previous two years. This represents over two thirds of the target set out in the NHS Plan.

Hospital Cleanliness

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evaluation he has undertaken into the efficiency of the league tables for hospital cleanliness; and what plans he has to amend them. [127707]

Mr. Hutton: The patient environment action team programme, and the resulting 'traffic light' ratings awarded to hospitals, have been significant factors in improving the environmental conditions, including standards of cleanliness, in hospitals.

Since the introduction of the system the number of 'Green' hospitals has increased from 22 per cent. to 78 per cent. (2000–2003) while the number being assessed as 'Red' has fallen from 36 per cent. to zero over the same period.

There are no plans at present to change the system.

Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the role of the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency in negotiations with the European Commission on the proposed Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive. [128312]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) and, before April 2003, the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) represented the UK Government in the negotiations on the proposed Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products that have taken place in the Council of Ministers Working Group in 2002 and 2003 under the chairmanship of successive European Union Presidencies. Before the publication in 2002 of the European Commission's formal proposals for a Directive the MCA had a range of discussions with the European Commission and representatives of other Member States, predominantly in the European Pharmaceutical Committee and an expert group set up by that Committee, about the emerging proposals.

During this period the MCA and later the MHRA has held discussions on a number of occasions with the UK herbal sector about issues and priorities to be pursued in the negotiations, notably the case for flexibility to take greater account of evidence of traditional use from outside the EU and to permit vitamins and minerals to be added to traditional herbal remedies registered under the proposed Directive.

Mixed-sex Hospital Wards

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to end all use of mixed sex wards. [130997]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health has set three objectives to support the elimination of mixed sex accommodation. A small number of hospitals have yet to achieve these objectives on every ward. This is because a number of new hospitals and healthcare facilities are currently in construction, which will upon completion bring all wards to the required standards.

Guidance issued to national health service trusts on the achievement of the objectives made it clear that a variety of ward layouts and designs could be used to deliver separate sleeping accommodation, including the use of single-sex wards, or combinations of single-sex bays and individual rooms. Single-sex bays, together with increasing numbers of single rooms, are common features of modern hospital design both here and abroad, and can provide perfectly acceptable levels of privacy and dignity.

NHS Charges

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* items and *(b)* procedures in the NHS for which charges are made. [127559]

Mr. Hutton: Treatment provided by the national health service is free at the point of delivery except in cases where specific legislation has been passed allowing a charge to be made. The current items and services for which a charge can be made are:

prescriptions;

dental services;

the supply of optical appliances by the hospital eye service;

treatment of private patients;

treatment of overseas visitors;

appliances such as wigs and fabric supports.

The NHS can also charge for the provision of accommodation and services for private resident and non-resident patients.

In addition to the above, NHS hospitals can charge for certain patient services using income generation powers. However a charge can only be made where the service is considered to be additional treatment over and above the normal service provision. Any item or service that is considered to be an integral part of a patient's treatment by their clinician remains free of charge.

NHS IT Programme

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the McKinsey report on the national IT programme for the NHS made an assessment of the total cost of the programme. [129230]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 11 September 2003]:* The report in question was commissioned to help inform planning for the National Programme for Information Technology in the National Health Service. It did not attempt to assess the cost of the national programme, funding for which was announced in January 2003.

Pain Relief

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what management and assessment services and facilities are available to those suffering from persistent pain. [128080]

Mr. Hutton: It remains the responsibility of primary care trusts (PCTs) to commission services for people with pain, taking account of the resources they have available and the needs of their wider populations. The Clinical Standards Advisory Group (CSAG) report on pain services, published in April 2000, highlighted variations in access to pain services throughout the country. It made recommendations to national hospital service acute trusts and commissioners on how pain services should be delivered in order to reduce variations to access.

It recommended that PCT commissioners should review local provision of pain services, looking particularly at the provision of more specialised treatments on a networked basis. In this review, account should be taken of the needs of both adults and children, and include patients with acute pain resulting from sudden illness or accident, as well as post-operative pain and chronic pain. Trusts should also agree with commissioners the services and resources which are appropriate to meet local needs.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has been reviewing pain management techniques as part of the Supportive and Palliative Care Guidance. This provides a clearer idea of what therapies are effective and areas where further work is needed. Part A of the guidance is available in draft on the NICE website at http://www.nice.org.uk/.

Hospital Security

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients are under *(a)* police guard and *(b)* armed police guard in (i) NHS and (ii) private hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [128766]

Mr. Hutton: This information is not routinely collected centrally.

Public Health Laboratory Service

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the Public Health Laboratory Service laboratories that *(a)* will transfer and *(b)* have transferred to NHS trusts, broken down by (i) trust, (ii) date of transfer, (iii) current running cost and (iv) staffing complement. [124310]

Miss Melanie Johnson: [illegible]unning costs and staffing numbers for the laboratories transferred to the national health service are shown in the following table. All the laboratory transfers were completed on or before 1 April 2003.

Laboratory	*NHS Trust*	*2002–03 budget (£)*	*Staff complement (WTE)*[1]
Ashford	East Kent Hospitals NHS Trust	2,799,466	62.69
Brighton	Brighton and Sussex University NHS Trust	1,868,306	42.44
Carlisle	North Cumbria Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	1,251,210	30.43
Chelmsford	Mid Essex Hospital NHS Trust	1,212,129	37.82
Chester	Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Trust	1,728,815	47.67
Central Middlesex	North West London Hospitals NHS Trust	1,625,217	30.70

Laboratory	NHS Trust	2002–03 budget (£)	Staff complement (WTE)[1]
Coventry	University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust	2,145,805	49.78
Dorchester	West Dorset General Hospital NHS Trust	1,134,621	22.99
Exeter	Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare NHS Trust	1,979,930	49.29
Gloucester	Gloucester Hospitals NHS Trust	1,465,721	45.71
Hereford	Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust	975,290	23.73
Hull	Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust	2,366,917	61.16
Ipswich	Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust	1,279,748	34.75
Leicester	University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust	2,812,959	68.30
Lincoln	Northern Lincolnshire and Goole Hospital NHS Trust	998,295	23.59
Liverpool	Aintree Hospitals NHS Trust	1,934,072	54.38
Luton	Luton and Dunstable NHS Trust	1,229,500	28.89
Middlesbrough	South Tees Hospitals NHS Trust	1,372,303	36.73
Norwich	Norfolk and Norwich University NHS Trust	2,055,942	52.34
Nottingham	Nottingham University NHS Trust	3,105,899	80.38
Peterborough	Peterborough Hospitals NHS Trust	944,533	25.00
Plymouth	Plymouth NHS Trust	2,125,294	44.17
Poole	Poole Hospital NHS Trust	2,329,965	52.67
Portsmouth	Portsmouth Hospital NHS Trust	1,984,922	47.01
Preston	Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	2,426,407	72.21
Reading	Royal Berkshire and Battle NHS Trust	1,644,385	35.94
Salisbury	Salisbury Healthcare NHS Trust	842,955	17.32
Sheffield	Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	2,354,821	58.60
Shrewsbury	Royal Shrewsbury Hospital NHS Trust	1,775,981	36.47
Stoke	North Staffordshire Healthcare NHS Trust	1,756,098	39.34
Taunton	Taunton and Somerset NHS Trust	1,474,244	32.28
Truro	Royal Cornwall Hospital NHS Trust	2,182,102	44.80

[1] Whole-time equivalent

Queen Mary's Sidcup NHS Trust

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many organisations tendered when the present contract for car parking at Queen Mary's Sidcup NHS Trust was awarded; and how long the contract lasts. [129756]

Mr. Hutton: Four organisations responded to the tendering exercise for this contract in 1999. The contract length is five years with an option to extend for a further two.

Stem Cell Research

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State's letter of 15 January, PO1021981, what action he has taken as a result of the House of Lord's findings in relation to stem cell research and therapeutic cloning; and if he will make a statement. [128416]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Government policy in this area of research has evolved following a number of influential reports, the most recent being that of the House of Lords Select Committee in February 2002. All of these reports have stressed the great potential of stem cell research and have concluded that no single source of stem cells should be worked on exclusively. The Government have made available, through the research councils, £40 million over two years for stem cell research, including stem cells derived from embryos, adult tissue, and cord blood.

The House of Lords confirmed, in its judgement of 13 March 2003, that embryos created by cell nuclear replacement (commonly known as therapeutic cloning) are fully regulated by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990. Subject to strict criteria, licences for the creation by therapeutic cloning of embryos for research may be granted by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority.

Wage Costs

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the wage costs of *(a)* administration and *(b)* estates staff within the NHS were in 2002–03. [130322]

Mr. Hutton: This information will be available in February 2004.

Waiting Times/Lists

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of patients in each hospital trust area were waiting for treatment for more than 12 months *(a)* in 2002–03 and *(b)* on the latest date for which figures are available. [130283]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* The table provides the percentage of patients at those trusts showing patients waiting over 12 months at either March or July 2003 or both. For all remaining trusts the percentage of patients waiting over 12 months at both periods was zero.

Patients waiting for elective in-patient admission: Position at month end: England (provider based)

NHS trust/primary care trust	Percentage of patients waiting over 12 months: March 2003	July 2003
East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust	0.51	0.09
Gloucestershire Hospitals	0.00	0.01
Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust	0.00	0.03
James Paget Healthcare NHS Trust	0.00	0.03
Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	0.00	0.01
Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust	0.03	0.02
Medway NHS Trust	0.19	0.06
North Bristol NHS Trust	0.01	0.00

Patients waiting for elective in-patient admission: Position at month end: England (provider based)

NHS trust/primary care trust	Percentage of patients waiting over 12 months	
	March 2003	July 2003
North Hampshire Hospitals NHS Trust	0.12	0.00
Royal Shrewsbury Hospitals NHS Trust	0.00	0.31
South Tees Hospitals NHS Trust	0.00	0.12
St. Mary's NHS Trust	0.00	0.02
Trafford Healthcare NHS Trust	0.00	0.04
University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust	0.12	0.00
West London Mental Health NHS Trust	7.69	0.00
Weston Area Health NHS Trust	0.18	0.00

Source:
Department of Health forms KH07 and Monthly monitoring

HOUSE OF COMMMONS COMMISSION

Parliamentary Works

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission what the estimated cost is of the work carried out to the Palace of Westminster in *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 2003 and *(c)* 2004; and how many workmen (i) are and (ii) have been employed on the Parliamentary Estate in connection therewith. [129606]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: The cost to the House of Commons of maintenance and new works on the Parliamentary Estate in the financial year 2002–03 was £29.5 million. For the financial year 2003–04 the forecast cost is £24.2 million and for 2004–05 it is £18.4 million. Due to the many estate-wide services, it is not possible to provide accurate figures for individual buildings or to provide figures by calendar years. During the summer recess of 2002 approximately 1,200 contractors' personnel were employed on site and in the summer of 2003 the number is approximately 1,000.

The House of Commons Commission can answer only for those parts of the Parliamentary Estate for which this House is responsible.

EDUCATION

Online Centres

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many UK online centres were opened in deprived or rural wards across the north west in 2002–03; and how many centres there are. [128566]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 9 July 2003.

Adult Education

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what his estimate is of the cost of the guarantee of free tuition to help adults study for a Level 2 qualification in *(a)* 2003–04, *(b)* 2004–05 and *(c)* 2005–06; and if he will make a statement. [130720]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 17 September 2003]:* The new entitlement to free tuition for adults studying for a first full level 2 qualification will be phased in from 2004–05: we expect to introduce the entitlement on a partial basis in academic year 2004–05. Subject to experience in that first year, the entitlement will proceed to roll out nationally from 2005–06. This will enable us to test out the impact on demand. The cost will depend on learner take-up of the entitlement. We have to target a greater proportion of state funding towards priority groups, so those with the greatest need have opportunities to acquire relevant skills and qualifications. Over time, colleges and other providers will need to better focus their resources to support this aim.

Bureaucracy (Universities)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) when he expects to receive the findings of the Committee chaired by David Van de Linde in relation to bureaucracy in universities; and if he will make a statement; [128415]

(2) if he will make a statement on the work in progress of the Better Regulation Review Group under Professor Van de Linde. [129994]

Alan Johnson: Professor Van de Linde has been asked to chair the Better Regulation Review Group, a committee of senior stakeholders from across higher education, to consider the issue of bureaucracy in higher education. The Group first met in March, since when it has been in regular discussions with the Department on regulatory matters, notably the Regulatory Impact Assessment of the White Paper The future of higher education, and aspects of it, such as the development of the Office for Fair Access. An important responsibility of the Group is to oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the Better Regulation Task Force report Higher education: Easing the burden. I look forward to receiving an interim report on the status of the recommendations from Professor Van de Linde in November.

Learning and Skills Council

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make it his policy to ensure that workers facing redundancy within the Learning and Skills Council are given the opportunity to retrain for other jobs within the organisation; and if he will make a statement. [129793]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Connexions

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many personal advisers Connexions employed, broken down by region, in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2002 and *(c)* 2003. [130717]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 17 September 2003]:* The information in the following table shows the number of full time equivalent personal advisers working for the Connexions Service by region in the first years of operation.

The number of full time equivalent personal advisers working for Connexions

	December 2001		December 2002		June 2003	
	PAs	Number of Partnerships	PAs	Number of Partnerships	PAs	Number of Partnerships
England	1,872.4	15	6,086.2	44	7,251.6	47
South East	118.0	1	606.9	5	862.1	6
London	252.2	2	841.7	6	910.3	6
East of England	42.8	1	398.6	5	614.6	6
South West	272.0	2	735.4	6	658.7	6
West Midlands	328.1	3	784.3	5	1,009.5	5
East Midlands	63.4	1	488.2	5	528.0	5
Yorkshire and Humber	300.0	2	800.5	4	898.0	4
North West	495.9	3	1,082.8	5	1,220.6	5
North East	118.0	0	347.8	3	549.8	4

Notes:
1. The figures include those staff directly employed by the Partnerships and those seconded to Connexions from local partner agencies.
2. In addition to personal advisers, Partnerships also employ other delivery staff whose main role is customer contact in support of the personal adviser role, but who are not qualified to give the in depth advice and guidance expected from a personal adviser. In 2001 there were 438.7 full time equivalent other delivery staff in the 15 Partnerships rising to 2,206.8 in the 42 partnerships in 2002 and 2,456.0 at the end of June 2003.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills by how much Connexions services are reducing their support, in terms of personal adviser time, for young people from *(a)* schools and *(b)* colleges. [130718]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 17 September 2003]:* Connexions offers a service to all young people aged 13–19 differentiated on the basis of need. It is not reducing personal adviser time in schools or colleges. There have been significant year-on-year increases in funding since Connexions was introduced in 2001–02. In 2000–01, before the start of Connexions, Careers service and New Start budgets totalled £243 million; in 2001–02, the first year of Connexions, the total budget was £320 million. In 2002–03 this rose to £420 million and in the current year to £455 million.

One service offered by Connexions is for career guidance to be available to all 13 to 19-year-olds. The Ofsted report "Connexions Partnerships: the first year 2001–2002" found that the implementation of the Connexions Service had maintained, restored and, in some instances, enhanced the provision of Careers Education and Guidance in schools and colleges.

Education Clothing Grant

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the level of education clothing grant given by each local authority in England. [130416]

Mr. Miliband: The information you have requested is not collected by this Department.

Foundation Degrees Forward

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a further progress statement on Foundation Degrees Forward; and what the planned publication date for its prospectus is. [129993]

Alan Johnson: Foundation Degree Forward (FDF) is in the process of being set up, as a network organisation, with its administrative centre located at the Lichfield Campus jointly owned by Staffordshire University and Tamworth and Lichfield College. Dr. Derek Longhurst has been appointed as the Executive Director. The FDF Management Board will hold its first meeting on October 7 when it will consider a Strategic Plan for 2003–06 and a Business Plan and Operating Statement for 2003–04.

Maintenance Grants

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students in sixth form colleges and other education institutions in Hull are eligible for maintenance grants; how many are receiving them; what steps he is taking to ensure that individual students receive such grants; if he will list those institutions whose students qualify; and if he will make a statement. [129532]

Alan Johnson: The latest information available shows that the number of 16 and 17 year olds eligible for Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) in Kingston upon Hull LEA at the end of 2000 was around 2,300. This is based on estimates of participation in full time education and the percentage of young people eligible for EMA based on income distribution. In 2002–03 1,960 students received weekly payments of EMA, of which 1,654 students received the maximum allowance.

Local LEAs are responsible for ensuring young people are aware of EMA. In the pilots eligibility is governed by the local authority area in which the young person lives, so any school with a sixth form, sixth form college or FE college at which an EMA student enrols will "qualify" to operate EMA.

EMA pilots are currently available in 56 LEA areas and the national scheme will be available from September 2004.

Post-graduate Certificate in Education (Citizenship)

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many places have been *(a)* taken up and *(b)* available for Post-graduate Certificate in Education Citizenship courses since their introduction; and if he will make a statement. [129894]

Mr. Miliband: Since 2001–02, when the citizenship PGCE course was introduced, 332 trainees have taken up places (147 in 2001–02 and 185 in 2002–03).

The table which shows the number of entrants to training against the number of places for 2001–02 and 2002–03 in England only.

	Places	*Entrants*
2001–02[1]	—	147
2002–03	200	185
2003–04[2]	250	—

[1] In 2001–02, there was no separate allocation for citizenship places.

[2] The number of entrants to Initial Teacher Training in 2003–04 is not yet available.

Source:

TTA

In addition to those trainees shown above, in 2002–03 14 trainees started the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP) in citizenship.

Safer Schools Partnership Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact of the Safer Schools Partnership Initiative. [130502]

Mr. Miliband: My Department, in partnership with the Home Office and Youth Justice Board, has commissioned an independent evaluation of the first year of the Safer School Partnerships (SSPs) scheme for police officers based in schools. The evaluation report is nearing completion.

"Streets Ahead", the recently published joint inspectorate report on the Street Crime Initiative, included positive examples of SSPs, with case studies of good practice in London and Manchester. Lessons learned from the first SSPs will be reflected in future guidance and training material.

School Budgets (Buckinghamshire)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools in *(a)* the Chesham and Amersham constituency and *(b)* Buckinghamshire have set deficit budgets for the academic year 2003–04. [129887]

Mr. Miliband: Figures for balances are collected at the end of each financial year. The latest complete figures are for March 2002, when 7 schools in the Chesham and Amersham constituency and 39 schools in Buckinghamshire as a whole, were in deficit.

School Standards

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* Key Stage 2 pupils and *(b)* Key Stage 3 pupils reached the required standards in both literacy and numeracy in each year since 1997. [127902]

Mr. Miliband: The percentages of pupils achieving the expected level in both English and Maths at *(a)* Key Stage 2 and *(b)* Key Stage 3 are shown in the following table for all years available since 1997.

Percentage

	(a) Key Stage 2	*(b) Key Stage 3*
1997	52	—
1998	51	—
1999	61	—
2000	64	55
2001	64	56
2002	65	57
2003*	66	—

*Provisional

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many *(a)* boys, *(b)* girls and *(c)* children from ethnic backgrounds have reached the required standards of (i) English and (ii) mathematics at Key stages 1, 2, 3 and 4 in each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority; [127904]

(2) how many and what percentage of *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls from ethnic minority backgrounds have reached the required standards of (i) English and (ii) maths at Key stages 1, 2, 3 and 4 in each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority. [127924]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls have reached the required standards of (i) English and (ii) mathematics at Key stages 1, 2, 3 and 4 in each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority. [127922]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

The tables show, for each local education authority, the number of boys and girls in maintained schools who achieved the expected level in each year from 1997 to 2002.

The figures shown are based on:

Pupils achieving level 2 or above at Key Stage 1 in reading and in maths.

Pupils achieving level 4 or above at Key Stage 2 in English and in maths.

Pupils achieving level 5 or above at Key Stage 3 in English and in maths.

Pupils achieving good grades (A*-C) at GCSE in English and in maths.

Secondary Schools (Buckinghamshire)

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what criteria will be applied by the adjudicator in relation to catchment areas for secondary schools in Buckinghamshire; and if he will make a statement. [130436]

Mr. Miliband: The Adjudicator is independent. In considering any objections he will look at them in the context of the law and guidance given in the Code of Practice on School Admissions, and take account of what is in the best interest of all pupils and parents in the area.

Student Loans

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to assist Moslem students with finance, in the event of the

student not wishing on religious grounds to take a loan requiring repayment of interest; and if he will make a statement. [129321]

Alan Johnson: The Government are committed to widening access to higher education. We are naturally concerned that some Muslim students from low income families may be missing out on the benefits of higher education because they may not wish to take out a student loan on religious grounds. Student loans are not commercial loans. To make sure that all borrowers pay back the same amount that they borrowed in real terms, the Government uprate the value of what is owed in line with the general rate of inflation.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills met representatives from the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) on 8 July to discuss their concerns, and senior officials from my Department will hold further discussions with FOSIS representatives in the near future.

Student Transport

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action he is taking in conjunction with the Learning and Skills Council to co-ordinate the transport requirements of individual students, with particular reference to those with *(a)* special needs and *(b)* specialist course requirements. [129984]

Alan Johnson: In 2001–02, we commissioned an extensive study by Steer Davis Cleave into transport support for students of 16–19 and in particular, those with disabilities and learning difficulties. In line with the recommendations from this, my Department has revised legislation, via Schedule 19 of the Education Act 2002, and made an additional £39 million of funding available to local education authorities (LEAs) and their partners for the three years from 2003–06. Now LEAs, Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) and further education colleges are required to work together to produce, publish and deliver local policies to ensure that there are effective transport services and financial support in order that young people can access and complete their further education. These new transport arrangements are currently the subject of independent evaluation.

This is in addition to the learner support fund, which is £36 million in 2003/04. This is paid to schools and colleges so that they can help students aged 16–19 to meet course related costs, which can include transport. The LSC also provides additional learning support to institutions to help with the extra costs a learner with special needs may require, e.g. for transport between sites and to other off-site activities for learners with mobility difficulties. And the LSC has provided support to education providers through revenue and capital funding to implement the Disability Discrimination Act.

The Government have announced that from September 2004 education maintenance allowances will be available across England. These will pay a means tested allowance of up to £30 per week (plus bonuses) to young people to provide them with an incentive to stay in learning and to help them with the associated costs, including transport.

Students 19 plus

Learner support funds are the main source of financial support to help students of 19 and over in further education with costs associated with studying, including transport costs. They are allocated via the LSC and used flexibly by colleges to help students facing financial difficulties related to their learning. £96.5 million has been made available for students aged 19 plus for 2003/04.

Each college is able to set its own policy on how it applies the funds and is required to give priority to students with disabilities, learning difficulties and other socially disadvantaged groups.

University of Bournemouth

Mr. Christopher Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what discussions he has had on the list of invitees to the meeting which he is addressing at the University of Bournemouth in October; [131053]

(2) if he will attend a meeting with students to discuss top-up fees when he visits the University of Bournemouth in October; [131054]

(3) if he will publish the list of invitees to the meeting which he proposes to address at the University of Bournemouth in October. [131055]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I have been invited to visit Bournemouth university which I intend to do in October. The university is responsible for the programme and arrangements.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Burma

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received about the circumstances of Aung San Suu Kyi and those members and supporters of the National League for Democracy imprisoned after the attack on 30 May on Aung San Suu Kyi's motorcade. [130638]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It is unacceptable that Aung San Suu Kyi and other members and supporters of the National League for Democracy (NLD) should ever have been detained by the Burmese regime. As I recently told the Burmese Ambassador to the UK, we hold the Burmese military regime responsible for the wellbeing of Aung San Suu Kyi and we will continue to push for her release and other NLD members and supporters detained since 30 May.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice the Government has issued to British American Tobacco on the future of its cigarette factory in Burma owned jointly with the Burmese Government. [130630]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government do not encourage UK companies to trade or invest in Burma while the regime continues to suppress the basic human rights of its people. On 2 July I asked British American Tobacco to withdraw their investment from Burma. They are currently considering this request.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what progress has been made to have Burma placed on the UN Security Council agenda; and if he will table proposals for targeted sanctions against Burma through the UK's position as chair of the UNSC; [130633]

(2) what proposals the Government plans to make to the UN Security Council regarding the political, economic and humanitarian crisis in Burma. [130639]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government fully supports the efforts of the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy to Burma and the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma to help bring about national reconciliation, respect for human rights and democracy in Burma. This includes raising Burma in the various fora of the UN as and when appropriate.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the governments of the ASEAN nations on formulating a co-ordinated policy to influence the Burmese Government towards democracy and improved human rights. [130634]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We take advantage of our regular bilateral and multilateral contacts with all ASEAN nations to discuss Burma related issues, most recently on 23–24 July at the ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting. We welcome the joint Asian and EU Foreign Ministers statement on 24 July calling for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and democracy in Burma which sent a strong message of EU-Asian unity to the regime. We will remain in regular consultation with ASEAN Governments in the build up to the ASEAN Summit on 7–8 October. We believe that the ASEAN nations have an important role to play in encouraging substantive change in Burma.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what results have followed his decision in June to write to tour operators to ask them not to organise tourism in Burma. [130636]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: By writing to the Association of British Travel Agents and individual tour operators we have drawn attention to the fact that Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy continue not to encourage tourists to visit Burma in the present circumstances. At least one UK tour operator has since said it will remove Burma from its 2004 Brochure and others are considering whether to withdraw.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has held about the closure of the universities in Burma following 30 May. [130637]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK made numerous representations to the Burmese authorities concerning the closure of universities after 30 May. The universities re-opened on 16 June.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what impact the publication of the road map to democracy and the national convention recently published by the Burmese Prime Minister has had on the Government's advice to British businesses on trading with and investing in Burma. [130640]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear in this House on 25 June, the British Government do not encourage trade with or investment in Burma, while the regime continues to suppress the basic human rights of its people, We offer no support for companies wishing to trade with Burma or for those who want to invest there. Representatives of British companies or their subsidiaries that inquire about the prospects either for trade with or investment in Burma are informed of this policy. The publication of the Burmese road map to democracy does not change this policy. We would want to see substantive dialogue with democratic groups leading to national reconciliation in Burma before considering any change to Government advice.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Burma about the road map to democracy; and if he will make a statement. [130641]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have had no discussions with the Burmese regime about its so called road map to democracy. I call on the Burmese authorities to release Aung San Suu Kyi and other members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) immediately and to enter into a substantive and meaningful political dialogue with them.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had about the exclusion of the National League for Democracy from the recently announced Burmese national convention. [130642]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK is active within the EU, UN and with our Asian partners to persuade the Burmese military regime to enter into substantive dialogue with democratic and ethnic minority leaders. Any meaningful democratic process in Burma must include the National League for Democracy.

Conflict Prevention Pools

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) when he expects the independent evaluation of the Global Conflict Prevention Pool to be complete; [130523]

(2) when he expects the independent evaluation of the Africa Conflict Prevention Pool to be complete. [130524]

Mr. Rammell: The joint external evaluation of the Africa Conflict Prevention Pool and the Global Conflict Prevention Pool began in June 2003. The results will inform the Spending Review 2004 process and so the aim is for the evaluation to be completed by early 2004.

Consultancies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many consultancies were commissioned by his Department in the last two years for which figures are available; and what the cost of those contracts was. [130894]

Mr. Rammell: The total number of consultancies could be established only at disproportionate cost. Annual expenditure on external consultants is published in the Department's Annual Reports (copies of which are in the Library of the House). It amounted to

£17.9 million in 2000–01 and £20.1 million in 2001–02. The vast majority of this expenditure was associated with our major Information Communication Technology and Estate construction programmes.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on smuggling arms to rebel forces within the Congo from *(a)* Rwanda, *(b)* Angola and *(c)* Uganda. [130658]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 17 September 2003]:* We condemn the supply of arms to militia groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and continue to call for an end to all such support. UN Security Council Resolution 1493 (2003) introduced an arms embargo on eastern DRC and on armed groups not party to the main power-sharing agreement (signed in Pretoria in December 2002). The UN Mission in the DRC (MONUC) are mandated by the same resolution to report regularly to the Security Council on information concerning arms supplies.

EU Accession States (Work Permits)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether residents of countries which join the European Union will have immediate permission to work in the United Kingdom with effect from the date of those countries joining the Union; and if he will make a statement. [129773]

Mr. MacShane: The EU (Accessions) Bill provides a power to grant nationals of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia the same rights to work in the UK from 1 May 2004 as are enjoyed by nationals of the states in the European Economic Area. The Accession Treaty automatically grants nationals of Cyprus and Malta these rights.

I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's written statement of 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 537–51WS, on EU enlargement and free movement of workers, and to the EU (Accessions) Bill and its Explanatory Notes—both available on the FCO website under 'enlarging the EU'—http://www.fco.gov.uk.

Israel

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Israeli Government regarding the security barrier. [130378]

Mr. Rammell: My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary both made clear our concerns over the route and likely impact of the "security fence" to Ariel Sharon, the Israeli Prime Minister, when he visited London on 14 July. Foreign Office officials have also made representations through the Israeli embassy.

The fence should not be built within occupied territory. We deplore this seizure of Palestinian land, isolation of Palestinian villages and the creation of a further physical obstacle to the two-State solution.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Questions directed to him remain unanswered. [130758]

Mr. Straw: My Department has 49 Parliamentary Questions unanswered as of 17 September, only one of which is more than 7 working days old, which will be answered shortly.

Serbia and Montenegro

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what monitoring is occurring of attacks on religious minorities in *(a)* Serbia and *(b)* Montenegro. [130572]

Mr. MacShane: The implementation of the Charter on Human and Minority Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in Serbia and Montenegro, including the protection and promotion of national minorities (whether religious, ethnic or otherwise), is closely monitored by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR). Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) also monitor observance of human rights in Serbia and Montenegro and include Amnesty International, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia (HCHRS) and Human Rights Watch.

Serbia and Montenegro is also subject to a number of the Council of Europe's human rights monitoring mechanisms, including those provided for under the Framework Convention on National Minorities which was ratified by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (now Serbia and Montenegro) on 11 May 2001.

Written Answers to Questions

The following answers were received between Friday 19 September and Monday 6 October 2003

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Gender Pay Gap

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Minister for Women what measures have been taken to address the pay gap between men and women; and if she will make a statement. [131312]

Ms Hewitt: The Government are taking action to tackle the complex factors behind the pay gap, including promoting voluntary pay reviews and good practice on equal pay. We have set a target for pay reviews and are working in partnership with businesses and trade unions, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and Opportunity Now towards ensuring that 35 per cent. of large companies have done pay reviews by 2006. We provided the EOC with £100,000 to produce a toolkit to help employers conduct pay reviews and provided trade unions with additional funding to train over 400 representatives in equal pay issues. The Government have committed all civil service Departments and agencies to review their pay systems and produce action plans to close any equal pay gaps, 83 action plans have been submitted, representing 98 per cent. of the civil service. We are also taking steps to widen women's opportunities in the labour market. The Employment Act 2002 introduced measures to help parents maintain links with the world of work and better balance their work and home lives. These will help women return to the labour market and have a positive impact on the pay gap. The Act also introduced an equal pay questionnaire that will make it easier to tackle pay discrimination in the workplace.

People Trafficking

Linda Perham: To ask the Minister for Women what assessment she has made of progress in tackling the illegal trafficking of women. [127787]

Beverley Hughes: I have been asked to reply.

We have set out a comprehensive approach to tackle trafficking in women and other forms of organised crime in the "White Paper Secure Borders, Safe Haven" published in 2002. The United Kingdom was one of the first countries to sign the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime, and its Optional Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children. The Government also supports action to combat trafficking, in both European Union and international fora and has supported information campaigns aimed at alerting women to the risks involved in such illegal immigration.

The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 introduced a new offence of trafficking for the purpose of controlling prostitution with a maximum penalty of 14 years, and comprehensive offences covering trafficking into, out of and within the UK for purposes of sexual exploitation are included in the Sexual Offences Bill.

The Government have also recently published a trafficking toolkit, which will be a best practice guide for immigration officers, police and others potentially dealing with trafficking. A pilot scheme to support victims of trafficking to help them give evidence against their exploiters has been running since March 2003.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Battalion Disbandments

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who has ultimate authority on the disbandment of a battalion of a regiment within the Army. [120172]

Mr. Ingram: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has ultimate authority on the disbandment of a battalion of a regiment within the Army.

CABINET OFFICE

Civil Contingencies

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what role the EU will play in civil contingencies planning. [130796]

Mr. Alexander: The EU is taking a leading role in facilitating multilateral emergency planning. Through the Committee for the Action Programme and for the Mechanism in the field of Civil Protection, the EU is establishing a Community mechanism to facilitate reinforced co-operation in civil protection assistance interventions.

While the UK continues to retain national responsibility for its own contingency planning, there may be cases where the resources of one nation are unable to cope with the scale of a particular incident.

In such exceptional circumstances we would expect the full co-operation of the member states and institutions of the European Union, including the Health and Safety Committee, in containing and resolving the situation. To this end the European Union's civil protection Monitoring and Information Centre would facilitate and co-ordinate any request for assistance from Member States.

Asbestos

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how much has been spent by his Department and its agencies on *(a)* asbestos surveys and *(b)* the management and removal of asbestos since 1 January

2001; and what budget is available to (i) commission asbestos surveys and (ii) manage and remove asbestos from buildings in (A) 2003 and (B) 2004. [130916]

Mr. Alexander: The Cabinet Office has undertaken asbestos surveys for the London and Basingstoke Estate, the GCDA buildings, HMSO (Norwich), Emergency Planning College (York), the COI and the CMPS Residential Training Centre (Sunningdale). This has identified risk areas and how this can best be managed.

The costs incurred since 2001 are as follows:

London Estate

No data on the costs of asbestos surveys and work pre-April 2002 are available, with the exception of the refurbishment project in Admiralty House and 22–26 Whitehall, where the cost of identifying and removing asbestos was £291,000. Expenditure in the management and removal of asbestos on the London Estate since April 2002 is £9,000.

Basingstoke Estate

The control of asbestos is the responsibility of the building's landlord. Some low risk asbestos has been found and removed but no costs were incurred.

GCDA

No asbestos identified and no costs incurred.

HMSO (Norwich)

The control of asbestos is the responsibility of the building's landlord. No risk has been identified and no costs were incurred.

Emergency Planning College (York)

No expenditure incurred in 2001 and 2002.

CMPS Residential Training Centre (Sunningdale)

Since 1 January 2001, £511 has been spent on asbestos surveys and £6,000 on asbestos removal (the latter amount was paid in 2003).

COI

No expenditure was incurred in 2001 and 2002.

The budgets available in 2003 and 2004 are as follows:

London Estate

The Cabinet Office's FM provider, as part of their fixed annual fee, maintains all asbestos surveys. No specific budget has been identified for the removal of asbestos, as there are no high-risk areas unless areas are disturbed due to building works. Costs of required measures will be identified and incorporated into any budgeted project costs at the time of the works.

Basingstoke Estate

No further risks have been identified and therefore no specific budget allocated.

GCDA and HMSO (Norwich)

No risk identified; therefore, no specific budget allocated.

Emergency Planning College (York)

The budget for 2003 for surveys is £5,725; for the management and removal it is £18,500. All of this work has been completed. The budget for 2004 for management and removal is £10,500.

CMPS Residential Training Centre (Sunningdale)

In May 2002 the Cabinet Office commenced a PPP contract with Initial Style Conferences Ltd. (ISC) to manage Sunningdale Park. All risks and expenditure relating to asbestos is now the responsibility of ISC.

COI

As the asbestos previously identified was deemed as being of low risk, costs of its management and removal will be included as part of any future refurbishment works. No separate cost data are available.

Information Technology

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what IT projects with a value in excess of £10,000 the Cabinet Office authorised in each of the last three financial years. [124424]

Mr. Alexander: I have today placed in the Libraries of the House a summary of IT projects with a value in excess of £10,000 that my Department authorised in the last three financial years.

It has been compiled from centrally held records and those maintained by existing business units, but, due to changes in my Department over the last three years, will not capture all projects that were managed by units that no longer exist.

The summary excludes any projects undertaken by the executive agencies of my Department (i.e. the Central Office of Information and the Government Car and Despatch Agency).

Mr. Flight: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many outsourced IT contracts have been signed by his Department in each year since 1997; how much each of these contracts is worth; with whom they are signed; how many have been renegotiated; how many are still in place; and if he will make a statement. [126209]

Mr. Alexander: My Department has signed 21 outsourced IT contracts since 1 April 1997. 20 of these contracts were awarded to the suppliers listed below for the delivery of services in connection with the Government Gateway. Of these, 9 have been renegotiated and 14 are currently in place. The estimated total value of these contracts is just over £117 million.

BCC Chambersign
BT Syntegra
Cable & Wireless
CGEY
Chatmoderators
Clark, McKay & Walpole
Domain Technologies
EDS (Initially Loudcloud)
EduServ
EMC Computer Systems (UK) Ltd
Equifax
ITNet
Microsoft Corporation
National Computing Centre
Sapient Limited
SchlumbergerSema
Securicor
Team Netsol
Vizuri
Westminster Digital.

A further contract for the provision of my Department's internal office systems and ancillary services was awarded to Compaq Computer Limited (now HP Ltd.) in January 2000 and runs for five years,

with the option to extend for a further two years. This was the renewal of an existing outsourced contract. The estimated expenditure on the core services over five years is in the region of £15 million.

Secondments

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the Cabinet Office's policy is on employing secondees from the private sector; how many secondees from the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sector the Cabinet Office were employed in each year since 1997; from which companies and organisations they were seconded; at what level they were employed; and if he will make a statement. [127066]

Mr. Alexander: The Government are committed to developing a modern, flexible, outward-focused civil service that works in partnership with all sectors of society. Interchange is a key tool in meeting that commitment. Secondments are encouraged as part of the interchange programme, which promotes the exchange of people and good practice between the civil service and other organisations. Before an interchange can occur all parties must be satisfied that no conflict of interest arises. In all cases agreement is reached with the parent organisation on the salary reimbursed by the Cabinet Office to ensure it falls in the civil service pay range appropriate to the post.

There are no records available prior to April 1999. The following table gives the number of secondees within the Cabinet Office by Pay Band within each year from 1999–2000. The figures for secondees from the private and public sectors are aggregated. Separate figures are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

	Level	*Number of secondees in post*
1999–2000	SCS	5
	Band A[1]	22
	Band B2[2]	6
	Band B1[3]	1
	Total	34
2000–2001	SCS	6
	Band A	33
	Band B2	12
	Band B1	1
	Total	52
2001–2002	SCS	9
	Band A	52
	Band B2	19
	Total	80
2002–2003	SCS	11
	Band A	44
	Band B2	10
	Total	65
2003–2004 (to date)	SCS	15
	Band A	20
	Band B2	8
	Total	43

[1] Combined grades 6 and 7.
[2] Combined grades Senior Executive Officer (SEO) and Higher Executive Officer (HEO).
[3] Equivalent to Executive Officer.

The following is a list of the companies and organisations from which the above were seconded:

Accenture
Addenbrooke's NHS Trust
Adult Learning Inspectorate
Age Concern
Arthur Andersen
Audit Commission
Australian Civil Service
Barking and Dagenham, London Borough
Bass Leisure Retail
Bates, Wells and Braithewaite
Boston Consulting Group
British Telecom
BSkyB
BUPA
Camden, London Borough
Canadian Government
Commission for Racial Equality
Deloitte and Touche
Energis
Energy Saving Trust
Environment Agency
Environmental Resource Management Ltd.
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
Financial Times
Ford Motor Company
French Civil Service
GlaxoSmithKline
Greater London Authority
Guy's and St. Thomas's Hospital Trust
Hay Management Consultants
Hertfordshire Constabulary
Hewlett Packard
House of Commons
IBM UK Ltd.
ICI
Imperial College
Improvement and Development Agency
Institute for Public Policy Research
Institute of Education
Kids' Club Network
King's Fund
KPMG
Local Government Association
Logica
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
Marks and Spencer
Metropolitan Police
Microsoft Ltd.
National Children's Bureau
National Consumer Council
National Council for Voluntary Organisations
National Criminal Intelligence Service
New Opportunities Fund
New Policy Institute
NHS Information Authority
NHS Purchase and Supply Agency
North Hertfordshire District Council

Office of Public Management
Ofsted
Oracle Corporation UK Ltd.
Oxera Consulting Ltd.
Poole Hospital NHS Trust
PricewaterhouseCoopers
Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
Royal Bank of Scotland
Sandwell Metropolitan Council
Singapore Government
Skillmind Consultancy
Social Market Foundation
South Bank University
Stockport Corporation
Sun Microsystems
Surrey County Council
Tarmac
Three
Unilever
University of Bristol
University of Edinburgh
University of Portsmouth
Warwick Business School
Welsh Development Agency
Westminster University
Worksystems Inc.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what targets were set by the CPS in 2002–03 to deal with prosecution cases in a timely and efficient manner in partnership with other agencies; and what the performance results are against these targets. [128716]

The Solicitor-General: In 2002–03, the Crown Prosecution Service set two targets in order to deal with prosecution cases in a timely and efficient manner in partnership with other agencies.

The first target was to send 80 per cent. of committal papers to the defence within 14 days (10 days in custody cases) of receipt from the police of a full file for committal certified as trial ready. The target was achieved in 86.7 per cent. of cases.

The second target was to deliver 84 per cent. of briefs to counsel within 14 days of committal or transfer (21 days in non-standard fee cases). The target was achieved in 86.6 per cent. of cases.

Domestic Violence

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what steps the CPS has taken to contribute to the Government's strategy to tackle domestic violence. [128721]

The Solicitor-General: The CPS handles about 13,000 cases of domestic violence each year. The revised policy on prosecution of cases of domestic violence launched in November 2001 focuses on the safety of the victim and children and on conducting cases, wherever possible, on the basis of evidence other than that of the victim. The work done by the CPS at operational level is complemented by the strategic contribution of the network of CPS Domestic Violence Co-ordinators across England and Wales who share information and good practice and issue guidance to prosecutors to help them identify and address difficult and sensitive issues that are regularly raised in domestic violence cases.

The CPS also contributes to the Government's strategy by consulting and working closely at a local level with criminal justice partners and the voluntary sector by participating in local domestic violence fora. At national level the CPS Policy lead on domestic violence attends the Home Office Virtual Unit and made a significant input into the Government White Papers, "Justice for All" and "Safety and Justice", addressing issues of prevention, protection and support.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will make a statement on the security situation in Afghanistan and its effect on humanitarian and reconstruction work. [130296]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The security situation in Afghanistan continues to be a major concern of the population, the Afghan government and the international community. In large areas of the south the aid community remains extremely constrained in providing humanitarian and development assistance because of the threats from a lack of reliable security.

Attacks have been primarily concentrated in the south of the country. However, there have been other incidents elsewhere in the country, including incidents related to clashes between contending power holders. NGOs and the UN continue to work across the whole of Afghanistan, although their freedom of movement is constrained in some areas.

To help to counter the increasing insecurity, four international joint civil-military provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) have been established in Mazar-e Sharif, Bamiyan, Kunduz and Gardez with four more planned to be operational before the end of this year in Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat and Charikar. The PRTs are designed to bring stability to the regions and facilitate the reconstruction effort of the Afghan Administration, UN and NGOs

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development how much of the money pledged the Government of Afghanistan has received; and how much money his Department has given to Afghanistan. [130297]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: International donors meeting in Tokyo 21 to 22 January 2002 pledged more than US$1.8 billion to rebuild Afghanistan in 2002 which has been disbursed, and US$4.5 billion over five years.

DFID have given £131million to Afghanistan since November 2001. The joint DFID, MOD and FCO Global Conflict Prevention Pool has also given £16 million.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will make a statement on attacks on non-governmental organisations workers in Afghanistan. [130299]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Aid workers and relief organisations can be seen as soft targets by those seeking to undermine efforts to rebuild and bring stability.

It is with much regret that in the last month two workers of the Afghan Red Crescent Society, a Mercy Corps driver and four members of the Danish Committee to Aid Afghan Refugees have been killed in Afghanistan.

I greatly admire the way in which, despite the difficult conditions under the present security situation, non-governmental organisations are continuing to provide assistance to the poorest and most vulnerable Afghans.

Aid Expenditure

Angus Robertson: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development how much aid his Department has *(a)* unilaterally and *(b)* multilaterally provided to (i) Afghanistan, (ii) Algeria, (iii) Angola, (iv) Bangladesh, (v) Botswana, (vi) Ghana, (vii) Jamaica, (viii) Kazakhstan, (ix) Kenya, (x) Nigeria, (xi) Pakistan, (xii) Sri Lanka, (xiii) Syria, (xiv) Tanzania, (xv) Tunisia, (xvi) United Arab Emirates and (xvii) the Ukraine per annum since 1997 through (A) ECHO, (B) the UN, (C) the World Bank and (D) the IMF; how much of this aid was delivered in kind; how much of this aid was provided as monetary investment for specific projects; and if he will make a statement. [129977]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Information in the form requested is not readily available but I have placed in the Libraries of the House two tables under the title "DFID Bilateral and Multilateral Aid to Countries referred to in Parliamentary Question UIN 129977". These show DFID bilateral expenditure to the countries listed broken down by form of aid, and the imputed UK share of multilateral assistance to these countries by main channel. The bilateral data are in financial (April-March) years and the multilateral in calendar years. The latest year is shown in each case.Note also that the imputed multilateral data are based on OECD statistics and are an estimate for the UK effort—i.e. wider than DFID.

Additional information on the bilateral expenditure is available in DFID's annual publication Statistics on International Development, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. No further information is available on multilateral expenditure.

Arms Control

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what steps have been taken by the Department to assist developing countries in increasing security for legal stockpiles of armaments. [131139]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The UK recognises that improving stockpile security is a key component of efforts to prevent the proliferation of illegal armaments. The UK provides limited assistance to countries on security for legally held stockpiles of small arms. Through the Global Conflict Prevention Pool Small Arms Strategy, the UK provides support to the work of UNDP's South Eastern Europe Small Arms Clearing House, which has provided training and assistance to states in that region on stockpile security. In Sierra Leone, the UK provided training to the military and security forces on weapons management and security systems as part of a wider package of support for restructuring the military forces after the conflict.

The UK was a key contributor to the development of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Best Practice Guidelines on Stockpile Management, published earlier this year, and is currently working with the OSCE to devise ways to support the operationalisation of these Guidelines.

DFID, the FCO and the MOD are also looking at ways to increase provision of technical guidance and assistance in this area within the context of security sector reform programmes.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development pursuant to his answer of 17 June, *Official Report*, column 122W, on the gun trade, what assessment he has made of the impact of export control legislation on the proliferation of small arms in developing countries; and whether the Government raised the issue of export control legislation and the proliferation of small arms at the UN Biennial Meeting of States in July. [129808]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The UK believes that stronger export control legislation is an important way of tackling the proliferation of small arms in developing countries, and is committed to working with our international partners to strengthen existing legislation at the national, regional and international levels. However, legislation also requires effective and sustained enforcement, and the UK government provides support to ensure effective implementation and enforcement of that legislation.

The UK Government made export control legislation one of its priorities for the UN Biennial Meeting of States, and made a strong statement on the need to strengthen and enforce export controls during the plenary session. The UK also co-sponsored a side meeting for interested states to consider ways of achieving this. This meeting established a considerable degree of support, particularly for regional processes as an interim stage to securing greater international agreement. The UK is now discussing options for taking this process forward with possible co-partners, including UK support for regional processes, and remains committed to working with our partners internationally to secure stronger export controls on transfers of small arms.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what steps the Department has taken to help developing countries

use and develop their air traffic control infrastructures to reduce the number of illicit arms shipments arriving in their countries. [131149]

Hilary Benn: The UK currently focuses its assistance on strengthening policing, customs and border control in developing countries as a means of helping them to reduce the number of illicit arms shipments arriving in their countries. This work is funded under the Global Conflict Pool Small Arms Strategy. The Pool has not provided any direct assistance to developing countries to develop their air traffic control infrastructure.

Burma

Vera Baird: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development whether UK development aid to Burma is made conditional upon specific policies or course of conduct by the Burmese Government. [130629]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: UK aid for the Burmese poor addresses priority humanitarian and other critical needs, including prevention of HIV/AIDS. UK aid is provided within the European Union (EU) Common Position on Burma, which states that "... Non humanitarian aid or development programmes shall be suspended ..." except those "projects and programmes which should be, as far as possible, defined in consultation with democratic groups, including the National League for Democracy, and run with their involvement:

in support of human rights and democracy,

in support of poverty alleviation and, in particular, of the provision of basic needs for the poorest section of the population, in the context of decentralised cooperation through local civilian authorities and non-governmental organisations,

in support of health and basic education through non-governmental organisations."

We require partners to institute suitable mechanisms to ensure that UK aid is used in a transparent and accountable manner. Monitoring and evaluation systems have to be set up by recipients of UK aid, and such systems prevent any part of it going to the regime.

Vera Baird: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what the *(a)* extent and *(b)* nature is of Government development aid to Burma; and what plans there are to change the amount and nature of aid. [130631]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: In the current financial year 2003–04, UK aid for poor Burmese people is likely to be about £4 million, addressing needs in the areas of health, HIV/AIDS and support to refugees. Options for future aid are currently being assessed through the preparation of a new country plan.

Vera Baird: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what proportion of UK development aid to Burma is channelled through the Burmese *(a)* Government and *(b)* Government agencies. [130632]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: UK aid for poor Burmese people is channelled through United Nations (UN) agencies and international and local non-governmental organisations. In 2003, some of the funding for the UN-led programme to tackle HIV/AIDS, to which the UK is the largest contributor, will be spent on activities delivered through the National AIDS Programme. It is not yet possible to say what proportion of UK aid will be used in this way. The UN is required to monitor these expenditures rigorously to ensure that they are used for the intended purposes in a transparent and accountable manner.

Burundi

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what recent assessment he has made of the numbers of people internally displaced in Burundi; and what measures are in place to meet their humanitarian needs. [130305]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The current estimate of the number of internally displaced persons as of August this year is just over 280,000 plus up to an additional 100,000 temporarily displaced at any time. They are an important focal point for the humanitarian relief effort in the country. Although this is effective where there is access, there is concern about the welfare of communities who cannot be reached.

The UK's humanitarian support to Burundi includes a £400,000 grant to Medecins Sans Frontieres for emergency health interventions, which benefits displaced persons in Bujumbura by increasing access to basic health and to emergency surgical services. We envisage a further £500,000 contribution to the UN Consolidated Appeal in the near future. The EU are providing, through its European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO), up to £15 million for humanitarian support activities in Burundi, this includes humanitarian support to internally displaced people.

We continue to monitor the humanitarian situation and will continue to respond to requests for support in line with perceived humanitarian priorities.

Cameroon

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development pursuant to the answer of 14 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 9W, on poverty reduction strategies, what pressure his Department applied for the inclusion of water, sanitation and hygiene in the Cameroon Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan published on 12 August; and whether the Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan provides sufficient resources to meet *(a)* the water and *(b)* the sanitation millennium development targets in Cameroon. [130749]

Hilary Benn: Cameroon's Poverty Reduction Strategy includes objectives of improved access to drinking water and sanitation under one of the seven Strategic Areas. DFID participated in discussions of the draft strategy with the Government of Cameroon and other donors. Our focus was on improved governance, monitoring of PRS implementation, and forestry sector reform, which is the sector we are concentrating on and where we feel we can make most difference. We would expect adequacy of the Strategy with respect to all the Millennium Development Goals to become clearer through the monitoring process, which the government of Cameroon and donors are working to put in place.

Congo

Ms Oona King: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what actions his Department is taking to support the transitional national government in the Democratic Republic of Congo. [130689]

Hilary Benn: Since the installation of the Transitional National Government in the Democratic Republic of Congo in July DFID has started to engage actively with it, and with other donors, aimed at establishing a significant programme of support to the DRC. This involves some initial Quick Impact Projects in the fields of health and education to an estimated value of £19 million. In addition, a DFID mission visited Kinshasa in early September to identify activities in support of the five Transitional Institutions of the TNG. We are also looking at working with partners, especially the Government of Belgium, in Security Sector Reform. The UK is also a major contributor to the World Bank's regional Great Lakes programme for DDR which will include programmes in the DRC.

Consultancy Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development how many consultancies were commissioned by the Department in the last two years for which figures are available; and what the cost of those contracts was. [130889]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID central Procurement Department commissioned consultancy contracts as follows:

	Number of contracts	*£ million*
2001–02	1,082	282
2002–03	833	262

In addition, DFID overseas departments commissioned lower value contracts worth a total of £20 million in 2001–02 and £25 million in 2002–03.

Departmental Budget

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what percentage of the Department's 2002–03 budget is spent on providing help to those without adequate access to water, food and shelter. [129248]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The central focus of the Government's policy on international development is a commitment to the internationally agreed target to halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015, together with associated targets including basic health care provision and universal access to primary education. We believe that reducing poverty is the best way of empowering people to take control of their own lives and gain access to basic requirements such as food, shelter and water.

The Monterrey Consensus, agreed at the UN Financing for Development conference in Monterrey in 2002, recognised the crucial role played by developing countries' own poverty reduction strategies. Experience has shown that the reform agendas drawn up locally are more successful than those imposed from outside. More effective use of aid means moving away from donors allocating funding to selected sectors and donor-led projects to providing support that is consistent with poverty reduction strategies drawn up by the developing countries themselves. It is for this reason that we do not plan our resources on the basis of different sectors. Rather, we allocate funds to regions and countries and allow country programmes to determine priorities according to national plans.

It is not therefore possible to provide an exact figure for the percentage of the Department's overall budget spent on particular sectors. Over half of the Department's overall budget is allocated to expenditure through multilateral organisations and other categories, such as direct budget support and humanitarian aid, where it is difficult to attribute precisely spending according to sectors.

We are committed to the Millennium Development Goal targets on water and sanitation as well as to the adoption of national policies and strategies for integrated water resources management in all developing countries by 2005. Improvements to water management are central to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. DFID expenditure on water and sanitation in 2001–002 was £33.8 million. We do not yet have final figures for 2002–03.

The United Nations agency responsible for shelter is UN-Habitat. The UK contribution is around £1 million a year (which in 2002–03 amounted to 27 per cent. of their core funding). We do not have figures on bilateral spending on shelter.

The causes of hunger are many and include poverty, ill health, exclusion, conflict and natural disasters. Poverty is, however, the principal cause. The concept of 'food security' focuses on people's ability to obtain food, rather than simply on food production, which is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for tackling hunger. Policies to tackle food insecurity need to be based on a clear understanding of who is hungry and why. The design of such policies needs to take into account people's vulnerability, the impact of shocks and the effects of trade policies.

DFID spent an average of around £275 million a year in the period 1998–99–2000–01 on Sustainable Livelihoods (including Agriculture and Food Security). Final figures are not yet available for 2002–03. This does not include short-term emergency food aid.

DFID's total bilateral spend in 2001–02 was £1,506 million, of which £964 million can be allocated by sector (this does not include budget support or humanitarian assistance).

It should be noted that all these figures are likely to understate the amounts actually spent in these sectors for the reasons given above and because, in the past, DFID only attributed expenditure to one sector even when an activity contributed to more than one sector.

Ethiopia

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what the Department's policy is on the Ethiopian Government's

programme of national resettlement in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region; and if he will make a statement. [130304]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The Government of Ethiopia are undertaking a programme of voluntary resettlement. We recognise that if properly managed, such programmes can have a role to play as part of a wider set of actions to address food insecurity. However, badly managed resettlement can have a negative impact if people are moved into inappropriate areas or given insufficient support or services.

There clearly have been some cases of inappropriate resettlement in Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region. Our overall policy has been to engage with the federal and regional Government to promote a more careful and measured approach. In addition, we have remained ready to respond to humanitarian situations that might develop. Our Ethiopia office will continue to monitor the situation carefully.

Export Control Act

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development pursuant to his answer of 18 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 241W, on the Export Control Act 2002, whether the Department discussed the impact of the orders on developing countries with *(a)* aid agencies and *(b)* NGOs working in developing countries. [129820]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: No. DFID officials did discuss the submissions made by aid agencies and NGOs working in developing countries to HMG's consultation on the draft secondary legislation of the Export Control Act with relevant DTI officials.

Food Expenditure

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development how much was spent on food by his Department and by each of the agencies for which it is responsible in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03; what proportion of that food by value was produced in the United Kingdom; what guidance he has issued to encourage the procurement of home-produced food; and if he will make a statement. [129373]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID's headquarters catering services purchased food costing £121,000 in 20012–02 (only part-year figures are available, dating from the start of the current contract) and £224,000 in 2002–03. The caterers estimate that around 60 per cent. was produced in the UK. We have agreed an action plan with them to implement the Government's policy for sustainable food procurement.

Great Lakes Region

Ms Oona King: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development when his Department will publish a joint strategy paper on the Great Lakes Region. [130688]

Hilary Benn: DFID and FCO plan to publish their Joint Strategy Paper on the Great Lakes within the next month.

Iraq

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development pursuant to his answer of 18 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 241W, on Iraq, whether water companies in the UK have offered assistance in Iraq. [129804]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: In response to requests from NGOs, one UK water company has provided assistance, on a not-for-profit basis, to drinking water supply and sanitation services in Iraq. The company has also provided DFID with information on its experience in the water sector in Iraq, and has offered further not-for-profit support to NGOs, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and the Baghdad Water Authority in rehabilitating water infrastructure. This offer has been forwarded to the Iraqi Ministry of Public Works and the CPA.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development pursuant to his answer of 9 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 614W, whether the Department has made an assessment of *(a)* whether there are sufficient numbers of trained public health laboratory staff in Iraq and *(b)* whether British military personnel can offer assistance in this area. [129806]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: No overall assessment of public health laboratory staff in Iraq has taken place since the conflict this year. Information from agencies working the health sector in Iraq, such as the World Health Organisation, suggests that trained Iraqi staff are available, but their skills need to be updated in line with current professional knowledge.

UK forces have a very small number of appropriately trained personnel in theatre who could, in principle, offer assistance in the training of Iraqi public health laboratory staff, subject to other priorities.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development pursuant to his answer of 17 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 124W, on Iraq, if he will also make a detailed study of the resources needed to re-establish a working civil service in Iraq. [129818]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The Coalition Provisional Authority is assessing the resources required to re-establish the Iraqi civil service. Institutional strengthening requirements are also expected to be addressed in the social and economic needs assessments now being undertaken by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and United Nations. DFID will consider whether any further detailed study is required after these bodies have reported their findings.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development pursuant to his answer of 17 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 124W, on Iraq, if he will take steps to ensure that short term reform to Iraq's food network before the restoration of normal market conditions are free of political interference. [129819]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID's priority in the short term is to minimise any disruption to food supplies, particularly to poor and vulnerable people, resulting from the winding-up of the Oil for Food Programme in Iraq. Over the medium term, our policy is to replace the

food distribution system by a monetary benefit which, like the current food distribution system, would initially be universal and standardised.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what support has been given by his Department to the Marsh Arabs of Iraq since the conclusion of hostilities in that country; and if he will make a statement. [129825]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID has been providing support for health care and sanitation for Iraqi Marsh Arabs and refugees in Iran through the NGO AMAR (£2.45 million over the last four years). We are in the process of considering a further year's support for AMAR. DFID has also granted £522,000 to the International Medical Corps for its work in Iraq, which includes providing clean and sustainable water supplies in Marsh Arab areas.

Social and economic needs assessments being undertaken by the World Bank, IMF and United Nations are expected to identify future requirements in the Marsh Arab areas. The Coalition Provisional Authority and the UN Environment Programme are also planning to assess environmental issues in Iraq, including in the southern marshlands. Future DFID support will be informed by outcome of these assessments.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls returning to school in Iraq. [129877]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: It is not possible to provide accurate estimates of numbers of children returning to school in Iraq because the administrative systems in the country do not at present have the capacity to collect such information. The Coalition Provisional Authority has reported that almost all Iraq's schools were open by June 2003. UNICEF, which assisted in the running of the summer examinations, has reported that end of year exams were taken by approximately 5.5 million children in June and July 2003.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development whether students in Iraq will be able to sit examinations in this academic year. [129878]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: UNICEF reports that end of year exams were taken by approximately 5.5 million children in Iraq in June and July this year. We fully expect Iraqi students to be able to sit examinations in the forthcoming academic year.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment he has made of the effect of the recent conflict in Iraq upon aid programmes for other developing countries. [130053]

Hilary Benn: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development and I set out in our letter of 22 May to Members of both Houses, we will not divert funding to Iraq from existing DFID programmes such as emergency assistance in Southern Africa, Afghanistan or the West Bank and Gaza, or programmes tackling poverty elsewhere.

Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what amounts have been spent in Iraq since 1 May on *(a)* re-establishing water supplies, *(b)* re-connecting electricity supplies and *(c)* assisting in supporting existing Iraqi hospitals and medical centres; and if the Department will include a breakdown of itemised expenditure in each weekly edition of its Iraq Update Report. [130291]

Hilary Benn: Most of DFID's expenditure on Iraq is channelled through the United Nations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and non-governmental organisations, each of which report to DFID on their expenditure and activities separately and at different times. It would not therefore be possible, other than at disproportionate cost to DFID and to the agencies concerned, to provide details of our total spending in Iraq, sector by sector, at any particular point of time.

DFID has so far committed £198 million to humanitarian and reconstruction assistance in Iraq. This includes £15.8 million to water and sanitation, £12.2 million to power and fuel, and £8.5 million to health and nutrition. A further £35 million has been allocated to humanitarian agencies without being earmarked to specific sectors, a proportion of which is being spent in the water, power and health sectors according to priorities identified on the ground. DFID has also recently agreed a £20 million project to help restore essential infrastructure in southern Iraq, which is expected to improve service delivery of power, water and fuel to over 5 million people.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what recent assessment has been made of the availability of medical supplies in Iraq. [130307]

Hilary Benn: Recent assessments by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Iraqi Ministry of Health indicate that there are no major shortages of essential medical supplies in Iraq. There are, however, still reported shortages of specialist supplies such as laboratory reagents, TB antibiotics, oxygen and drugs for some chronic diseases. A number of agencies, including WHO, have helped refurbish drug warehouses in Baghdad, and the transport of drugs to the regions.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what recent assessment has been made of the supply of *(a)* clean water, *(b)* sanitation and *(c)* electricity throughout Iraq. [130308]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Recent assessments suggest that the Baghdad water system is working at approximately 80 per cent. of its pre-war capacity, and that 75 per cent. of the population of Baghdad has access to sewage networks. The supply of clean water and access to sanitation in other areas is difficult to assess accurately. UNICEF and the General Corporation for Water Supply are compiling a database on progress in the water and sanitation sector in order to provide better assessments of the current level of services.

Electricity supply throughout Iraq has improved over the last month. On 8 September, power generation had reached 3550 megawatts, approximately 81 per cent. of the pre-war level of 4400 megawatts. The Coalition Provisional Administration has set a target for reaching

this pre-war level by the end of September. Work is also taking place to restore the transmission grid, which has suffered particularly badly from looting and sabotage. This will allow the additional power to be used effectively throughout the country to improve the reliability of service and to provide additional power to the less well served areas. In July and August Baghdad had power on a 3 hours on and 3 hours off basis while Basrah had up to 20 hours per day.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what measures are in place to restore and maintain security in Iraq to enable the provision of humanitarian aid. [130309]

Hilary Benn: The provision of stability and security in Iraq is the highest priority for the Coalition. A secure environment is essential if political and economic reconstruction is to succeed, and humanitarian assistance provided. The Coalition is making considerable efforts to develop Iraq's own security institutions as quickly as possible, as well as deploying, additional forces to Iraq as announced by my RHF the Secretary of State for Defence on 8 September.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment has been made of the level of food shortages in Iraq. [130310]

Hilary Benn: The food security situation in Iraq is under constant review by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Iraqi Ministry of Trade. Food stocks are not expected to run out.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what recent discussions the Department has had regarding the role of the UN in Iraq. [130311]

Hilary Benn: DFID is in regular contact with the UN, both in New York and in-country, about its operations in Iraq and I met Kevin Kennedy, the head of the UN mission in Iraq, during my recent trip to Baghdad. The UN is still assessing the effect on its operations of the bombing of its Baghdad office and the subsequent temporary reduction in the number of international staff in Iraq. The UN has said that it intends to continue to operate in Iraq and that its key humanitarian programmes, including the Public Distribution System for food, will remain operating under the management of Iraqi staff.

A current priority for the UN is to complete assessments of its own security provisions and put in place additional appropriate security measures. DFID has offered to help support increased safety and security measures for the UN operations in Iraq.

DFID is also involved in discussions with other Government Departments on the role of the UN in Iraq's political development.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assistance his Department is giving to the *(a)* World Bank, *(b)* IMF and *(c)* UN in preparing the report on the social and economic needs in Iraq; and when he expects the report to be completed. [131203]

Hilary Benn: DFID has not provided financial assistance to the IFIs or the UN to prepare their report on the social and economic needs of Iraq.

DFID has however committed £3.15 million to the IMF to provide technical assistance to Iraqi Ministries and £113 million to UN agencies for humanitarian and reconstruction activities.

We expect the WB/IMF/UN report to be published on 2 October.

Kosovo

Adam Price: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what humanitarian contribution the Department has made since 1999 to help children in Kosovo who lost their parents owing to the conflict there in 1999. [130348]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Immediately after the end of the 1999 conflict, DFID disbursed £108 million as humanitarian assistance, covering food supplies, shelter, health care, mines clearance and support to small enterprises, and funding for international relief agencies working with refugees both in Kosovo and in neighbouring countries. This assistance included the provision of £4.5 million to UNICEF for support to schools. DFID also provided humanitarian support through its contributions to the EC Humanitarian Office.

Since then DFID has collaborated with the Kosovo authorities and the World Bank to review social welfare policies, and is providing a £2 million grant, to assist with social policy reform. This includes the provision of social assistance to families and children in need, and social services for the protection of children. DFID has also co-funded a major poverty assessment to assist the design and monitoring of social services and benefits. In parallel with this, DFID has provided support to the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) for the strengthening of systems for setting standards and quality assurance for children's services.

Liberia

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what measures are in place to improve the *(a)* sanitary conditions and *(b)* water supply in Liberia. [130301]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: During the peak of the conflict the NGOs that remained in Liberia managed to ensure a minimum level of water supply to the displaced in Monrovia, but sanitation became a major cause for concern. The current situation is that water supply and sanitation issues are being addressed in Monrovia by the UN, NGOs and the Red Cross with the help of DFID funding, but access to areas outside Monrovia and its environs are still hampered by security concerns.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will make a statement on the security situation in Liberia and its impact on humanitarian relief. [130302]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Security remains the major issue hampering humanitarian access in Liberia and the capacity of ECOMIL to ensure security outside of

Monrovia is limited. Access to areas outside Monrovia is being hampered by militia groups and access to other major towns is sporadic.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what recent assessment he has made of the availability of *(a)* food, *(b)* shelter and *(c)* medicines for the people of Liberia. [130303]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Food supply and nutritional issues are being addressed by the UN and NGOs. From 16 August until 5 September, the World Food Programme (WFP) has provided assistance to 419,177 beneficiaries with 2,994 metric tons of food. In addition, WFP distributed 337 metric tons of food to an estimated 62,130 people through special feeding programmes, approximately 50,000 of whom were fed under Action Contre la Faim's DFID-funded emergency food distribution.

The Red Cross and the UN are addressing non-food items and shelter requirements, and a number of our partners on the ground are supplying medical equipment and drugs to Liberian health centres (Figures currently unavailable).

To address all these needs, we have committed £4.7 million to support the humanitarian work of the UN, the International Committee of the Red Cross and NGOs. This in addition to the £2.9 million we have provided to international agencies and NGOs in Liberia previously this year.

Microsoft

Norman Lamb: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development how much was paid to Microsoft in licensing fees by his Department and its agencies in each of the last three years; and how much has been budgeted for *(a)* 2003–04 and *(b)* 2004–05. [130672]

Hilary Benn: DFID undertook a major upgrade of its systems in the period 2000–02 and the resulting licence fees paid to Microsoft takes account of this. The figures are:

	£
2000–01	223,451[1]
2001–02	162,849
2002–03	55,000

[1] includes ASSIST 2000 Upgrade Project licence fees

Our budgets for future years (providing we continue with Microsoft) will be approximately £60,000 for both 2003/04 and 2004/05.

Middle East/North Africa

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will make a statement on his assessment of the link between accountable regimes and economic growth in *(a)* the Middle East and *(b)* North Africa; and what action his Department is taking to promote good governance in the regions. [129892]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The Middle East and North Africa compares badly with other regions of similar incomes and characteristics in terms of public accountability and inclusiveness. A number of reports have been published recently which highlight the relationship between accountable governance and economic growth in the Middle East and North Africa. The 2002 "Arab Human Development Report" concluded that social and economic development was being hampered by deeply rooted shortcomings in the structures of governance in the region. More recently, a World Bank's report, "Better Governance in the Middle East and North Africa", noted that income growth per head averaged just 0.5 per cent. across the region in the period 1985–2000, and at the heart of this poor record was a noticeable "governance gap". Taken together, these reports provide a substantial body of evidence to support the view that improving accountable governance, strengthening political and economic freedoms, and enhancing public participation are prerequisites for lasting economic, social and human development in the region.

Promoting better governance is a key feature of DFID's bilateral programme to the region: this is set out as a central theme of our soon-to-be-published Regional Assistance Plan. Examples include support to public administration and civil service reform in both Jordan and the Palestinian Territory. We are also working to help ensure that the European Commission's development programme takes proper account of the need to improve governance and respect for human rights, and reduce poverty, in partner countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development how many Questions directed to the Department remain unanswered. [130760]

Hilary Benn: According to our records there are 17 outstanding questions (not answered by their due date in the question book, which is two days from date of tabling) from before the Conference recess.

Of these, 16 including this one, are due to be published on 6 October. The reply to the outstanding one will be published shortly.

Reproductive Health Services

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development pursuant to his reply of 16 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 332W, what percentage of the money spent on reproductive health services, is being spent on *(a)* HIV/AIDS programmes and *(b)* family planning; and in which countries. [130514]

Hilary Benn: The Department for International Development spent £31 million in 2002–03 on activities within the Sector-Wide Approaches (SWAPS) that had support for reproductive health services as one of their objectives (the reply of 16 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 332W refers).

The breakdown is as follows:

Country	Title	Expenditure 2002–03 (£)
Ghana	Health Grant	3,500,000
Malawi	Health SWAP	163,126
Mozambique	Essential Medicines	4,700,000
Tanzania	Health Sector Programme	9,489,992
Zambia	Health SWAP	7,621,863
Bangladesh	SHAPLA[1] WB Time Slicing	5,000,000
Cambodia	Health Sector Support	226,835
Total		30,701,816

[1] Support for Health and Population for the Less Advanced Programme: World Bank Time Slicing.

DFID support for reproductive health is wide ranging. It covers HIV/AIDS programmes, prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections and maternal and adolescent health. Reproductive health also encompasses the services for family planning, contraception and childbearing that make an important contribution to increasing women's choice and opportunity and to preventing unplanned or unwanted pregnancy. Family planning services also provide an important opportunity to improve sexual health and in particular to increase women's access to methods that help prevent HIV infection. The £31 million expenditure for 2003–03 cannot therefore be apportioned between HIV/AIDS and Family Planning, as many reproductive health programmes and projects contribute to both objectives (for example through the provision of information on family planning and HIV/AIDS prevention or the provision of condoms).

The figures above include only the DFID contributions to SWAPS. If our other expenditure on Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS (for example through multilateral organisations) were included the amounts would be considerably higher.

Russian Republics

Angus Robertson: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development how much international aid was received directly by the Russian constituent republics of *(a)* Ingushetia and *(b)* North Ossetia-Alania in each year since 1997; how much of this was delivered in (i) money and (ii) kind; what the UK's share of aid was in each year; and if he will make a statement. [131327]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Since 1997, DFID has contributed over £15 million for humanitarian assistance to support refugees and internally displaced people in the North Caucasus (includes Chechnya, North Ossetia, Ingushetia and Dagestan). Our funding is channelled through selected international agencies such as the UN and the International Red Cross.

For 2003–04, DFID has so far approved funds of £1.8 million for humanitarian assistance to support for both refugees and internally displaced people in the North Caucasus.

Since 1997, the EC contribution to the North Caucasus has been euro 111 million.

We do not have a breakdown of the total amount of international aid provided to Ingushetia and North Ossetia-Alania.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will list the major development programmes launched in *(a)* Ingushetia and *(b)* North Ossetia-Alania in each year since 1997; how long these programmes have run; what his Department's involvement has been in each of these programmes; and what assessment his Department has made of the impact of each programme. [131328]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The UK's development programme for Russia aims, through its work with Federal Government, to benefit all regions of the country. However we consider that the North Caucasus is a medium term emergency. The security environment doesn't lend itself to developmental programmes. Therefore, the UK's assistance is focused only on humanitarian programmes. The UN agencies and the ICRC do work with the Russian Authorities to try and build capacity in certain areas, which we support.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment his Department has made of the humanitarian situation in *(a)* North Ossetia-Alania, *(b)* Ingushetia, *(c)* the Ferghana Valley and *(d)* South Ossetia and their (i) direct and (ii) indirect sources; and if he will make a statement. [131329]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The overall humanitarian situation in North Ossetia-Alania and Ingushetia remains acute. People affected by the instability in Chechnya are facing their fifth extremely difficult winter amid rising tensions in the region.

Four years after the resumption of hostilities in the Republic of Chechnya, more than 80,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Chechnya still live in tents or unsuitable shelters in the neighbouring Republic of Ingushetia. In North Ossetia, there are 30,000 Georgian refugees living in poor conditions. In Chechnya, the situation is worse. According to a recent UN report, more than 100,000 of the about 800,000 people living there are still displaced from their homes and surviving indoor conditions.

The UK travel restriction to the North Caucasus prevents DFID from making direct assessments of the humanitarian situation. DFID makes regular missions to Moscow and Georgia to meet with key international organisations and government officials who work in the area. Our humanitarian support to the North Caucasus is channelled through the UN, ICRC and international NGO's.

DFID has made no independent assessment of the humanitarian situation in the Ferghana Valley. The Department's representatives in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, are in regular contact with the UN organisations active in the Valley as well as with the governments concerned.

In South Ossetia the humanitarian situation remains acute. A de facto government is functioning. There is little rule of law. The area is economically dependent upon smuggled goods from Russia. Local Ossetians are migrating to North Ossetia due to economic hardship and lawlessness. The UN, Organisation for Security and Co-operation for Europe (OSCE), the EU is active in South Ossetia. The UN through its UNOCHA and

(formerly the UNHCR) is responsible for humanitarian assessments and aid provision. The EC has participated in the Joint Control Commission (JCC) on South Ossetia since 1991. This quadripartite body (with Georgia, South Ossetia, North Ossetia and Russia) is conducted by the OSCE. The OSCE continues the search for a settlement. The EU provided in 2000 and 2001 Euro 1.045 million to the Georgia Border Guards, aimed at protecting the unarmed OSCE monitors at the border between Georgia and Chechnya. Most International Organisations formerly involved left as the security situation deteriorated.

We are aware of the situation and we have made small contributions through the multilateral organisations and Small Grants Scheme.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will list the major development programmes launched in South Ossetia in each year since 1997; how long these programmes have run; what his Department's involvement has been in each of these programmes; and what assessment his Department has made of the impact of each programme. [131332]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The UK's development programme for Georgia aims to benefit all regions of the country. However the difficulties of working in unresolved conflict situations do not lend themselves to development programmes. The EU has provided through its annual allocations from the 1997 and 1999 budgets a total of Euro 7.5 million to stimulate the peace process between South Ossetia and the Georgian Government.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what the total amount of international aid received directly by the Georgian autonomous region of South Ossetia was in each year since 1997; how much of this was delivered in *(a)* money and *(b)* kind; what the United Kingdom's share of aid was in each year; and if he will make a statement. [131331]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Since the cease-fire agreement concluded in 1992 to bring the fighting to an end, the legal situation over the status of South Ossetia remains grid locked between the Georgian Government and South Ossetia authorities and is unlikely to be resolved in the foreseeable future. We will continue to support the efforts of the international community to bring about a lasting settlement to this situation.

We do not have a breakdown of the total amount of international aid provided to South Ossetia. We do however make small contributions annually through our Small Grants Scheme managed by our embassy in Tbilisi. We have not provided any major assistance to South Ossetia.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's involvement in the United Nations' Ferghana Valley Development Programme; what discussions *(a)* he and *(b)* members of his Department have had with representatives of the (i) Tajik, (ii) Turkmen and (iii) Uzbek governments about the United Nations' Ferghana Valley Development Programme; and if he will make a statement. [131330]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The UN Ferghana Valley Development Programme dates back to early 2000, and since then there has been no British involvement. The programme attempts to link the three neighbouring states (Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) through a number of cross border development initiatives. There has been little progress due to the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the Uzbek Government.

Smoking

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development (1) what discussions he has had with developing countries about health programmes to reduce smoking; and what assessment has been made of the use of UK programmes in developing countries; [131204]

(2) what estimate his Department has made of the healthcare costs associated with the growth in smoking in developing countries; [131205]

(3) what discussions his Department has had with developing countries on *(a)* using taxation to reduce consumption of tobacco products and *(b)* developing public education campaigns on the dangers of smoking; [131206]

(4) what measures his Department has taken to educate the public in least developed countries on the dangers of smoking. [131237]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: We do not have direct discussions with or provide support to countries in this area, but work through the World Health Organisation (WHO) and also support the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. This convention was adopted at the World Health Assembly in May 2003 and has been signed by 56 countries so far, including many developing countries. The convention requires countries that have signed it to implement comprehensive tobacco control programmes and strategies at the national, regional and local levels. These include promoting treatment programmes to help people stop smoking, education to prevent people from starting and measures to prohibit sales of tobacco products to minors. The convention recognises that tax and price measures are an important way of reducing tobacco consumption, particularly in young people, and requires signatories to consider public health objectives when implementing tax and price policies on tobacco products.

This year we plan to transfer a total of £12.5 million to WHO. For the calendar year 2002, WHO spent $4.1 million of its regular budget and $10.4 million of extra-budgetary funds on tobacco-related work, from a total expenditure of $464 million in 2002.

South Asia

Mrs. Ann Cryer: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will make a statement on aid programmes funded by the Department in *(a)* India, *(b)* Bangladesh and *(c)* Pakistan in the last five years. [131010]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID's country programme in India is governed by the Country Strategy Paper published in 2000. We run a nationwide programme, which covers the whole of India, and we also have state-level programmes in Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal. Our main partners are the Indian Government; focus state governments and non-governmental organisations. The principal objectives of DFID's work in India under the current strategy are to have partnerships with selected state governments, to support economic reform, services, empowerment of poor, especially minority groups, and better management of the natural and physical environment. We are currently revising our country strategy in India.

In Pakistan we support priorities agreed following reengagement with the Government in 2000. The programme has three objectives: creating economic conditions for poverty reduction; improving health outcomes; and improving education outcomes. In Pakistan too we are preparing a new Country Assistance Plan to support the Government of Pakistan's own Poverty Reduction Strategy due for publication in October 2003. DFID works in Pakistan with a wide range of partners including Government departments and non-government organisations, and closely coordinates its activities with those of other multilateral and bilateral development agencies.

In Bangladesh we work in accordance with our Country Strategy published in 1998. Here too a new County Assistance Plan is about to be published which gives priority to advancing the position of women and girls. The new Country Plan supports the Government of Bangladesh's own national poverty strategy and focuses DFID activity around seven areas of importance: support to the private sector, land transport, maternal mortality, primary education, access to food and water and Governance. DFID works in Bangladesh Government departments and non-government organisations and closely coordinates its activities with those of other multi-lateral and development agencies.

In 2002–03, DFID spent £161 million, £39 million and £77 million in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh respectively.

Southern Africa

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what emergency aid has been provided to southern Africa in recent months. [129444]

Hilary Benn: Since September 2001, DFID has provided approximately £120 million in emergency assistance to the six countries in Southern Africa (Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe) that have been most affected by the humanitarian crisis over the past two years. Most of this assistance (approximately £90 million) has been provided to Zimbabwe and Malawi, where needs have been greatest. In addition, we estimate that our contribution to commitments by the European Commission to date is around £26 million.

Since January this year, over £35 million has been spent on supporting continuing humanitarian operations, particularly in Zimbabwe, but also covering Zambia, Malawi, Swaziland and Mozambique. We intend to programme a further £40 million of emergency aid to Zimbabwe this year, building on our existing programme commitments, in response to the serious humanitarian needs there. We, along with the UN and other donors, will ensure that our humanitarian assistance continues to be distributed according to need and without political interference.

Where immediate humanitarian needs have reduced, as we have seen this year in Zambia and Malawi, we have shifted our support to programmes that support recovery from the crisis, including through provision of seeds and fertilisers. In Malawi, some £9.3 million has been committed for these activities—again with the objective of improving food security at the household level and ensuring that safety nets that cover an appropriate mix of cash, food and subsidised inputs, are available for the most vulnerable. We have also provided seeds and fertilisers in Mozambique and Swaziland and responded to UN calls for support to seed fairs in those countries.

Emergency assistance is still needed this year in areas of southern Mozambique, and in Lesotho where the failure of the winter harvest has put more people at risk. We are working to identify where the greatest needs are in these countries and will provide emergency aid to help cover the greatest gaps.

DFID is also supporting the work of the UN Regional Inter-Agency Co-ordination and Support team in Johannesburg, which works to co-ordinate and harmonise UN and NGO efforts across the region. We have provided £2 million of support to this team so far, and are looking to continue this support until the end of the current phase of the UN Consolidated Appeal, which ends in June 2004.

Vietnam

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will make a statement on aid to Vietnam. [131239]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID is finalising a new Country Assistance Plan for Vietnam, which will be published in November. The key objectives of this plan are: more effective, efficient and equitable use of public financial resources; promotion of socially inclusive development and greater accountability of Government to citizens; and support to economic and social transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy. These objectives will support the Government of Vietnam's own Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS).

Under the new CAP, DFID's assistance is planned to increase from £26 million in 2003–04 to £60 million in 2005–06. This increase is in response to the Government of Vietnam's success in and continuing commitment to, reducing poverty. The incidence of poverty has halved from 58 per cent. in 1992 to 29 per cent. in 2002.

DFID's current assistance to Vietnam includes supporting the development of primary education, the building and maintenance of rural roads, public financial management reform, state owned enterprise reform, reducing HIV infection, and area based rural development in the Northern Mountains and Central

Region. We will continue to work in these areas. We are also directly supporting the Government of Vietnam's reform programme under the CPRGS by providing budget support through the World Bank Poverty Reduction Support Credit. In addition we are supporting the development of the National Assembly, and a project to analyse how market institutions can achieve better development outcomes for the poor. Our assistance is mainly co-financed with other donors.

WTO Meeting (Cancun)

Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what proposals the department has put forward for increasing the importance attributed to protecting the environment in taking forward world trade reform at the World Trade Organisation ministerial meeting in Cancun. [130295]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The UK, with DTI and DEFRA as the lead departments, has taken a central role in determining the European Union's negotiating position on trade and environment issues. Despite the collapse of Cancun, we will continue to work towards achieving a successful outcome at the WTO and jointly ensuring the implementation of the WSSD Commitments.

One of the WTO trade and environment negotiating mandates is to clarify the relationship between WTO rules and specific trade obligations in Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). The EU's overall aim is to ensure that these two bodies of international law are mutually supportive. With a view to better informing the WTO debate, at Cancun, the EU proposed that agreement be reached to formalise the observer role of MEAs, UNEP and UNCTAD in the WTO Committee on Trade and Environment Special Sessions. The text under discussion when the Conference collapsed had taken on board the EU view by making clear that MEAs and UN agencies should be given observer status in the Committee on Trade and Environment Special Sessions.

The EU has also been the main driver supporting further work on eco-labelling and increased market access for environmental goods. At Cancun, the EU proposed that agreement should be reached on a new WTO Committee on Trade and Environment work programme on labelling for environmental purposes. However, there was little support for this from other WTO members and at the time of the collapse of the talks, no progress had been made on this issue.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Building Regulations/Standards

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the impact of Part M of the Building Regulations on the design of new housing. [130981]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has recently commissioned research to evaluate the impact of the changes to Part M introduced in 1999. The work is expected to begin before Christmas, and to report in two years time.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidance he has given local authorities to ensure the consistent application of Part M of the Building Regulations by building control officers. [130982]

Phil Hope: Each Part of the Building Regulations consists of a, usually small, number of functional requirements. Guidance on the application of the requirements is provided by a statutory 'Approved Document'. Each such document states that it is intended to provide guidance for some of the more common building situations, but recognises that there may well be alternative ways of achieving compliance with the requirements, and advises builders and developers that "... there is no obligation to adopt any particular solution contained in an Approved Document if you prefer to meet the relevant requirement in some other way."

Every building in its site context is different and there must therefore be room for discretion and adaptation to local circumstances. Nor is it possible in a usable guidance document to illustrate an acceptable solution for the almost infinite variety of building situations. Absolute consistency of application of any part of the Building Regulations is thus neither achievable nor desirable, and reliance must be placed on the professionalism and competence of the building control community.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many instances there have been of enforcement action against builders for breaches of Part M of the Building Regulations in the last three years; and with what results. [130983]

Phil Hope: Responsibility for enforcement of the Building Regulations rests with local authorities. Data on enforcement action are not collected centrally, and could not be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what amendments he proposes to make to Part M of the Building Regulations. [130984]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister expects to announce the publication of amendments to Part M of the Building Regulations relating to buildings other than dwellings shortly. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister issued a consultation document on the proposed amendments in November 2002, and officials have since then, with the assistance of the Building Regulations Advisory Committee, been finalising the new Approved Document. The amendments will extend the application of Part M to work to existing buildings, reflect the contents where appropriate of British Standard BS 8300:2001 'Design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people—Code of Practice', and complement the objectives of Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 relating to accessibility of goods, facilities, services and premises.

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will extend the period in which a builder can be sued for poor workmanship. [131305]

Mr. Lammy: I have been asked to reply.

The period within which a civil action must be commenced against a builder for poor workmanship is subject to the Limitation Act 1980 (unless the terms of

an individual contract specify otherwise). In July 2002, the Government announced its acceptance in principle of the recommendations for reform of the 1980 Act contained in the Law Commission report "Limitation of Actions", subject to further consideration of certain aspects. Legislation will be introduced when an opportunity arises.

The Commission proposed a core limitation regime that would apply to the majority of claims for a remedy for a wrong or the enforcement of a right. In broad terms, a claim would have to be brought within a primary limitation period of three years from the date on which the claimant knows (or ought reasonably to know) the facts giving rise to the claim, the identity of the defendant, and that any injury, loss or damage was significant. No claim could be brought after the expiry of a 10-year "longstop" period, which normally would run from the date on which the cause of action arose. At present in a simple contract claim the limitation period is six years from the date the cause of action arose.

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has received in the last 12 months on the buildmark warranty scheme operated by the National House-Building Council. [131306]

Phil Hope: Over the last 12 months, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has received about 50 letters from hon. Members and from members of the public raising points about the Buildmark warranty scheme. This is a non-statutory scheme ran by the National House Building Council (NHBC), which is an independent company, limited by guarantee. Officials from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister inform NHBC senior management of the key points raised in correspondence, to assist them in their monitoring of the scheme.

Compulsory Purchase Orders

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to amend the law regarding compulsory purchase orders. [130987]

Keith Hill: Part 7 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill, currently before Parliament, includes provisions to amend the planning compulsory purchase power at section 226 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and to introduce a new loss payment to enhance compulsory purchase compensation. A further six amendments to the Bill were tabled on 17 September 2003 to provide for improvements to compulsory purchase procedures and compensation arrangements. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will consult shortly on the details of a further proposed amendment to the Bill relating to advance payments of compensation for land subject to mortgage.

The Law Commission is also considering how best to codify, consolidate and modernise the existing complex and convoluted legislative base, and is expected to produce its final recommendations in January 2004.

Consultancy Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the five highest value consultancy contracts relating to *(a)* council house privatisation and *(b)* stock transfer for proposals; and what payments have been in each case in each of the last three years. [130895]

Keith Hill: Information on costs relating to Best Value studies, decent home delivery option appraisals or housing transfer advice is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether his Department maintains a recommended list of consultants to carry out *(a)* Best Value studies and *(b)* council house privatisation studies. [130946]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does not maintain lists of consultants to carry out Best Value studies, decent home delivery option appraisals or housing transfer advice.

Domestic Violence

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what action his Department is taking to help victims of domestic violence. [129449]

Yvette Cooper: Tackling domestic violence, and supporting those who are victims of domestic violence, is taken very seriously across Government.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister announced at the end of last year a £7 million capital investment programme through the Housing Corporation to extend and renovate the national network of women's refuges in England. Initial allocations for 2003–04 were agreed in conjunction with the Housing Corporation in March this year and it is hoped that further schemes will be supported in the next two years.

The Supporting People programme, which begins on 1 April, will put in place a new integrated policy and funding framework for housing-related support services, including those for people experiencing domestic violence. Current annual expenditure is £34 million for a total of 5,000 places. Local authorities have now submitted their shadow Supporting People strategies. These are currently being analysed and will provide valuable data on the supply of refuge and support services for people experiencing domestic violence, so helping to inform and direct future action.

Supporting People guides have also been issued on addressing the accommodation and support needs of households experiencing domestic violence; and two dedicated co-ordinators are working with providers and local authorities to ensure that the sector is prepared for the new programme.

In July 2002, the main homelessness provisions of the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002 were brought into force. These required local housing authorities to take a more strategic approach to preventing and tackling homelessness, placed stronger duties on authorities to help homeless people, and extended the groups of homeless applicants who have a priority need for accommodation, including, among others, people vulnerable as a result of fleeing their home because of violence. The Homelessness Directorate has allocated £70 million in 2003–04 to local authorities and other agencies to help them address

homelessness. This will include some support for domestic violence schemes where local authorities have identified this as a priority.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in partnership with Comic Relief, plans to support the introduction of a national freephone helpline, linked to a 'refuges online' database to assist victims of domestic violence which it is hoped will be operational before the end of the year.

Euro

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what cumulative spending by all local authorities has been in each year in preparing for United Kingdom entry to the euro; how much he plans to allocate for spending by all local authorities on preparations for United Kingdom entry to the euro for each year from the current financial year up to and including 2005–06; and what estimates he has made of the cumulative total costs to all local authorities of changeover to the European Single Currency. [131605]

Mr. Raynsford: Details of public sector expenditure to date on changeover planning were included in the third outline National Changeover Plan, published on 9 June 2003. Copies of the document are available in the Library of the House.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister expects no significant costs to local authorities at this stage and there are no plans for additional allocation of funds. The guidance to local authorities, which was released on 17 June, advises them to undertake sensible risk management and business planning for the possibility of a euro changeover. All the evidence from the euro area suggests that such early planning can significantly reduce costs of any changeover.

In the event of any changeover, the total cost to local authorities will depend upon the circumstances and approach taken by individual councils. The Government would look with local authorities at the pressures they face.

High Hedges

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to propose legislation to deal with fast-growing high hedges; and if he will make a statement. [130881]

Keith Hill: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 17 September 2003, *Official Report*, columns 859–60.

Homelessness

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many families have claimed to be homeless in *(a)* Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, *(c)* the North East and *(d)* England, in each year since 1997; [128711]

(2) how many people were homeless in *(a)* the Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, *(c)* the North East and *(d)* England, in each year since 1997. [128714]

Yvette Cooper: Information collected is in respect of households, rather than persons, and is not available below local authority level. The available information reported by South Tyneside MBC, and all councils comprising the North East region and nationally is presented as follows. The term "homelessness acceptances" means those applicants whom a local housing authority have accepted as being eligible for assistance, homeless through no fault of their own and who have a priority need for accommodation. The priority need categories were extended by Order in July 2002 to broaden the safety net available for homeless people.

	Homelessness Decisions			*Homelessness Acceptances*		
	South Tyneside	*North East Region*	*England*	*South Tyneside*	*North East Region*	*England*
1997	144	12,800	246,170	126	4,420	102,000
1998	[1]206	11,730	250,960	[1]166	4,370	104,630
1999	266	12,440	249,110	212	4,830	105,370
2000	246	12,100	252,290	201	5,060	111,340
2001	370	12,320	260,170	306	5,470	118,560
2002	430	14,210	273,480	364	6,420	124,880

[1] South Tyneside reported in only three quarters of 1998.

Notes:

1. Decisions include those where applicant household was found to be ineligible for assistance under the homelessness provisions of housing legislation.
2. Figures for the North East and England include estimates for missing data, and have been rounded to the nearest 10.
3. Acceptances refers to households found to be eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need.

Source:

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister P1(E) quarterly housing activity returns

Housing

Bob Russell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 15 September, ref 129306, for what reasons the allocation of additional funds for additional investment in local authority housing stock under the Sustainable Communities Plan did not include the option for a local authority to retain ownership and democratic control. [131012]

Keith Hill: The Government believes that the benefit from additional resources will be maximised if the landlord function is separated from the authorities broader strategic functions. The three options offering additional investment—stock transfer, Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMOs)—all provide this.

They also ensure that tenants have a greater role in the future management of their homes.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will grant the Rowner housing estate in Gosport eligibility for his schemes for special support. [128156]

Keith Hill: The Government Office for the South East is currently working with Gosport's Local Strategic Partnership and Hampshire county council to help resolve the key issues around the Rowner estate. At present the partnership is in its infancy and as such is debating proposals to tackle the root causes of the problems surrounding the Rowner estate. The Government Office is in a position to provide advice during this process to the Local Strategic Partnership and Hampshire county council on any schemes that the Rowner estate may be eligible for.

Local Government

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will estimate the level of area cost adjustment for each local authority in the West Midland region for the 2003–04 financial year using average pay levels for the West Midland region as a basis. [131360]

Mr. Raynsford: The table gives the area cost adjustment (ACA) values calculated for each upper tier authority in the West Midlands region, relative to the West Midlands average. Because we no longer use average wages as the basis of the ACA, the figures are relative to the average labour cost adjustment for the West Midlands region.

	ACA						
Authority	*Education*	*PSS: children and younger adults*	*PSS: older people*	*Police*	*Fire*	*Highway maintenance*	*EPCS*
Shropshire	0.970	0.972	0.968	0.968	0.968	0.976	0.976
Telford and Wrekin	0.970	0.972	0.969	0.969	0.969	0.976	0.976
Staffordshire	0.981	0.983	0.980	0.980	0.980	0.985	0.985
Stoke-on-Trent	0.976	0.977	0.974	0.974	0.974	0.980	0.980
Herefordshire	0.964	0.966	0.962	0.962	0.962	0.971	0.971
Worcestershire	0.986	0.987	0.985	0.985	0.985	0.988	0.988
Warwickshire	1.029	1.029	1.032	1.035	1.036	1.031	1.031
Wolverhampton	0.995	0.997	0.996	0.999	1.000	1.003	1.003
Walsall	0.972	0.976	0.971	0.974	0.975	0.984	0.984
Dudley	0.979	0.982	0.979	0.982	0.983	0.990	0.990
Sandwell	0.991	0.993	0.991	0.994	0.995	0.999	1.000
Solihull	1.055	1.053	1.059	1.062	1.063	1.051	1.052
Coventry	1.030	1.030	1.033	1.036	1.037	1.031	1.032
Birmingham	1.032	1.032	1.035	1.038	1.039	1.033	1.033

Note:
ACA factors estimated relative to the West Midlands average

There are two parts to the ACA: the labour cost adjustment (LCA) and the rates cost adjustment (RCA). To produce the ACA factors calculated in the table, individual LCA factors have been calculated for each upper tier authority in the West Midlands. These factors have been rebased so that they are relative to the West Midlands regional average and used in the above ACA calculation.

As a result, these ACA figures are not directly comparable to the current ACA figures because the West Midlands region is not used as the basis for ACA calculations. No lower limit is applied to the LCA figures calculated in the table, in the interest of providing illustrative figures for every authority.

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the impact of regional pay in public services upon the area cost adjustment used in revenue support grant calculations. [131368]

Mr. Raynsford: In his Budget statement, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that the Government would be giving increased emphasis to the regional and local elements of public sector pay. As a first and immediate step, the terms of reference or remit letters of the Pay Review Bodies have been modified to require them to have regard to regional/local labour markets and their effects on recruitment and retention. The ability to recruit and retain staff in every location is crucial to high quality public services. Staff shortages, resulting from an inability to recruit and retain staff with the requisite skills in the right numbers in specific locations, are currently concentrated in certain areas, mainly but not exclusively in parts of London and the south-east. A stronger local and regional element to pay is one important tool to address these issues.

The area cost adjustment already directs grant to areas with higher wages in recognition of the increased recruitment and retention cost experienced there. Any effect of regional public service pay will be reflected in the pay cost evidence that we use in calculating the area cost adjustment.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many prosecutions have taken place using the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982; and if he will make a statement. [128798]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

Persons proceeded against under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 cannot be separately identified on the Home Office Court Proceedings database.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, what recent estimates he has made on the costs of re-organising local government in the *(a)* North West, *(b)* North East and *(c)* Yorkshire and Humberside as a part of his proposals to set up regional assemblies. [131678]

Mr. Raynsford: The cost of re-organising local government in the three regions will be dependent on the extent of the changes recommended by the Boundary Committee for England and subsequent decisions made by the newly created authorities about their organisational structure and levels of service provision.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much central government funding was allocated to each local authority in recognition of residents receiving *(a)* disability living allowance, *(b)* attendance allowance and *(c)* minimum income guarantee in the latest year for which figures are available. [130414]

Yvette Cooper: Elderly people in receipt of disability living allowance (DLA) and attendance allowance are taken into account in the older people social services formula spending share, although it is not possible to provide a detailed breakdown of how much money local authorities receive as a direct result of this.

Local housing authorities have a statutory duty to offer means tested disabled facilities grants (DFGs) to eligible applicants who require adaptations to help them live independently in their own homes. The grants are available to homeowners and tenants in both the private and social rented sectors.

The Government meets 60 per cent. of local authority expenditure incurred on DFGs, with the remaining 40 per cent. being met from the authority's own resources. The budget for this grant for English authorities in 2003–04 is £99 million compared with £88 million in 2002–03 and £56 million in 1997–98. The allocation of these resources to local housing authorities takes into account the numbers of people claiming DLA and attendance allowance within each local authority.

A table showing each English local housing authority's share of DFG resources from the national budget for 2003–04 is available in the Libraries of the House.

Planning

Bob Russell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what procedures are open to residents to seek an independent determination of planning applications involving departure from the local plan where the local authority is both the land owner and the planning authority; and if he will make a statement. [131609]

Keith Hill: The procedures dealing with development undertaken by local authorities are set out in the Town and Country Planning General Regulations 1992. Guidance on these regulations is given in Department of Environment (DOE) Circular 19/92. The general principle underlying these regulations is that the local planning authorities must make planning applications in the same way as any other person and must follow the same procedures as would be applicable to everyone.

Any local authority development proposals or development on authority owned land which are not in accordance with the provisions of the local development plan, must also be notified to my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister so that he can consider whether to "call in" the application for his own determination. If consent is granted for a development undertaken by a local planning authority, the only recourse remaining to any aggrieved third party is to apply for judicial review if they believe the decision was wrong in law or to ask the Local Government Ombudsman to investigate if they consider there has been maladministration by the local authority.

Property Rentals

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent discussions he has had with groups representing tenants about the feasibility of establishing a Government-sponsored bond scheme for those renting property. [131128]

Keith Hill: Later this year the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister plan to hold a seminar between officials and representatives of groups with an interest in tenancy deposits (including tenants), to discuss the possibility of legislative measures for deposit handling in the context of the Law Commission's proposals for tenure review. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will continue to consult interested parties on any further proposals.

Regional Assemblies

Joyce Quin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) on what basis the assessment was made in the White Paper, "Your Region, Your Choice", that elected regional assemblies needed at least 25 members in order to provide members for the executive while retaining sufficient backbench members for effective scrutiny but set an upper limit of 35 members for assemblies; [131545]

(2) on what basis the assessment was made in the White Paper, "Your Region, Your Choice", that for elected regional assemblies to be representative of different political views and different parts of a region 25 members was the minimum needed to secure a representative assembly using proportional representation. [131546]

Mr. Raynsford: Elected regional assemblies will be strategic bodies with an efficient and focused membership of between 25 and 35 elected members. They will have a similar role to that of the Greater London Authority, which has a Mayor and 25 assembly Members.

The Government expects that elected regional assemblies will have an executive of at least three members and a maximum of six, including the leader. The Government believes that this leaves a sufficient number of members to exercise the scrutiny function.

Approximately two thirds of elected members will be constituency members, the other third will be regional members elected from a regional list. This form of proportional representation will ensure that the assembly is representative of the region. Fewer than 25 members would make it difficult to reflect the vote proportionately. Membership will be larger where population is greater up to a maximum of 35. Any larger size would risk compromising the strategic role of Elected Regional Assemblies and could cause confusion between this and the separate representative and service delivery role of local authorities. Elected regional assemblies will also be expected to involve regional stakeholders in their work, which will help ensure that different views are taken into account.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To as the Deputy Prime Minister, if he will place in the Library the responses he received to the soundings exercise to gauge opinion on the proposed regional assemblies. [131679]

Mr. Raynsford: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced on 16 June that copies of the summary document "Your Region, Your Say" were available in the Libraries of both Houses, along with copies of the 1,333 responses from representative organisations. Copies of the 7,132 responses from individuals are held by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and can be viewed on request, except for those that requested that their responses be held in confidence.

Revenue Support Grant

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what base year was used to calculate the level of visitor numbers when setting the Revenue Support Grant for 2003–04. [130897]

Mr. Raynsford: The 2003–04 Local Government Finance Settlement included estimates of day visitors and overnight visitors.

The estimates of day visitors were based on research using information from the Leisure Day Visits Survey 1988–89, 1991 Census, 1991 Survey of Visits to Tourist Attractions, 1991 Census of Employment and other information about urban areas, National Parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty and official bathing beaches. The information used was that available to the Secretary of State for National Heritage on 1 November 1993.

The estimates of overnight visitors were generally based on information from the United Kingdom Tourism Surveys (1993 to 2001), for domestic visitors; and from the International Passenger Surveys (1999 to 2001) and the 1991 Census for foreign visitors.

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he made of visitor numbers to Worcester City when calculating the Revenue Support Grant for 2003–04. [130898]

Mr. Raynsford: The figure used in the calculation of the 2003–04 Local Government Finance Settlement for the annual number of day visitors to Worcester City was 2,188,000. Overnight visitors are not included in the calculation for district councils.

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he next plans to assess visitor numbers used in the Revenue Support Grant allocation. [130899]

Mr. Raynsford: A review of the visitor indicators used in the calculation of Formula Spending Shares is planned to commence early in 2004.

The 2003–04 Local Government Finance Settlement saw the introduction of a new formula. To give some stability, it was announced there would be no further Formula Spending Share formula changes until 2006–07 at the earliest, except where there are changes in the functions of councils, or the financing of particular services. During this time data will continue to be updated.

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of *(a)* the night-time economy and *(b)* visitor numbers for county towns when setting the Revenue Support Grant. [130900]

Mr. Raynsford: Overnight visitors to an area are included in the calculations for the Police and Highway Maintenance Formula Spending Shares. Day visitors are included in calculations for the Police, Highway Maintenance and Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services Formula Spending Share.

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he will use 2001 census data to determine country of birth indicators when allocating revenue support grants in 2004–05. [130902]

Mr. Raynsford: Data from the 1991 census will be used to determine the country of birth indicators in the calculation of the 2004–05 Local Government Finance Settlement.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Rights of Way

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what steps have been taken to assess whether any land held by the Church of England may be suitable for dedicating for access under section 16 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. [131573]

Mr. Bell: No such assessment has been made. The Commissioners are committed to protecting public rights of way over their land and ensuring that such rights are respected. Any proposals for additional rights that were compatible with the Commissioners' trustee obligations and had no adverse effect on the land or tenants would be looked at on their merits.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Organ Donors

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs if he will amend the Electoral Registration form to allow persons to indicate whether they are willing to be organ donors. [130989]

Mr. Leslie: The framework governing the purposes for which the electoral registration form and the electoral register may be used, which was introduced last year after lengthy discussion, complies with data protection and human rights legislation, and my Department has no plans to amend the electoral registration form to allow it to be used for additional purposes. We concur with the view of the independent Electoral Commission that additional material unrelated to electoral issues should not normally be included with registration forms.

Electoral Register

Mr. Love: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what action he is taking to tackle the problem of citizens disappearing from the electoral register; and what assistance he gives local authorities. [131423]

Mr. Leslie: The Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001 introduced in February 2001 a number of changes to voter registration procedures, including 'rolling registration', aimed both at making it easier to register to vote and at achieving more accurate and up to date electoral registers. The independent Electoral Commission is to undertake research into the effects of the changes to registration procedures in order to identify the extent of under registration, which the Government will consider carefully. The Electoral Commission is responsible for offering advice and guidance to electoral registration

officers on these and other matters and will continue to encourage registration through various promotional activities.

Mr. Love: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what obligations local authorities have to ensure UK citizens remain on the electoral register. [131424]

Mr. Leslie: Electoral Registration Officers, appointed by local authorities, are required to compile and maintain accurate electoral registers. They must register all eligible persons and have powers to seek information from any person who they consider is eligible to be registered. It is an offence for any person to fail to comply with a request for information from, or to give false information to, an Electoral Registration Officer.

Asbestos

Dr. Cable: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how much has been spent by his Department and its agencies on *(a)* asbestos surveys and *(b)* the management and removal of asbestos since 1 January 2001; and what budget is available to (i) commission asbestos surveys and (ii) manage and remove asbestos from buildings in (A) 2003 and (B) 2004. [130914]

Mr. Lammy: My Department's HQ Estate has spent £5,801 on asbestos surveys and £10,396 on the management and removal of asbestos since 2001. Funding for commissioning surveys and the management and removal of asbestos from the estate in 2003 and 2004 will be available from existing maintenance budgets.

The Court Service is unable to provide the information and figures without incurring disproportionate costs. They are preparing to comply with the 2004 duty by identifying where in buildings asbestos is present, assessing the risk and, depending on its condition and whether it is likely to be disturbed, taking action to manage the risk.

Catherine Meyer

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Constitutional Affairs what plans he has to make representations to the Chief Justice of Germany concerning the case of Catherine Meyer. [131740]

Mr. Lammy: None.

Western Circuit

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs (1) who was consulted about the proposal to remove Hampshire from the Western Circuit; when the decision will be made; and if he will make a statement; [129035]

(2) what representations he has received on the proposal to remove Hampshire from the Western Circuit; [129043]

(3) what factors underlay the proposal to *(a)* remove Hampshire from the Western Circuit and *(b)* include it in a South Eastern tier; and if he will make a statement. [129044]

Mr. Key: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs (1) what assessment he has made of the impact on the Western Circuit of his proposal to move Winchester Crown Court into the South Eastern Circuit; [129017]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact of his proposal to move Winchester Crown Court into the South Eastern Circuit on the administration of justice in the Salisbury Constituency; [129018]

(3) what representations he has received from the judiciary about his proposal to remove Winchester Crown Court into the South Eastern Circuit; [129019]

(4) what consultation he proposes to hold with hon. Members for constituencies in *(a)* Wiltshire and *(b)* Dorset about his proposals to remove Winchester Crown Court from the Western to the South Eastern Circuit; [129020]

(5) where people from the Salisbury Constituency charged with *(a)* murder, *(b)* manslaughter and *(c)* attempted murder will be sent for trial if Winchester Crown Court is removed to the South Eastern Circuit. [129021]

Mr. Leslie: The Courts Bill, which is currently before Parliament, makes provisions that will allow the Government to replace the existing 42 magistrates courts committees and the Court Service with a single executive agency, responsible for the administration of all the courts below the House of Lords. No date has yet been set for the establishment of the new unified courts agency although it will not be before April 2005.

The unified courts agency will be an entirely new organisation, twice the size of either of the two services that will be subsumed within it. The Secretary of State and I have given close consideration to the regional management structure for the agency and what the boundaries of those regions should be. In this context, we paid careful attention to the "Modernising Government" White Paper of March 1999. This sets out the Government's policy that, wherever possible, the boundaries of government departments and public bodies at regional level should coincide with those of the Government Offices for the Regions. This commitment was repeated in the White Paper "Your Region, Your Choice" in May 2002.

Since May 2003 the Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), officials from the Department for Constitutional Affairs and I have held meetings with the senior judiciary, representatives of the General Council of the Bar, and judges and barristers from the Western Circuit to discuss the structure of the new agency and in particular how the area currently covered by the Western Circuit should fit within that. Written submissions from judges and barristers have also been received on the subject.

On 31 July 2003, the Secretary of State and I announced our decision that, at local level, the unified courts agency would have 42 management units coterminous with local government boundaries. This is in line with other criminal justice agencies such as the Police Authorities, Crown Prosecution Service and the Probation Service. There will also be seven regions.

The boundaries of these regions will be coterminous with those of the Government Offices for the Regions, with two exceptions. The Secretary of State and I have decided that the Cheshire management unit should be linked with the Wales region for the time being but that we want to review this in 2006–07 as part of a general post implementation review of the agency's working arrangements. We have asked for further work to be undertaken before deciding whether to align the Hampshire unit with the South East or South West regions. This work will cover what the impact of including Hampshire within the South East region would be on the administration of justice throughout the current Western Circuit and in particular whether there would be a need to change the way in which cases are handled in Wiltshire, Dorset and Hampshire. This will inform our decision, which we intend to take by 31 October 2003. I would be happy to discuss this matter with hon. Members representing constituencies in those counties.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what plans he has for redeployment of members of his Department out of London and the south east. [125361]

Mr. Lammy: The scope for relocating Government activity is being considered by Sir Michael Lyons. His independent review was announced in the Chancellor's Budget statement on 9 April.

Details of the review, including the consultation launched on 19 June, can be found on the HM Treasury website at www.hm-treasury.gov.uk. Sir Michael will report his findings on the scope for relocating Departments and other public sector bodies before the end of the year.

Currently, 11,315 DCA staff (out of a total of 13,455) are either based in regional locations or are in front-line customer facing roles in London and the south east. We are, in light of the Sir Michael Lyons exercise, reviewing the need for continuing to locate staff in London and the south east.

Domestic Violence

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs (1) when the new forms, devised by the Safety Stakeholder Group of his Department, screening Children's Act cases for domestic violence will be brought into use; and what steps are being taken prior to the forms' introduction to ensure that relevant issues of domestic violence are brought to the attention of the court; [130516]

(2) what factors have influenced the date of the introduction of the new domestic violence forms for use in Children Act 1989 cases. [130656]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* I have been asked to reply.

We want to encourage contact between children and their non-resident parent where it is in the best interests of the child and safe for all family members. We encourage parents who are divorcing or separating to agree contact arrangements for their children. Most parents do agree such arrangements. Where the courts are asked to intervene, the Children Act 1989 makes the welfare of the child its paramount concern. The courts are required to consider any harm a child has suffered or is at risk of suffering when determining what, if any, contact order to make. The court is also obliged to make a finding of fact in any case involving allegations of violence. The court must determine whether or not the alleged violence has occurred and, if so, its impact on the child. This obligation is set out in best practice guidelines issued by the Children Act Sub-Committee to the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Board on Family Law in spring 2001. The impact of these guidelines is being evaluated.

The court may attach supervisory conditions to an order for contact that may be for indirect rather than direct contact. We are providing £2.5 million over the next three years from the Children's Fund to extend the provision of supervised contact.

Section 120 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 amended the Children Act 1989 to make it clear that when a court is considering whether a child has suffered or is likely to suffer harm, this harm includes harm a child may suffer as a result of witnessing the ill-treatment of another person. In addition the Safety Stakeholder Group has suggested revisions to the court forms used in applications for residence, contact, specific issues and prohibited steps to highlight allegations of domestic violence. This would enable domestic violence to be raised right at the beginning of proceedings and enable the judge more effectively to determine whether, and in what terms, any order should be made on the basis of all the available facts. The revised definition of harm and the changes to the court forms to highlight domestic violence will be implemented as soon as the necessary resources are identified.

Ecclesiastical Appointments

Mr. Beith: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs for what reason his powers of appointment to ecclesiastical livings referred to in paragraph 37 of the Consultation Paper on Reforming the Office of Lord Chancellor are described as the appointment of priests, but not to the appointment of clerks in holy orders, including deacons. [131824]

Mr. Leslie: A "Clerk in Holy Orders" is a generic designation, which covers those orders recognised by the Church of England, of which priests are one. The Lord Chancellor only appoints priests to those posts under his patronage.

Ethnic Minorities

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many ethnic minorities there are in each grade in his Department. [131739]

Mr. Lammy: The number of staff of minority ethnic origin by responsibility level is set out in the table below.

Ethnic Origin of Permanent Staff in the Department for Constitutional Affairs (including the Court Service and the Public Guardianship Office) by Responsibility Level as at 31 August 2003

Grade equivalent	Ethnic minority staff	White staff	Not known	Total	Ethnic minority as percentage of known ethnic origin
AA/AO	660	4,326	2,442	7,429	13.2
EO	333	1,763	789	2,885	15.9
HEO/SEO	131	1,193	459	1,783	9.9
Grade 6/7	26	364	179	569	6.7
SCS	0	81	36	117	0
Total	1,150	7,727	3,906	12,783	13

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs (1) what research he has undertaken to assess the implications of the ending of the free legal advice and representation service to ethnic minorities; and if he will make a statement; [128328]

(2) what factors underlay the decision to end the free legal advice and representation service to ethnic minorities; what the benefits are of the changes he is proposing; and if he will make a statement. [128329]

Mr. Lammy: I have assumed that the hon. Member is referring to the effect on the services currently provided to ethnic minority clients by the Immigration Advisory Service (IAS), following the proposed transfer of funding from the Home Office to the Legal Services Commission.

The terms of the contract that will be awarded to the IAS following the transfer of funding from the Home Office to the Legal Services Commission have yet to be finalised. Ministers will write to the IAS in the near future, once the position is clearer.

Fine Defaulting

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what measures have been taken to prevent people defaulting on court-imposed fines. [130771]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Gentlemen to the Written Ministerial Statement I gave on 25 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 40WS in respect of fine enforcement.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many and what value of court-imposed fines were defaulted on in *(a)* Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, *(c)* Tyne and Wear and *(d)* the UK in each year since 1997. [130772]

Mr. Leslie: The data are not available in the form requested.

Magistrates' Court Committees (MCCs) have a responsibility to collect a range of debts imposed by both the magistrates courts and the crown court. Debt collected not only includes fines but also fees, compensation, confiscation orders, legal aid contributions and some maintenance orders. It is not yet possible to separate out only the fines from the total and thus it is also not possible to report on the number or the value of court imposed fines that were defaulted on.

The available data illustrating the total value of arrears outstanding at relevant Courthouse, Northumbria MCC and national are as follows.

Closing arrears totals[1]

£

Courthouse/area	1999–2000[2]	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03
Gateshead	n/a	n/a	461,028.08	439,039.30
Newcastle upon Tyne	563,330.36	589,787.61	979,945.41	967,089.08
North Tyneside	366,322.00	454,551.00	613,469.00	587,985.00
Sunderland	n/a	502,039.19	600,256.41	607,341.86
South Tyneside	169,930.30	181,144.84	270,283.70	358,126.63
Northumbria MCC[3]	2,008,365	2,763,505	3,201,597	3,157,655
England and Wales	227,361,076	225,908,941	246,481,521	276,870,306

[1] The amount of the 'closing balance owed' that is in arrears.
[2] Current information collection commenced in 1999–2000 and data is not available prior to that year.
[3] To note: this data is incomplete, it does not include information on Houghton Le Spring.

Food Expenditure

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how much has been spent on food by his Department and by each of the agencies for which it is responsible in 2002–03; what proportion of that food by value was produced in the United Kingdom; what guidance he has issued to encourage the procurement of home-produced food; and if he will make a statement. [129370]

Mr. Lammy: The majority of food is provided under catering service contracts with commercial suppliers, in addition the Department buys some food directly.

Expenditure on catering service contracts in 2002–03 amounted to £2,093,265, the amount for food bought directly for the same period was £377,209.

Information available for DCA HQ indicates that on average 52 per cent. of the food bought directly was produced in the UK. For food provided under catering

service contracts, dependent on the type of product and time of year this proportion varies from 25 per cent. to 100 per cent.

DCA is working with DEFRA to implement their guidance on local sourcing and has developed an action plan with our current catering service providers to increase the proportion of local and UK produce purchased.

Immigration Advisory Service

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what free legal representation will be available to those refused visas by overseas posts when funding is withdrawn from the Immigration Advisory Service. [128327]

Mr. Lammy: The terms of the contract that will be awarded to the Immigration Advisory Service (IAS) following the transfer of funding from the Home Office to the Legal Services Commission have yet to be finalised. Ministers will write to the IAS in the near future, once the position is clearer.

Judges' Lodgings

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs if he will list for each judges' lodgings in each of the last four years *(a)* their total cost, *(b)* the number of nights they were used by judges, *(c)* the number of staff employed, *(d)* whether it is freehold and *(e)* in relation to *(d)* (i) the capital value if freehold and (ii) its surrender value if leasehold. [123202]

Mr. Leslie *[holding answer 2 July 2003]:* The information requested has been set out in the following tables. The individual capital values of judges' lodgings have not been provided as they are considered to be commercially confidential. The disclosure of individual property values could prejudice the Department's negotiating position when progressing any plans to rationalise the lodgings estate. The information is withheld under exemption 7 of the Code (relating to effective management and operations of the public service). No data are available for leasehold and license properties.

Expenditure for each judge's lodgings, for the years 1999–2003 inclusive

Lodging	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Birmingham	356,736.17	405,865.43	415,705.55	432,874.74
Leicester	40,964.94	50,432.89	44,928.71	91,569.11
Lincoln	35,075.36	39,000.34	38,385.96	42,885.14
Northampton	25,031.50	18,109.32	30,622.87	17,472.17
Nottingham	189,056.39	218,144.54	246,113.20	250,807.08
Stafford	104,226.10	137,966.93	88,366.49	99,057.55
Warwick	9,792.75	235.00	4,827.92	0
Worcester	24,001.84	33,214.04	55,280.08	31,991.60
Leeds	289,833.69	376,933.30	316,445.18	319,626.98
Pawsworth	331,201.69	430,176.19	326,003.36	305,022.17
Sheffield	322,359.72	291,088.99	242,090.17	256,479.49
Temporary judge's lodgings (Hull)	0.00	14,112.24	27,053.68	12,515.76
Carlisle	35,784.61	34,554.58	31,239.93	22,821.63
Liverpool	291,920.72	233,721.22	274,731.19	235,575.37
Manchester	340,661.18	448,365.96	382,005.97	339,810.76
Preston	213,045.95	214,021.46	223,802.25	225,748.93
Chelmsford	105,494.41	107,853.64	114,388.17	138,508.71
Lewes	142,912.21	178,327.11	159,481.23	147,923.35
Temporary judge's lodgings (Lewes)	0	0	0	22,192.13
Maidstone	185,689.18	224,916.27	206,906.43	188,572.83
Norwich	124,637.02	186,917.83	152,954.05	149,283.82
Oxford	59,168.85	42,878.64	38,768.96	33,449.34
Reading	112,420.32	123,004.54	182,071.19	169,882.14
St. Albans	216,451.08	291,011.19	224,267.65	258,149.67
Caernarfon	13,771.03	14,652.72	21,989.96	10,482.15
Cardiff	235,173.88	317,177.84	286,408.24	235,232.72
Chester	197,999.40	268,956.26	234,009.87	202,777.96
Mold	46,604.57	48,145.87	67,136.40	0
Swansea	182,186.78	213,549.28	199,587.93	177,590.17
Bristol	213,888.24	213,776.82	209,010.69	242,817.41
Exeter	46,945.43	39,512.79	64,960.49	65,923.56
Plymouth	16,856.05	17,628.52	15,537.34	18,527.92
Truro	19,967.87	19,647.59	20,637.26	14,123.77
Winchester	255,824.13	301,791.48	325,776.83	295,237.96
	4,785,683.07	5,555,690.83	5,271,495.20	5,054,934.09

Number of judge nights each judges' lodgings was used for the period 1999–2003

Lodging	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03
Birmingham	620	575	560	717
Leicester	62	53	73	109
Lincoln	42	46	55	48
Northampton	23	20	40	17
Nottingham	201	239	263	313
Stafford	146	144	207	161
Warwick	38	0	30	0
Worcester	29	40	41	35
Leeds	509	549	599	576
Plawsworth	554	590	496	394
Sheffield	230	256	303	231
Temporary judge's lodgings (Hull)	0	45	90	40
Carlisle	59	60	84	35
Liverpool	529	457	491	518
Manchester	492	635	581	659
Preston	274	218	277	348
Chelmsford	151	69	145	142
Lewes	120	125	60	42
Temporary judge's lodgings (Lewes)	0	0	0	38
Maidstone	120	120	110	81
Norwich	130	125	145	120
Oxford	72	30	40	24
Reading	110	80	131	129
St. Albans	165	230	95	135
Caernarfon	13	16	26	10
Cardiff	331	426	311	249
Chester	198	199	188	206
Mold	23	20	8	0
Swansea	147	190	190	145
Bristol	323	235	229	267
Exeter	73	91	93	55
Plymouth	15	25	18	30
Truro	20	30	40	23
Winchester	370	330	224	300
	6,189	6,268	6,243	6,197

Number of staff employed at each judges' lodgings during the period 1999–2003

Lodging	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03
Birmingham	8	10	10	6
Leicester	—	—	—	—
Lincoln	—	—	—	—
Northampton	—	—	—	—
Nottingham	6	6	6	4
Stafford	—	—	—	—
Warwick	—	—	—	—
Worcester	—	—	—	—
Leeds	10	10	10	7
Plawsworth	7	7	7	7
Sheffield	6	6	6	6
Temporary judges' lodgings (Hull)	—	—	—	—
Carlisle	—	—	—	—
Liverpool	7	7	7	7
Manchester	9	9	7	7
Preston	6	6	5	5
Chelmsford	—	—	—	—
Lewes	4	4	3	3
Temporary judges' lodgings (Lewes)	0	0	0	—
Maidstone	4	4	5	5
Norwich	5	5	5	5
Oxford	5	5	5	5
Reading	4	4	4	2
St Albans	4	4	4	2
Caernarfon	—	—	—	—
Cardiff	6	6	6	5
Chester	5	3	4	4
Mold	3	3	3	—
Swansea	4	4	4	2
Bristol	7	5	4	4
Exeter	—	—	—	—
Plymouth	—	—	—	—
Truro	—	—	—	—
Winchester	9	8	7	5
	119	116	112	91

Schedule of right of occupation by judges' lodgings and summary valuation of freehold properties as at 30 September 2001

Lodging	Freehold	Leasehold	License	Other
Birmingham	•	—	—	—
Leicester	—	—	•	—
Lincoln	—	—	•	—
Northampton	—	—	•	—
Nottingham	•	—	—	—
Stafford	—	—	•	—
Warwick	—	—	—	•
Worcester	—	—	•	—
Leeds	—	•	—	—
Plawsworth	•	—	—	—
Sheffield	•	—	—	—
Temporary judges' lodgings (Hull)	—	—	—	•
Carlisle	—	—	•	—
Liverpool	—	•	—	—
Manchester	•	—	—	—
Preston	•	—	—	—
Chelmsford	—	•	—	—
Lewes	—	•	—	—
Temporary judges' lodgings (Lewes)	—	—	—	•
Maidstone	•	—	—	—
Norwich	•	—	—	—
Oxford	—	—	•	—
Reading	•	—	—	—
St Albans	•	—	—	—
Caernarfon	—	—	•	—
Cardiff	•	—	—	—
Chester	•	—	—	—
Mold	—	•	—	—
Swansea	•	—	—	—
Bristol	—	•	—	—
Exeter	—	•	—	—
Plymouth	—	—	—	—
Truro	—	—	•	—
Winchester	•	—	—	—
	11,375,000.00	Not available	Not applicable	Not applicable

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many nights were reimbursed in relation to judges' overnight accommodation; and what the average cost was per night in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [123203]

Mr. Leslie *[holding answer 2 July 2003]:* No reimbursement was made in relation to High Court judges' overnight accommodation. The average cost per night in each of the last four years is set out in the table. These figures are based on the total annual expenditure of the lodgings network and therefore not only include the costs of providing accommodation, travel and subsistence for High Court judiciary and their clerks, but also the accommodation overheads (i.e. rent, rates, capital charge) of the lodgings themselves.

	Average cost per night (£)
1999–2000	774.06
2000–01	886.36
2001–02	844.38
2002–03	815.71

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs if he will make a statement on progress of the review of judges' lodgings; and when it commenced. [123204]

Mr. Leslie *[holding answer 2 July2003]:* An internal review of judges' lodgings reported to the, then, Lord Chancellor in July 2000. Progress on a number of the administrative and staffing improvements has been

good and new arrangements for transporting the judges to and from lodgings have now been introduced. We have, in addition, discontinued the use of Mold Lodgings. These measures will save in excess of £450,000 per annum in running costs.

It is still our policy intention to introduce further efficiencies, particularly on rationalisation of lodgings ownership. I will be in a position to make a statement later this year.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what discussions he has had with the judiciary on the reform of the judges' lodging system; and if he will make a statement. [123205]

Mr. Leslie *[holding answer 2 July 2003]:* Discussions have taken place with the judiciary and will continue to do so.

Legal Advice

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Constitutional Affairs what action the Government is taking to make access to legal advice more readily available to poor people. [131658]

Mr. Lammy: The key aim of the Community Legal Service (CLS) is to provide greater access to advice services to everyone within England and Wales. Financial eligibility limits apply to the provision of publicly funded Legal Help, ensuring that public funding is targeted to assist those on low incomes. In addition, through the work of over 200 CLS Partnerships, and supported by initiatives such as the Partnership Initiative Budget and the Legal Services Commission's Methods of Delivery Pilots, we are devising new ways of delivering frontline legal advice services to local communities. Regional Legal Service Committees and CLS Partnerships are responsible for co-ordinating the delivery of legal and advice services in their area and through an analysis of local legal needs, can ensure that resources are more effectively targeted to help the socially excluded and other vulnerable groups.

Legal Aid

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what the legal aid budget is in 2003–04 for immigration and asylum work. [130945]

Mr. Lammy: Legal aid expenditure for immigration and asylum forms part of a single asylum fund jointly owned by the Department for Constitutional Affairs and the Home Office. Discussions about the level of funding in relation to the single asylum fond with HM Treasury are still taking place and it is therefore not possible to answer this question yet.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what the legal aid budget is for 2002–03; and what it was in 1991–92. [131738]

Mr. Lammy: The legal aid budget for the financial year 2002–03 was £1,871 million; the budget for the financial year 1991–92 was £697 million.

Magistracy

Helen Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Constitutional Affairs what progress has been made in recruiting more people from the most deprived areas of Warrington North to the magistracy; and if he will make a statement. [130928]

Mr. Leslie: The Cheshire Advisory Committee is responsible for the recruitment of lay magistrates in Warrington. It has been working for some time on increasing awareness across all local communities of the opportunities for individuals to apply to become JPs. Recruitment in North Cheshire which includes Warrington North has been a particular difficulty therefore priority has been given to this area.

The Committee is in the middle of a recruiting process that ends on 30 November. I will be in a position to write to my hon. Friend once recruitment has finished with final evidence of progress.

Some recent initiatives include advertising in a Match-Day Programme for Warrington Rugby League Football Club and having a stand at the local Asda Superstore. There have been press releases and local radio coverage. Recruitment literature has been sent to local political party constituency offices and to the Council for Voluntary Service, and links are being maintained with the local Council for Racial Equality.

Microsoft

Norman Lamb: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how much was paid to Microsoft in licensing fees by the Lord Chancellor's Department and its agencies in each of the last three years; and how much the Department for Constitutional Affairs and its agencies has budgeted to pay Microsoft for licensing fees in *(a)* 2003–04 and *(b)* 2004–05. [130671]

Mr. Leslie: The DC A has contracts for IT services with EDS, Liberata and Fujitsu, which include the provision of Microsoft licences. The licences are obtained direct by the three suppliers, and recharged as an element in the overall service charge. The Department also purchases a limited number of Microsoft licences outside these contracts. The amounts spent on these in the last three last financial years are as follows:

	£
2000–01	124,155
2001–02	66,148
2002–03	71,100

Since these licences are procured by local business units within the Department there are no central monies specifically budgeted for licence fees in the financial years 2003–04 and 2004–05.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many questions directed to the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs remain unanswered. [130766]

Mr. Lammy: My Department as of today, 6 October, has eight unanswered questions in the House of Commons and two unanswered questions in the House of Lords.

Crown Dependencies

Mr. Beith: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what proposals he has for the future of the Lord Chancellor's responsibilities in respect of *(a)* Jersey, *(b)* the Bailiwick of Guernsey and *(c)* the Isle of Man; and what discussions he has had with Crown Dependencies on these matters since he took office. [131823]

Mr. Lammy: There are no proposals to change the relationship between the Crown Dependencies, the Crown and the UK. However, as part of the process of abolishing the office of Lord Chancellor, the Government proposes that his responsibilities as the Privy Counsellor primarily concerned with the affairs of the Crown Dependencies should be transferred to the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs.

I visited Jersey on 21–22 September and am due to visit the Isle of Man in November. I also hope to visit Guernsey in the next few months.

My discussions in Jersey covered a wide range of matters.

Supreme Courts Act

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what the present role is of the Court established under the Supreme Courts Act 1981. [131665]

Mr. Leslie: The Supreme Courts Act 1981 established the Court of Appeal, the High Court and the Crown Court, collectively, as the Supreme Court of England and Wales. The Court of Appeal is divided into Criminal Division, which hears appeals from the Crown Court, and the Court Martial and Civil Division, which hears appeals mainly against decisions in the High Court and county court. The High Court has three divisions: Chancery Division, Queens Bench Division and Family Division, each of which exercises appellate jurisdiction and handles different types of civil work. The Crown Court is responsible for trials of indictable offences, appeals from magistrates courts and cases for sentence.

We have proposed the creation of a UK Supreme Court, which will be the highest court in the whole of the United Kingdom and will take on the present jurisdiction of the Appellate Committee of the House of Lords as well as the devolution functions of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. This will not affect the function of the three courts that currently make up the Supreme Court of England and Wales.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what new name he proposes for the current Supreme Court. [131697]

Mr. Leslie: We are consulting on how we should re-name the current Supreme Court the jurisdiction of which is England and Wales. To avoid confusion in the future, the title of Supreme Court will be reserved for the new court for the United Kingdom which will be created as a result of the Government's constitutional reform proposals, announced on 12 June 2003.

Appointments

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs if he will list the names of the people whom the Lord Chancellor has appointed since 12 June; what posts they were appointed to; and for what term each person was appointed. [129998]

Mr. Leslie: A table detailing the names of those appointed by the Lord Chancellor since 12 June, the posts to which they have been appointed and the term of appointment has been sent to the hon. Member, and a copy placed in the House of Commons Library.

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many new entrants to the Civil Service were employed in the Department in each of the last five years; and how many in each year were aged 50 or over. [119823]

Mr. Lammy: I apologise for the delay in replying to your question, this was due to an administrative error.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr. Alexander), gave to him on 24 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 658W.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Film Council

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the films that have been approved since 2000 by *(a)* the Film Council's New Arena Fund and *(b)* the Film Council's Premiere Fund; in each case, how much was invested; and how much has so far been recouped. [130954]

Estelle Morris: The Premiere Fund was established to stimulate commercial filmmaking in association with the private sector and improve the quality and appeal of British films. Details of the films supported and how much has been recouped are shown at Table 1.

The New Cinema Fund was established to support innovative film-making to develop film culture, encourage creative excellence and nurture new talent. Details of the films supported and how much has been recouped are shown at Table 2.

In addition, the New Cinema Fund has invested £1.3 million in over 200 short digital films. This initiative provides a platform for new and emerging talent to explore innovative ways of telling stories and is not designed to provide a financial return on the investment.

The UK Film Council investment in a film is likely to take place well before the film receives a theatrical (or other) release, resulting in a considerable time-lag between the investment and any recoupment. Individual films are expected to generate income over many years

through different "windows" of exploitation around the world (for example, DVD, Pay-TV, Free TV). The recoupment received to date is therefore only a small part of the return on the investment expected by the UK Film Council.

Table 1: Premiere Fund

Title	*Net award*	*Receipts*
Code 46	1,565,063	0
The Importance of Being Earnest	1,320,000	227,925
Gosford Park	2,000,000	2,000,000
L'Homme du Train	500,000	0
Mike Bassett: England Manager	2,103,000	1,688,965
Miranda	849,315	112,933
Sex Lives of the Potato Men	1,766,222	0
Sylvia	2,450,000	0
Valiant	2,580,645	0
Young Adam	500,000	0
Total	15,634,245	4,029,823

Table 2: New Cinema Fund

Title	*Net award*	*Receipts*
AKA	101,250	0
Anita and Me	680,000	17,879
Ape	178,000	0
Blind Flight	460,000	10,000
Bloody Sunday	299,500	138,830
Bodysong	350,000	0
This Little Life (Entering Blue Zone)	241,000	0
Hoover Street	175,000	0
Kiss of Life (Helen of Peckham)	510,000	10,000
Intermission	570,000	0
Live Forever	212,249	1,760
The Magdalene Sisters	620,000	64,477
Noi the Albino	100,000	0
One for the Road	240,000	0
One Love	899,827	0
Once Upon A Time in the Midlands	750,000	262,485
Revengers Tragedy	510,000	10,000
Tomorrow La Scala (Sweeney)	247,406	0
This is not a Love Song	289,650	13,047
Touching the Void	335,000	0
Total	7,768,882	528,478

Note:

The figures given in the tables relate to films on which the UK Film Council had entered into contracts by 30 June 2003, and therefore do not include all of the awards made to date. Some of the films listed are still in production and have therefore not started to recoup funding.

National Lottery

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent assessment she has made of lottery funding for projects in seaside towns. [131321]

Estelle Morris: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not made any recent assessment of lottery funding specifically for projects in seaside towns. However, since the introduction of the National Lottery Act 1998, and changes to policy directions, distributors have increasingly focussed on areas of social and economic deprivation, including seaside resorts. The Government remains committed to ensuring that all parts of the country should have access to lottery funds. Many areas, suffering wider social and economic deprivation, need extra support to develop and put in applications of a quality that will succeed. The National Lottery Funding Decision Document, published in July, contained proposals to make it easier for communities to access lottery grants.

Ministerial Engagements

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what sporting engagements she has attended in her official capacity since January, broken down by category. [129505]

Tessa Jowell: Since January I have visited the following sporting events in my official capacity:

Event	*Date*
Arsenal *v* Chelsea	1 January 2003
England *v* Australia Football Match	12 February 2003
World Indoor Athletics Championships	16 March 2003
London Marathon	13 April 2003
Wimbledon Tennis Championships	6 July 2003

Royal Residences

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the plans are for each of the buildings for which her Department is responsible which were occupied by Her Late Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother. [131284]

Mr. Caborn: Clarence House is the only building that was occupied by the late Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother for which the Department is responsible. Clarence House has recently been refurbished as the official London residence for His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales, Prince William and Prince Harry, to provide office accommodation for his immediate staff and to enable His Royal Highness to carry out his official duties.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Asbestos

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much has been spent by his Department and its agencies on *(a)* asbestos surveys and *(b)* the management and removal of asbestos since 1 January 2001; and what budget is available to (i) commission asbestos surveys and (ii) manage and remove asbestos from buildings in (A) 2003 and (B) 2004. [130918]

Maria Eagle: A programme of surveys and risk assessments, covering all buildings occupied by this Department, is being carried out and it is anticipated that this will be completed by April 2004. This Department is expected to be fully compliant with the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations by the required date of 21 May 2004. No estimate has been made of the cost of these actions so far or of the likely future cost. However, the majority of the Estate occupied by this Department was transferred, for value, to Land Securities Trillium in 1998. Under the terms of the contract they are responsible for arranging and funding the surveys and risk assessments and also taking necessary action for the removal or management of any asbestos found.

Child Care

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps are being taken to *(a)* train and *(b)* recruit people in the child care sector; and if he will make a statement. [128675]

Margaret Hodge: I have been asked to reply.

Child care is an important community resource, supporting parents to work, learn and study. Good quality child care supports better outcomes for children. A skilled and qualified child care workforce is essential to meet our objective to increase the availability of high quality child care for all age groups.

We provide for the training of child care workers through the Learning and Skills Council, and through funding allocated to local authorities and their Early Years Development and Child care Partnerships. It is for local LSCs and local authorities to assess needs in their areas and develop plans to ensure the training delivered best meets them. We issued joint guidance with LSC to encourage local planning for workforce development.

A national child care recruitment campaign has been running since 2000 to encourage people to consider a career in child care. It includes television and media advertising, a variety of customised information and materials, a national orderline and a website with order facility. Local authorities promote careers in child care using a range of materials and events, working with local partners such as Jobcentre Plus, Careers Services, providers and sector organisations to provide practical help to potential recruits.

We issued guidance to local authorities in July 2003, including activities to promote training and recruitment. The General Sure Start Grant includes £129.9 million for workforce development for the two years 2004–06, which covers training and recruitment for child care and early years workers.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the efficiency of information technology where the Child Support Agency is responsible for drawing payments from an individual for a number of children by different partners. [131376]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. David Drew, dated 26 September 2003:

The Secretary of State in replying to your recent Parliamentary question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You ask for a statement on the efficiency of IT where the CSA is responsible for drawing payments from an individual for a number of children by different partners.

The child support computer system has been designed to support and reflect the change in policy under the new child support scheme. This means that it will allocate payments received from Non Resident Parents equally between all the relevant Parents with Care based on the number of qualifying children. However, we recognise that in implementing the new child support scheme arrangements and introducing a complex new IT system that there will be teething problems. Where problems occur we aim to respond quickly and to ensure that these do not adversely affect the client.

A report on progress in the implementation of the new child support scheme was placed in the Library on 14 July 2003.

Crosby

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many times he has visited Crosby in his official capacity; and what the purpose was of each visit. [129503]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Since becoming the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, in May 2002, I have not yet had the opportunity to visit the hon. Member's constituency.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* press officers, *(c)* civil servants, *(d)* advisers to civil servants and *(e)* permanent staff were working for the Department in each year since 1996. [126477]

Maria Eagle: Information on the numbers of staff in civil service Departments and agencies is published in Table C of "Civil Service Statistics" which covers permanent staff numbers in each Department and agency from 1995 to 2002. Copies of the publication are laid in the Libraries of both Houses.

The Department for Work and Pensions was created in June 2001 merging staff from the Department of Social Security and the Employment Service. Information in respect of the Department for Work and Pensions first becomes available in the October 2001 publication. Prior to this, information for the two former Departments is shown separately. Information on staffing in respect of the former Department of Social Security is in the publications from 1995 until April 2001. Information in respect of staffing in the former Employment Service is included with those of the Department for Education and Employment and is also included in publications from 1995 to 1 April 2001.

The latest edition, based on April 2002 data was published on 24 July 2003. The figures include press officers.

As at 16 July 2003, the Department employed two special advisers. The term advisers to civil servants is not recognised.

Incapacity Benefit

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to change the rules relating to the payment of incapacity benefit for disabled lay members of employment tribunals. [129634]

Maria Eagle: Any incapacity benefit (IB) recipient can work for up to and including £20 a week for an unlimited period, or work for less than 16 hours a week and earn up to and including £67.50 per week for 26 weeks. The latter can be extended for another 26 weeks if a New Deal for Disabled People Job Broker, Jobcentre Plus Personal

Adviser or Disability Employment Adviser agrees that progress is being made towards work of 16 or more hours a week.

In addition, a person receiving IB can work for one day a week as a panel member on appeal tribunals that specifically involve issues of disability, such as those dealing with disability living allowance or attendance allowance, without their benefit being affected. However, there are no current plans to introduce similar provisions for disabled lay members of employment tribunals who receive incapacity benefit.

Job Advertisements

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures are taken by the Employment Service to ensure that those businesses advertising jobs through job centres are genuine. [129422]

Mr. Browne: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the Chief Executive, David Anderson. I have asked him to reply to my hon. Friend.

Letter from David Anderson to Mrs. Janet Dean, dated 25 September 2003:

As Jobcentre Plus is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to reply direct to your question asking what measures are taken by Jobcentre Plus, as the public Employment Service, to ensure that businesses advertising vacancies with us are genuine. This is something that falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Our aim is to maintain a reasonable level of assurance about our vacancies without setting up a costly and cumbersome checking process that may deter genuine employers from giving us their vacancies. We have systems in place to establish the genuine nature of both the employers and their jobs. For example, the employer is required to provide us with a valid UK address, postcode and landline telephone number. If there is any cause for doubt a visit may be arranged to the employer by staff from the local Jobcentre Plus office.

We maintain regular contact with all employers using our services. If we believe that an employer has deliberately misled us and we are unable to obtain assurances to the contrary, the employer's vacancies are removed from display.

By and large these arrangements work well and we rarely receive complaints from customers as to the genuineness of employers. However, when we do receive such a complaint, we investigate the complaints thoroughly and promptly and, if appropriate, remove the company's vacancies from display. Should such an 'employer' attempt to advertise further vacancies, these are not advertised until the previous problems have been resolved satisfactorily.

I hope this is helpful.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many staff in JobCentre Plus were employed on temporary contracts; how many were employed in London; and if he will make a statement on his policy on the employment of temporary staff in JobCentre Plus; [125493]

(2) what consultation was held in 2002–03 with trade unions concerning the termination of employment of temporary workers by JobCentre Plus; what his policy is on consultation with trade unions on the employment and termination of temporary contract workers; and if he will make a statement; [125494]

(3) how many staff on temporary contracts employed by JobCentre Plus *(a)* in total and *(b)* in London had their contracts terminated in financial year 2002–03; in each case how many (i) had been employed for more than 49 weeks but less than 52 weeks, (ii) were employed for more than 52 weeks, (iii) were women and (iv) were from minority ethnic communities; and if he will make a statement on his policy towards the termination of employment of temporary contract workers. [125495]

Mr. Browne: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus, David Anderson. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from David Anderson to Mr. Andrew Dismore, dated 25 September 2003:

As Jobcentre Plus is an Executive Agency, I have been asked to reply to your questions concerning the employment of temporary workers and consultation with trade unions by Jobcentre Plus. This is something that falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

I apologise for the delay in replying, which has arisen because of the need to obtain and verify the detailed information requested. Our payroll information does not distinguish between contracts that run their course or those which are terminated early. Information on contracts 'terminated' would therefore include both categories. It would not, however, include those who resigned In the course of their temporary employment.

During 2002–03 Jobcentre Plus took on 6,034 temporary staff and 6,968 temporary staff left our employment. 5,269 of these had their contracts terminated—1,048 of them in London—and the detailed information you requested about these temporary workers is set out in the table below.

	Jobcentre Plus	*London*
Temporary workers whose contracts were terminated in 2002/03	5,269	1,048
In each case how many:		
Had been employed for more than 49 weeks but less than 52 weeks	433	85
Were employed for more than 52 weeks[2]	3	0
Were women	3,300	702
Were from ethnic minority communities[1]	481	135

[1] This data is collected from application forms and is voluntary. It may therefore, not represent the total sample. Across DWP, ethnicity data is only currently held for only 67.7% of permanent staff.

[2] It is not the usual practice to extend contracts beyond 51 weeks. One contract was extended while the individual was awaiting the imminent results of her application for a permanent appointment—for which she was unsuccessful so her contract was ended. Two contracts were extended to cover acute shortfalls of staff.

Source:
Information from FAMIS and REBUS Payroll Database

Jobcentre Plus employs temporary workers for a number of reasons, for example, to help manage peaks of work and to aid release of permanent staff for training and preparation for major business change.

All Jobcentre Plus permanent staff are recruited through procedures and criteria which meet the Civil Service Commissioners' rigorous fair and open competition criteria. However, to support flexibility and responsiveness Jobcentre Plus generally does not recruit temporary staff through such procedures, as they are only being recruited to meet a short-term need. All temporary staff are recruited through a procedure that includes an initial application form, a sift, an interview, and the completion of pre-appointment checks. The Department recommends that at least three applicants are interviewed for each post. Equality of opportunity is central to all the Department's personnel and recruitment policies.

Jobcentre Plus informs temporary staff of the length of time they are likely to work for us by specifying the duration of their temporary contracts. This situation is then kept under review in relation to any changing business needs. Temporary contracts can be extended up to a maximum of 51 weeks.

Managers at all levels of the business discuss with their trade union representatives Jobcentre Plus overall staffing requirements on an ongoing basis. In particular, these discussions cover the need for recruitment or promotion exercises, redeployment of staff, or the need to manage staff reductions. Discussions take into account the established policies within the Department for Work and Pensions for dealing with these issues—policies which have been subject to consultation with the trade unions at Departmental level.

In the case of managing staff reductions Jobcentre Plus has agreed principles for redundancy avoidance and handling with the trade unions which set out a number of measures to avoid redundancies of permanent staff. These measures make specific reference to reducing or eliminating the use of casual/temporary staff and contract employees.

Between April 2002 and February 2003, Jobcentre Plus London region reduced its permanent staffing through a combination of staff moving to The Pension Service, other parts of the Department for Work and Pensions, other Government Departments and through natural wastage. In reaching the reduction in staffing figures, no permanent members of staff were dismissed or made redundant.

A number of meetings, at both Regional and District level, have taken place with trade union representatives since last summer about the deployment of staff across London region. These meetings have also been supplemented by correspondence. Headcount target figures were shared with trade union regional colleagues in September 2002, and a discussion on measures required to manage towards those workforce numbers took place at a meeting on 25 September 2002.

Subsequently, specific plans for releasing temporary workers were discussed with union representatives in January 2003. Detailed letters followed this meeting together with a further meeting, which took place in February 2003.

I hope this is helpful.

Microsoft

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much was paid to Microsoft in licensing fees by his Department and its agencies in each of the last three years; and how much has been budgeted for *(a)* 2003–04 and *(b)* 2004–05. [130683]

Mr. Browne: The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) was formed in June 2001.

Payments made to Microsoft by DWP in 2001–02 were £1,075 and 2002–03 were £282.

Payments made direct to Microsoft are very low because the majority of purchases are made by the Department's main IT Service Provider on the DWP's behalf and are therefore not recorded as a Departmental purchase from Microsoft.

Details of how much has been budgeted for in 2003–04 and 2004–05 cannot be provided since the Department do not budget for software licences by specific suppliers.

Ministerial Visits

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the *(a)* foreign and *(b)* UK visits he has made since 1 April; what the cost was to public funds of each trip; whom he met; and what gifts were received. [126870]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government publishes the overall costs of all Ministerial overseas travel and a list of all visits overseas by Cabinet Ministers costing in excess of £500 on an annual basis. The list for the period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003 was published by the Prime Minister on 16 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 482W. The next list for the period 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004 will be published at the end of the financial year.

In respect of gifts received, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, on 14 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 482W.

Between 1 April and 16 July, I have made a number of visits in the UK, the individual cost of each could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Pension Credit

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in what circumstances and for what reason, under pension credit legislation, pensioners will receive an award of £1.20 instead of 60 pence for each extra pound of qualifying income; and whether those entitled to the £1.20 award will be informed of this. [131044]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 18 September 2003]:* In very exceptional circumstances the effect of applying the normal formula will be that some pensioners will receive a reward of £1.20 instead of 60 pence for each extra pound of qualifying income. This may happen if the Pension Credit recipient is also receiving a working tax credit, spousal maintenance, or a social security benefit which does not count as rewardable income. It will only occur if their total income brought to account is greater than their appropriate guarantee level but the income which counts for the savings credit is less than the guarantee level. If this happens the pensioner will be able to ask the Pension Service for an explanation.

Pensions (Armed Forces)

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Defence on the implications of the Pensions Green Paper for armed forces personnel's future pensions. [131313]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department has worked closely with MoD officials to ensure that the proposals have taken full account of the changes to policy likely to emerge from the Pension's Green Paper (published in December 2002).

The proposals for the new schemes reflect recent announcements on pensions reform. For example, the replacement of the early Immediate Pension provision with an Early Departure Scheme will ensure compliance with Inland Revenue proposals to increase the earliest age from which a pension can be paid from 50 to 55.

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TRANSPORT

Motor Vehicle Pollution

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will issue a statement on his Department's plans to reduce motor vehicle pollution over the next 10 years.131278]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's Powering Future Vehicles Strategy, published in July 2002 and available via the Department's website, sets out our plans for promoting the development, introduction and take-up of clean, low carbon vehicle technologies and fuels in the UK. We will be publishing a first progress report on the implementation of this Strategy very shortly. Emissions of key air pollutants from motor vehicles are set to fall by about 30 per cent. over the next decade as progressively tighter European regulations come into effect for new vehicles, and as older, more polluting vehicles drop out of circulation. The Government is also playing a constructive role in discussions in Europe on future vehicle emission standards for the period from 2010 onwards.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what support the Department plans to give to low pollution fuel initiatives. [131279]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government is always prepared to consider supporting the introduction and use of clean fuels where these offer proven environmental benefits. We have an excellent track record of incentivising cleaner fuels by means of fuel duty incentives. Decisions on fuel duty levels are a matter for the Chancellor of the Exchequer. My Department also runs a number of grant programmes which can help support the introduction of clean, low-carbon vehicles and fuels. Details of these are available via the Transport Energy website at http:// www.fransportenergv.org.uk .

Asbestos

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer of 16 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 17W, on asbestos, if he will list the buildings identified as containing asbestos. [130939]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Balloons

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether there is a standard of airworthiness in respect of tethered balloons for passenger transport; [131180]

(2) when he expects European Aviation Safety Authority type certification CS31TGB to be *(a)* promulgated and *(b)* enforced; [131189]

(3) what plans he has to give the Civil Aviation Authority powers to certify the safety of airworthiness of tethered balloons for passenger transport; [131181]

(4) if he will list the *(a)* telephone calls, *(b)* meetings, *(c)* correspondence and *(d)* other communication he has had with the (i) Civil Aviation Authority, (ii) European Aviation Safety Authority, (iii) Joint Aviation Authority and (iv) EU transport ministers on the certification of airworthiness of tethered balloons for passenger transport in the last 12 months; [131190]

(5) what research he has conducted on the safety regimes of *(a)* France and *(b)* Germany on tethered balloons for passenger transport; [131191]

(6) whether UK operators of tethered balloons for passenger transport will be able to operate such equipment after 28 September without *(a)* type certification under CS 31 TGB and *(b)* grandfather rights; [131182]

(7) what recent assessment he has made of the safety of tethered balloons for passenger transport; [131183]

(8) what assessment he has made of the employment prospects for the balloon industry, with particular reference to the effects of the lack of a certification standard for tethered balloons for passenger transport; [131192]

(9) what estimate he has made of sales volumes of tethered balloons for passenger transport in the next five years; [131184]

(10) what estimate he has made of the number of tethered balloons for passenger transport which have been *(a)* sold in and *(b)* imported into the UK in the past five years; [131193]

(11) how many officials at his Department have duties relating to the certification of airworthiness of tethered balloons; [131194]

(12) what his Department's responsibilities are in respect of Civil Aviation Authority certification for tethered balloons for passenger transport; [131185]

(13) what his Department's responsibilities are in respect of the airworthiness of tethered balloons for passenger transport; [131186]

(14) how many Civil Aviation Authority officials have *(a)* full and *(b)* part-time duties in relation to airworthiness certification; [131195]

(15) what advice he gives to manufacturers of tethered balloons on the *(a)* current and *(b)* proposed regulatory framework; [131196]

(16) what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* UK balloon manufacturers *(b)* the Civil Aviation Authority and *(c)* the European Aviation Safety Authority on the certification of airworthiness of tethered balloons for passenger transport; [131187]

(17) what plans he has to make provision for the temporary certification of airworthiness of tethered balloons for passenger transport, in advance of a European standard; [131188]

(18) how many *(a)* accidents, *(b)* injuries and *(c)* deaths to (i) passengers, (ii) operators and (iii) users of tethered balloons for passenger transport have been reported in the last five years; [131197]

(19) if he will list the communications he has had with ministers in other departments with regard to the certification of airworthiness of tethered balloons for passenger transport in the last 12 months; [131303]

(20) if he will make a statement on the negotiations with EU authorities establishing grandfather rights for regulatory authorities in France and Germany in respect of tethered balloons for passenger transport. [131304]

Mr. McNulty: There are no international airworthiness standards in respect of tethered balloons for passenger transport.

In the UK, the Air Navigation Order 2000 exempts such aircraft, described as captive balloons, from the requirement to be registered and thus from any airworthiness certification requirement. Tethered balloons carrying passengers are treated as fairground rides and their safety standards have been regulated by the Health and Safety Executive, rather than the Civil Aviation Authority. The Department for Transport accordingly has had no duties relating to the airworthiness of tethered balloons.

Some other European countries have required tethered balloons to be registered and established national airworthiness certification requirements. Such requirements have been the responsibility of the states concerned and the Government has had no reason to research their safety regimes. UK produced tethered balloons sold into these countries have been required to meet national requirements which has caused some practical difficulties due to those states' unfamiliarity with UK Health and Safety Executive regulations.

EC Regulation 1592/2002 on common rules in the field of civil aviation and establishing a European Aviation Safety Agency came into force in September 2002. Its primary objective is to establish and maintain a high uniform level of civil aviation in Europe and an additional objective is to facilitate the free movement of goods, persons and services. The regulation lays down safety essential airworthiness requirements for aircraft and aviation products within its scope, which includes tethered balloons, and empowers the agency to establish the type certification basis for each aircraft, to issue the appropriate type certificates and to conduct, either itself or through national aviation authorities, the technical inspections associated with such certification. This system will facilitate the marketing of aircraft, such as captive balloons, throughout the Community.

The agency is required to take up its certification responsibilities by 28 September. Commission Regulations detailing how these responsibilities will be implemented are being drawn up to a very tight timetable and should be finalised very shortly. The UK has been fully involved in the process of drawing up these implementing regulations. The regulations will include transitional provisions to ensure that all aircraft types currently used in member states can continue to be used after 28 September, including UK built tethered balloons.

There are also provisions to give grandfather rights to a large range of aircraft and products certified under previous regimes. Under specified conditions, the type certification basis for certain products will be deemed to be an EASA certification basis: this will apply to a number of types of tethered balloons certified in other member states. Such provisions cannot apply to UK designed balloons because there has been no UK type certification basis for them. The agency has to establish an EASA certification basis for these aircraft and work is in hand to draft the appropriate certification specification (Certification Specification 31 Tethered Gas Balloons, known as CS 31 TGB). The agency is using a team of national expert put together by the Joint Aviation Authorities to develop this specification, industry will be consulted and it is expected to be adopted early in 2004.

EASA arrangements for outsourcing tasks to national aviation authorities will allow the CAA to carry out a range of certification activities on behalf of the agency after 28 September and we understand that the CAA could quickly begin the necessary certification work for UK tethered balloons on the basis of the current draft of the certification specification. The authority has been in touch with the manufacturer of tethered balloons in the UK about the EASA developments and will endeavour to ensure as smooth a transition to the new system as possible.

Food Expenditure

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much was spent on food by his Department and by each agency for which it is responsible in *(a)* 2001-02 and *(b)* 2002-03; what proportion of that food by value was produced in the United Kingdom; what guidance he has issued to encourage the procurement of home-produced food; and if he will make a statement. [129376]

Mr. McNulty: The Department came into being on 29 May 2002. The information requested is given in the following table.

The Department's catering services are all contracted out, with the contractor recovering costs through the sale of services. Expenditure on food in DfT is, therefore, limited to official hospitality provided by the Department and its Agencies, and canteen subsidies. Records of spend on food provided at some external conferences and similar events are not kept centrally and are not included.

The Department does not generally prescribe the sourcing of goods and produce supplied to the Department or sold in staff restaurants, nor are contractors currently required to provide this information. The percentage and value of foodstuffs sourced from the UK under existing departmental catering contracts is not, therefore, readily available.

DEFRA has published a "Guidance and action Sheet for buyers and their internal customers" that includes guidance on local sourcing and in particular how to remove obstacles to tendering faced by local and UK suppliers. I am taking steps to ensure that the guidance is implemented by departmental purchasers involved in the procurement of facility management/catering services.

We are also working closely with DEFRA, and our agencies, to integrate and promote the principles of sustainable development into the public procurement of food and catering services.

Department/Agency	2001–02 hospitality expenditure (£)	2001–02 canteen subsidies (£)	Estimated percentage of procured food produced in UK in 2001–02	Estimated monetary value of UK produced food supplied to organisation in 2001–02 (£)
(Central) Department	Not Available[1]	None	Not Available[1]	Not Available[1]
Driving Standards Agency	54,575	None	Not Available[1]	Not Available[2]
Driver Vehicle and Licensing Agency	35,512	None	86	Not Available[2]
Highways Agency	216,995	9,692	Not Available[2]	Not Available[2]
Maritime and Coastguard Agency	35,525	None	Not Available[2]	Not Available[2]
Vehicle Certification Agency	2,000	None	Not Available[2]	Not Available[2]
Vehicle and Operator Services Agency	147,787	142,921	60	Not Available[2]
Total	492,394	152,613	—	—

Department/Agency	2002–03 hospitality expenditure (£)	2002–03 canteen subsidies (£)	Estimated percentage of procured food produced in UK in 2002–03	Estimated monetary value of UK produced food supplied to organisation in 2002–03 (£)
(Central) Department	[3]161,924	None	Not Available[2]	Not Available[2]
Driving Standards Agency	28,364	None	Not Available[2]	Not Available[2]
Driver Vehicle and Licensing Agency	92,188	None	87	Not Available[2]
Highways Agency	212,103	13,461	Not Available[2]	Not Available[2]
Maritime and Coastguard Agency	46,587	None	Not Available[2]	Not Available[2]
Vehicle Certification Agency	2,000	None	Not Available[2]	Not Available[2]
Vehicle and Operator Services Agency	90,357	33,980	60	Not Available[2]
Total	633,503	47,441	—	—

[1] The Department for Transport came into being on 29 May 2002, earlier figures for the predecessor department are not available.
[2] This information is not held centrally, and is not readily available from catering service providers.
[3] The Department for Transport came into being on 29 May 2002, the figure shown only includes available data from that date up to and including 31 March 2003.

Docklands Light Railway

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effects on the integrated transport strategy of bicycles not being allowed on the Docklands Light Railway. [131124]

Mr. McNulty: None. The Docklands Light Railway is the responsibility of the Mayor and Transport for London.

Local Transport Finance

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the *(a)* unclaimed and *(b)* returned sums from each local authority's local transport plans for the last year for which figures are available. [129721]

Mr. McNulty: Most capital funds paid through the Local Transport Plan system to local authorities are subject to financial flexibilities which are sufficient to ensure that none are unclaimed or returned. The exceptions relate to funds allocated for major local transport schemes—through grants under Section 56 of the Transport Act 1968, or through credit approvals.

As Section 56 grants are claimed in arrears and are subsequently subject to audit, local authorities invariably claim only as much as they need to cover works undertaken on a particular scheme in a particular financial year, and no grant needs to be returned. The authorities that claimed less than the full amount offered by the Government for major schemes in 2002–03 are listed as follows.

Authority	Scheme	Unclaimed amount (£)
Sandwell MBC	Hagley Road Bus Showcase Route	300,000
Tyne and Wear PTA	Stephenson's Link	887,000
Tyne and Wear PTA	Metro Track Dualling	199,000
Newcastle CC	Quayside Public Transport	392,000

Where under-claiming is the result of a delay in delivering a scheme, the Government may decide to offer a corresponding additional grant for the scheme in subsequent years.

There is no corresponding 'claim' for credit approvals. Following a local authority bid, the Government may decide to make credit approvals available, at times and levels decided by Ministers. Local authorities that chose not to take full advantage of credit approvals made available in 2002–03 are listed in the following table. These sums were subsequently reallocated as credit approvals for other local authority transport schemes.

Authority	Scheme	Unclaimed amount (£)
Bolton MBC	Quality Bus Corridor	155,999
Bradford CC	South Bradford Integrated Transport	2,122,000
Cheshire CC	Chester Park and Ride	1,480,000
East Sussex CC	A22 Dualling	23,000
Gateshead MBC	Centrelink	276,410
Salford CC	Trafford Road Improvement	617,000
Staffordshire CC	Biddulph by-pass	300,000
Stockport MBC	Manchester Airport Eastern Link Road	89,000
Tyne and Wear PTA	Stephenson Link	50,000
Tyne and Wear PTA	Metro Track Dualling	300,000
Warwickshire CC	Nuneaton Development Project	240,000

M6

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effect that the charge for lorries using the M6 toll road will have on lorry movements on the non-tolled M6 motorway. [130970]

Mr. Jamieson: Since the announcement of the toll prices the Highways Agency have not carried out any assessment.

Following the opening of the Toll Road, the Highways Agency in conjunction with the Concessionaire will carry out a review of flows along the adjacent network together with flows on the toll road.

Under all charging scenarios, the net relief to the M6 was forecast to be quite small. Long distance through traffic which transfers onto the M6 Toll, which represents about one third of M6 traffic, will release capacity on the M6 which will be taken up by local traffic, thus providing significant relief to many local roads.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what powers he has to alter the charges for using the M6 toll road. [130971]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State has no powers to alter the charges. Under the terms of the concession agreement signed in 1992, the Concessionaire (Midland Expressway Ltd.) is responsible for all aspects of the M6 toll's operation, including the level of tolls.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he had with the private operator of the M6 toll road over the setting of the initial charges for users; and what representations he made to the operator. [130972]

Mr. Jamieson: The concession agreement places no obligation on the Concessionaire to consult with the Secretary of State before setting toll charges. Under the terms of the concession agreement signed in 1992, the Concessionaire (Midland Expressway Ltd.) is responsible for all aspects of the M6 toll's operation, including the level of tolls.

Mapeley Steps Contract

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the then Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and Regional Affairs was a party to the agreement between the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise and Mapeley Steps Ltd (Bermuda) in April 2001 to sell buildings; and whether he received advice from officials with regard to *(a)* the contract and *(b)* where the purchaser company was based. [124866]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

The agreement for the transfer of buildings to Mapeley Steps Ltd. by the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise was signed by officials of those departments pursuant to a general authorisation to sign documents on behalf of the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions in whom the majority of the Civil Estate is nominally vested.

Mersey Tunnels

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has received a full set of accounts for the Mersey Tunnels illustrating income and expenditure with appropriate notes and an auditor's certificate in the last 12 months. [131229]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of 16 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 626W.

Section 100 of the County of Merseyside Act 1980 does not require that the accounts sent to Ministers have to be accompanied by appropriate notes and an auditor's certificate.

Motorways

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from road hauliers and their associations on his proposal for use of motorway hard shoulders within the Active Traffic Management project. [130968]

Mr. Jamieson: No formal representation has been received from road hauliers and their associations on the proposals for the controlled use of the hard shoulder within the Active Traffic Management project. However, as part of the preparation for the trial of Active Traffic Management on the M42, the Highways Agency commissioned research to assess user attitudes to the Active Traffic Management proposals. The views of HGV drivers that use the M42 were sought as part of this work.

Representatives of the Highways Agency have also met and discussed the proposals for the M42 with a range of key stakeholders including the local emergency services. The road hauliers associations will be consulted in the future as part of the on-going stakeholder liaison.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to include in his public education programme the promotion of good lane discipline among the users of motorways. [130969]

Mr. Jamieson: There is a specific section in the "Motorways" part of the Highway Code on lane discipline. The Department has also produced a leaflet 'A guide to safer motorway driving' which includes advice on lane discipline.

Passenger Railway Carriages

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many passenger railway carriages there were in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1998 and *(c)* 2003; and if he will make a statement. [128792]

Mr. McNulty: Figures are only readily available for the years 1995 and 2003. There were 9,979 vehicles in 1995 and 10,610 in 2003. This increase reflects both the fact that some operators have increased the number of services they provide and the statutory requirement to replace the Mark 1 rolling stock that is currently operated by the three franchises operating south of the river Thames (GoVia South Central, Connex South Eastern and South West Trains).

Public Transport

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures have been taken to extend public transport infrastructure since 1997; and what measures have been taken to ensure that the infrastructure is adequately maintained. [130453]

Mr. McNulty: We have launched a major programme of investment through the 10 Year Plan for transport, published in July 2000. This comprises a £180 billion programme of public and private funding aimed at improving transport infrastructure and services across all modes. Major additions and enhancements to public transport infrastructure started or completed since 1997 include:

High Speed Channel Tunnel Rail Link
Heathrow Express rail line
West Coast Main Line upgrade
Chiltern Line double tracking
Rebuilding of Manchester and Leeds stations
London Underground Jubilee Line extension
London Underground modernisation
Docklands Light Rail extensions to Lewisham and City Airport
New light rail lines in Birmingham, Manchester, Croydon, Sunderland and Nottingham
Guided busways in Leeds, Bradford and Crawley.

The 10 Year Plan also included substantial increases in funding to improve the maintenance of infrastructure. Funding for local road maintenance has been doubled, with the aim of eliminating the long-term maintenance backlog by 2010. Network Rail is now focussing on reducing the maintenance backlog on rail, and plans toreplace 740 miles of track this year (compared to 300 miles achieved by Railtrack and in the run-up to privatisation). And substantial new investment is now going in through the PPP to tackle the long-term maintenance backlog on the London Underground.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to invest in public transport infrastructure in the next five years. [130454]

Mr. McNulty: Investment plans for transport over the current decade were set down in the 10 Year Plan for transport, published in July 2000. Up-dated plans were published in the progress report published in December 2002. Expenditure on public transport is not separately identified, but total investment (public and private) over the five years from 2004–05 on railways, and on non-roads transport by local transport authorities and the Mayor for London, is estimated to be around £48 billion.

Light Pollution

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance he has issued to highway authorities about light pollution resulting from road lighting. [131235]

Dr. Howells: The Lighting Board of the Roads Liaison Group (which brings together representatives from national and local highway authorities across the UK) is producing a revised Code of Good Practice for Street Lighting. This will include advice on reducing light pollution. In the meantime, other guidance issued previously remains applicable.

The Department of Transport published "Road Lighting and the Environment" in 1993 which gave advice on good street lighting practice to reduce sky glow and light pollution generally.

The Department also contributed to "Lighting in the Countryside: Towards good practice", which was commissioned by the Department of the Environment (now Office of the Deputy Prime Minister). The document provides guidance to local authorities, highway planners and engineers and members of the public. It demonstrates what can be done to lessen the adverse effects of external lighting, including street lighting. The advice is applicable in towns as well as the countryside.

Road Safety

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many signs there are on trunk roads indicating that queues are likely; and what plans the Government has to eliminate the causes in each case. [129149]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

European Cohesion Policy

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on the Leipzig Declaration on European Cohesion Policy; and if she will make a statement. [130886]

Jacqui Smith: The Government's position on the future of the EU Structural and Cohesion Funds was confirmed in a statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 17 September 2003. Although some of the principles of the Leipzig declaration—for example, its emphasis on a strengthened Community regional and cohesion policy and an enhanced role for regional and local government—are reflected in the Government's approach, our overall position is somewhat different. In particular, we believe that richer EU member states should fund their own regional policy within an EU-wide agreed framework and we do not regard the current budget maximum, 0.45 per cent. of EU GDP, as a reference point for future Structural and Cohesion funding.

Arms Exports

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what export credit guarantee arrangements have been made to support the Defence Systems and Equipment Information exhibition held in London in September; and if she will make a statement. [129915]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The ECGD has not made any arrangements to support the DSEI exhibition.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will take steps to ensure that end-user certificates used for arms exports carry *(a)* the serial numbers of the arms being exported, *(b)* the number

of weapons to be transferred, *(c)* details of the transportation to be used to carry the shipment and *(d)* details of the route the shipment is to take. [131133]

Nigel Griffiths: End-user certificates must be consistent with the model format published on the Department of Trade and Industry's export control website. Precise details of information required on end-user certificates will vary depending on the nature of the proposed export and end-user. There are currently no plans to amend this format.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if, as part of her proposals for the secondary orders to the Export Control Act 2002, she will create a binding agreement with countries that receive arms exports from the UK that they will not re-export weapons of UK origin without first informing the UK Government. [131134]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government has no plans to introduce such binding agreements. The surest way to minimise the risk of UK arms being re-exported and ending up in the wrong hands is to carry out a rigorous assessment of export licence applications at the licensing stage.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information the Foreign Office passes to the export control organisations on emerging conflicts; and whether this information is then used for making decisions on reducing or ceasing shipments. [131138]

Nigel Griffiths: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office work very closely with the Department of Trade and Industry's Export Control Organisation, to keep them fully informed of any changes in circumstances that might affect export licensing decisions. The Export Control Organisation then establishes which pending applications and extant licences need to be re-examined. Applications have been refused, or extant licences revoked, if the changed circumstances warrant this.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department has taken to increase the security devices used on end-user certificates. [131144]

Nigel Griffiths: Each page of a submitted EUC must contain an original signature and be dated. With each completed EUC, the end-user or consignees must provide a covering letter on their headed stationary signed by the same person who has signed the EUC. Both the EUC and covering letter must be in original format.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether contact details for the Export Control Agency are visible on end-user certificates. [131145]

Nigel Griffiths: End-user certificates are provided by the consignee or end-user of the goods to be exported. The Department of Trade and Industry's export control address is included on all export licences issued on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether there are provisions in the proposals for the Secondary Orders of the Export Control Act 2002 to regulate the provision of military and police training to embargoed countries. [131147]

Nigel Griffiths: Yes, where specified by the terms of the embargo.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether end-user certificates for arms exports set out the conditions under which the export licence has been granted. [131150]

Nigel Griffiths: End-user certificates (EUCs) are provided by the consignee or end-user of the goods to be exported and must be consistent with the model format published on the Department of Trade and Industry's export control website. Conditions under which the export licence has been granted are set out on the export licence issued on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the extent to which her proposals for export control accord with Clause 5 of the resolution on Export Control passed by the European Parliament on 19 June. [131151]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government's proposals for export control are fully consistent with Article 5 of the EU Council Common Position on the control of arms brokering, adopted on 23 June 2003.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what international agreements the UK is party to on small arms regulation; and how her Department is ensuring these commitments are maintained, with particular reference to the proposals on export control. [131152]

Nigel Griffiths: The UK fully supports the UN Programme of Action (POA) on Small Arms and Light Weapons and actively participated in the first Conference in 2001 and the follow up Biennial Meeting of States, which was held in July 2003 to review progress on implementing the PoA. To help control the supply of SALW, the UK is leading the global effort to develop common international standards on arms exports. In December 2002 the UK was instrumental in securing "Best Practice Guidelines in the Exports of SALW" in the Wassenaar Arrangement, a group of 33 of the world's major arms exporters.

The UK signed the UN Protocol against the illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in firearms.

We continue to work in partnership with other Governments, NGOs and industry on policies and projects to implement the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms. This includes £20 million (2001–04) to curb small arms proliferation worldwide. The UK provides funding for research, projects such as weapon destruction, building awareness of small arms issues.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of how the Government's proposals on transportation of small arms, set out in the Department's consultation on the Export Control Act, comply with Clause II.12 of the

United Nations Programme on Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. [131154]

Nigel Griffiths: The UK has fully taken into account it's international obligations on small arms, including the UN Programme of Action.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what reasons all the recommendations set out in Clause II.14 of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects were not included in the Department's proposals for export controls, with particular reference to the creation of a register of arms brokers. [131155]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government believe that licence applications should be scrutinised on a case by case basis and that it is impractical to maintain a register of brokers who have been 'vetted' by the DTI.

The consultation document on the draft Export Control Bill explained that the Government proposes to register information on all those applying for licences, both for experts and for arms trafficking and brokering activities. It is intended that this database will be used for licensing and enforcement purposes, including on an international basis as appropriate.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support her Department provides *(a)* financially and *(b)* in other ways to Interpol's international weapons and explosives tracking system; and what use her Department makes of the system. [131156]

Nigel Griffiths: None.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what studies her Department has *(a)* conducted and *(b)* collated on the export controls regime in (i) the US and (ii) other European countries. [131157]

Nigel Griffiths: The DTI maintains contact with officials in the export control regimes of other countries, for example through participation in the work of the international export control regimes and the EU Dual-Use Regulations Working Party. Collated systematic studies have not been carried out.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will amend her proposals on export control in response to the resolution passed by the European Parliament on 19 June calling on nation states *(a)* to adopt full extraterritorial legislation on export controls and *(b)* to establish registers for arms dealers. [131158]

Nigel Griffiths: The DTI can find no record of any resolution by the European Parliament on this subject.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arms embargoes the UK has imposed since 1997 on countries in response to *(a)* armed conflict and *(b)* human rights violations. [129848]

Mr. Rammell: I have been asked to reply.

Since 1997 the UK has implemented mandatory UN arms embargoes on Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Ethiopia/Eritrea and Liberia, an EU embargo on Indonesia and a unilateral embargo on Zimbabwe. The latter was superseded by an EU arms embargo in February 2002. The UN arms embargo on Sierra Leone from 1998 was in response to internal armed conflict between the rebel militia group, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), and the government. In 1999 an arms embargo was imposed on Afghanistan because of internal conflict. In 2000, a UN arms embargo was placed on Ethiopia/Eritrea due to armed conflict between the two states. It was terminated in 2001. The UN arms embargo on Liberia from 2001 was imposed (superseding the UN arms embargo UNSCR 788 (1992)) because Charles Taylor's government was supporting the RUF in Sierra Leone, and at war internally with a rebel opposition group, the Liberian United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD). The UN Security Council deemed that all of these conflicts represented a threat to international peace and security and therefore the Security Council acted under Chapter 7 of the Charter of the United Nations. An EU arms embargo was imposed on Indonesia in September 1999 because of conflict in East Timor; this was limited to four months and it fell away in January 2000. In February 2001, the UK imposed a unilateral arms embargo on Zimbabwe because of human rights violations involving repression by the government of the Zimbabwean public. In February 2002, the EU imposed an arms embargo against Zimbabwe for the same reason, which the UK now implements instead.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of how her Department's proposals for the secondary orders on export control will impact on the Government's commitment to improve human rights internationally. [129865]

Nigel Griffiths: The new controls will support the Government's commitment to human rights. Under current export controls, all licence applications received are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria that require the Government to give consideration to respect for human rights. The Government have made clear that these criteria will also form the basis for decisions on licence applications for exports subject to the new controls. By increasing the number of transactions subject to licensing, the new controls will increase the Government's ability to act to prevent human rights abuses.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her Answer of 9 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 630W, if she will make a statement on the submission to the consultation on Export Control from Fund for Peace which was e-mailed to her Department on 1 May. [129805]

Nigel Griffiths: Yes.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what reasons the National Criminal Intelligence Service was not included in the bodies consulted on the proposed legislative changes to export controls. [130028]

Nigel Griffiths: The DTI consulted other interested Government Departments, including the Home Office of which NCIS is a part, when formulating policy in this area.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether her assessment of US export controls included an analysis of the effect US export controls have on the competitiveness of US arms manufacturers. [130186]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* There is no assessment of the effect of other countries' export controls on the competitiveness of US arms manufacturers.

Asbestos

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 13 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 1096W, on asbestos, if she will list the buildings identified as containing asbestos. [130938]

Ms Hewitt: For the Department of Trade and Industry's London Estate, the buildings identified as containing asbestos are listed:

10 Victoria Street, London SW1H 0NN;

Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London SE1 7LJ; and

Westfield House, 30 Knaresborough Drive, London SW18 4UT.

Atomic Energy Board

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what matters are dealt with in the 1952 Atomic Energy Board (minutes and papers); and if she will transfer those documents to the Public Record Office for public inspection. [129246]

Mr. Timms: These minutes and papers contain information relating to the civil and military nuclear programme in the early 1950s.

They are retained in the Department for reasons of defence and security under section 3(4) of the Public Records Act 1958. As part of a continual programme of reviewing retained material their retention is currently being re-considered.

Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her Department's assessment is of the *(a)* environmental, *(b)* social and *(c)* human rights impacts of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline project in Azerbaijan; and if she will make a statement. [129976]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The review of the ETC project is ongoing. Cover will only be provided if ECGD are satisfied that the relevant environmental, social and human rights impacts have been properly addressed and that the financial and project risks are acceptable.

Biopharmaceuticals

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the turnover was of the biopharmaceuticals industry in *(a)* Speke Garston and *(b)* Greater Merseyside in 2002–03. [130434]

Jacqui Smith: In August 2002, Merseyside had 14 biopharmaceutical companies with a turnover of £406 million for the period 2001–02. Specific figures for the Speke Garston area are not available, though the area has the highest concentration of biopharmaceuticals companies in the North West.

Blackouts

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment she has made of the capacity of the National Grid to avert power blackouts in the UK. [130974]

Mr. Timms: The Government views with concern recent problems on the high voltage electricity transmission network that led to power cuts in London and the Midlands on 28 August and 5 September respectively. We have received a report from National Grid Transco (NGT) on the incident in London and we will shortly receive a report from them on the Midlands incident.

The independent energy market regulator, Ofgem, and the DTI are jointly commissioning consultants to investigate the operational and technical issues surrounding these electricity supply interruptions. In the light of the findings, the DTIs Engineering Inspectorate will consider whether the Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations 2002 were fully adhered to. Separately, Ofgem will consider whether any transmission licence obligations have been violated.

British Coal

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in reviewing the arrangements for apportioning surpluses in the pension schemes for former employees of British Coal. [130371]

Mr. Timms: I am advised that the current arrangements represent a good deal for the pension scheme members. Their basic pensions are secure even in times when, as is now the case for the Mineworkers Pension Scheme, investment performance has produced a deficit. Under the terms of the Guarantee, that deficit will be met by a transfer of several hundred million pounds from the Investment Reserve, which represents Government's share of pre-privatisation surpluses in the Scheme, to the Guaranteed fund to pay members' guaranteed benefits. And despite the deficit, Government have agreed to a Trustee proposal allowing members of the MPS to continue to receive inflation linked increases to their total pension (i.e. basic pension plus bonus) over the next three years.

The DTI Department has held discussions with the Trustees of the British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme and the Mineworkers' Pension Scheme on the future of the Government Guarantee for those Schemes, including the division of surpluses.

Following those discussions the trustees were advised that the Government do not consider it would be right to adjust the current surplus sharing arrangements. Some other changes to the Guarantee arrangements were agreed, as were further discussions to consider possible different methods of paying for the Guarantee

and also other ways of guaranteeing the bonuses that have already been awarded to members, while not representing a significant additional burden on the taxpayer

Broadband

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether she has asked for a regulatory impact assessment on forthcoming internet traffic management proposals explicitly to consider broadband rollout; [117718]

(2) what steps she is taking to ensure any forthcoming internet traffic management proposals are consistent with the Government's objective of making Britain the most competitive and extensive broadband market of all the G7 nations by 2005; and if she will make a statement. [117719]

Mr. Timms: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) on 14 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 488W.

Carbon Dioxide

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* national and *(b)* international organisations the Department has consulted on plans to capture and store carbon dioxide. [130533]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 18 September 2003]:* We are consulting a large number of UK organisations covering industry, academia and environmental bodies in considering the options for carbon capture and storage (CSS). This has mostly been through conference and seminar events. A full list of the organisations who have participated more fully in the development of our current position can be found at annex 1 of the "Review of the Feasibility of Carbon Capture and Storage in the UK". This report can found on the DTI website at http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/coal/cfft/co2capture/review.pdf. DEFRA have also been closely involved in the development of our conclusions. In addition to this we have held a public seminar in October 2002 at which representatives of Greenpeace and Bellona were invited to speak on the issue. Other NGOs, such as Friends of the Earth, the WWF and the RSPB also attended.

Internationally, we have directly discussed CCS with the governments of Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany. CCS is also an area of interest included in the UK/US Cleaner Fossil Fuel Implementing Arrangement signed earlier this year. We have also been in touch with governments and industry in both Canada and Australia.

Chemicals Industry

Mr. Mike Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she has taken to secure the future of the north-west chemicals industry; and if she will make a statement. [130994]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 18 September 2003]:* The chemical sector is very important to the north-west and DTI has worked very closely with the private sector lead North West Chemical Initiative to develop a strategy and action plan for the sector. The North West Chemical Initiative was established with the financial support of both the North West Development Agency and DTI.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has recently announced that £50 million worth of regional selective assistance has been awarded to chlorine manufacturer Ineos Chlor (subject to EU Commission approval) to help modernise its Runcorn facility on Merseyside. Over 2000 direct jobs at the plant will be safeguarded by the aid, part of a £389 million investment programme by the company, safeguarding around a further 8,000 jobs in associated businesses which are dependent upon the Runcorn site.

The UK Government fully supports the objectives of the new European chemicals strategy. However, it considers that the draft legislative text published by the Commission before the summer would not create a workable, efficient system that will provide the right level of protection of human health and the environment while avoiding unnecessary burdens to industry. Indeed, the UK Government consider that as currently drafted the legislation would be both too costly and damaging for the chemicals industry (particularly small businesses) and not effective enough in terms of protecting human health and the environment. We are working with other member states and the Commission to ensure that there are substantial changes to the legislation before it is finally agreed.

Copyright Law

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to review copyright law in relation to publication of research. [131169]

Ms Hewitt: I have no plans to review copyright law in relation to publication of research. The law clearly defines a copyright owner's exclusive rights under which he is, among other things, able to decide whether or not, and if so how, copies of his copyright work are issued to the public.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to review intellectual property rights as they apply to those working in institutes of higher education. [131170]

Ms Hewitt: My Department maintains a close relationship with higher education institutions and has published guidance on managing intellectual property in higher education in co-operation with these institutions. I have no plans to review these matters specifically, but there may be recommendations from current reviews under way that impact on this area.

E-Working

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of how many *(a)* businesses in the UK and *(b)* businesses regulated by the Financial Services Authority do not have access to *(a)* email and *(b)* the internet. [131259]

Mr. Timms: The information is as follows:

(a) The DTI International Benchmarking Study 2002 shows that [illegible] UK businesses, 12 per cent. do not have access to e-mail and 9 per cent. do not have access to the internet. These figures are weighted by number of employees.

(b) Unfortunately, no statistical information of this type is available for businesses regulated by the Financial Services Authority.

EU Copyright Directive

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what evidence she has taken on the implementation of EU Directive 2001/29/EC (May 2001). [131171]

Ms Hewitt: We have received representations, both in person and in writing, from a very large number of organisations and individuals, including over 300 written responses to the consultation paper on UK implementation of EU Copyright Directive 2001/29/EC issued last year. These representations covered the views of a very wide range of interests and dealt with a great number of issues ranging from general concerns to detailed drafting points.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment is made of the environmental impact of products, goods and services for which ECGD guarantees are given; who makes that assessment; and whether such assessments are published. [129933]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The nature of the environmental assessment varies with the size, sector and location of the project in question, but it includes consideration of the impact on water, air quality and atmospheric emissions, wildlife and habitats, degradation of land, unsustainable consumption of natural resources, use of hazardous substances, waste generation and noise.

For low and medium potential impact cases the assessments are carried out by ECGD's in-house specialists. These assessments are not published.

For high potential impact cases ECGD requires an in-depth Environmental Impact Assessment. These are normally produced by environmental consultants and are generally made publicly available by the project developer.

Further details of ECGD's environmental assessment procedures are given in the 'Case Handling Process—Information Note' and in the guidance notes to ECGD's Impact Questionnaire, both of which are available from the Department's website (www.ecgd.gov.uk).

Fair Trade

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 14 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 17W, on the Everything But Arms Agreement, how many people in sub-Saharan Africa *(a)* have lived and *(b)* are predicted to live, on less that $1 a day between 1990 and 2015; and if she will assess the impact of the Everything But Arms Agreement on the number of people. [130694]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Figures for sub-Saharan Africa, given in the World Development Indicators Report (World Bank) show the number of people who have lived or are predicted to live on less than $1 a day between 1990 and 2015 as follows:

	Million people
1990	241
1999	315
2015	404

These figures, as a percentage of the total population, are:

	Percentage
1990	47.4
1999	49.0
2015	46.0

There are as yet no estimates of the impact of the Everything But Arms Agreement.

Export Licences

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 16 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 463W, what account was taken of the Home Office guidelines that extra-territorial jurisdiction is permissible in cases where it is likely that the crime would otherwise not be judiciable. [130185]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* The Government took the guidelines set out in the Home Office Review of Extra-Territorial jurisdiction into consideration when deciding on the extra-territorial scope of the controls to be introduced under the Act. The proposed new controls are consistent with these guidelines.

Inward Investment

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many jobs have been *(a)* created and *(b)* protected in the North East region by inward investment projects since 1997. [131319]

Jacqui Smith: The number of jobs that have *(a)* been created is 20,947 and *(b)* protected is 31,495 in the North East region by inward investment projects since 1997. This is based on information provided by companies at the time of announcement of the decision to invest in the UK. These figures include only those projects where Invest-UK and its regional partners were involved or, which have come to their notice.

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many inward investment projects there have been in the North East region since 1997; what the value of each project was; and what plans she has to attract future inward investment into the region. [131320]

Jacqui Smith: Invest-UK recorded 288 inward investment decisions in the North East region since 1997. This is based on information provided by companies at the time of announcement of the decision

to invest in the UK. These figures include only those projects where Invest-UK and its regional partners were involved or, which have come to their notice.

Invest-UK does not have a value figure, as many companies do not notify this.

With regard to attracting future inward investment into the region, Invest-UK works in partnership with all of the UK's Development Agencies including One North East Development Agency, to attract the maximum level of inward investment and to market the UK's attractions for high quality investment.

Mobile Phone Charges

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from consumer organisations on simplifying the charging structures of mobile phone companies. [131123]

Mr. Timms: None.

Modern Languages

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* assessment she has made and *(b)* research she has commissioned on the commercial impact of (i) the declining uptake of modern languages courses at GCSE, A level and undergraduate level and (ii) the change in status of modern foreign languages from a mandatory to an optional subject at Key Stage 4. [130710]

Ms Hewitt: Although the DTI has not commissioned any specific research on the commercial effects of the decline in the uptake of modern languages, We continue to monitor the situation for example making a point of asking established inward investors about the issues that concern them (currently they do not raise foreign language skills as such an area of concern).

We were of course party to the work carried out by the DfES Steering Group which met under the Chair of Baroness Ashton (and included representation from the Nuffield Foundation, FCO, British Chambers of Commerce and Trade Partners UK) tasked with developing a strategy for improving foreign language teaching. While the study of modern foreign languages will no longer be compulsory at Key Stage 4 from September 2004, any pupil wishing to do will have an entitlement to do so. This statutory entitlement is to be welcomed as a way of strengthening of the work done at key stages 2 and 3 and of encouraging greater take-up of modern foreign languages during the 14–16 phase and beyond.

We will of course be continuing to work with the DfES and others to monitor the situation.

Near Earth Objects

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures the Government has taken to fulfil each of the recommendations in the September 2000 Report of the Task Force on potentially hazardous Near Earth Objects: and if she will make a statement. [130857]

Ms Hewitt: The Government issued their response to the Task Force Report in February 2001 and an update to the response was issued in January 2002. My noble Friend the Minister for Science will be meeting the former members of the Task Force in the autumn. A further update will be issued before the end of the year.

Postal Services

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what criteria are used to distinguish between rural and urban post offices. [130798]

Mr. Timms: The decision to classify a post office branch as urban or rural is an operational matter for Post Office Ltd. The company classifies as rural any post office within a community of less than 10,000 inhabitants. Above that the post office is classified as urban. I understand that the company has a geographical mapping model that enables it to adopt a consistent approach to classification across the country.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultations have been undertaken by *(a)* Postwatch and *(b)* Postwatch Scotland since 2001; and how much each of these has cost. [129901]

Mr. Timms: This is a matter for Postwatch and I have therefore asked the Chairman of Postwatch to reply directly to the hon. Member.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the latest posting time is from each parliamentary constituency which will achieve first delivery of first class mail to the House the following day; and what the latest posting time is at the hon. Members' post office which will achieve next day first delivery of first class mail to each parliamentary constituency. [131059]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 18 September 2003]:* This is an operational matter for Royal Mail Group plc. I have therefore asked the Deputy Chairman of Royal Mail to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Renewable Energy

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she has put in place to develop the electricity grid to support the development of renewable energy resources. [131262]

Mr. Timms: The Government are clear that the electricity grid network needs to be developed to support more renewable generation. It is working closely with Ofgem to ensure that the costs of this required work is spread across the whole of the GB consumer base. An important part of this process will be the British Electricity Trading and Transmission Arrangements (BETTA), and these are currently under development.

The Government are committed to bringing forward legislation in time to implement BETTA in April 2005. Through the Transmission Issues Working Group, Government meet with Ofgem, the Scottish Executive, the Wales Assembly Government and the Transmission Assets Owners to review the progress of this important work. Already an early success is the start of the

required planning work required to strengthen transmission lines in Scotland to accommodate an initial 2 GW of new renewable generation.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make proposals concerning the renewable obligation under the renewable energy policy to *(a)* change the wording defining biomass and *(b)* exclude raw material from this definition. [131308]

Mr. Timms: We have no plans to change the definition of biomass in the way suggested.

A Statutory Consultation, "The Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order 2003", was published on 29 August 2003. Its main focus is a set of modifications to the co-firing rules to enhance the prospects for energy crops without a radical change to the Obligation. Consultation closes on 21 November 2003.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made towards the 2010 targets of electricity sales from licensed electricity suppliers coming from eligible renewable sales. [131309]

Mr. Timms: In 2002, 1.7 per cent. of electricity sales from licensed electricity suppliers came from sources eligible for the Renewables Obligation; the comparable figure for 2001 was 1.5 per cent.

In 2002, 3.0 per cent. of electricity generated in the UK came from all renewable sources; the comparable figure for 2001 was 2.6 per cent.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will make a statement on the implications for the future of renewable obligation certificate trading following the recent demise of TXU; [130519]

(2) if she will make an assessment of the performance of renewable obligation certificate trading. [130520]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 17 September 2003]:* Renewables Obligation Certificate trading is a matter for the electricity industry.

We are aware of the electricity industry's concerns regarding the consequences of TXU going into administration and the implications of a potential shortfall in the Renewables Buy-out Fund for the value of Renewables Obligation Certificates and the level of confidence in the renewables market.

My officials are in discussion with the industry at present to discuss the implications of the potential shortfall and consider options for resolving the issue. I understand that officials from Ofgem are in discussion with the TXU administrator on compliance with the obligation.

Road Traffic Management

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will answer the questions, references 117718 and 117719, on road traffic management proposals, tabled by the hon. Member for Twickenham for written answer on 5 June 2003. [131258]

Mr. Timms: I have answered the Member's questions today.

Royal Mail

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the effect on rail employment of the decision of Royal Mail to abandon the use of rail for post distribution. [129210]

Mr. Timms: I refer to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Baillieston (Mr. Wray) on 15 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 541W.

Small Businesses

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the start up rate was for small businesses in *(a)* the Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, *(c)* Tyne and Wear, *(d)* the North East and *(e)* the UK in each year since 1997. [130735]

Nigel Griffiths: Business start-ups are measured officially by VAT registrations. The latest year for which VAT registration data are available is 2001. Data are not available for parliamentary constituencies.

The VAT registrations threshold has risen during this period from £48,000 to £54,000. There is no accurate estimate of the number of companies that would be added to this total if the £48,000 threshold had not risen by more than the rates of inflation.

VAT registrations 1997–2001, number and rate

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Number					
United Kingdom	182,570	186,250	178,460	183,325	175,455
North East Government Office Region	4,170	4,215	4 230	4,280	4,050
Tyne and Wear Metropolitan county	1,825	1,750,	1,785	1,800	1,675
South Tyneside	190	185	205	180	175
Rate per 10,000 resident adults[1]					
United Kingdom	40	40	38	39	37
North East Government Office Region	21	21	21	21	20
Tyne and Wear Metropolitan county	21	20	21	21	19
South Tyneside	15	15	17	15	14

[1] Mid-year resident adults (aged 16 and over)

Source:

Business Start-ups and Closures: VAT Registrations and De-registrations 1994–2001

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support the Government offers to new small businesses in the North East. [130736]

Jacqui Smith: Government support for new businesses comes in a variety of forms. The Business Link Operators (BLOs) put together programmes for start-up businesses, working with Enterprise Agencies and other partners, which are funded from a variety of sources, including: SBS core funding, residual SRB monies, RDA "single programme" funds, and European funds. In total, in the North East, the BLOs are spending around £3.6 million on start-up programmes (such as BL Tees Valley's "Start Right in Business" programme), and are contributing around £1.7 million to supporting incubation projects.

Support programmes vary in content between sub-regions, but essentially offer a programme of advice and assistance in key areas where new businesses require help, eg producing business plans to help access finance; developing marketing programmes, managing finance and cash flow, etc. They may be able to offer subsidies directly, or secure funding through other partners.

Help for start-up businesses does not end with the start-up programmes. LSC-funded workforce development, DTI-funded TPUK activities, and DTI's new products such as the R&D) grant are part of the wider range of services available via BLOs which may be appropriate for young businesses.

Access to Finance initiatives, such as the SBS-funded Regional Venture Capital fund (Capital North East) and Investor Readiness programmes (operated by Northern Enterprise and Entrust respectively), and the BL Tyne and Wear-operated regional Micro Loan fund can also benefit businesses in the early stage of operation, and lead to a more mature approach to business finance being inculcated into new businesses in a region where a grant culture has persisted. This is essential for the future growth prospects of businesses.

Start-up programmes in the North East are becoming better co-ordinated, with closer working between BLOs, Enterprise Agencies and other partners. Examples include the new start-up consortium in Tyne and Wear, closer working relationships in County Durham, and the "Start Right In Business" programme in Tees Valley. The on-going RDA-led review of business support process will develop these co-operative approaches further.

An RDA-led initiative "Strategy for Success" should lead, through the creation of centres of excellence and an DPR exploitation company, to the spin out of more businesses through the HEI sector.

At national level, SBS is co-ordinating the development of a cross-Government national strategy for start up businesses. This will draw on the experience and research from partners around the country to create a consistent, evidence-based start-up proposition, to which local variations may be added. It will also develop a co-ordinated between DWP, DFES and other Government Departments which will result in easier access and interface with entrepreneurs. An early result of such co-operation is the "No-nonsense Guide" to Government rules and regulations for setting up your business. This has been well received by start-up companies and by business support intermediaries.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action the Government is taking to encourage entrepreneurs to set up their own businesses in the North East. [130737]

Jacqui Smith: The information is as follows:

Enterprise Centres in six FE colleges in Tyne and Wear.

Sponsoring "Start a Business a day" initiative by the Chronicle Newspaper Co-operative working with People into Enterprise and Women into the Network to run events helping budding entrepreneurs turn hobbies into businesses.

Specialised programmes in decentralised advice centres in rural Northumberland, including motivational workshops and de-mystification sessions.

A three-day rural enterprise event.

Initiatives to encourage social enterprise such as "School for Social Entrepreneurs" and "Regen School" in Tyne and Wear and the work of the Community Enterprise team at BL County Durham. Co-operation being developed through NESEP (North East Social Enterprise Partnership) "Women get into Enterprise" programme, one of a number of initiatives to encourage enterprise in under-represented groups.

Linking in with incubation projects to provide co-ordinated start-up support and advice.

The RDA, ONE North East, has embarked on an ambitious programme to encourage more start up businesses by encouraging would-be entrepreneurs to take the plunge and start their businesses with the help of support programmes and agencies in the region, and in which the BLOs provide a key delivery role. This is using the flexibility of single programme funding to prioritise the entrepreneurship agenda in the NE to raise the relative start-up rate and encourage entrepreneurs to stay in the North East. Initiatives include:

A major event last April, organised by BL Tyne and Wear and funded by the RDA and SBS, in which the regions' BLOs and Enterprise Agencies ran Start up shows in Tyne and Wear and Teesside and which would-be entrepreneurs could speak directly with advisers, other entrepreneurs, etc.

This was followed by several local outreach events earlier this year supported by a regional enterprise PR campaign.

The "Enterprise Island" programme in which progress of 10 would-be entrepreneurs was charted in a film.

Initiatives are also being developed to boost graduate enterprise (building on programmes the universities have developed through HEFCE funding), and to further promote enterprise in schools building on "Enterprise Insight", Young Enterprise, and other programmes.

At national level, SBS is co-ordinating the development of a cross-Government strategy to encourage an enterprise culture. Emerging ideas for this will be closer co-operation with Job Centres and the benefits system (including ideas pioneered by Inbiz, a Teesside company), and with careers services to encourage self-employment and business start up as a career choice. The strategy is also expected to develop ideas for reducing risk to individuals contemplating business start-up.

Subcontinent

Mrs. Ann Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on bilateral trade relations with *(a)* India, *(b)* Bangladesh and *(c)* Pakistan. [131009]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Trade relations between the UK and the South Asia markets are strong.

India, Pakistan and Bangladesh provide a wide range of business opportunities for UK companies. Trade Partners UK and Invest UK, the two operating arms of British Trade International (BTI), deliver a package of services to British and South Asian companies wishing to do business with each other.

BTI teams in our High Commission offices in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh and in the English regions are available to provide support and advice to British companies wishing to do business with all three countries.

In 2002 the value of the United Kingdom's bilateral trade (in goods) with the three markets was:

£ million

	UK exports	*UK imports*	*Total*
India	1,768	1,870	3,638
Bangladesh	68	482	550
Pakistan	234	488	722

Note:
Figures for trade in services in 2002 are currently unavailable.

Union Learning Representatives

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with trade union representatives on the development of union learning representatives. [130578]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I have been asked to reply.

Union Learning Representatives are a key component of the Government's new Skills Strategy. In developing the strategy we consulted widely and met with trade union representatives on a number of occasions to discuss the vital role that unions and their learning representatives have to play. The TUC is, of course, a key member of the Skills Alliance which will bring together Government, employers and trade unions to oversee the future development and delivery of the Skills Strategy.

Union Learning Representatives have already proved to be highly effective in helping to encourage workers to improve their skills, particularly workers with low skills and those with literacy and numeracy problems—the very people who so often miss out on learning opportunities. That is why we introduced legislation to give them statutory backing and rights to time off with pay which came into effect at the end of April 2003. This will help to reinforce the invaluable role that Union Learning Representatives are currently playing in the workplace to promote workforce development and open up new training opportunities for their colleagues.

There are currently around 6,500 Union Learning Representatives. The new statutory rights will help their numbers to grow and we look forward to seeing a national network of over 22,000 trained Union Learning Representatives in place by 2010, helping over 250,000 workers a year into learning.

TREASURY

Breast Cancer

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of breast cancer cases diagnosed in the United Kingdom in each of the past five years. [131314]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Dr. Julian Lewis, dated 30 September 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question concerning the estimate of the number of breast cancer cases diagnosed in the United Kingdom in each of the past five years. I am replying in his absence. (131314)

The number of registrations of newly diagnosed cases of breast cancer in females in the United Kingdom in the most recent five years for which data are available are given in the following table. The figures shown are for females only and exclude the small number of breast cancer cases that occur in men.

Registrations of newly diagnosed cases of breast cancer in females, UK, 1996–2000

	Females
1996	37,000
1997	39,300
1998	39,500
1999	40,900
2000[1]	40,400

[1] Data for Scotland for 2000 are not yet available. The figure for the UK has been estimated using 1999 data for Scotland.

Sources:
National Cancer Intelligence Unit, Office for National Statistics.
Welsh Cancer Intelligence & Surveillance Unit.
Scottish Cancer Registry, National Health Service in Scotland.
Northern Ireland Cancer Registry

European Union

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the change in Britain's annual financial contribution to the European Union will be after 1 May. [131274]

Ruth Kelly: The Government publishes a trended forecast of the UK's net contribution to the EC Budget. The latest forecast, which was published in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget Report (HC 500 (Table C11, footnote 3)), covers the period up to 2005–06 and includes the additional costs to the UK arising from enlargement.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost of membership of the European Union was in each year since 1997; and what these figures are expressed as a sum per taxpayer. [131276]

Ruth Kelly: Details of the United Kingdom's net contribution to the EC budget for each of the years 1997–98 to 2002–03, including an estimate per taxpayer, are set out in the following table:

	Net contribution (£ million)	Net contribution per taxpayer (£)
1997–98	2,567	98
1998–99	4,111	153
1999–2000	3,325	[1]
2000–01	4,318	147
2001–02	1,488	51
2002–03	3,097	105

[1] Estimates of taxpayers based on the 1999–2000 Survey of Personal Incomes (SPI) have been temporarily withdrawn.

Note:

Figures for 1997–98 to 2001–02 are outturn, the figure for 2002–03 is an estimated outturn.

Sources:

Net contribution figures taken from Table 3.1 of 2003 European Community Finances White Paper "Statement on the 2003 EC Budget and measures to counter fraud and financial mismanagement" (Cm 5800).

Net contribution per taxpayer calculated by dividing net contribution figure by number of taxpayers shown in Table 1.4 of Inland Revenue Statistics.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the financial management of the European Union. [131388]

Ruth Kelly: The Government publish an annual statement on European Community Finances, which includes details of recent developments in financial management and the fight against fraud. The most recent Statement was published in April 2003 (Cm 5800).

Financial Services

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out the timetable for mandatory electronic reporting required for all businesses regulated by the Financial Services Authority. [131257]

Ruth Kelly: The matter raised in this question is the responsibility of the Financial Services Authority. The FSA will be writing to the hon. Member.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he has taken since 1997 to reduce fraud in the financial services industry in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [131385]

Ruth Kelly: The Financial Services Authority has been established to regulate the financial services industry effectively, and has been given a specific statutory objective to reduce the potential for financial firms to be used for financial crime, including fraud.

Household Incomes

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the number of adults living on an income of less than *(a)* £5,000, *(b)* £7,500, *(c)* £10,000, *(d)* £15,000, *(e)* £20,000, *(f)* £30,000, *(g)* £35,000, *(h)* £40,000, *(i)* £50,000, *(j)* £75,000, *(k)* £100,000, *(l)* £150,000, *(m)* £200,000, *(n)* £500,000, *(o)* £1 million and *(p)* £10 million in the latest year for which information is available. [130553]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested is provided for households and is set out in the table. The income definition used is household net equivalised income before housing costs.

Number of households in 2000–01 with net equivalised[1] income of less than	Number[2] (thousand)
(a) £5,000	483
(b) £7,500	1,857
(c) £10,000	4,651
(d) £15,000	10,950
(e) £20,000	15,872
(f) £30,000	21,090
(g) £35,000	22,319
(h) £40,000	23,048
(i) £50,000	23,795
(j) £75,000	24,290
(k) £100,000	24,439
(l) £150,000	24,504
(m) £200,000	24,523
(n) £500,000	24,576
(o) £1,000,000	24,586
(p) £10,000,000	24,586

[1] Income is adjusted or equivalised to take into account variations in both size and composition of the household. This process reflects the notion that a family of several people needs a higher income than a single person in order for both households to enjoy a comparable standard of living. Incomes of larger families are adjusted downwards and incomes of smaller households adjusted upwards.

[2] This is based on IGOTM Tax/Benefits model using the Family Resources Survey 2000–01.

Advertising Campaigns

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the publicity and advertising campaigns run by his Department since April 2002, specifying the *(a)* purpose, *(b)* cost to public funds, *(c)* number of staff involved and *(d)* method of evaluation in each case; and if he will make a statement. [124371]

Ruth Kelly: Information in the required format for all Departments for which the Chancellor has responsibility could be provided only at disproportionate cost. HM Treasury has conducted no such campaign since April 2002. Other Departments have carried out publicity campaigns in connection with, for example, their responsibilities for enforcing the law and assisting taxpayers with their obligations. Information about many such campaigns is included in the annual reports published by these Departments. Details were also provided in my answer to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 5 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 1062W. Planned expenditure for 2002–03 was provided in the Paymaster General's answer to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 18 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 232W.

Debt

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average *(a)* unsecured debt per person and *(b)* annual income per person was in each year since 1997. [129931]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Karen Dunnell to Dr. Vincent Cable, dated 30 September 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on unsecured debt per person and annual income per person. I am replying in his absence. (129931) The information

requested is shown in the table below. The data for unsecured debt (households' total financial liabilities other than secured debt) and income (households1 gross disposable income) used in the calculations are national accounts series for the combined household and non-profit institutions serving households (NPISH) sectors. The accounts for the household and NPISH sectors are currently combined; separate estimates are not available.

The average annual disposable income and unsecured debt person can be obtained by dividing the appropriate national accounts totals by the UK population aged 16 and over. These are shown for the years requested in the table.

Average annual income and unsecured debt per person, UK, 1997–2002

	Annual Income per person (£)	*Unsecured Debt per person (£)*
1997	12,400	3,540
1998	12,680	3,790
1999	13,330	4,090
2000	13,980	4,470
2001	14,980	4,900
2002	15,310	5,330

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of capital gains tax is paid at the 40 per cent. rate of tax; and if he will make a statement. [130144]

Dawn Primarolo: 81 per cent. of the capital gains tax accrued in 2000–01 was paid at the 40 per cent. rate of tax.

Employment Disincentives

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effects on *(a)* wage inflation, *(b)* labour market productivity and *(c)* the economy of the disincentive for those on low incomes to change jobs because of short term cash flow problems. [129861]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government are committed to making work pay and to supporting low-income households in sustaining employment. The new tax credits help low-income families and working households by providing targeted financial support according to need and are designed to reduce households' uncertainty about their income when circumstances change. The Government are also encouraging low-income households to save more, helping them to deal with short-term cash flow problems. No assessment has yet been made of the impact of these policies on wage inflation, labour market productivity or the economy.

Corporation Tax

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many companies paid corporation tax at *(a)* the main rate, *(b)* the small companies rate and *(c)* a zero rate in each year from 1990–91 to 2003–04; and if he will make a statement. [130546]

Dawn Primarolo: Information on the numbers of companies liable for tax at different rates is published in Table 11.3 available on the Inland Revenue's website: www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/index. Figures for 2001–02 will be published shortly.

Corporate Venturing Scheme

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of the costs of the Corporate Venturing Scheme announced in the March 2000 Budget for each year from 2000–01 to 2005–06; what assessment he has made of the economic effects of this scheme; and if he will make a statement. [130130]

Dawn Primarolo: The estimated cost of tax reliefs for the Corporate Venturing Scheme from 2000–01 to 2002–03 are:

£ million

Tax year	*Cost of Tax reliefs*
2000–01	5
2001–02[1]	2
2002–03[1]	1

[1] Figures for more recent years are subject to revision, as more information becomes available.

With a long-term measure such as CVS the full effects on outcomes such as investment, productivity and output will not become apparent for a number of years, in the meantime we will continue to monitor activity and expenditure.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what seizures were made by Customs officials at *(a)* Newhaven, *(b)* Poole and *(c)* Isle of Wight ports in each of the last five years for which there are records of (i) drugs, (ii) firearms, (iii) pornography, (iv) illegal meat, (v) cigarettes and tobacco and (vi) other goods; and if he will make a statement. [127153]

John Healey: Seizures by number, and where applicable volume, for drugs, firearms, cigarettes, pornography and other goods for the requested ports are as follows. Data for the financial years prior to 2000–01 are not available.

Number of seizures (volumes in brackets where applicable)	*2002–03*		*2001–02*		*2000–01*	
	Newhaven	*Poole*	*Newhaven*	*Poole*	*Newhaven*	*Poole*
Class A Drugs	1 (36.75kg)	2 (1.5kg)	0	0	0	0
Firearms and ammunition	0	1 (8)	1 (218)	1 (5)	n/a	n/a
Pornography	0	0	2	1	n/a	n/a

Number of seizures (volumes in brackets where applicable)	2002–03		2001–02		2000–01	
	Newhaven	Poole	Newhaven	Poole	Newhaven	Poole
Cigarettes	43 (3,863,276)	81 (2,949,678)	157 (370,520)	173 (2,480,239)	17 (60,060)	92 (712,140)
Other[1]	0	10 (11)	1 (1)	8 (8)	0	0

[1] Includes gas canisters and offensive weapons.

There are no recorded seizures of these commodities from the Isle of Wight ports for the period in question.

Responsibility for illegal imports of meat and animal products passed to Customs on 11 April 2003 from DEFRA. Customs have no recorded seizures of illegal meat from the requested ports for the period in question.

Departmental Employment

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many jobs under the remit of his Department in *(a)* the core department, *(b)* non-departmental public bodies, *(c)* executive agencies and *(d)* independent statutory bodies, organisations and bodies financially sponsored by his Department are in (i) Scotland, (ii) each region in England, (iii) Wales, (iv) Northern Ireland and (v) overseas, broken down by (A) whole-time equivalent jobs and (B) the percentage per individual department, body or organisation. [127313]

John Healey: I refer the hon. Member to Table D of the annual publication 'Civil Service Statistics', which is available in the Library of the House.

This information is also available on the Cabinet Office Statistics website: http://www.civil-service.gov.uk/statistics/css.htm.

The Treasury has two advisory non-departmental public bodies and one public corporation:

NDPB	Staff number	Location
Statistics Commission	7	England
Public Services Productivity Panel Unit	No staff (12 members)	n/a
Bank of England[1]	2,187	England

[1] Bank of England is a Public Corporation.

Four parliamentary bodies are financially sponsored by the Treasury:

Bodies	Staff number	Location
The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association	7	England
The British American Parliamentary Group	1 (part-time)	England
The Inter-parliamentary Group	7	England
The British-Irish Inter-parliamentary Body	1 full-time, 1 part-time	England

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* press officers, *(c)* civil servants, *(d)* advisers to civil servants and *(e)* permanent staff were working for his Department in each year since 1996. [126486]

John Healey: The Treasury does not employ advisers to civil servants.

The staffing figures for permanent staff (civil servants) at HM Treasury since 1996 are published on the Cabinet Office web site at www.civil-service.qov.uk/statistics.

For the number of Press Officers employed by HM Treasury since 1996, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers given by my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 10 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 614W and the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 10 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 400W.

The table following lists the number of Special Advisers in each year since 1996. Additionally, the Chief Economic Adviser has been appointed on Special Adviser terms since October 1999.

Number of special advisers in each year since 1996

Year[1]	HM Treasury Special Advisers[2]
1996	2
1997	3
1998	4
1999	3
2000	3
2001	4
2002	4
2003	3

[1] At 1 April.

[2] These figures do not include members of the Council of Economic Advisers that was established in 1997.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his statement of 9 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 415, on EMU, what the *(a)* composition and *(b)* remit is of the euro preparation committees in (i) Scotland, (ii) Wales and (iii) Northern Ireland. [131270]

Ruth Kelly: The composition and remits of the Euro Preparations Committees for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are set out as follows:

(i) Scotland Euro Preparations Committee

(a) Composition

Scotland Office: Right hon. Alistair Darling MP, Secretary of State, David Crawley, Head of Office;

Scottish Executive: Right hon. Jack McConnell MSP, First Minister; right hon. Jim Wallace QC MSP, Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning; Andy Kerr MSP, Minister for Finance and Public Services;

John Elvidge, Permanent Secretary; Trevor Jones, Head of Health Department and Chief Executive, NHS Scotland; Dr. Andrew Goudie, Chief Economic Adviser;

HM Treasury: Ruth Kelly MP, Financial Secretary;

Committee of Scottish Clearing Bankers: Susan Rice, Chair;

Confederation of British Industry (Scotland): Iain McMillan, Director;

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities: Councillor Pat Watters, President;

Federation of Small Businesses (Scotland): Andy Willox, Scottish Policy Convenor;

Scottish Consumer Council: Graeme Miller, Chairman;

Scottish Council for Development and Industry: Donal Dowds, Chairman;

Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations: Professor Joan Stringer, Convenor;

Scottish Enterprise: Dr. Robert Crawford, Chief Executive;

Scottish Financial Enterprise: Amanda Harvie, Chief Executive;

Scottish Retail Consortium: Eddie Thompson, Chairman;

Scottish Trades Union Congress: Tracey White, Assistant Secretary; and

The Scottish Chambers of Commerce: David Ross, Chairman.

(b) Remit

The Chancellor of the Exchequer proposed that Scotland should have its own Committee to oversee Scottish preparations for potential future UK entry into Economic and Monetary Union and to provide advice and input to the work of the UK National Standing Committee on the Euro.

The chairman of the Committee is the Secretary of State for Scotland and its work is being taken forward in partnership with the First Minister of the Scottish Executive.

Scottish Executive and Scotland Office Ministers also attend both the Committee of Devolved Euro Ministers and Euro Ministers meetings, which oversee public sector preparations.

As a devolved Administration the Scottish Executive is responsible for euro preparations within its own remit, but it is also responsible for overseeing preparations in other sectors in Scotland.

The role of the Scottish Euro Preparations Committee is to:

Oversee the work of Euro preparations across the Scottish economy;

Generate awareness of preparations issues in Scotland;

Ensure co-ordination and co-operation between key sectors;

Consult on the third outline National Changeover Plan in Scotland; and

Feedback particular Scottish views and issues to the Chancellor's Standing Committee on Euro Preparations (of which the Secretary of State for Scotland is a member).

(ii) Wales Euro Preparations Committee

(a) Composition

Wales Office: Peter Hain MP, Secretary of State for Wales; Don Touhig MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State;

Welsh Assembly Government: First Minister Rhodri Morgan; Minister for Finance, Local Government and Public Services; Sue Essex and Permanent Secretary Sir Jon Shortridge;

HM Treasury: Financial Secretary to the Treasury;

Cardiff Chamber of Commerce: Helen Conway;

CBI Wales: David Rosser, Director;

Chartered Accountants for Business in Wales: Andrew Leonard;

Farmers' Union of Wales: Brian Walters, Vice-President;

National Farmers' Union: Malcolm Thomas, Director;

NHS Wales: Martin Turner, Chief Executive Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust;

Wales Council for Voluntary Action: Graham Benfield, Chief Executive;

Wales Tourist Board: Jonathan Jones, Chief Executive;

Wales TUC: Margaret Hazell, Vice-President;

Welsh Consumer Council: Vivienne Sugar;

Welsh Development Agency: David Childs, Finance Director;

Welsh Language Board: Jon Walter Jones, Chief Executive; and

Welsh Local Government Association: Sandy Blair, Director.

(b) Terms of reference

The Chancellor proposed that Wales should have its own Committee to oversee Welsh preparations for potential future UK entry into Economic and Monetary Union.

The Secretary of State for Wales is taking this work forward in partnership with the First Minister of the Assembly, who has responsibility for euro preparations in policy areas under the Assembly's control.

The role of the Wales Euro Preparations Committee is to:

Oversee the preparations in Wales

Generate awareness of the preparations

Ensure co-ordination and co-operation between key sectors

Consult on the third outline National Changeover Plan

Feedback Wales' views to the Chancellor's Standing Committee on Euro Preparations, (of which the Secretary of State for Wales is a member).

(iii) Northern Ireland Euro Preparations Committee

(a) Composition

Northern Ireland Office: The right hon. Paul Murphy MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland; Ian Pearson MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State;

Head of NI Civil Service: Mr. Nigel Hamilton;

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development: Mr. Pat Toal, Permanent Secretary;

Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment: Mr. Bruce Robinson, Permanent Secretary;

Department of Finance and Personnel: Mr. David Thomson, Treasury Officer of Accounts

HM Treasury: Ruth Kelly MP, Financial Secretary

Confederation of British Industry (NI): Dr. Ian McMorris, Chairman;

NI Chamber of Commerce and Industry: Mr. Ian Morrow, Deputy Chief Executive;

Institute of Directors: Mr. Dennis Rooney, Chairperson;

Federation of Small Businesses: Mrs. Rosemary Armstrong, Lady Chair;

Northern Ireland Congress/Irish Congress of Trade Unions: Frank Bunting, Northern Secretary

NI Tourism Industry Confederation: Mr. John O'Carroll, Chief Executive;

NI Banker's Association: Mr. John Diver, Deputy Head of Payment Operations, Ulster Bank Ltd.;

Institute of Chartered Accountants (Ulster Society): Mr. John Hannaway, Chairman;

General Consumer Council for NI: Mr. Stephen Costello MBE, Chairman;

NI Council for Voluntary Action: Mr. Seamus McAleavey, Chief Executive;

Northern Ireland Centre for Competitiveness: Bob Barbour, Chief Executive;

Chartered Institute for Marketing: Mr. Michael Maguire, Regional Director;

NI Local Government Association: Heather Moorehead, Chief Executive.

The Chancellor proposed that Northern Ireland should have its own Committee to oversee local preparations for potential future UK entry into Economic and Monetary Union.

This work is being taken forward by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland under Direct Rule and, on the restoration of Devolution, in partnership with the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of the Assembly, who will have responsibility for euro preparations in policy areas under the Assembly's control.

The role of the Northern Ireland Euro Preparations Committee is to:

Oversee the preparations in Northern Ireland

Generate awareness of the preparations

Ensure co-ordination and co-operation between key sectors

Consult on the third outline National Changeover Plan

Feedback Northern Ireland's views to the Chancellor's Standing Committee on Euro Preparations, (of which the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is a member).

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his statement of 9 June, *Official Report*, column 415, on EMU, if he will list the locations of events to disseminate information and promote discussion which *(a)* have been held and *(b)* are planned, broken down by constituency. [131271]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury continues to work closely with key stakeholders across the country/UK on practical preparations for potential future UK entry into Economic and Monetary Union.

New members have joined the Chancellor's Standing Committee from the Local Government Association, regional development associations, citizens advice and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations. New preparation committees in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have been set up to oversee local preparations for potential future UK entry into Economic and Monetary Union.

Euro

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the rate of economic growth in the eurozone since 1999; and if he will make a statement; [131378]

(2) what assessment he has made of the unemployment rate in the eurozone; and if he will make a statement. [131379]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury's latest assessment of developments in and prospects for the euro area economy is set out in the April 2003 Financial Statement and Budget Report (HC 500).

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect upon the UK economy of the interest rate most recently set by the European Central Bank; and if he will make a statement. [131380]

Ruth Kelly: A full assessment of the importance of euro area developments for the UK economy was given in "UK membership of the single currency: an assessment of the five economic tests", published on 9 June (CM 5776).

Food Expenditure

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was spent on food by his Department and by each of the agencies for which it is responsible in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03; what proportion of that food by value was produced in the United Kingdom; what guidance he has issued to encourage the procurement of home-produced food; and if he will make a statement. [129368]

Ruth Kelly: The information is not available in the form requested.

Gold

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the world market in gold bullion. [131389]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury monitors developments in the gold market on a daily basis and receives ongoing advice and analysis from the Bank of England. We are

well aware of recent developments, including de-hedging operations by gold producers that have resulted in upward pressure on the US dollar price of gold.

Individual Savings Accounts

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what his estimate is of the revenue yield from *(a)* abolishing the tax relief on individual savings accounts and *(b)* halving the annual subscription limit for ISAs; and if he will make a statement; [130123]

(2) what his estimate is of the cost to the Exchequer of the individual savings account for each year from 1998–99 to 2005–06; what his estimate is of the effect of the ISA tax relief on total savings; and if he will make a statement. [130148]

Dawn Primarolo: Available estimates of the tax relief on ISAs from 1999–2000 to 2002–03 are contained in the following table.

Available estimates of the tax relief on ISAs[1]

£ million

Year	*Cost of tax relief*
1999–2000	120
2000–01	420
2001–02	725
2002–03	825

[1] From 1999–2000 to 2002–03

The estimates represent the reduction in tax liabilities from investment in ISAs. They do not indicate the yield from abolishing ISAs since in practice this could result in significant and uncertain changes in taxpayers' behaviour because of the range of alternative investment options. Therefore, no estimate is available of this yield.

There is no available estimate of the effect of ISAs on total savings. Overall, ISAs have attracted a wide range of individuals of different ages and income, whose savings experience will vary widely. They have attracted more younger and lower income savers than TESSAs and PEPs.

The relief in any particular year is derived from subscriptions built up over a number of years, including the current year. In 2000–01, the latest year for which estimates are available, contributions in excess of half of the current limits represented around 40 per cent. of the total. Assuming a similar distribution of contributions in every year since the introduction of ISAs would imply that the costs of relief given in the table would have been 40 per cent. lower each year.

Iraq

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether it is his policy that Iraq's debt should be written off. [129860]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's paper "A Vision for Iraq and the Iraqi People" of 17 March made it clear that we are seeking a fair and sustainable solution to Iraq's external debt problems.

The Government believes the most effective way to deliver a fair and sustainable solution is by asking the International Monetary Fund (IMF), International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and other responsible international organisations, to make a full assessment of Iraq's needs, resources and obligations. We expect this to be followed by a shared solution through the Paris Club of official creditors and comparable treatment from other creditors. On 14 April the Prime Minister stated in this context that he hopes people will be generous in recognizing Iraq's needs for the future.

We strongly supported the International Monetary and Finance Committee (IMFC) and Development Committee statements about the importance of addressing the debt issue. The IMF and IBRD have started making their assessments.

UNSCR 1483 welcomes the readiness of creditors, including those of the Paris Club, to seek a solution to Iraq's sovereign debt problems, protects oil revenues from seizure until December 2007, and provides a transparent route for settlement of UN compensation claims.

We welcomed the 10 July Paris Club statement that creditors ". . . share the view that they don't expect Iraq to be in a position to resume payments to them before end 2004." We expect this unofficial moratorium to allow sufficient time for the establishment of an internationally recognized, representative Government of Iraq, legally empowered to negotiate and agree an IMF programme and debt treatments with creditors.

Lost Working Days

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 1 September, *Official Report*, column 884W, on lost working days and chronic pain, when he will supply the information requested. [131199]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Burstow, dated 30 September 2003:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question pursuant to my answer of 1st September, *Official Report*, column 884W (126352), on lost working days and chronic pain. (131199)

Unfortunately, due to what I understand was an administrative error, the answer to another of your questions (126506) was printed at the above Hansard reference by mistake. The answer that should have been provided is given below.

Using data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), it is estimated that in England, in the twelve months ending in May 2003, there were 89.25 million working days lost due to sickness or injury. The corresponding figure for the previous twelve months was 96.68 million. Comparable data for earlier periods are not available. The LFS does not collect information about the types of illnesses or injuries which cause sickness absence. Therefore, information about the number of working days lost because of chronic pain is not available.

I apologise for the delay in providing an answer to this question.

Microsoft

Norman Lamb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was paid to Microsoft in licensing fees by his Department and its agencies in each of the last three years; and how much has been budgeted for *(a)* 2003–04 and *(b)* 2004–05. [130685]

John Healey: The information requested is commercially confidential and is covered by Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mortgage Companies

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to introduce a statutory obligation on mortgage companies to advise borrowers about the risks of using property and equity release as a vehicle for pension investment when they take on a new mortgage. [131202]

Ruth Kelly: On 1 July 2003, Parliament approved legislation bringing mortgages, including equity release mortgages, within the scope of Financial Services Authority (FSA) regulation with effect from 31 October 2004. The FSA is consulting on rules governing the advice and selling of these products.

National Insurance

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding the status of employers' national insurance contributions for seafarers on ships trading in United Kingdom territorial waters. [129629]

Dawn Primarolo: Since my announcement in April 2003 regarding employer's national insurance contributions for mariners engaged through offshore manning companies, I have received letters from shipping industry representatives and employers affected. I also met industry representatives on 8 September 2003. In the light of the evidence they presented concerning the likely effect of the proposals on the competitiveness of UK shipping in territorial waters, I have decided to restrict the changes I announced to mariners who are employed in inshore waters classified as A, B, C or D under the Merchant Shipping (Categorisation of Waters) Regulations 1992. Regulations were laid before Parliament on 18 September 2003 and the changes will apply from 13 October 2003.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been lost to the National Insurance Fund by reductions in contributions by employers to compensate for the climate change levy. [129716]

Dawn Primarolo: The reduction in contributions to the National Insurance Fund to compensate for the climate change levy is £1.1 billion for each of the years 2001–02 and 2002–03 and it is estimated to be £1.2 billion for 2003–04. These figures are rounded to the nearest £0.1 billion.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the transfer of the contribution to the NHS from the National Insurance Fund matches the total received by the increase of 1 per cent. in national insurance rates. [129726]

Dawn Primarolo: Under the National Insurance Contributions Act 2002, all the proceeds of the 1 per cent. increase in national insurance contributions from April 2003 are added to the amount allocated to the national health service. The effect on the National Insurance Fund of the change in the allocation to the national health service from national insurance contributions, following the National Insurance Contributions Act 2002, is shown in Appendix 5 of the Report by the Government Actuary on the drafts of the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 2003 and the Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating and National Insurance Funds Payments) Order 2003. This was presented to Parliament in February 2003.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the amount of the Treasury's supplement to the National Insurance Fund would be if it had been paid at the same rate that prevailed from 1911 to the late 1980s; and what proportion the supplement would now be as a proportion of the total cost of the basic pension. [129866]

Dawn Primarolo: The Treasury Supplement was abolished in 1988–89. It is not possible to say what the amount of the supplement would be for the current year, as the relevant rate used to calculate the supplement varied from one year to the next.

Rented Properties

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the financial benefits to the Exchequer of creating a bond payment scheme for tenants living in rented properties. [131127]

John Healey: No assessment has been made of the financial benefits to the Exchequer of creating a bond payment scheme for tenants living in rented properties.

Research and Development Tax Credit

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost arising from cash repayments and enhanced deductions of the research and development tax credit in 2000–01. [131042]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 18 September 2003]:* For companies claiming the R&D tax credit for small or medium-sized companies in 2000–01, the cost to the Exchequer was £75 million.

Personal Expenditure

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimates are of the proportion of income paid in *(a)* income tax, *(b)* income tax and national insurance contributions, *(c)* income tax, NICs and value added tax and *(d)* income tax, NICs, vat and council tax for each income decile for each year since 1990–91; and if he will make a statement. [130557]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Karen Dunnell to Mr. David Laws, dated 30 September 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on estimates of the proportion of income paid in *(a)* income tax, *(b)* income tax and national insurance contributions, (NICs), *(c)* income tax, NICs and value added tax (VAT) and *(d)* income tax, NICs, VAT and council tax, for each income decile for each year since 1990–91. I am replying in his absence. (130557)

Due to changes in some survey variables, consistent estimates for UK taxes and income are only available with effect from the financial year 1996–97. These are produced from the Office for National Statistics' analysis "The effects of taxes and benefits on household income" and the latest analysis for 2001–02 was published on 11 April 2003 on the National Statistics website.

Results for 2001–02 and earlier years are also published in 'Economic Trends', which can be obtained from the House of Commons Library. The analysis includes measures of income inequality for the United Kingdom as a whole based on data from the Expenditure and Food Survey (EPS), formerly the Family Expenditure Survey (FES). For the data that you have requested, sample sizes are only sufficient to allow a breakdown to be given by quintiles of income distribution and not by decile.

Tables 1 to 6 show for each year between 1996–97 and 2001–02 the requested direct and indirect taxes paid as a proportion of gross income for all households in the UK, and for each income quintile group where households are ranked by equivalised disposable income. Equivalisation is a standard methodology that takes into account the size and composition of households and adjusts their incomes to recognise differing demands on resources. The net council tax figures are gross council tax less reported council tax benefits and discounts. The tables also show the equivalised disposable income quintile point boundaries, which have been calculated separately for each year. For example, the 1st quintile point is the income below which one fifth of all households are estimated to lie. The quintile point boundaries differ between each year as shown in the tables.

Table 1: Selected direct and indirect taxes paid as a percentage of gross income by equivalised disposable income quintile, 1996–97

United Kingdom *% of gross income*

Quintile	*Income boundary[1] (£ per year)*	*Income tax*	*Income tax and national insurance contributions (NIC)*	*Income tax, NIC and value added tax (VAT)*	*Income tax, NIC, VAT and council tax*
Bottom		3.2	4.6	14.7	17.9
	8,031				
2nd		5.9	8.5	17.0	19.7
	11,344				
3rd		10.0	14.2	21.9	24.2
	15,519				
4th		12.9	17.9	24.9	26.8
	21,964				
Top		17.4	21.5	27.0	28.4
Average for all households		12.9	17.0	23.8	25.7

[1] Boundary point between equivalised disposable income quintiles

Source:

Office for National Statistics, based on the analysis 'The effects of taxes and benefits on household income', published on the ONS website and in Economic Trends.

Table 2: Selected direct and indirect taxes paid as a percentage of gross income by equivalised disposable income quintile, 1997–98

United Kingdom *% of gross income*

Quintile	*Income boundary[1] (£ per year)*	*Income tax*	*Income tax and national insurance contributions (NIC)*	*Income tax, NIC and value added tax (VAT)*	*Income tax, NIC, VAT and council tax*
Bottom		2.9	4.4	14.6	17.8
	8,504				
2nd		5.5	8.2	16.5	19.4
	11,922				
3rd		9.7	14.2	21.8	24.2
	16,342				
4th		13.0	18.2	25.3	27.2
	23,457				
Top		17.4	21.6	27.0	28.4
Average for all households		12.9	17.1	23.8	25.8

[1] Boundary point between equivalised disposable income quintiles

Source:

Office for National Statistics, based on the analysis 'The effects of taxes and benefits on household income', published on the ONS website and in Economic Trends.

Table 3: Selected direct and indirect taxes paid as a percentage of gross income by equivalised disposable income quintile, 1998–99

United Kingdom *% of gross income*

Quintile	*Income boundary[1] (£ per year)*	*Income tax*	*Income tax and national insurance contributions (NIC)*	*Income tax, NIC and value added tax (VAT)*	*Income tax, NIC, VAT and council tax*
Bottom		3.7	5.3	16.0	19.8
	8,785				
2nd		6.2	9.1	17.3	20.3
	12,494				
3rd		10.3	14.7	22.4	25.0
	17,192				
4th		13.2	18.4	25.4	27.4
	24,255				
Top		18.2	22.3	27.8	29.2

Table 3: Selected direct and indirect taxes paid as a percentage of gross income by equivalised disposable income quintile, 1998–99

United Kingdom *% of gross income*

Quintile	*Income boundary[1] (£ per year)*	*Income tax*	*Income tax and national insurance contributions (NIC)*	*Income tax, NIC and value added tax (VAT)*	*Income tax, NIC, VAT and council tax*
Average for all households		13.5	17.7	24.5	26.6

[1] Boundary point between equivalised disposable income quintiles

Source:

Office for National Statistics, based on the analysis 'The effects of taxes and benefits on household income', published on the ONS website and in Economic Trends.

Table 4: Selected direct and indirect taxes paid as a percentage of gross income by equivalised disposable income quintile, 1999–2000

United Kingdom *% of gross income*

Quintile	*Income boundary[1] (£ per year)*	Income tax	*Income tax and national insurance contributions (NIC)*	*Income tax, NIC and value added tax (VAT)*	*Income tax, NIC, VAT and council tax*
Bottom		3.2	4.7	15.9	20.1
	9,171				
2nd		6.3	9.1	17.3	20.6
	13,173				
3rd		10.1	14.3	22.1	24.8
	18,212				
4th		13.3	18.3	25.2	27.4
	26,118				
Top		17.8	21.7	26.8	28.2
Average for all households		13.4	17.4	24.0	26.2

[1] Boundary point between equivalised disposable income quintiles

Source:

Office for National Statistics, based on the analysis 'The effects of taxes and benefits on household income', published on the ONS website and in Economic Trends.

Table 5: Selected direct and indirect taxes paid as a percentage of gross income by equivalised disposable income quintile, 2000–01

United Kingdom *% of gross income*

Quintile	*Income boundary[1] (£ per year)*	*Income tax*	*Income tax and national insurance contributions (NIC)*	*Income tax, NIC and value added tax (VAT)*	*Income tax, NIC, VAT and council tax*
Bottom		3.6	5.0	16.4	20.6
	9,790				
2nd		7.3	9.9	18.5	21.8
	13,808				
3rd		10.9	15.0	22.8	25.4
	19,029				
4th		13.9	18.8	25.7	27.9
	27,109				
Top		17.7	21.5	26.8	28.3
Average for all households		13.7	17.5	24.3	26.5

[1] Boundary point between equivalised disposable income quintiles

Source:

Office for National Statistics, based on the analysis 'The effects of taxes and benefits on household income', published on the ONS website and in Economic Trends.

Table 6: Selected direct and indirect taxes paid as a percentage of gross income by equivalised disposable income quintile, 2001–02

United Kingdom *% of gross income*

Quintile	*Income boundary[1] (£ per year)*	*Income tax*	*Income tax and national insurance contributions (NIC)*	*Income tax, NIC and value added tax (VAT)*	*Income tax, NIC, VAT and council tax*
Bottom		3.3	4.5	15.8	20.3
	10,417				
2nd		6.3	8.7	16.2	19.6
	14,761				
3rd		10.3	14.3	21.2	24.0
	20,082				

Table 6: Selected direct and indirect taxes paid as a percentage of gross income by equivalised disposable income quintile, 2001–02
United Kingdom *% of gross income*

Quintile	*Income boundary[1] (£ per year)*	*Income tax*	*Income tax and national insurance contributions (NIC)*	*Income tax, NIC and value added tax (VAT)*	*Income tax, NIC, VAT and council tax*
4th	28,631	13.5	18.3	24.5	26.8
Top		18.3	22.1	26.7	28.1
Average for all households		13.7	17.5	23.6	25.8

[1] Boundary point between equivalised disposable income quintiles
Source:
Office for National Statistics, based on the analysis 'The effects of taxes and benefits on household income', published on the ONS website and in Economic Trends.

Road Pricing

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress he has made in the development of a scheme for charging road hauliers for road use; and when he expects to implement the scheme. [130966]

John Healey: "Modernising the taxation of the haulage industry—lorry road-user charge—Progress Report Two", published on 6 May 2003 and available in the Library of the House, described the Government's plans to develop the lorry road-user charge, alongside an offsetting cut in hauliers' fuel duty. Since then Customs and Excise have been working very closely with the haulage industry and with other stakeholders to refine the detailed requirements of the Charge. This is necessary before the tendering process can begin.

The charge is a new and complex development, and it will therefore be some time before we will be certain about when it can be introduced.

The Government and the haulage industry want to ensure that the Charge will work reliably and as intended when it goes live. In the meantime our plan remains to introduce the Charge in 2006.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he intends that British road hauliers will have to pay vehicle excise duty for individual lorries when he implements the scheme for road use charges. [130967]

John Healey: The Government stated in "Modernisation the taxation of the haulage industry: progress report two", published in May 2003, that when introduced the distance based lorry user charge will be offset though tax cuts in fuel duty.

Decisions about vehicle excise duty for lorries will be made separately by the Chancellor as part of the normal Budget decision making process.

Sweden (Euro Referendum)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what reports he has commissioned on the euro campaign in Sweden. [130043]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 17 September 2003]:* None. However, the Government continually monitor economic and political developments in other economies.

Tax Credits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan) of 3 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 377W, on tax credits, how many written appeals against tax credit decisions for *(a)* disagreements about award notices and *(b)* reporting changes in circumstances have been received in each of the last six months; and of those, how many were found to be in favour of the appellant. [126545]

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what action he is taking to reduce the length of time it takes for the Inland Revenue to make a decision on appeals about the level of tax credit awarded; [128212]

(2) what assessment he has made of the length of time it takes for the Inland Revenue to make a decision on appeals about the level of tax credit awarded. [128213]

Dawn Primarolo: Up to the end of August, when over 4.6 million claims were in payment, less than 0.5 per cent. had had written correspondence classified as CTC or WTC appeals. Over half of these appeals had been settled by 31 August.

The Inland Revenue has increased the resources allocated to handling appeals against tax credit awards. This has had a significant impact on its handling of appeals, in further improving the rate at which appeals are settled.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many claims for compensation in relation to the delivery of the child and working tax credits have been received; and how many have been *(a)* processed, *(b)* successful and *(c)* unsuccessful. [128749]

Dawn Primarolo: The information is not available in the form requested.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many letters to the Inland Revenue from right hon. and hon. Members about working family tax credit applications were awaiting a reply on 31 August; how many of those were over *(a)* 30 days old and *(b)* 60 days old; and if he will make a statement. [128802]

Dawn Primarolo: At mid-September 2003 there were no letters from right hon. and hon. Members about working families tax credit applications awaiting a reply.

Clive Efford: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total paid out since May 1997 to increase family incomes has been; and what has been the average gain per family *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in Eltham. [129432]

Dawn Primarolo: Total benefit and tax credit expenditure directed at children from 1997–98 to 2003–04 (in 2003–04 prices) is estimated at £106 billion. The real terms increase in annual spending on financial support for children over this period is 87 per cent.

As a result of personal tax and benefit measures on average families with children in the UK are £1,200 better off in real terms this year compared with 1997–98. It is not possible to estimate the equivalent gain for families living in Eltham.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the effect on employment of the working tax credit; and if he will make a statement. [130016]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* The working families' tax credit was designed to improve work incentives and help families move into employment, and evaluation findings will be published in due course. Building on the success of WFTC, the new working tax credit is a further step in improving in-work support for low earners.

Tax Rates

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the revenue yield from introducing a rate of tax of *(a)* 50 per cent. and *(b)* 45 per cent. on (i) incomes over £100,000 per annum, (ii) taxable incomes over £100,000 per annum, (iii) incomes over £150,000 per annum, (iv) taxable incomes over £150,000 per annum and (v) capital gains over £100,000 per annum; and if he will make a statement. [130138]

Dawn Primarolo: We are compiling comprehensive information on income tax which we expect to publish on the Inland Revenue website shortly. A copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

The full-year capital gains yields from introducing a rate of tax of *(a)* 50 per cent. and *(b)* 45 per cent. on incomes over £100,000 per annum are £100 million and £50million respectively.

Thalidomide Trust

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what meetings he has had with the Thalidomide Trust in the last 12 months; and what advice and assistance he has offered to the Trust. [131302]

Dawn Primarolo: I met representatives of the Thalidomide Trust on 18 December 2002. Subsequently, Inland Revenue officials visited the Trust to offer direct advice and assistance on a number of issues, including tax repayment and access to tax credits.

Treasury Growth Forecasts

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the accuracy of Treasury growth forecasts over the last three years. [129084]

Mr. Boateng: In recent years, Treasury forecasts of GDP growth have outperformed the average of independent forecasts (as included in "Forecasts for the UK Economy—A comparison of independent forecasts", HM Treasury).

VAT

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to preserve the zero rate of UK VAT for *(a)* children's clothing and *(b)* motorcycle safety helmets under European Commission proposals to revise reduced rates of value added tax (COM(2003) 397 final); and if he will make a statement. [129134]

Dawn Primarolo: We have made clear that the European Commission's proposals as they currently stand are unacceptable.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Burundi

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the situation in Burundi; what actions his Department is taking to support the peace process; and if he will make a statement. [130690]

Mr. Mullin: The latest round of talks between the FDD (Nkurunziza) and the Government of Burundi in Dar es Salaam ended on 16 September without agreement. It is not clear how the regional initiative will now respond.

The British Government is committed to supporting the Arusha process and the transitional Government institutions. We have given extensive support to South African Vice President Zuma and his facilitation team. We are also supporting the African Mission in Burundi, both financially and politically.

Colombia

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support he has offered President Uribe to assist in the safe return of the two British people taken hostage by terrorist guerrillas in Colombia. [131245]

Mr. MacShane: We welcome the news of Mathew Scott's escape from his captors in Colombia and are continuing our efforts to secure the release of Mark Henderson, the other Briton who was among those abducted in the Sierra Nevada National Park on 12 September. We have offered help from British police kidnap specialists to the Colombian government. Embassy staff in Santa Marta are also liaising closely with the Colombian authorities involved in the search for the hostages. We have stressed throughout the incident the need for the safety of the hostages to be put above all other considerations.

Ethical Foreign Policy

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what actions his Department takes to ensure that the UK pursues an ethical foreign policy. [131363]

Mr. Rammell: It is increasingly clear that respect for human rights, good governance and the rule of law helps underpin political stability, economic development and open societies. Ensuring respect for human rights remains, therefore, at the heart of the Government's foreign policy. On 18 September, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) published its Annual Report on Human Rights 2003 which sets out the Government's work over the past year to promote human rights abroad. A copy of the report has been sent to all Members of Parliament and is also available on the FCO's website (www.fco.gov.uk). The report includes details of projects funded under the FCO's Human Rights Project Fund which has spent £17 million over five years on over 600 human rights projects in more than 90 countries.

Iraq

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the frequency of abduction of Iraqi *(a)* women and *(b)* children. [130312]

Mr. Rammell: Given the current nature of policing in Iraq no comprehensive crime recording exists. Crime recording and analysis will of course need to be part of the reformed Iraqi Police Service.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the UK is making financial contributions to other coalition nations' forces in Iraq. [129750]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* We are providing some logistical help to Coalition partners operating under UK command in Multinational Division South East (MND SE). We continue to assess the help that we could provide on a case by case basis.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many military personnel from each of the coalition countries are deployed in Iraq; and what he estimates the totals will be in six months' time. [129882]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 15 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 587W. We keep force levels under constant review as the situation develops. We are not at this stage able to estimate what numbers will be in six months time.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the Government have for posting civil servants to Iraq. [131141]

Mr. Rammell: We have seconded over 100 UK civil servants to the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Iraq since the end of the conflict. They have made an outstanding contribution to the CPA's work in providing services across Iraq, and we expect to maintain at least this level of commitment over the next few months.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what preparations have been made to hand over border controls in Iraq from coalition forces to Iraqi civilians. [131143]

Mr. Rammell: We are working to give the Iraqis a greater role in security. We are assisting the development of the border police and the new Iraqi army which will have a role in border security. On 15 September there were 2,122 trained border police working alongside coalition forces and a further 3,269 training. The Shalamcheh Point of Entry is now manned by Iraqis.

Afghanistan

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how many soldiers have left the Afghan army since training by British forces began; and what effects this has had on the proposed date of the completion of the training of the Afghan army; [130777]

(2) when he expects the training of the Afghan army to be complete; and how many recruits have now been trained. [130780]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The US leads international efforts to establish a new Afghan National Army (ANA). UK personnel trained the first battalion of the ANA in April 2002 and have been providing NCO training since March 2003. The ANA decree signed by President Karzai in December 2002 refers to training up to 70,000 personnel but does not specify a completion date. We do not have access to exact figures for personnel who have completed the US training program, or for the retention rate. But the ANA currently consists of eight battalions and as of late June around 4,500 soldiers had undergone basic training.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the process of democratisation and political participation in Afghanistan; what recent discussions *(a)* he and *(b)* members of his Department have had with representatives of the Afghan Government; and if he will make a statement. [131338]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Work has begun on a new Afghan constitution. The UK has made clear that the new constitution must reflect Afghan culture and traditions and also respect Afghanistan's obligations under international human rights standards. A Constitutional Loya Jirga will meet in December to approve a new constitution.Elections are due in mid-2004, but it has yet to be decided how these are to be organised. The UN has begun the voter registration process, although they are still seeking funding for this programme. The UK has so far allocated £3 million to assist with preparations for the elections, and we will consider further requests for funding.

During their visits to Afghanistan earlier this year, both my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Rammell) met with President Karzai and a number of his Ministers in the Afghan Transitional Administration. Reform of the political process was one of the many issues that were discussed. Officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and our embassy in Kabul are in regular contact with members of the Transitional Administration on these issues.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions *(a)* he and *(b)* members of his Department have had with representatives of NATO member states' governments concerning the expansion of (i) the number and (ii) the mandate of peacekeeping operations in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [131339]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK has regular discussions at all levels with NATO partners both bilaterally and in NATO fora on matters relating to Afghanistan, including the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). NATO took over leadership of ISAF in August 2003 and is currently engaged in a review of ISAF's role. It would be inappropriate for us to second-guess the outcome of this review and any possible effect it might have on the ISAF mandate or the number of troops required for any additional tasks. But any change to ISAF's role would also require amendment of its mandate through the UN.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions *(a)* he and *(b)* members of his Department have had with representatives of the Russian Government concerning peacekeeping operations in Afghanistan. [131340]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: On 26 June 2003, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary briefed President Putin and Foreign Minister Ivanov on his forthcoming visit to Afghanistan. Russia is not directly participating in the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. But we regularly discuss issues relating to Afghanistan, including security issues, with the Russian Government, both bilaterally and in international fora such as the NATO-Russia Council and the UN. Most recently, officials briefed the Russian embassy in London on 15 September 2003 on progress made by the UK Provincial Reconstruction Team in Mazar-e Sharif.

Arms Embargoes

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will impose secondary arms embargoes on countries that continue to supply countries with military or para-military equipment in violation of an existing arms embargo. [131146]

Mr. Rammell: Any proposal for sanctions, secondary or otherwise needs to be looked at on a case-by-case basis. Her Majesty's Government supports the use of sanctions that are closely targeted and designed to deliver a clear objective. Such measures are most effective when they are enforced by multilateral institutions such as the UN, the EU or the OSCE. The UK therefore seeks to work with the international community where it can to prevent sanctions breaches.

The UK has supported the imposing of secondary sanctions against countries where appropriate; for instance, UNSCR 997(1995) which imposed an arms embargo on Rwanda also imposes an embargo on the sale or supply of arms to persons in the States neighbouring Rwanda; "if that sale or supply is for the purpose of the use of such arms or materiel within Rwanda".

Article 111.8 (EU Draft Constitutional Treaty)

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of the unanimity requirement on the effectiveness of Article 111.8 Draft Constitutional Treaty for the European Union in combating discrimination. [130859]

Mr. MacShane: The Government believe that the unanimity requirement in Article III-8 will provide a good basis for EU legislation to combat various forms of discrimination. The Government consider that the requirement of unanimity will ensure that EU legislation is framed appropriately in order to take account of national diversity as well as the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity. Furthermore, initiatives taken under Article III-8 are measures aimed

at supporting member state action, and do not therefore in any case stop member states putting in place additional measures.

Asbestos

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much has been spent by his Department and its agencies on *(a)* asbestos surveys and *(b)* the management and removal of asbestos since 1 January 2001; and what budget is available to (i) commission asbestos surveys and (ii) manage and remove asbestos from buildings in (A) 2003 and (B) 2004. [130921]

Mr. Rammell: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office commissioned a complete review of asbestos in buildings in the UK in 2002. The cost of this survey was £81,500. Approximately £180,000 has been spent on the removal of asbestos during routine maintenance and refurbishment works. No further expenditure on surveys is anticipated for the next two years. There is no planned programme for asbestos removal in 2003 and 2004 as the review did not indicate that this is necessary.

In our posts overseas, the cost of asbestos specific surveys since January 2001 has been £72,672. The management and removal of asbestos is however a component of building maintenance budgets devolved to our Posts, and it is therefore not possible separately to identify asbestos related expenditure without incurring disproportionate costs.

Subcontinent

Mrs. Ann Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the UK's relationship with *(a)* India, *(b)* Bangladesh and *(c)* Pakistan. [131008]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: This Government attaches great importance to the South Asian region as a whole.

The UK and India work together on regional and global issues, poverty relief, trade and investment, science and the environment. The shared vision was set out in the New Delhi Declaration of January 2002. There has been a series of high-level visits to and from India. Outward visits have been made by: my right hon. Friends the Deputy Prime Minister; the Foreign Secretary; and Secretaries of State for Defence; Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Culture; Trade and Industry; and the then Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short). We have received recent inward visits from Indian Ministers including the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and Defence Minister.

The UK and Bangladesh regularly engage on all levels and there have been a number of high profile visits between our two countries, including that of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to Dhaka in January 2002, and that of the Bangladeshi Foreign Minister, Morshed Khan, to London in May 2003.

Our bilateral relationship with Pakistan is close. Our relationship has been strengthened by the initiatives launched by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in Islamabad in the judicial, commercial and defences spheres. We very much welcomed the official visit to the UK in June 2003 by President Musharraf.

The large number of British nationals of South Asian origin play a major part in Britain's economy and culture and strengthen the partnerships we share with India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.

Brazilian Prisons

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many United Kingdom citizens have been detained in Brazilian prisons in each year since 1997. [131333]

Mr. Mullin: The total number of British prisoners detained in Brazilian prisons each year since 1997 is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1997	15
1998	8
1999	12
2000	11
2001	12
2002	15
2003[1]	26

[1] To date

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for each year since 1997 the representations *(a)* he and *(b)* members of his Department have made to representatives of the Brazilian government concerning the conditions of gaols in Brazil; what assurances were sought; what assurances were given; and if he will make a statement. [131334]

Mr. Rammell: Since 1997, our dialogue with Brazil on human rights questions has taken place within the framework of the UK-Brazil Joint Declaration on human rights. The situation in Brazil's prisons forms a regular part of our bilateral dialogue. Prisons was one of the topics I discussed during my meeting with Nilmario Miranda, Brazil's Special Secretary for Human Rights, in Brasilia last May.

We have developed an active programme of co-operation with Brazil in this area. A project to improve the management of prisons in the state of Sao Paulo, thereby increasing respect for the human rights of prisoners, has received funding of £191,430 from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (FCO) Human Rights Project Fund. Key project partners include the Brazilian Federal Government's Department of Prisons and the Sao Paulo State Government's Secretariat of Prison Administration. On 29 August, a successful workshop was held to encourage other State Governments to replicate the ongoing project and discussions continue with federal and state authorities to this end.

A project to produce a Brazilian Portuguese language version of a handbook, 'A Human Rights Approach to Prison Management' has received funding of £12,200 from the FCO's Human Rights Project Fund. The project, operating in partnershipwith the Brazilian Federal Government's Department of Prisons, aims to

distribute copies of this practical guide to all prison staff throughout Brazil, promoting best practice in placing human rights at the centre of prison management, thereby increasing practical respect for the human rights of prisoners throughout the country.

Central Asia

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the security situation in Central Asia and its *(a)* direct and *(b)* indirect causes. [131336]

Mr. Rammell: We monitor the security situation in Central Asia closely. Security in the region is affected by many factors, including the threat from local and international terrorism, crime, and the political situation in each country.

We are not aware of any current, specific terrorist threat to British nationals in Central Asia, but we cannot discount the possibility of attacks. We advise travellers to the region to contact the relevant embassy for up-to-date advice.

Although we have no immediate plans to change our current assessment of the security situation in Central Asia, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's travel advice is kept under constant review.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions *(a)* he and *(b)* members of his Department have had with representatives of the (i) Russian and (ii) US governments on Central Asia; what issues were raised in these discussions; and if he will make a statement. [131337]

Mr. Rammell: We have regular discussions with representatives of both the Russian and US governments on Central Asia. This year officials have discussed a variety of issues affecting the respective countries of Central Asia and the region as a whole, including economic and political reform, counter-narcotics, regional co-operation and security matters.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed the problem of drug trafficking in Central Asia and the surrounding region with Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov on 4 March 2003.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place with *(a)* the Russian Government and *(b)* governments of the Baltic states regarding the clean up of dumped chemical weapons in the sea after the Second World War. [129097]

Mr. MacShane: The UK disposed of captured German chemical munitions in the Skagerrak immediately after World War II. We did not dump or dispose of captured German chemical weapons in the Baltic.

This issue was first raised by Russia in a NATO context in 1997. They also raised the matter directly with the UK around the same time and subsequently raised it with the EU in 1998.

The issue was also investigated by the Helsinki Commission, an international maritime forum, in the early 1990s. At that time there was no evidence of any increased levels of toxicity in the seas in that area.

The NATO Political Committee rejected proposals for a joint NATO-Russia environmental expedition, stating that any future expeditions should be conducted through, or as part of, the Helsinki Convention.

Although there is no suggestion that this would be an acceptable method for disposing of chemical weapons stocks today, the UK believes that any attempt to raise or salvage the munitions could create a far greater environmental hazard.

Diplomatic Posts

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many diplomatic posts overseas his Department has closed in the last three years; and how many posts it plans to close in the next three years. [131103]

Mr. Rammell: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office did not close any Posts in the financial years 2000–01, 2001–02 or 2002–03.

This financial year (2003–04) we have already closed Bamako. We have announced plans to close San Salvador, Managua and Tegucigalpa by the end of this financial year. There are currently no proposals to make any further closures of Diplomatic Posts in the next three years, although the situation is kept under continuous review.

Draft European Constitution (Territorial Cohesion)

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's position with regard to the forthcoming Inter-Governmental Conference on the articles in the draft European Constitution dealing with terroritorial cohesion. [130887]

Mr. MacShane: The Government are considering the implications of the references to territorial cohesion, and will respond appropriately in the Intergovernmental Conference.

Entry Clearance

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list entry clearance posts that have ceased to use the pre-assessment of entry clearance applications, together with the date on which each post ceased to use the procedure. [131102]

Mr. Mullin: Guidance was issued to all visa sections on 2 May 2002, instructing them to minimise the use of pre-assessment procedures.

Posts authorised to use pre-assessment were advised that it should only be used where applicants clearly lack adequate documentation, to manage queues on days where the visa operation would otherwise be unable to cope with demand, or deal with specific local circumstances affecting limited groups.

Since many posts thus have authority to use pre-assessment in exceptional circumstances, there is no definitive record of those posts which have ceased to use the procedure.

European Union

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the evidential basis is of the statement on page 8 of the White Paper, "A Constitutional Treaty for the EU", that the EU's share of total UK trade has grown from 40 to 55 per cent. [131272]

Mr. MacShane: HM Customs and Excise data indicates that in 1973 UK trade with the EU 15 was 43 per cent. of total UK trade. This has risen to 55.2 per cent. in 2002.

Detail	*1973*	*2002*
UK trade with the EU 15 (£ million)	12,177	227,925
UK trade with the world (£ million)	28,310	413,281
EU15: per cent. share	43.0	55.2

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his Department is doing to encourage more countries to join the European Union. [131275]

Mr. MacShane: The British Government continue to champion the accession of the three remaining candidates for EU membership. We are providing political and practical support to help Romania and Bulgaria complete their negotiations, prepare for membership and accede in 2007. We are also encouraging Turkey to implement fully the reforms that are a prerequisite for the opening of EU accession negotiations.

Beyond this, we will continue to support eligible potential future candidates in carrying out political and economic reforms that will help their EU candidacies.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his assessment of the benefits of expansion of the European Union. [131349]

Mr. MacShane: We have long supported the enlargement process, which will promote peace, prosperity and security across the EU and beyond. Both the benefits and potential costs to the UK of the next wave of enlargement are outlined in the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) on the European Union (Accessions) Bill. The RIA has been placed in the Library of the House and is available on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website: www.fco.gov.uk

Heads of State (Assassination)

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Her Majesty's Government's policy is on the assassination of heads of state recognised by the United Nations; and what recent representations have been made to other countries on this matter. [131112]

Mr. MacShane: Our policy is to act in accordance with UK and International law. In the case of the Israeli decision in principle to expel President Arafat, the UK has made its view clear during debates in the UN Security Council and General Assembly. The expulsion or harm of President Arafat would be wrong and counterproductive. Israel should not allow its justified anger at the continuing violence to lead to actions that would undermine both the peace process and Israel's own interests. My noble Friend the Baroness Symons made strong representations to the Israeli Ambassador on this issue on 15 September.

Krishna Maharaj

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when, in relation to Krishna Maharaj, the Government expects to have advised the United States court of the submitting of its brief. [128804]

Mr. Mullin: We are appointing US lawyers who will advise the Government and take matters forward with the US Courts in an appropriate manner.

Legal Advice

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make an assessment of the feasibility of publishing the legal advice prepared by the Attorney General for use by the United Kingdom ambassador to the United Nations. [130361]

Mr. Rammell: It is the long-standing practice of successive Governments that neither the substance of Law Officers' advice, nor the fact that they have been consulted, is publicly disclosed. This information is withheld under exemptions 2 and 4*(d)* of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Military and Police Training

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what powers the Government have to prevent UK citizens providing *(a)* military and *(b)* police training to embargoed countries and forces. [131130]

Mr. Rammell: Where the United Nations Security Council has adopted a resolution deciding that states shall prohibit the supply of military and police training to specified countries or forces, the UK will generally implement this by making statutory instruments under the United Nations Act 1946 applicable to the UK, Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. Where the European Union has acted swiftly to implement a UN Security Council Resolution by an EC Regulation, the EC Regulation will be directly applicable in the UK and Gibraltar, and the UK and Gibraltar will legislate only to provide penalties for the breach of the Regulation in those territories.

Where the European Union has adopted measures prohibiting the supply of military and police training (for example, in the case of Zimbabwe), those measures will include an EC Regulation which is directly applicable in the UK and Gibraltar. The UK and Gibraltar will legislate only to provide penalties for the

breach of the Regulation. Bermuda and the Crown Dependencies will adopt their own legislation to implement the EU measures. The UK will legislate in respect of the Overseas Territories other than Gibraltar arid Bermuda using powers in the Saint Helena Act 1833, the British Settlements Acts 1887 and 1947, and prerogative powers.

The precise powers taken in legislation will depend upon the scope of the sanctions regime against that particular state. However, legislation will generally create a criminal offence of providing assistance and training to prohibited territories or individuals without a licence from an appropriate authority, and this will apply to all individuals within the territory to which the legislation applies, and also to all categories of British citizen wherever they may be. Legislation will also generally provide ancillary powers to enforce the prohibition, for example, powers for the obtaining of evidence and information, and provisions for criminal proceedings and penalties. Penalties on summary conviction will generally be imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or a fine not exceeding £5,000 or both, and on conviction on indictment, imprisonment for a term not exceeding seven years or an unlimited fine or both.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many of the countries hoping to join the European Union in the near future he has visited in his capacity as Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. [131273]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has visited seven of the acceding member states and candidate countries: Poland (October 2001), Hungary, Romania and Slovakia (July 2002), the Czech Republic (November 2002), Slovenia (December 2002) and Turkey (October 2001 and December 2002).

Portuguese Embassy

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Portuguese Ambassador requesting that he require staff at his office in London to acknowledge and respond to correspondence from hon. Members. [130845]

Mr. MacShane: The Portuguese Chargé d'Affaires has assured the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that the Portuguese Embassy are committed to responding to all correspondence which they receive, including that from hon. Members.

Russia

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions *(a)* he and *(b)* members of his Department have had in 2003 with representatives of the Russian Government concerning the security situation in (i) Ingushetia and (ii) North Ossetia-Alania; and if he will make a statement. [131335]

Mr. Rammell: We regularly discuss the security situation in the North Caucasus, including Ingushetia and North Ossetia, with representatives of the Russian Government, e.g. at the annual human rights talks at senior official level in March 2003.

We remain concerned about the security and human rights situation in Chechnya and the surrounding republics. We have noted with concern recent bombings throughout the North Caucasus, including the bombings in Mozdok, North Ossetia, and most recently of the Federal Security Service headquarters in Magas, Ingushetia. We also monitor carefully the humanitarian and security situation of Internally Displaced People in the North Caucasus, particularly those in tent camps in Ingushetia.

Sierra Leone

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the oral Answer given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, 11 September 2003, *Official Report*, columns 169–70WH, which countries and organisations have been approached by the UK Government for additional funding for the UN special court in Sierra Leone. [130909]

Mr. Rammell: The Government has lobbied more than 40 states. These have included EU partners as well as selected Asian, Middle Eastern and African states. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has written in person to his colleagues in 10 states and has put the issue of funding for the Special Court for Sierra Leone on the agenda of the General Affairs and External Relations Council of the EU on 29 September. The Government has also approached the European Commission on this issue.

Sudan

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what monitoring is being undertaken by the British Government of human rights abusers in Sudan. [130570]

Mr. Mullin: There has been no formal human rights monitoring mechanism in place since the defeat of the EU sponsored resolution on Sudan at the UN Commission on Human Rights on 16 April. This resulted in the termination of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur. However, the British embassy in Khartoum continues to monitor human rights abuses and raises them with the Government of Sudan bilaterally and as part of the EU/Sudan Dialogue. We also part-fund the work of the Sudan Organisation Against Torture (SOAT) which documents human rights abuses.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the suppression of the media in parts of the Sudan. [130571]

Mr. Mullin: On 9 August President Beshir announced the complete lifting of press censorship. The British embassy in Khartoum will monitor the implementation of this arrangement.

UN Arms Embargoes

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken to encourage national legislatures, with particular reference to countries which produce military or paramilitary equipment, to increase the number of UN arms embargoes that they enact at a national level. [131135]

Mr. Rammell: The UK fully supports UN sanctions. We try to ensure that other States follow suit. The UK has lobbied countries believed to be involved in embargo breaches both unilaterally and multilaterally. Lobbying regarding sanctions enforcement often occurs during high-level ministerial visits.

In addition, officials from the FCO, MOD, DTI and HM Customs and Excise undertake regular Export Control Outreach visits to raise awareness about responsible export controls, licensing and enforcement. Since 2001, the UK has held bilateral talks with Bosnia, China, Cyprus, Hong Kong, Israel, Macau, Malta, Poland, Russia, Serbia and Montenegro and the Ukraine.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has taken steps to encourage the UN Security Council to develop a list of *(a)* military, *(b)* paramilitary, *(c)* police and *(d)* dual-use equipment to which UN arms embargoes will apply. [131148]

Mr. Rammell: The Bonn-Berlin process (a German initiative involving the UN Secretariat and supported by the UK) on the design and implementation of arms embargoes and travel and aviation related sanctions in 2001, considered the question of whether the UN Security Council should adopt lists of military goods to which UN arms embargoes would apply. The participants concluded that it was important to agree a list of goods prior to the introduction of a UN resolution with the assistance of the UN Secretariat. If there were divergent views on the list, arbitration should be provided by the UN Secretary-General.

However, due to lack of consensus among Security Council members, these proposals were never adopted. UK sanctions policy focuses upon and encourages the use of sanctions that are appropriately targeted and effectively implemented and enforced. The UK therefore continues to support the adoption of lists of military equipment to which UN arms embargoes would apply.

United Nations (Sanctions)

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is on supporting increased *(a)* funding and *(b)* resources available to the UN's sanction committees. [131132]

Mr. Rammell: The UK contributes to UN sanctions committees through assessed contributions on an annual basis. Mandates for funding are set out by the Security Council. These mandates are ratified by the General Assembly, who in turn approves the budget. HMG wants to see all the sanctions committees functioning effectively; through appropriate funding and resources, but to date support for increased funding for sanctions committees has not been necessary.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support he has given towards the creation of a dedicated sanctions unit within the UN Secretariat. [131131]

Mr. Rammell: The UK and France drafted a joint proposal in 2001 for an independent sanctions monitoring mechanism to improve the Security Council's capacity to monitor targeted sanctions regimes it has established. After considerable discussion among Council members, the proposal stalled as some members were opposed to it. The Government are currently considering whether we should re-initiate discussions on this proposal again in the near future.

Visas

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many non-settlement visa applications were *(a)* received, *(b)* determined and *(c)* refused at entry clearance posts worldwide in (i) 2000, (ii) 2001, (iii) 2002 and (iv) 2003 to date. [131100]

Mr. Mullin: The information is as follows.

	Non-settlement visas issued		
	Received	*Issued*	*Refused*
2000	1,616,790	1,431,283	110,391
FY 2001–02	1,687,816	1,471,458	164,916
FY 2002–03	1,714,167	1,465,472	166,462

The table above shows the number of non-settlement visa applications received, issued and refused at entry clearance posts worldwide each year since 2000. Since 2001, statistics have been collated by financial year (1 April to 31 March) rather than calendar year.

The discrepancies in these figures are due to the fact that applications can be carried forward from one month to the next before being resolved, and applications can be withdrawn during processing and still count as an application received. Posts are also required to count all applications received (a mother and three children on one passport may count as four applications, but one entry clearance may be issued).

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* short-term and *(b)* long-term student visa applications were (i) received, (ii) determined and (iii) refused at entry clearance posts worldwide in each month since 1 January 2002. [131101]

Mr. Mullin: Worldwide statistics for student visas are collated by financial year (1 April to 31 March) only, and are not available on a monthly basis. The statistics do not distinguish between short-term and long-term student visa applications. During the financial year 2002–03 the worldwide figures for the number of student visa applications that were received, determined and refused were as follows:

(i) Received applications—171,100

(ii) Determined applications—120,888

(iii) Refused applications—48,845

Zimbabwe

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Zimbabwean Government regarding the shutting down of the *Daily News*. [131212]

Mr. Straw: I issued a press statement on 15 September condemning the Government of Zimbabwe for this latest attack on the free and independent media in Zimbabwe. I made it clear that we regard the closure of the *Daily News* as a blatant attempt by the Government of Zimbabwe to stifle independent scrutiny and silence democratic voices in Zimbabwe. With our support the EU also issued a declaration on 18 September, condemning the closure of the *Daily News* and describing it as a serious attack on freedom of information in Zimbabwe. I issued a further press statement on 20 September. We will continue to press for the *Daily News* to be allowed to resume publication.

Visitor Visa Applications

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visitor visa applications were *(a)* received, *(b)* determined and *(c)* refused at entry clearance posts worldwide in each month since 1 January. [131097]

Mr. Mullin: Worldwide statistics for all visitor visas are collated by financial year (1 April to 31 March) only, and are not available on a monthly basis. During the financial year 2002–03 the worldwide figures for the number of visitor visa applications that were received, determined and refused were as follows:

Applications	*Number*
(a) Received	1,421,597
(b) Determined	1,219,169
(c) Refused	175,434

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many family visitor visa applications were *(a)* received, *(b)* determined and *(c)* refused at (i) Mumbai, (ii) New Delhi, (iii) Dhaka, (iv) Islamabad, (v) Tehran, (vi) Nicosia, (vii) Accra, (viii) Lagos and (ix) Nairobi in each month since 1 January. [131098]

Mr. Mullin: The following table shows the statistics requested up to July, after which figures are not yet available.

	Mumbai	*New Delhi*	*Dhaka*	*Islamabad*	*Tehran*	*Nicosia*	*Accra*	*Lagos*	*Nairobi*
Received									
January	825	1,210	410	619	645	297	2,039	1,558	173
February	840	962	289	723	798	139	1,879	1,145	187
March	1,384	1,468	421	2,281	855	189	1,749	1,019	116
April	2,314	2,499	383	1,852	89	196	2,198	582	199
May	2,610	3,172	409	1,447	1,592	223	2,378	643	147
June	2,700	3,520	807	2,057	2,009	487	1,999	940	543
July	2,862	3,747	1,238	2,865	1,911	485	1,975	1,057	749
Issued									
January	659	584	116	524	504	284	725	1,281	146
February	690	458	99	631	602	126	701	130	156
March	1,202	810	144	2,263	635	[1]174	737	197	58
April	2,016	1,726	77	1,827	98	[1]174	1,131	318	152
May	1,984	2,272	123	1,393	1,339	456	1,225	456	128
June	2,044	2,265	467	1,943	1,674	454	1,205	559	464
July	2,336	2,579	830	2,563	1,508	449	1,346	681	618
Refused									
January	219	626	247	95	134	13	1,317	264	27
February	198	504	190	92	190	13	1,213	649	31
March	305	658	277	18	220	15	1,083	706	58
April	418	773	306	25	—	22	1,053	341	43
May	658	900	232	54	253	17	1,151	344	16
June	713	1,223	251	114	300	33	838	385	58
July	589	1,168	315	302	403	36	638	340	80

[1] Figures given for March and April in Nicosia have been double-checked. The identical figure is coincidental.

The discrepancies in these figures are due to the fact that applications can be carried forward from one month to the next before being resolved, and applications can be withdrawn during processing and still count as an application received. Post are also required to count all applications received (a mother and three children on one passport may count as four applications, but one entry clearance may be issued).

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many family visitor visa applications were *(a)* received, *(b)* determined and *(c)* refused at entry clearance posts in (i) South Asia region, (ii) Middle East region, (iii) Far East region, (iv) Central Europe region, (v) Southern Europe region, (vi) Western Europe region, (vii) Equatorial Africa region, (viii) Southern Africa region and (ix) Near East and North Africa region in each month since 1 January. [131099]

Mr. Mullin: The following table shows the statistics requested up to July, after which figures are not yet available.

	South Asia	Middle East	Far East	Central Europe	Southern Europe	Western Europe	Equatorial Africa	Southern Africa	Near East/ North Africa
Received									
January	3,618	962	798	1,497	1,712	969	4,403	1,253	1,202
February	3,528	1,055	502	1,400	1,575	1,138	3,792	456	941
March	6,836	1,081	794	1,731	1,974	1,519	3,634	518	976
April	8,846	322	789	1,850	2,088	11,733	3,861	616	1,270
May	9,492	2,166	557	2,153	2,501	1,649	4,120	513	1,428
June	11,066	2,912	1,256	2,994	3,397	2,017	4,868	1,055	2,257
July	12,655	2,565	1,629	3,233	3,636	2,767	5,110	1,523	2,718
Issued									
January	2,467	761	725	1,396	1,616	901	2,561	720	1,006
February	2,615	779	416	1,220	1,383	993	1,364	279	787
March	5,658	822	719	1,548	1,792	1,368	1,424	263	795
April	7,297	271	675	1,577	1,801	1,614	2,094	375	948
May	7,515	1,829	502	1,945	2,264	1,497	2,510	340	1,144
June	8,565	2,485	1,172	2,721	3,110	2,007	3,166	678	1,912
July	9,964	2,049	1,489	2,983	3,370	2,870	3,568	1,008	2,244
Refused									
January	1,317	217	58	124	136	71	1,874	516	166
February	1,088	[illegible]	80	115	127	61	2,138	188	152
March	1,339	[illegible]	86	110	129	98	2,135	246	123
April	1,688	[illegible]	99	122	137	109	1,833	245	235
May	2,024	316	61	166	181	90	1,785	139	276
June	2,473	391	75	223	248	87	1,732	430	265
July	2,685	501	135	235	250	163	1,441	509	369

The discrepancies in these figures are due to the fact that applications can be carried forward from one month to the next before being resolved, and applications can be withdrawn during processing and still count as an application received. Posts are also required to count all applications received (a mother and three children on one passport may count as four applications, but one entry clearance may be issued).

Western Sahara

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made on the Baker peace plan in the Western Sahara. [130574]

Mr. Rammell: In July this year the Security Council called upon the parties to the dispute to work with the United Nations and with each other towards acceptance and implementation of James Baker's Peace Plan which provides for a UN organised referendum after a transitional period. The United Kingdom is encouraging the parties and States of the region to cooperate fully with the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy to this end.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Child Care

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on measures taken to encourage employer responsibilities towards child care costs for employees with children. [131307]

Margaret Hodge: The Government recognises that making child care affordable is a key challenge for the National Child care Strategy and has made a substantial investment to achieve this.

All working parents may receive means-tested support through the child care element of the Working Tax Credit (WTC). Families are eligible to apply for the child care element of WTC where a lone parent or both parents work for at least 16 hours a week. Support may be worth up to 70 per cent. (maximum £135 a week for one child) of eligible child care costs up to £200 a week. Parents cannot claim the child care element of WTC for the time their children receive a free nursery education place but may be eligible for help for extended hours or wraparound care. The responsibility for claiming WTC rests with parents, not child care providers.

We are working closely with Inland Revenue and the Treasury over proposals to improve employer supported child care for employees. Inland Revenue and Treasury launched a consultation document in February 2003, and the responses were published on September 17.

Child Protection

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to implement Lord Laming's recommendations on child protection when formulating future star ratings for Social Services Departments. [127564]

Margaret Hodge: The Green Paper Every Child Matters and Keeping Children Safe—the Government's response to the Victoria Climbie Inquiry Report and the Joint Chief Inspectors' Report Safeguarding Children were published on 8 September, and copies are available in the Library.

Since the Victoria Climbie Inquiry Report was published on 28 January 2003, councils with social services responsibilities have been required by the Social Services Inspectorate to carry out a self-audit of their child protection services. This was based on a checklist

issued by the Government of the recommendations in the report that were considered to be basic good professional practice.

Within the social services star rating system, there are performance levels expected for child protection services. For 2003, this will include a performance indicator on child protection review conferences. It will also use the audit of child protection services. Where inspectors judge that the audit has revealed that a council's child protection services are only at best, serving some people well, then the overall assessment of children's services will not be higher than "serving some people well", with a consequent effect on the maximum star rating that a council can achieve.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many of Lord Laming's recommendations in his report on child protection had been put into action by 1 July. [127894]

Margaret Hodge: 83 of the 108 recommendations contained in the Victoria Climbie Inquiry report had been partially or fully implemented by 1 July 2003.

Our substantive response to the report as part of the Green Paper 'Every Child Matters', was published on 8 September.

Somali Refugees

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the number of unaccompanied Somali child refugees in local authority care in England. [127387]

Margaret Hodge: This information is not available in the form requested. However, in 2002, the most recent year for which figures are available, 345[1] Somali children applied for asylum in the UK as unaccompanied asylum seeking children i.e. aged under 18 at the time of their application. Only a small proportion of applications result in grants of refugee status. This figure is taken from the annual Home Office statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 2002" published by the Home Office on 28 August 2003. It is published on the internet at the following web address; http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html. The bulletin is also available in hard copy.

All unaccompanied asylum seeking children are supported by local authorities under the Children Act 1989.

[1] This figure is provisional and rounded to the nearest 5.
The data is not comparable to manual counts data prior to 2002.
The data excludes age dispute cases.

Admissions Policy

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills under what circumstances it is possible for *(a)* local education authority maintained schools, *(b)* academies and *(c)* city colleges which have an admissions policy which requires prospective pupils to undertake an assessment of ability and or aptitude to charge the pupil or parent for information about the pupil's performance in the assessment except where the information is sought under the Data Protection Act 1998. [131289]

Mr. Miliband: Maintained schools, academies and city colleges cannot charge for or in connection with admission.

If the request for information about a pupil's performance in an assessment for ability or aptitude is unrelated to the application for admission, or any appeal against a decision not to admit the pupil, then they may charge for supplying that information.

Adoption

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children have been adopted *(a)* voluntarily and *(b)* as a result of a court order by (i) social services and (ii) other agencies in Gloucestershire and the adjoining authorities in the last five years. [130198]

Margaret Hodge: All adoptions require an adoption order to be made by a court. When deciding whether to make an adoption order, section 6 of the Adoption Act 1976 requires the court to take account of the wishes and feelings of the child and give due consideration to them, having regard to his age and understanding.

The number of children adopted from Gloucestershire and the seven adjoining authorities in the years ending 31 March 1998–2002 are shown in the table.

Information on the number of children adopted through voluntary adoption agencies is not collected centrally. However, the actual figure is likely to be very small, as voluntary adoption agencies only place children voluntarily relinquished by their birth family to their care for the purposes of adoption.

Number of looked after children adopted during the years ending 31 March 1998–2002, in Gloucestershire and the adjoining local authorities

	Number[1]				
	1998[2]	*1999*[3]	*2000*[3]	*2001*[4]	*2002*[4]
England	2,100	2,200	2,700	3,100	3,400
Gloucestershire		10	20	20	20
Herefordshire		—	15	15	10
Worcestershire		10	25	35	60
Warwickshire		—	10	10	15
Oxfordshire		20	30	20	30
Swindon		—	10	10	—
Wiltshire		15	20	10	15
South Gloucestershire		—	5	10	10

[1] Numbers are rounded to the nearest five. Numbers between one and five are suppressed (—).
[2] Because of the small number of children involved in many local authorities, reliable estimates cannot be obtained from the SSDA 903 one-third sample for 1997–98.
[3] 1998–99 and 1999–2000 adoption data are taken from the Key Statistics Return (KS1).
[4] 2000–01 and 2001–02 data are from the AD1, an annual return completed by local authorities with social services responsibilities in England. This return provides data on children looked after by each local authority who were adopted during the year ending 31 March.

Apprenticeships

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on progress towards the take-up of modern apprenticeships with

specific reference to the provision of opportunities for employees working for smaller companies in rural areas. [130587]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Modern apprenticeships make an important contribution to meeting the skills needs of smaller companies in rural areas. The operation and delivery of modern apprenticeships is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council and I have therefore asked John Harrwood, the council's chief executive, to write to the hon. Gentleman with the information requested and to place a copy of his reply in the Library.

Autism

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how the education authorities in Tyne and Wear have performed in relation to the Government's inspection programme for autistic education; [130741]

(2) what inspection provision the Government has in place to measure the quality of autistic education; [130742]

(3) how much is spent on average on each autistic child in each education authority in Tyne and Wear in the current financial year; [130743]

(4) how many specialist teachers for autistic children there are in each education authority in Tyne and Wear; [130744]

(5) how many autistic children there are in each education authority in Tyne and Wear. [130745]

Margaret Hodge: The quality of educational provision in schools and local education authorities is the subject of inspections by the Office for Standards in Education. Ofsted look at how schools and local education authorities provide for all children, including those with special educational needs such as autistic spectrum disorders. They are currently carrying out a thematic study of how local education authorities and schools are implementing the inclusion framework introduced as a result of the SEN and Disability Act 2001 and this should be published in 2004. Information about Ofsted reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Data is not collected centrally on:

the spending of each local education authority on children with autistic spectrum disorders,

the number of specialist teachers for autistic spectrum disorders in local education authorities, or

the numbers of children with autistic spectrum disorders .

Spending by local education authorities and schools on special educational needs is estimated at around £3.12 billion in 2002–03—some 12.6 per cent. of the total overall spending on schools.

Data on the numbers of children with different types of special educational needs, including autistic spectrum disorders, will be collected as part of the Pupil Level Annual Schools Census from January 2004. We anticipate that provisional data from the survey will be available in May 2004 and that final figures will be published in November 2004.

Guidance from the Autism Working Group on good practice in provision for autistic spectrum disorders was issued to local education authorities in July 2002 and provides a practical tool for authorities to review and improve their provision for children on the autistic spectrum.

CAFCASS

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to the answer of 1 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 719W, on CAFCASS, how many private law cases were unallocated *(a)* less than 10 weeks and *(b)* more than 10 weeks before a CAFCASS report is filed at court. [131177]

Margaret Hodge: CAFCASS's target is that at least 95 per cent. of requests in a month should be allocated 10 weeks before a report is filed at court. A benchmark of 10 weeks is used because this is the timescale required for an officer to complete relevant inquiries and meet the deadline for filing the report with the court. It also enables the service to be flexible when dealing with urgent cases that arise with shorter filing dates.

In July 2003, CAFCASS dealt with 3,200 private law cases. Of these, 385 cases were unallocated less than 10 weeks before a report was filed at court. This is 4.7 per cent. of the caseload and achieved the target. 1,236 private law cases were unallocated more than 10 weeks before a report was filed at court.

Child Abuse

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what changes have been instituted since the publication of the Laming Report to enable the free exchange of information between agencies in child abuse investigations. [127988]

Margaret Hodge: On 19 May, my hon. Friend the then Health Minister, Jacqui Smith launched a booklet for practitioners who have concerns about the welfare of children. "What To Do If You're Worried A Child Is Being Abused" was published jointly by six Government Departments and is aimed at all practitioners who come into contact with children, parents and/or families in the course of their work.

The booklet contains a short section on sharing information. This steers practitioners through the process of deciding whether to share information, and if so, what to share and with whom. It explains in a clear and concise way the issues involved in making decisions about sharing information. Copies of the booklet are available in the Library.

The Green Paper Every Child Matters and Keeping Children Safe—the Government's response to the Victoria Climbie Inquiry Report and the Joint Chief Inspectors' Report Safeguarding Children were published on 8 September, and copies are available in the Library.

The Green Paper sets out proposals for new information sharing systems to enable concerns to be registered at an early stage and flagged up to relevant staff working with children. The Green Paper also

explains how front-line workers will become more closely integrated through arrangements such as Children's Trusts.

To take forward such information sharing systems, the Government provided £1 million to 10 'Identification, Referral and Tracking' (IRT) trailblazers involving 15 local authorities to test out approaches. We are putting in place a central team to learn lessons and develop a national framework for local information sharing systems. We will have early lessons from the trailblazers by December 2003, and more detailed information by late summer 2004. By the end of 2004, we aim to set out how the lessons from the trailblazers can be reflected across the country. As part of this, the Government will examine the potential benefits and risks of introducing ICT-based information sharing systems at local authority level.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to institute mandatory inquiries into unexpected child deaths. [127987]

Margaret Hodge: Paragraphs 117–121 of Keeping Children Safe—The Government's response to The Victoria Climbie Inquiry Report and Joint Chief Inspectors' report Safeguarding Children, sets out the Government's position in relation to recommendations made by the Victoria Climbie Inquiry and the Joint Chief Inspectors relating to Serious Case Reviews and inquiries into child deaths.

Child Law Reform

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer to the hon. and learned Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) of 1 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 718W, on child law reform, which Minister has overall responsibility for child law reform. [129713]

Margaret Hodge: My Department has lead responsibility across Whitehall for policy on children, young people and the family. As Minister for Children, Young People and the Family in the DfES, I will keep under review the legislation relating to children and young people for which this Department is responsible. A number of other Ministers are responsible for legislation that impacts, either directly or indirectly, on children. I will work with these Ministers with a view to ensuring that their legislation contributes to the best possible outcomes for children and young people.

Children and Young People's Unit

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what work the Children and Young People's Unit undertakes in Scotland in relation to reserved matters. [130528]

Margaret Hodge: In terms of domestic policy, the Children and Young People's Unit has an England only remit. In terms of international policy, the Unit has a remit to co-ordinate the UK's participation in a number of international initiatives relating to children and young people, notably the EU Open Method of Co-Ordination on Youth Policy and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The EU Open Method of Co-Ordination on Youth Policy relates exclusively to devolved policy issues—youth participation, local information services for young people, youth volunteering and youth research. Each Devolved Administration is responsible for implementing the obligations of this initiative, whilst the CYPU is responsible for overseeing implementation in England, for co-ordinating the UK's approach as a whole and for reporting UK progress to the European Commission.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child covers both devolved and reserved issues. In the case of devolved policies (for example, health and social services, education, participation policy), the Devolved Administrations are responsible for observing the convention when making devolved policy decisions. In the case of reserved policies, the relevant Whitehall Department is responsible for observing the convention when making reserved policy decisions, and for consulting the Devolved Administrations as necessary. Examples of reserved policies covered by the convention are: asylum and immigration (Home Office), international development (DfID) and defence policies (MOD). The CYPU is responsible for co-ordinating the UK's approach as a whole across all policy leads (including the Devolved Administrations on devolved matters) and for reporting to the UN on UK implementation.

When undertaking this co-ordinating role for international initiatives, the CYPU works in accordance with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Concordats with the Devolved Administrations on International and EU Relations, with full and regular working-level contacts with the Devolved Administrations.

Children's Directorate

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many officials will work in the new Children's Directorate in his Department. [127895]

Margaret Hodge: The number of officials who will work in the Children and Families Directorate of this Department will be determined by decisions on what functions are required to secure the best possible outcomes for children, young people and families, how those functions can be best organised within this Department and the resources needed for them to be carried out. I will be considering recommendations on those issues soon.

Civil Servants

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many civil servants have been employed by his Department in each of the years 1997–98 to 2002–03; and what the median and weighted mean salary is for each of these years. [117761]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The numbers of civil servants employed in my Department as at 1 April for the years in question were as follows.

	Number of civil servants employed
2002	4,170
2001	4,775
2000	4,303
1999	3,948
1998	3,838

The figures for 2003 are not yet available.

Median and weighted mean salary information could be produced only at disproportionate costs.

Comprehensive Schools

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance he has issued to local education authorities in respect of the minimum size of comprehensive secondary schools; and if he will make a statement. [131290]

Mr. Miliband: The Department issues non-statutory guidance in Building Bulletin 82: "Area Guidelines for Schools". This document, which is currently being revised, gives recommendations on overall floor areas and the sizes of individual spaces in relation to the number of pupils.

Connexions

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the budget for 2003–04 for the Connexions service is for each *(a)* local education authority and *(b)* Careers Service area; and how many young people there are in each of those areas. [128953]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 11 September 2003]*: The Connexions Service is provided nationally by 47 Connexions Partnerships. The budget allocations for each Partnership and the number of young people in each Partnership area is given below. The careers service functions are now subsumed within Connexions. How much is spent in each local authority area is a matter for Connexions Partnership to decide based on local needs.

13–19 year old population & grant allocations by Connexions partnership

	13–19 population	Total grant allocation (2003–04) £ million
Bedfordshire & Luton	50,443	4,738,377
Berkshire	70,668	6,233,298
Birmingham & Solihull	115,837	13,035,551
Black Country	98,410	11,471,386
Bournemouth, Dorset & Poole	56,469	5,005,025
Cambridgeshire & Peterborough	62,544	5,839,068
Central London	102,829	15,335,249
Cheshire & Warrington	74,385	6,849,066
Cornwall & Devon	133,053	12,511,182
County Durham	45,259	4,691,191
Coventry & Warwickshire	72,316	6,959,745
Cumbria	40,809	4,211,678
Derbyshire	79,903	7,817,476
East London	169,356	21,649,094
Essex, Southend & Thurrock	132,913	12,621,280
Gloucestershire	48,280	4,386,413
Greater Manchester	237,663	26,251,106
Greater Merseyside	143,438	17,407,792
Hereford & Worcester	59,096	5,495,746
Hertfordshire	89,549	7,584,278
Humber	79,679	8,531,852
Kent & Medway	136,973	12,940,734
Lancashire	128,522	12,709,953

13–19 year old population & grant allocations by Connexions partnership

	13–19 population	Total grant allocation (2003–04) £ million
Leicestershire	82,252	8,188,625
Lincolnshire & Rutland	57,822	5,392,320
M. Keynes, Oxfordshire & Bucks.	114,576	10,293,332
Norfolk	63,483	6,270,498
North London	83,678	9,774,835
Northamptonshire	55,557	5,563,219
Northumberland	27,006	2,875,134
Nottinghamshire	91,166	9,642,650
Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin	39,214	3,628,394
Somerset	42,114	3,719,593
South Central	153,355	14,244,717
South London	105,237	10,330,508
South Yorkshire	112,859	12,356,833
Staffordshire	92,935	9,234,154
Suffolk	54,878	5,157,784
Surrey	87,305	7,866,666
Sussex	115,980	11,075,372
Tees Valley	63,221	7,142,333
Tyne & Wear	100,435	11,664,903
West London	111,400	12,056,005
West of England	84,132	7,889,859
West Yorkshire	191,799	20,541,868
Wiltshire & Swindon	51,484	4,778,769
York & North Yorks.	65,939	5,391,600
Total England	4,276,221	439,356,51

The 13–19 population data on which Connexions Service funding allocations are based use a combination of 13–15 year old pupils in school taken from the Annual School Census at January 2001 and the number of 16–19 year olds from the Estimated Resident Population Mid-2000 based on the 1991 Census by single year of age.

Domestic Violence

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what means he is using to educate young people at school about domestic violence issues; [129619]

(2) whether domestic violence and its impact is a topic in the citizenship syllabus; [129620]

(3) at what age he intends that education about the dangers and effects of domestic violence will be given to children at school. [129621]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) teaches pupils about social and moral differences, including aggressive behaviour. Specifically in primary schools, pupils are taught how to get help, to realise the consequences of anti-social and aggressive behaviour, and to resolve differences by looking at alternatives. There are opportunities for schools to address violence, including domestic violence, through the framework of PSHE and Citizenship. In Citizenship, for example, pupils can discuss the impact of domestic violence and challenge the belief that domestic violence is inevitable and acceptable.

Resources such as 'Watch Over Me' which has been sent to all secondary schools, support the teaching of domestic violence. This includes a video that highlights risks in different situations. This pack covers domestic

violence, explaining the role of schools in conflict resolution, why schools should discuss domestic violence, and lesson plans.

Early-years Education (Buckinghamshire)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of 3-year-olds have access to early years education in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire. [129883]

Margaret Hodge: The information is not available in the form requested.

In January 2002, 2,500 free early years education places were taken up by 3-year-olds in Buckinghamshire local education authority area.

We have made the commitment that by April 2004, six months ahead of our original target, all 3-year-olds whose parents want one, will have access to a free, part-time early education place.

The latest figures on early years provision in England were published by the Department in the Statistical First Release 15/2003 "Provision For Children Under Five Years Of Age In England—January 2003 (Provisional)", copies of which are available from the Library and the Department's website, www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/.

Earned Autonomy Scheme

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools applied for the earned autonomy scheme; and how many have been *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful in being granted earned autonomy. [127892]

Mr. Miliband: The Government is not currently operating an Earned Autonomy scheme, as defined in the Education Act 2002. Instead, it has taken a number of steps to extend autonomy across the school system more generally. In relation to teachers' pay and conditions, specific new freedoms have been introduced from 1 September this year which mean that schools have a greater degree of flexibility in relation to certain pay decisions. Changes to the curriculum at Key Stage 4 set out in the strategy document 14–19: Opportunity and Excellence will enable schools to respond more flexibly to the needs of their pupils. We have established the Implementation Review Unit—a Panel of serving head teachers and other school staff to identify areas where schools can be freed from bureaucracy and red tape. The Power to Innovate offers all schools the chance to apply for innovative projects that would otherwise be blocked by education legislation. The Government is keeping under review whether to introduce an Earned Autonomy scheme as provided for in the 2002 Act.

Educational Scholarships

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what support the Government gives to companies that sponsor educational scholarships. [131120]

Mr. Miliband: The Government are keen to encourage the involvement of companies and businesses in education. However, we regard the sponsorship of educational scholarships as a matter for the companies themselves.

Energy Performance Directive

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action he is taking *(a)* to encourage schools and colleges to respond to the requirements of the European Directive on the energy performance of buildings and *(b)* to monitor compliance with it. [129982]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Department is working closely with ODPM on actions required to implement the European Directive on energy performance. ODPM believe that many of the requirements of the directive can be implemented through changes to the Building Regulations and to Approved Document Part L2 (the next revision being due in 2005). As schools are required to comply with building regulations, any changes in energy performance requirements will apply to schools.

The Department already encourages energy efficiency and management in schools through a number of measures. The Departments guidance on design of new school buildings promotes a carbon performance rating of 5kg C/m^2 per year or better, which is in line with current building regulations requirements.

Further Education colleges will be responsible for compliance with the Directive in relation to their own premises and the Learning and Skills Council is updating its guidance to colleges on estate management to reflect the directive's requirements.

The Departments approach to monitoring compliance is still being developed with ODPM.

European Court Ruling

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will publish the Government's response to the Council of Europe in respect of the European Court of Human Rights ruling in the 1998 A v UK judgment. [130811]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 18 September 2003]:* In cases of alleged assault against children where the defence of reasonable chastisement is used, the Courts are obliged to take note of the outcome in the European Court of Human Rights of the A v UK case. Juries must now be directed, when considering the reasonableness of any punishment, to consider the nature and context of the defendant's behaviour, its duration, its physical and mental consequences in relation to the child and the reason given by the defendant administering punishment.

The Government has asked the Attorney General to keep the use of the reasonable chastisement defence under review in order to assess the impact of A v UK. His findings to date suggest that this defence is being used properly.

The Government's position is that these measures fulfil our obligations arising from the A v UK ruling and we will be responding to the Council of Europe accordingly. [We will publish this response after it has been presented to the Council of Europe in October.]

Fees Remission and Grants

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will estimate the number of students likely to qualify for *(a)* full fees remission, *(b)* partial fees remission and *(c)* maintenance grants under his revised proposals; and what the projected annual cost for each category of such remissions and grants is. [129990]

Alan Johnson: From 2004/05, the percentage of students receiving fee remission will be affected by the inclusion of the income of parents' spouses and co-habiting partners in the means-test. Future numbers and proportions of students receiving fee remission also depend on changes in demand for higher education.

The latest data (provisional Academic Year 2001/02) available for English and Welsh domiciled students are:

	(a) Full fee remission	*(b) Partial fee remission*
Student numbers (thousand)	334	127
Percentage	43	16
Cost (£ million)	[1]405	405

[1] Public expenditure on fees assessed for payment from public funds.

Source:

Form F503G survey of LEAs for Student Support Scheme students from England and Wales as published in the Statistical First Release of 29 April 2003.

Once the Higher Education Grant in September 2004 has been introduced, it is estimated that around 30 per cent. of students will be eligible for the full grant and around 10 per cent. for a partial grant. The annual cost has been estimated at around £300 million.

Foster Parents

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) whether foster parents have the same maternity and paternity rights as other parents; and what assistance is given to foster parents willing to take on disabled children; [128068]

(2) how many children have been placed with foster parents in each year since 1997; and what measures have been taken to encourage more couples to foster children; [128069]

(3) what assistance is given to foster parents to take on children with behavioural problems; and whether it is compulsory for them to attend school; [128070]

(4) what age financial assistance to foster parents looking after children with behavioural problems stops; and what plans he has to extend payments to fosterers parenting for children reaching adult age [128071]

Margaret Hodge: Foster carers do not have the same right to maternity and paternity leave as other parents with respect to the children they are fostering. However, from April 2003 foster parents have the right to request flexible working. The recent Green Paper on Children at Risk "Every Child Matters" consults on a proposal for increasing parental rights for foster carers.

Foster parents caring for disabled children may receive funding and support beyond and above a fostering allowance. This will be dependent on the child's needs.

The table as follows shows the numbers of children in foster placements each year since 1997:

Number of looked after children in foster care in England at 31 March: 1997–2002

At 31 March	*All children in foster placement*[1]
1997	33,500 (66% of all children looked after)
1998	35,000 (65% of all children looked after)
1999	36,200 (65% of all children looked after)
2000	37,900 (65% of all children looked after)
2001	38,300 (65% of all children looked after)
2002	39,200 (66% of all children looked after)

[1] Figures exclude children looked after under an agreed series of short term placements

Source:

The information provided is derived from the SSDA903, a one in three sample survey of all looked after children in England, completed by local councils with social services responsibilities.

The Choice Protects Review has been set up to strengthen fostering services and has a grant of £113 million over three years from 2003–4 attached to it. To support local recruitment the Review has commissioned Fostering Network to develop Good Practice Guidelines for the Recruitment of Foster Carers, which will be available shortly, and is also developing a recruitment toolkit for local authorities. The recent Green Paper on Children at Risk "Every Child Matters" consults on further proposals to encourage more people to consider fostering.

Treatment foster care is a new three year scheme linked to the Choice Protects Review, which aims to provide foster care for the most difficult to place children. two million has been made available to set up development projects in 2003–4 and a further three million is available for new bids in 2004–5.

Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 states that: "The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable:

(a) to his age, ability and aptitude, and

(b) to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise."

The Children Leaving Care Act 2000 places a duty on local authorities to provide general assistance for looked after young people, including those with behavioural problems, in cash or in kind, until they are 21, and to assist with employment, education and training.

Free School Meals

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what the face value is of the free school meal voucher or equivalent provided by each local education authority in England; [129737]

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure that the value of a free school meal voucher or equivalent provided by local education authorities enables pupils using cafeteria systems to purchase a two-course lunch and a drink which conform to the nutritional standards laid down by his Department. [129738]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 15 September 2003]:* It is the responsibility of the local education authority or, where a budgetary element for school meals has been delegated to them, a school's governing body to decide the monetary value of a free school meal. The Department for Education and Skills, does not collect data on the value of the free school meal voucher.

'Healthy School Lunches' guidance, produced by this Department, includes the Secretary of State's strong recommendation that the value of a free meal should be set to enable eligible pupils to have a standard two course lunch and a drink.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what guidance he has issued to schools on introducing systems which do not make pupils receiving free meals readily identifiable; [129739]

(2) if he will provide incentives for schools to increase the take-up of free school meals; and if he will make a statement. [129740]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 15 September 2003]:* The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) funded research, commissioned to the Child Poverty Action Group, into the reasons children fail to take up their free school meal entitlement. The findings were published in a research report (RR270) entitled 'Improving the Take-Up of Free School Meals' in May 2001. The study identified a number of good practice strategies that could be adopted to encourage more parents and pupils to take up their entitlement. It also suggested that every effort should be made to ensure that pupils receiving free school meals are not easily identifiable. For example, this could be achieved if schools that operate a cafeteria system introduce cashless systems such as swipe cards.

The report is published on the DfES Research and Statistics Gateway website www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/ Alternatively, copies of the report can be obtained from DfES Publications by telephoning: 0845 6022260 quoting reference RR270.

The Department of Education and Skills has no plans at present to provide incentives for schools to increase the take-up of free school meals.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average time taken by each local education authority between a parent registering for free school meals and the provision of free meals to their children was in the last year for which figures are available. [129741]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 15 September 2003]:* The Department for Education and Skills does not collect this information.

Free Tuition

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how he will define the qualifying breadth of a qualification at Level 2 to which an entitlement to free tuition will be attached. [131367]

Alan Johnson: Adult learners will be eligible for free tuition to reach their first full level 2 qualification. The White Paper "21st Century Skills; Realising Our Potential" (Cmnd 5810) stated that a full level 2 would be interpreted as covering "any qualification equivalent in standard and breadth to 5 GCSEs at A*-C or a National Vocational Qualification at level 2". We are working with the Learning and Skills Council and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to identify in detail which qualifications meet this definition.

Further Education

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students there were in further education in Leeds, North-West in each year since 1997. [127295]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The numbers of people resident in Leeds, North-West constituency who were students at Further Education colleges in each year since 1997/98 are shown in the table. Due to the way the data is collected, figures prior to 2000/01 are only available for students funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), or as it was then, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Learners not funded by the council are included for 2000–01 and 2001–02.

Numbers of people resident in Leeds North West constituency studying at Further Education colleges by year (thousands)

Academic year	*Council funded*	*Non-council funded*
1997–98	5.4	N/a
1998–99	5.4	N/a
1999–2000	5.3	N/a
2000–01	4.9	1.0
2001–02	5.4	1.1

Source:
Individualised Student Record

Gifted Children

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures are in place to ensure that gifted children that are *(a)* moved up educational years at school and *(b)* placed in a different school retain contact with their peer group. [127957]

Mr. Miliband: It is rare for a gifted pupil to be accelerated to an older year group for all subjects, and rarer still to be placed in a different school. Such decisions are taken locally. Schools and local education authorities should take account of all relevant factors, particularly the academic and social needs of the student concerned.

Internet Access

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the internet access available to the economically disadvantaged. [130195]

Mr. Charles Clarke: We assess internet access through quarterly surveys produced by the Office for National Statistics. Access is tracked by income, age, gender and region. Latest figures from the Office for National Statistics (published in July) show that levels of internet access in the UK continue to grow. 54 per cent. of the adult population are now regular users of the internet.

However the figures also show that take-up among economically disadvantaged groups is lower. 12 per cent. of households in the lowest income group have internet access compared to 86 per cent. in the highest income group.

In May and June, to help drive up levels of internet among those less likely to be online the Office of the e-Envoy, supported by the Department for Education and Skills ran the Get Started campaign. The campaign promoted the benefits of the internet to key groups such as the unemployed, lone parents, those with disabilities and the elderly. People were encouraged to visit UK online centres throughout the country that offered free internet st. ... sessions. Evaluation of the campaign, particularly its impact on economically disadvantaged groups, will be completed shortly.

Key Stage Attainment

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of children who attained *(a)* level 4 in mathematics Key Stage 2 assessment in 1998 achieved level 5 or above in mathematics Key Stage 3 assessment in 2001; and what proportion who attained level 5 in mathematics Key Stage 2 assessment in 1998 achieved level 6 or above in mathematics Key Stage 3 assessment in 2001. [131291]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is as follows:

Of those pupils who achieved level 4 or above in the 1998 Key Stage 2 Maths tests, the proportion who went on to achieve level 5 or above in the 2001 Key Stage 3 Maths tests was 92.6 per cent.

Of those pupils who achieved level 5 or above in the 1998 Key Stage 2 Maths tests, the proportion who went on to achieve level 6 or above in the 2001 Key Stage 3 Maths tests was 96.5 per cent.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of children who attained level 4 in English Key Stage 2 assessment in 1998 achieved level 5 or above in English Key Stage 3 assessment in 2001; and what proportion who attained level 5 in English Key Stage 2 assessment in 1998 achieved level 6 or above in English Key Stage 3 assessment in 2001. [131288]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is as follows:

Of those pupils who achieved level 4 or above in the 1998 Key Stage 2 English tests, the proportion who went on to achieve level 5 or above in the 2001 Key Stage 3 English tests was 85.4 per cent.

Of those pupils who achieved level 5 or above in the 1998 Key Stage 2 English tests, the proportion who went on to achieve level 6 or above in the 2001 Key Stage 3 English tests was 81.6 per cent.

Learning and Skills Councils

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of funds available to the Learning and Skills Council was devolved to the discretion of local LSCs in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04; and what proportion is projected for 2004–05. [131013]

Alan Johnson: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, will write to the hon. Gentleman with the information requested and place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what changes he is making in financial provision for learning and skills councils for the next three financial years; what assessment he made of the effect of these changes; and if he will make a statement. [131299]

Alan Johnson: The budgets allocated to the Learning and Skills Council for the next three financial years were set out in the Grant Letter to the LSC on 5 December 2002. A copy of this was placed at the time in the Library. The budget figures in the letter are £8,095 million in 2003–04, rising to £8,618 million in 2004–05 and £9,200 million in 2005–06. These figures represent record levels of investment in the learning and skills sector and will substantially improve standards and increase the number of people engaged in learning.

Decisions relating to the allocation of budgets by the LSC National Office to local LSCs are a matter for the LSC. Mark Haysom, the Council's Chief Executive from 1 October 2003 will write to the hon. Gentleman with this information and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Level 2 Qualification

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how he will ascertain whether students seeking to access free tuition for a Level 2 qualification have no existing higher qualifications. [129697]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We are working with the Learning and Skills Council to evaluate the use of existing data systems for checking whether applicants have already gained a relevant qualification. We shall be using the experienced gained in the Employer Training Pilots to assess the risks. The phased introduction of the entitlement provides the opportunity to test that light tough but robust validation procedures are in place.

National Literacy Strategy

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the effect of the National Literacy Strategy on literacy skills among primary school pupils in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire. [129884]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The National Literacy Strategy has transformed standards of literacy in our primary schools. Nationally, 75 per cent. of pupils achieved level 4 or above in the 2003 Key Stage 2 English tests, 10 percentage points more than in 1998.

The results in Buckinghamshire LEA show that in 1998 73 per cent. of pupils achieved level 4 or above in English at Key Stage 2. In 2003 the figure was 80 per cent. We are unable to disaggregate results for schools in Chesham and Amersham.

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the effect of the National Literacy Strategy on literacy skills amongst primary school children in Tynemouth constituency. [130388]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The National Literacy Strategy has transformed standards of literacy in our primary schools. Nationally, 75 per cent. of pupils achieved level 4 or above in the 2003 Key Stage 2 English tests, 10 percentage points more than in 1998.

The improvement in literacy standards of pupils in North Tyneside LEA has been greater than the national improvement. In 1998, 65 per cent. of pupils achieved level 4 or above in English at Key Stage 2. In 2003 the figure was 77 per cent. We are unable to disaggregate results for Tynemouth schools.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the representations made by his Department to the Centre for British Teachers regarding the management and delivery of the primary *(a)* literacy and *(b)* numeracy strategies in the last three years. [131341]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Department for Education and Skills has a close working relationship with CfBT Education Services and is in daily communication with its representatives regarding the management and delivery of the primary literacy and numeracy strategies.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what changes his Department plans to make to the management and delivery of the primary *(a)* literacy and *(b)* numeracy strategies. [131343]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The separate professional teams responsible for the delivery of the national literacy and numeracy strategies within the contract between the Department and CfBT Education Services have been brought together this year under the leadership of a new Director of the Primary Strategy. The Primary Strategy force has a central role in delivering the Government's commitments set out in "Excellence and Enjoyment".

Mathematics/Science Education

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps have been taken to improve the recruitment of young people into electronic engineering since the publication of his Department's Research Report No.112, The Labour Market for Engineering, Science and IT Graduates: Are there Mismatches Between Supply and Demand? [131114]

Mr. Charles Clarke: My Department is working actively with the DTI and with the industry to address the issues raised. Following the recent Roberts Review, Government have announced the largest sustained growth in science and engineering expenditure for a decade, with £1.25 billion extra a year by 2005–06.

We are improving the careers advice available to young people. We are committed to expanding higher and vocational education provision in order to deliver the skills and qualities that individuals need in the workplace. This includes the establishment of progression routes for vocational learning from Vocational GCSEs through to Modern Apprenticeships, Foundation Degrees and Graduate Apprenticeships.

Examples of collaboration between DTI, DfES and the sector includes 'Electronics in Schools' to enable more schools to provide the teaching of electronics within schools, therefore making 11–14 year olds more aware of electronics and the opportunities available, and the 'Shell Technology Enterprise Programme' which provides undergraduates with a placement in the field of electronics on completion of their degree.

One of the first Sector Skills Council's we have licensed is SEMTA, the Science, Engineering and Technologies Alliance. They will be the key to our on-going work in identifying and addressing gaps between the supply and demand of suitably qualified people.

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what have been the student participation rates for physics at A level standard in the last five years. [131116]

Mr. Miliband: The number of entries for physics A level by all candidates in all schools and further education sector colleges in England in 1998–2002:

	Physics	*Total GCE A level entries*	*Percentage of total GCE A level entries*
2002	28,642	666,479	4.3
2001	28,616	707,784	4.0
2000	28,945	709,580	4.1
1999	30,428	720,304	4.2
1998	30,605	724,852	4.2

Figures for 2003 are due to be published on 8 October 2003 and will be available on the Department's website.

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what incentives his Department is giving to students to study mathematics and physics at A-level; [131117]

(2) what action his Department is taking to encourage the development of *(a)* the Filtronics plc Maths Scheme and *(b)* other industry schemes to encourage young people to study mathematics at school; [131118]

(3) what progress has been made following the meeting between his Department's officials and Filtronics plc on 29 January to consider the Filtronics plc Maths Scheme. [131121]

Mr. Miliband: The Department does not offer incentives to students to study any particular A-level subjects. Students should choose those subjects which are the most appropriate for their individual skills and aspirations. The independent Post-14 Maths Inquiry is due to publish its final report by the end of October and has received evidence from a wide range of interested organisations, including Filtronic. The inquiry is expected to make recommendations on the curriculum, qualifications and pedagogy for those aged 14 and over in schools, colleges and higher education institutions to

enable students to acquire the mathematical knowledge and skills necessary to meet the wide-ranging needs of employers and of further and higher education. In view of this, consideration of local initiatives and schemes such as Filtronic's should rightly take place once we have had the opportunity to consider the inquiry's final report.

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what state scholarships there are to support students studying accredited courses in mathematics, physics and engineering. [131119]

Alan Johnson: There are no state scholarships available to students undertaking maths, physics or engineering courses. However, there is a range of statutory, targeted and discretionary financial support available to undergraduate students irrespective of discipline.

Microsoft

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was paid to Microsoft in licensing fees by his Department and its agencies in each of the last three years; and how much has been budgeted for *(a)* 2003–04 and *(b)* 2004–05. [130681]

Mr. Charles Clarke: From our records the Department for Education and Skills has spent the following amounts on Microsoft products in licensing fees in the last three years:

£

Year	*Amount spent*
2000–01	[1]1.4 million
2001–02	538,000
2002–03	215,000

[1] Includes £1,130,000 on Computers within Reach Project.

For 2003–04 and 2004–05, £350,000 has been budgeted for each year.

Numeracy Strategy (Tynemouth)

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the effect of the National Numeracy Strategy on numeracy skills among primary school children in Tynemouth constituency. [130389]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The National Numeracy Strategy has transformed standards of numeracy in our primary schools. Nationally, 73 per cent. of pupils achieved level 4 or above in the 2003 Key Stage 2 mathematics tests, 14 percentage points more than in 1998.

The improvement in numeracy standards of pupils in North Tyneside LEA has been greater than the national improvement. In 1998, 59 per cent. of pupils achieved level 4 or above in mathematics at Key Stage 2. In 2003 the figure was 76 per cent. We are unable to disaggregate results for Tynemouth schools.

Ofsted Inspections

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 2 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 293W, on school setting, (1) what percentage of maintained secondary school lessons inspected by Ofsted between 1995 and 2002 in *(a)* Year 7, *(b)* Year 8, *(c)* Year 9, *(d)* Year 10 and *(e)* Year 11 were recorded as set by ability in (i) history, (ii) geography, (iii) music and (iv) religious education; [131173]

(2) what percentage of maintained schools in West Sussex LEA inspected by Ofsted between 1995 and 2002 in *(a)* Year 7, *(b)* Year 8, *(c)* Year 9, *(d)* Year 10 and *(e)* Year 11 were recorded as set by ability in (i) history, (ii) geography, (iii) music and (iv) religious education. [131174]

Mr. Miliband: These are matters for Ofsted. HM Chief Inspector, David Bell, will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many Questions directed to him remain unanswered. [130764]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: 35.

PFI (Schools)

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the Private Finance Initiative in schools. [131234]

Mr. Charles Clarke: There are now 59 Schools PFI contracts signed covering 595 schools with a total capital value of £1.6 billion. Services have started in 39 projects, which include more than 100 brand new, replacement or refurbished schools.

In addition, 36 schools projects and 4 ICT projects have been approved by the Project Review Group (PRG) and are in procurement. The total capital value for these is over £1.6 billion and they involve more than 600 schools. Nineteen further projects covering more than 260 schools have been prioritised for support by DfES. The amount of PFI credits has been significantly increased by this Government, from £35 million in 1997–98 to a planned £1.05 billion in 2004–05.

Retraining (Upper Age Limits)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make it his policy to remove upper age limits for retraining into a new job under Government training schemes. [130988]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We want to ensure that people of all ages can acquire skills that enable them to fulfil their own potential and meet the needs of employers. Our Skills Strategy, "21st Century Skills—Realising Our Potential" signalled a number of important developments, including opening up Modern Apprenticeships to older workers and developing a Level 2 entitlement intended for people in the workforce who are not already qualified at that level.

Schools

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps his Department has taken to reduce the number of school *(a)* exclusions and *(b)* truants. [130386]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Under our innovative Behaviour and Attendance Strategy, we are providing £470 million between 2002 and 2006 to schools and local education authorities to encourage prevention and early intervention in tackling the root causes of truancy and the poor behaviour that can lead to exclusion.

The Government are putting in place unprecedented measures to prevent bad behaviour. For example, we have introduced targeted Behaviour Improvement Programmes in 61 areas. We are providing training and support to all secondary schools and we are piloting similar resources in up to 3,500 primary schools. Through these initiatives, we are promoting successful alternatives to exclusion, although we recognise that head teachers retain the right to exclude pupils in the case where they judge that is necessary.

We are determined to tackle the long standing problem of truancy and its negative impact on children's life chances. The Government now co-ordinates truancy sweeps at a national level. We provide expert support and advice to the 56 education welfare services facing the largest challenges. We are bearing down on parentally condoned truancy through national implementation of the Fast Track to Prosecution initiative. Through the Anti-Social Behaviour Bill, we are seeking to introduce parenting contracts and penalty notices for the parents of persistent truants.

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many times consent has been given to a relaxation of the minimum area standard for team game playing fields at schools, under section 543 of the Education Act 1996 (as amended by paragraph 159 of Schedule 30 to the School Standards and Framework Act 1998), in each of the last five years. [128610]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 set out the minimum size of team game playing fields that should be provided for schools according to the age and number of pupils attending those schools. The Secretary of State's agreement is needed if changes to the team game playing field provision mean that a school falls, or remains, below the minimum required by the Regulations. This means that agreement is also needed if a school already below the required minimum makes any changes to its team game playing fields, even if it results in an increase.

We have no central records before 2000. Six applications were agreed in 2000, 25 in 2001, 11 in 2002, and 9 so far in 2003. Of these 41 approved applications, 31 (75 per cent.) resulted in either no change or an increase in the amount of team game playing field provided for schools.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* classroom assistants and *(b)* teachers in schools there were in (i) the Chesham and Amersham constituency and (ii) Buckinghamshire in each year since 1997. [129886]

Mr. Miliband: The number of full time equivalent (FTE) regular teachers and teaching assistants in the maintained sector in Chesham and Amersham constituency and Buckinghamshire LEA since 1997 are shown in the following table.

Teachers and teaching assistants in Chesham & Amersham constituency and Buckinghamshire: 1997 to 2003

	Chesham & Amersham constituency		*Buckinghamshire LEA*	
	FTE number of teachers[1]	*FTE number of teaching assistants*[1,2]	*FTE number of teachers*[3]	*FTE number of teaching assistants*[1,2]
1997	850	80	[4]—	[4]—
1998	860	100	3,790	460
1999	870	90	3,740	470
2000	880	100	3,930	490
2001	890	110	3,900	570
2002	930	170	4,030	760
2003	[5]860	160	4,240	710

[1] *Source:* Annual Schools Census.
[2] Includes nursery assistants, special needs support staff, minority ethnic pupil support staff and other teaching assistants
[3] *Source:* 618g annual survey of teacher number and vacancies
[4] Not available on a consistent basis because of local government reorganisation
[5] provisional
Note:
Teacher numbers for 2003 from the Annual School Census are provisional. Annual School Census and 618G have a survey data of the third Thursday in January.
Source:
618g annual survey of teacher number and vacancies.

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the local authorities' schools funding taskforce. [119761]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 18 June 2003]:* The Department for Education and Skills is working in partnership with LEA and school representatives to identify changes that need to be made to the funding system for 2004–05 so that all schools can expect to receive a reasonable per pupil settlement in that year. We have been discussing how best to ensure sufficient funding increases for every LEA; the right balance between support through general grant and through ring-fenced and targeted grant; how to give confidence that schools and pupils will receive the money intended for them; the right balance between school and LEA central provision; how to ensure that that variations in the budget increases received by different schools within each LEA are appropriate and fair; and how work force reform, in line with the National Agreement, can be sustained. We will aim to ensure that changes are in place in good time to allow LEAs and schools to plan for 2004–05 and so provide increased predictability and stability in school funding.

Sixth Form Colleges

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent representations he has received on the adequacy of public funding to support pay increases in sixth form colleges; and if he will make a statement. [131001]

Alan Johnson: On 1 September I met with sixth form college employers' and union representatives to discuss funding for sixth form colleges. The outcome of the Spending Review 2002 provides a good settlement for the FE sector. In 2003–04 assumed total funding for further education allocated to the Learning and Skills Council has increased by 6 per cent. in real terms compared with 2002–03. The funding allocated to the Learning and Skills Council also assumes there will be year on year real terms increases in total funding

for further education of 7 per cent. in 2004–05 and 5 per cent. in 2005–06. Sixth form colleges are independent organisations. It is for them to determine the level of pay increases for their staff in negotiation with the trade unions within the resources available.

Students

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information he collates on possible changes to the pattern of student enrolment paying *(a)* controlled undergraduate fees and *(b)* undergraduate fees as a result of his student support proposals. [129991]

Alan Johnson: We do not have any specific estimates of the possible change to the pattern of student number enrolments as we do not know which universities will be charging the variable fees and which will be charging controlled fees. However initial analysis suggests that we can expect enrolment to continue to rise over the course of the decade. We continue to monitor enrolment through a number of sources such as UCAS, HESA and HEFCE.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research he has collated on the opportunity costs incurred by full-time students in higher education. [129729]

Alan Johnson: The opportunity costs incurred by students participating in higher education (HE) comprise the earnings they could have earned had they not been studying net of the income they receive through working during their studies. Both these income streams vary between individuals.

Individuals with two or more A-levels who have been in the labour market for up to three years have average net annual earnings of around £8,300[1]. Over a three year, full-time HE course this would be equivalent to around £25,000 in foregone earnings.

However, many students also work while studying. Student Income and Expenditure Survey (SIES) data indicate that full-time first-degree students typically earn around £5,000[2] over the duration of their course. This means that an overall opportunity cost for full-time first-degree students who enter with two or more A-levels is on average around £20,000. However, this average figure will vary widely between individual students.

[1] Based on spring 2003 LFS data for the UK, covering men and women aged 18–24 whose highest qualifications are two or more A-levels. Individuals are assumed to be UK employees who have been in the labour market for up to three years. Individuals are assumed to work 52 weeks per year.

[2] Based on SIES 1998/99 data for full-time first-degree UK students aged 18 to 24-years-old. Net earnings are up-rated by the average earnings index in order to get equivalent spring 2003 data.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Office for Fair Access will share *(a)* chief executives and *(b)* accounting officers. [129732]

Alan Johnson: As we set out in "Widening Participation in Higher Education", the Office for Fair Access will be separate from but supported by HEFCE. It will exercise its independent judgment in considering and monitoring access agreements. We will give more detail on its organisation when we introduce the Higher Education Bill.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if the remission of tuition fees for higher education by British public sector organisations has been approved as *(a)* a state aid under European legislation and *(b)* non-taxable under British revenue law. [129733]

Alan Johnson: State aid (as defined under Article 87(1) of the European Treaty) does not apply to educational functions such as the remission of tuition fees for higher education students. There is therefore no need for approval.

No special approvals are required for the treatment of fee remission arrangements. Existing tax law provides methods by which such arrangements can be exempt from tax, depending on the circumstances.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has for obtaining information on *(a)* students' financial situation, *(b)* living conditions and *(c)* academic experiences from interested bodies, with particular reference to the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the National Union of Students, and for disseminating information between these bodies. [129764]

Alan Johnson: The Department has conducted a Student Income and Expenditure Survey (SIES) for the 2002/03 academic year. It will provide up-to-date information on the finances and living arrangements for full-time, young, single, childless, English and Welsh domiciled students who are undertaking an undergraduate degree at publicly funded higher education institutions in England and Wales in 2002/03. The National Union of Students (NUS) and Universities UK (UUK) are represented on the SIES steering committee.

The new National Student Survey, which is being developed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, will collect students' views on their learning experiences from 2004 onwards. The Council is working with key sector partners, including the National Union of Students, to develop the Survey. The results of the Survey will be publicly available.

Sure Start

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many relevant children there are in each of the Birkenhead Sure Start areas; and how many of these children have been contacted by Sure Start. [129170]

Margaret Hodge: The three Sure Start local programmes in Birkenhead were developed and approved on different timescales. This is reflected in their level of activity and the number of children they are reaching.

Sure Start Birkenhead North was approved in August 2000 and has reported that since then it has contacted over 95 per cent. of the 648 children living in the area. Sure Start Ferries was approved in January 2002 and has estimated that it has to date contacted over 74 per cent. of the 741 children living in the area. Sure

Start Birkenhead Central was approved in January 2003 and has so far contacted 33 per cent. of the 868 children living in the area.

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the benefits of the Sure Start Scheme. [130383]

Margaret Hodge: A large scale, comprehensive evaluation of the Sure Start programme is under way. This will establish what works to improve outcomes for young children and their families, in the short, medium and long term.

By its nature many of the benefits of Sure Start will be long term: so the evaluation is tracking 8,000 children over time—initially at nine months, three years and five years—and then beyond. The first information will be available by spring 2004.

The evaluation is also examining how the programme is being implemented. To date assessments have been published on Setting Up Sure Start, Early Experiences of Implementing Sure Start, Characteristics of Sure Start Areas and Fathers in Sure Start Areas. These assessments show that many of the necessary building blocks for successful Sure Start programmes, such as joint working and involvement of parents in planning and delivering services, are being put in place.

These publications and further information about the National Evaluation can be found at www.surestart.gov.uk/ensuringquality/research/localprogrammeevaluation/

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many Sure Start schemes there are in the north east; and what their total cost has been. [130384]

Margaret Hodge: A total of 63 Sure Start Local Programmes have been approved in the north east of England. To date we have given approval for over £33.2 million capital and paid just over £46.1 million in revenue for Sure Start Local Programmes in the North East of England to help reach 238,000 0 to 3-years-old children. Some of the programmes have started delivering full Sure Start services for parents and families in their area and others are at various stages of delivery.

Teachers

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the relationship between SATS scores and the results of teacher assessment at Key Stage Two. [129030]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 11 September 2003]:* Testing of all pupils at the end of each key stage of education provides objective evidence, against a national standard, of what children have learned in the core subjects. Teacher assessment is an important part of the overall statutory assessment framework and covers the full range and scope of the programmes of study, taking into account evidence of achievement in a range of contexts, including that gained through discussion and observation.

The evidence from both types of assessment, together provides, valuable information to support the future learning of each pupil.

The results from teacher assessment and tests are broadly consistent, but they are derived from different sources of evidence of a pupil's attainment.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers he estimates will lose their jobs in *(a)* the Chesham and Amersham constituency and *(b)* Buckinghamshire as a result of the financial problems encountered by schools in England in the next school year; and how many (i) teaching and (ii) other staff posts he estimates will remain unfilled for the same reason. [129890]

Mr. Miliband: My right hon. Friend has made no such estimate. Provisional statistics on teacher and support staff numbers and teacher vacancies at January 2003 were published in April in Statistical First Release 10/2003. Statistics released on 9 September provided regional and LEA level breakdowns of these figures. Provisional national figures for January 2004 are due to be published next April. As I made clear in my reply to the hon. Member of 8 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 112w, the broad assessment of changes in teaching staff numbers made by my Department in liaison with local education authorities (LEAs) in May this year did not provide a definitive picture.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the subjects which have missed targets for teacher training recruitment in the last year for which figures are available. [127284]

Mr. Miliband: My Department has moved from a system which obliges teacher training providers to aim for a particular intake target to one that incentivises them to recruit as many good candidates as they can in the areas where new teachers are needed most. That is why 4,000 more conventional teacher training places and over 5,000 more employment-based training places will be funded in 2003/04 than were being funded in 1996/97. The table shows the number of conventional teacher training places funded in 2002/03 by subject and phase; the number of entrants who took up these places; and the number of recruits to employment-based teacher training in that year. Numbers of funded employment-based training places are not specified in advance by subject or phase.

2002/03	*Initial teacher training places*	*Entrants to initial teacher training*	*Entrants to employment based teacher training*
Primary	14,000	14,451	1,659
Secondary			
Mathematics	1,940	1,673	382
English and drama	2,350	2,479	649
Science	2,850	2,701	506
Modern Foreign Languages	2,050	1,732	221
Technology[1]	2,500	2,404	653
History	950	985	79
Geography	1,100	946	59
Physical Education	1,200	1,325	138
Art	850	885	82
Music	700	596	68
Religious Education	700	576	62
Citizenship	200	185	15

2002/03	Initial teacher training places	Entrants to initial teacher training	Entrants to employment based teacher training
Other	300	174	100
Secondary Reserve	100	—	—
Total secondary	17,790	16,661	3,014
Overall Total	31,790	31,112	4,673
Fast Track	n/a	117	n/a
Total (including Fast Track)	31,790	31,229	4,673

[1] Technology includes design and technology, business studies and information technology

Source:
TTA

Teenage Pregnancy

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what evaluation he has made of the effectiveness of the Teenage Pregnancy Unit working with local teenage pregnancy units; and if he will make a statement. [120769]

Margaret Hodge: The Teenage Pregnancy Unit was established in 1999 with a cross Whitehall remit to manage implementation of the Strategy. The first independent evaluation report of the Strategy, published in 2002, commended the joint working between the Teenage Pregnancy Unit, Regional Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinators based in Government Offices and Local Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinators who lead the implementation of strategies in each top tier local authority. The second annual report of the national evaluation will be published shortly.

The report acknowledged the success of these arrangements as a major factor in wielding influence at local level. The effectiveness of joint working was also recognised in the first annual report of the Independent Advisory Group on Teenage Pregnancy, published in 2001. The importance of joint working was reinforced in the second annual report of the Independent Advisory Group on Teenage Pregnancy, published in July 2003.

There are very encouraging signs that the Government's overall teenage pregnancy strategy is working. Data for 2001 published in February by the Office for National Statistics shows that conceptions among under 18-year-olds in England fell by 3 per cent. and represents a total reduction of 10 per cent. since 1998. For under 16s, the rate is 4 per cent. lower than in 2000 and represents a 10 per cent. reduction since 1998.

University Medical Schools (Funding)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 18 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 749W, which university medical schools are in receipt of funding from the improving retention pot as a result of admitting full-time students under 21 with an A-level points score of less than 3 C's to study medicine; how many such students each medical school has admitted; and how much such funding each school has attracted. [131004]

Alan Johnson: The Higher Education Funding Council for England, in making funding allocations to institutions to improve retention, does not allocate funds to particular individuals, departments or schools. How they are distributed internally is entirely at the discretion of institutions. Information on how much funding is passed on to individual medical schools is not available.

University Research

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will report progress in preparing a single measure of research excellence on the basis of collaboration between university departments and external partners. [129992]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The Government are working with other partners to develop appropriate metrics for the science base and knowledge transfer.

This work will be informed by the conclusions of the review of the Research Assessment Exercise which is due to report during the next few months.

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proposals the Government have to increase funding for departmental research in UK universities. [127294]

Alan Johnson: The Government have announced the most generous research settlement for many years, with overall expenditure on science and research increasing by £1.25 billion a year by 2005–06 compared to 2002–03—around 30 per cent. in real terms. In our grant letter to the Higher Education Funding Council for England this year, we announced increased quality-related funding for research in higher education institutions of £80 million in 2003–04, £107 million in 2004–05 and £246 million in 2005–06.

Visual Impairment

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will assess the level of accessibility for visually impaired people in *(a)* UK Online Centres and *(b)* Online Centres in Wales. [129946]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* The Department allocated £199 million of Capital Modernisation Funding (CMF) to fund around 2,800 UK online centres specifically to provide ICT access to the disadvantaged. One main target group centres were set up to reach people with disabilities. Centres are expected to demonstrate that they comply with current requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and other legal requirements around Equal Opportunities. This element is scrutinised as part of the contract monitoring process.

One way that my Department is looking to improve accessibility for the disabled and visually impaired in UK online centres is a package of 811 Assistive Technology kits. These kits have been made available to help some centres meet the immediate, basic, access requirements of a wide range of disabled people. For example, for visually-impaired users the package includes a large keyboard with big keys as well as magnification and screen reading software.

The Department also has contracts in place with key organisations such as AbilityNet, Direct Support and Becta to ensure that there is adequate support and guidance for UK online centres and centre staff on a wide range of issues including people disabilities.

I am afraid I am unable to advise you on Online Centres in Wales as the DfES are only responsible for centres in England. May I suggest you speak to National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay, Cardiff CF99 1NA, Tel: 029 20 825111.

DEFENCE

Iraq

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the incident in the Mansur district of Baghdad on 27 July, with particular reference to the number of Iraqi civilians killed by US forces during that incident. [129643]

Mr. Hoon: UK Armed Forces were not involved in the incident in question. We do not possess sufficient information to comment on incidents involving Coalition partners' Armed Forces.

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of coalition forces were killed in Iraq from the end of the conflict to 1 September. [128944]

Mr. Ingram: Between the end of the conflict and 1 September, 16 United Kingdom armed forces personnel and one member of the Defence Fire Service (DFS) had died. Eleven, all from the armed forces, were killed in action or subsequently died of wounds received and six, including the member of the DFS, died in non-battle accidents or from natural causes.

We do not hold data on the numbers of fatalities suffered by other members of the coalition.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions the Government has had with allies on the use of NATO peacekeepers in Iraq. [130778]

Mr. Ingram: The possibility of NATO involvement in stabilisation operations in Iraq has been the subject of discussion within NATO and, bilaterally, between allies. Following the NATO ministerial meeting in June 2003, a communiqué was released that read:

> "The North Atlantic Council will review NATO's contribution to the stabilisation efforts on a regular basis."

The North Atlantic Council has also agreed for NATO to support the Polish-led Multinational Division (Centre South) in Iraq. This support includes assistance with the force generation of the Multinational Division (Centre South), provision of NATO owned and operated satellite communications and advice on logistics.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his written ministerial statement of 8 September 2003, *Official Report*, columns 2–3WS, on Iraq, what funds have been set aside to cover the costs of the additional British troops to be sent to Iraq. [131106]

Mr. Hoon: The Chancellor of the Exchequer has set aside £3 billion to a special reserve for the cost of military operations in Iraq. The Ministry of Defence drew down £1 billion of this reserve at Spring Supplementary Estimates 2002–03.

It is too early to estimate the costs likely to arise in 2003–04. Once these are known, additional funding, if required, will be sought by MOD in the normal way through Supplementary Estimates.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether all sites in Iraq where cluster munitions were deployed by the coalition have been identified. [129602]

Mr. Ingram: Those areas where it is known Coalition Forces dropped explosive ordnance including cluster bombs, have been noted and work is currently underway to inspect and mark these areas in order to confirm the presence of unexploded ordnance. This work is being carried out by United Kingdom and Coalition Armed Forces and Non-Governmental Organisations. In areas outside the UK Area of Operation, it is for the Coalition Partners concerned to comment on their progress.

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment he has made of the degree of success achieved in integrating tri-service United Kingdom personnel into the United States Army V Corps Headquarters staff at Headquarters, Combined Joint Task Force, in Baghdad. [130333]

Mr. Ingram: Following its involvement in the recent successful combat operations in Iraq, Headquarters V (US) Corps assumed the role of Headquarters Combined Task Force 7 (HQ CTF 7).

The Headquarters commands a multinational organisation of some 30 nations. It ensures that the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF7) provides the military support required by the Administrator and the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). CJTF7 is commanded by an American three star officer. He has two deputies, one of whom is a UK two star officer (who also acts as the senior British military representative in Iraq). UK military staffs have been embedded in the HQ since May and now fill some 30 posts. We judge that the integration of tri-service United Kingdom personnel in the Headquarters, has gone very well.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* five most used weapons and *(b)* five most expensive weapons used in the Iraq conflict were; what the unit value of each of these weapons was; how many of each of these weapons were used; and if he will make a statement. [113262]

Mr. Ingram: The five most common weapons deployed by UK forces during Operation TELIC were:

SA80 A2 rifle and variants;
Browning 9mm pistol;
General Purpose Machine Gun;
L2A2 hand grenade;
LAW 94 Light Anti-armour Weapon.

Calculating the unit costs of weapons used during the Coalition's military action will take some time since they will include the costs of weapons consumed in excess of peacetime levels and the cost of repairing and replacing

weapons and ordnance that was destroyed or damaged. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as the work is complete.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many leaflets have been distributed by UK forces in Iraq giving information about the dangers of unexploded ordnance since the conflict began. [131142]

Mr. Ingram: Providing a safe, secure and risk free environment for the Iraqi people is a key aspect of restoration activity for the Coalition. The United Kingdom has made a significant effort to educate the local population in its area of operations about the dangers of mines and unexploded ordnance. To date, over 4,000 leaflets containing information about the dangers of unexploded ordnance have been distributed in theatre by UK troops. Those troops involved in explosive ordnance disposal continue to distribute leaflets.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 1 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 901W, on warehouse looting in Basra, whether UK forces will increase their patrols as a result. [129999]

Mr. Ingram: United Kingdom forces currently have 12 personnel from 1st Battalion The Kings Regiment based at the warehouse in Basra. Their role is primarily administrative but also to support and oversee the local Iraqi security guards who are directly responsible for the security of the warehouse.

The physical security of the warehouse has been improved, with perimeter fences being secured and better lighting installed, and the guards have successfully apprehended a number of would be looters. UK forces continue to conduct routine patrols in the area of the warehouse. Commanders on the ground—who are best placed to judge—do not currently judge that there is a need to increase the frequency of these patrols.

Armoured Vehicles

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the value to the Ministry of Defence is of the planned sales of armoured land rovers; how many have been sold in the past two years; and how many are up for sale. [130791]

Mr. Ingram: The financial returns to the Ministry of Defence for the planned sale of armoured land rovers is very much dependent on the vehicles' condition and the requirements of the market and therefore cannot be accurately determined. However, the average return to the MOD for each of those vehicles already sold is approximately £1,500, following completion of removal of armour and repair/making good of any damage resulting from the removal process. To date some 26 vehicles have been sold in the past two years and eight scrapped due to poor condition. There remain 82 vehicles that could be sold.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the procurement process for the *(a)* TRACER and *(b)* MRAV armoured vehicle programmes. [130622]

Mr. Ingram: Both the Tactical Reconnaissance Armoured Combat Equipment (TRACER) and Multi Role Armoured Vehicle (MRAV) programmes were subject to our normal procurement processes, which are kept under regular review.

The joint United Kingdom/United States decision to terminate the collaborative TRACER programme came at the end of its Assessment Phase and took account both of an emerging, wider requirement for deployable, rapid effect forces, and the potential cost of the TRACER solution. I am satisfied, therefore, that this phase of the procurement process fulfilled its purpose, namely to take account of such factors before deciding whether to commit to a major investment decision.

On MRAV, I refer the hon. Member to the statement I made on 17 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 71WS, about the UK's decision to withdraw from this tri-national programme, which is managed by the Organisation for Joint Armaments Cooperation (OCCAR) on behalf of the UK, Germany and the Netherlands. Officials intend to conduct a 'Post Project Evaluation' study once the United Kingdom has completed its withdrawal from the programme.

Arms Exports

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on Britain's arms dealings with Israel. [131364]

Mr. Ingram: Export licence applications for items to be exported to Israel are assessed by the DTI on a case-by-case basis against the consolidated European Union and national arms export licensing criteria in the light of the circumstances prevailing at the time.

The Government's procurement policy is laid out in the Defence Industrial Policy reference OP DEF 2002/1, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent by his Department in each year since 1997–98 on promoting British military equipment and arms sales to foreign customers. [131111]

Mr. Ingram: The Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO) of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) plays a fundamental role in implementing the Government's policy of supporting legitimate United Kingdom defence exports.

Operating costs for DESO in each year since financial year 1997–98 are as follows.

£ million

Financial year	Expenditure	Receipts	Net operating costs
1998–99	45.359	-29.342	16.017
1999–2000	46.473	-34.977	11.496
2000–01	55.81	-41.430	14.380
2001–02	48.930	-37.853	11.077
2002–03	56.944	-44.407	12.537

Main sources of offsetting income for DESO are three Government to Government project offices, where the customer country pays MOD costs, and the Disposal Services Agency where costs are met from revenue.

DESO raises other sources of income from charging industry for activities undertaken on their behalf where Government independence from industry is not essential and when costs can be directly identified calculated and recovered from individual companies.

Savings to the defence budget come from spreading the fixed overhead cost of equipment over the longer production runs generated by exports, from the sale of surplus military equipment to overseas governments and from Commercial Exploitation Levy receipts on exports of equipment developed using public money.

Bat Colony (RAF Halton)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress so far and expected timetable of measures to investigate and manage the bat colony at the Princess Mary Hospital site, RAF Halton. [129398]

Mr. Caplin: Following the completion of the bat survey on the Princess Mary Hospital site in July this year, and at the request of English Nature, Defence Estates has commissioned WSP Environmental (licensed bat ecologists) to undertake evening emergent and dawn swarming surveys to establish the population size of each roost. These surveys will be completed by the middle of September.

Based on the results of these surveys, WSP Environmental will prepare a mitigation strategy that will outline the measures to be put in place to ensure the protection of the bats. This mitigation strategy will be submitted in draft to English Nature and Aylesbury Vale District Council on the 19 September and subject to their agreement will be incorporated into the Environmental Statement which will be submitted with the outline planning application for the Princess Mary Hospital site at the end of the September.

Application for the DEFRA licence, implementation of the mitigation measures and the management of the bat roosts will be the responsibility of the eventual purchaser of the site.

Bosnia

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the timescale for EU forces taking over the SFOR mission in Bosnia. [130779]

Mr. Ingram: No decisions have yet been taken on an end date for the SFOR operation, or on the arrangements for any follow-on missions.

Commonwealth Service Personnel

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what surveys of *(a)* Commonwealth families and *(b)* Fijian families have been carried out to ascertain their views on life in the armed forces away from their homes; and if he will make a statement. [130850]

Mr. Caplin: The Army carried out an informal survey of Foreign and Commonwealth soldiers and their families in 2002. No other surveys have been conducted by any of the Services specifically targeting Commonwealth or Fijian families. The data revealed no large variants between different ethnic groups, and Foreign and Commonwealth soldiers have generally the same level of occurrences on most issues, although there is a slightly higher level of cases on welfare and immigration. The Adjutant General's staff are now taking forward recommendations arising from the survey.

Each Service, however, conducts Continuous Attitude Surveys of serving personnel to measure the morale and understand the concerns of their people.

The questions cover a wide variety of subjects, including families, welfare and quality of life. The surveys are sent to a randomly selected sample, which may therefore include Commonwealth or Fijians, but they are not specifically targeted.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to provide *(a)* discounted telephone calls and *(b)* discounted air fares to Commonwealth servicemen and women and their families for communication with their friends and family in their country of origin; and if he will make a statement. [130851]

Mr. Caplin: There are currently no plans to provide discounted air fares or discounted telephone calls for personnel from Commonwealth countries, whose Terms and Conditions of Service (TACOS) are the same as for all other personnel. However, under the "Leave to Countries Abroad" (DOMCOL) scheme, a Service individual normally domiciled abroad may accumulate part of their Annual Leave Allowance each year over a period not exceeding five years for the purpose of visiting the country of their domicile. Under the scheme, which is subject to specific qualifying conditions, personnel are entitled to travel at public expense once in five years after five years service to the country of normal domicile. Requirements for the DOMCOL scheme include that the individual be single, but married personnel whose family are resident abroad and have been separated from their family for the whole of the five-year qualifying period may also register under the scheme.

The Ministry of Defence is aware that current TACOS vary between the Services and consequently do not offer all Commonwealth personnel the same opportunities for compassionate leave and travel arrangements as for those ordinarily domiciled in the United Kingdom, and is reviewing TACOS accordingly.

For those personnel on deployed operations the Operational Welfare Package (OWP) provides 20 minutes of publicly funded telephone calls per week for all

personnel, regardless of nationality or country of origin and allows them to maintain telephone contact with their families and friends overseas.

Continuous Attitude Surveys

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when he expects the next continuous attitude surveys in each service will be *(a)* conducted and *(b)* published; in what format the report of the surveys will be published; and if he will make a statement; [130849]

(2) what plans he has to publish the armed forces continuous attitude surveys; and if he will make a statement. [130848]

Mr. Caplin: The next Continuous Attitude Survey (CAS) for the Royal Navy will be issued at the end of September with a report expected at the end of December 2003. For the Army the next survey is scheduled to be sent out in December with a report due in the spring. For the RAF the next survey will be issued on 1 November with the results reported later next year. The RAF report with the 2002 results will however be produced on 1 November. All three reports are produced electronically and distributed to internal stakeholders.

Copies of the questions asked in each of the CASs are held in the Library of the House. There are no immediate plans to publish the answers. We are however reviewing the range of survey material to release and appropriate ways of putting it into the public domain.

Daedalus Site

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department is proposing to make further use itself of the Daedalus site at Lee-on-the-Solent. [131263]

Mr. Caplin: The Ministry of Defence continues to assess the scope for estate rationalisation across the whole of mainland Great Britain. Areas such as Portsmouth, Gosport, and Fareham currently accommodating a high incidence of MOD activity are a particular focus for this work.

The Daedalus site may present an opportunity to facilitate rationalisation within these areas or elsewhere. No specific recommendations, for the Daedalus main site, have yet been made and it will be some time before the necessary studies have been conducted and completed.

Defence Diversification Agency

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress towards creating a Defence Diversification Agency. [130381]

Mr. Ingram: The Defence Diversification Agency (DDA) was created in 1999 as part of the then Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA). In July 2001 the DDA became part of the Ministry of Defence head office when QinetiQ plc and the Defence Science and Technology Laboratories were created out of DERA.

Over the four years it has been operating the DDA has made very good progress. It has assisted over 2,000 firms with access to MOD's knowledge bases and facilitated more than 400 contracts to transfer defence technology and know how into the civil sector. DDA has also arranged for more than 40 commercial technology offerings to be made to MOD programmes, which has resulted in some 20 contracts to date.

Defence Equipment Exhibition

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what subsidy is provided by his Department to the Defence Systems and Equipment International Exhibition held in London in September 2003; and if he will make a statement. [129914]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 20 May 2003, *Official Report*, columns 677–78W) which gave an estimate of the direct cost to the Ministry of Defence of DSEI 2003. The final cost of the exhibition remains to be established.

Departmental Finance

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library copies of *(a)* operating cost statements, *(b)* statements of recognised gains and losses, *(c)* cash flow statements and *(d)* the fixed asset register maintained by his Department's management groupings since the financial year 1999–2000. [130747]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what financial information is maintained by his Department's management groupings. [130748]

Mr. Ingram: A management grouping is the lowest level at which a complete set of financial ledgers is kept. The Department's management grouping holds all the accounting information necessary to prepare the management grouping resource accounts. It also provides the relevant accounting information to the Top Level Budget (TLB) holder to enable the TEB to prepare its resource account submissions for the publication of the overall departmental resource accounts.

Departmental Relocation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the possible benefits of moving his Department out of London; and if he will make a statement. [130222]

Mr. Caplin: The Department's estate strategy was set out in 'In Trust and On Trust', published in 2000. The aim is to create a defence estate of the right size, shape and location through corporate management of the estate. The implementation of this strategy has informed our active engagement in the Independent Review on Public Sector Relocation—the Lyons Review—and will continue to do so.

In recent years the Department has relocated a significant amount of defence activity from London. The reviews and evaluations that inform these decisions have generally been undertaken internally, rather than commissioned from external consultants. We evaluated the relocations of the Defence Procurement Agency,

and the Meteorological Office as part of our submission to the Lyons Review, which generally welcomed the actions taken by the Ministry of Defence.

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 8 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 701W, on depleted uranium, what agreement was reached with the United States about use of depleted uranium munitions. [129821]

Mr. Caplin: Decisions on the release of information on the use of depleted uranium (DU) munitions by United States Forces during the recent conflict in Iraq are a matter for the US Department of Defence. There are currently no plans to produce a combined report of DU firings by United Kingdom and US Forces.

Electromagnetic Guns

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment has been made of the effects on the environment of the US electromagnetic gun tests at Dundrennan; [130247]

(2) when the trials of the new US electromagnetic gun at Dundrennan are expected to conclude; [130248]

(3) whether a review is planned of the safety procedures involved in the US electromagnetic gun trials at Dundrennan; [130463]

(4) what representations have been received from the local community on the dangers involved in the trials of the US electromagnetic gun at Dundrennan. [130464]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence and the United States Army have been working together on a collaborative research programme into the Electro-Magnetic gun at Dundrennan range, in Kirkcudbright, since 1993. In December 2002, we jointly signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the US to continue this long-standing project agreement until 2009.

Extensive tests have proven that the electro-magnetic radiation from the gun is negligible and that it has no effect on the environment.

The safe operation of defence ranges is of paramount importance. Safety procedures at Dundrennan have been tried and tested over the last 10 years without incident. Risk assessments are conducted prior to each series of firings and strict operating procedures are followed. Safety procedures are constantly reviewed and updated in line with the progress of the trial, and all safety procedures are independently audited.

We have received a limited number of representations from the local community regarding the possible dangers associated with the Electro-Magnetic gun testing at Dundrennan. The correspondence received specifically focuses on the perceived use of depleted uranium, but also reflects some general concerns, which have been generated by articles in the press. The Electro-Magnetic gun's projectiles do not contain depleted uranium, nor do they contain any explosives.

The high velocity of the projectile round generates the penetrative effect, not the projectile's mass or density.

European Armaments Policy

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the contribution of a European armaments policy to the development of the European security and defence policy; and what contribution his Department has made to the plans of the European Commission to develop such a policy. [130805]

Mr. Ingram: The Government are committed to playing a leading role in the development of European security and defence policy. Working with other European Union partners, we are actively engaged in the creation of an inter-Government Agency in the field of defence capabilities, development, research, and acquisition. The Agency, which will be capability focussed, will, inter alia, promote and enhance European armaments co-operation with the aim of contributing to the military equipment needs of member states in a cost effective and efficient manner. The Government's view of the Commission's initiative to develop European armaments related proposals are set out in the Explanatory Memorandum on European Community Document entitled: "Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Social and Economic Committee of the Regions "European Defence—Industrial and Market Issues: Towards an EU Defence Equipment Policy" Reference Number 8484/03 [COM (2003) 113 final] dated 15 May 2003, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The Government notes that armaments are primarily a matter for European Union member states with any contribution from the Commission being in support of national Governments' initiatives.

Ex-servicemen (Injury Claims)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the decision taken by the War Pensions Agency to redefine the acceptance procedure for ex-service people who make claims for injuries from reasonable doubt to balance of probability. [131322]

Mr. Caplin: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of 17 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 753W.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on Britain's military commitment to the Falkland Islands. [129911]

Mr. Ingram: We are fully committed to ensuring the sovereignty and security of the Falkland Islands.

Food Expenditure

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent on food by his Department and by each agency for which it is responsible in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03; what proportion of that food by value was produced in the United Kingdom; what guidance he has issued to encourage the procurement of home-grown food; and if he will make a statement. [129378]

Mr. Ingram: In 2001–02 the total amount spent on food by the MoD was £114.8 million and in 2002–03 it was £115.7 million. Of these totals, 61 per cent. was spent on products of UK origin; however, 25 per cent. of the food goods purchased by the MoD are not produced or grown in UK.

The MoD's main food supply contractor, 3663, is mandated to give due consideration to British products during the tendering process and to procure them whenever they are competitive.

Future Rapid Effects System

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when the British Army will have its initial operating capability with the Future Rapid Effects System; [130407]

(2) for what reason funding for the Future Rapid Effects System Assessment Phase Planning work has ceased; what the expenditure on this work has been to date; and how the results of this work will be used in the Future Rapid Effects System programme; [130408]

(3) what the next phase of the Future Rapid Effect System project will be; what assessment he has made of the advantages of the next phase being led by *(a)* Alvis Vickers Ltd. and *(b)* a company other than Alvis Vickers Ltd.; and how long he expects it would take to select a contractor other than Alvis Vickers Ltd. through competitive tender; [130410]

(4) what the size was of the co-located industrial Future Rapid Effect System team made up of personnel from Alvis Vickers, BAE Systems and General Dynamics UK in July; and what assessment he has made of the effect on British industry if the next phase of FRES were to be awarded to *(a)* Alvis Vickers and *(b)* a company other than Alvis Vickers. [130411]

Mr. Ingram: The project to introduce a Future Rapid Effect System is currently in its concept phase. As part of this, Alvis Vickers Ltd. (AVL) has recently completed background planning work to develop initial estimates of programme schedule and cost. This work involved some 70 staff drawn from AVL, BAE Systems and General Dynamics (UK) Ltd. and was valued at approximately £4 million. The Department is now considering procurement options and will consider all relevant factors in determining the way forward. The ISD for FRES will not be endorsed until the main investment decision, but on current plans, the intention is to introduce early variants into service around the end of the decade.

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to award a contract for the demonstration and manufacture phase of the Future Rapid Effect System. [130412]

Mr. Ingram: The project to introduce a Future Rapid Effect System is currently in its Concept phase. The Department is now considering procurement options but no date has yet been fixed for the award of contracts for future phases.

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the average age is of the British Army fleets of *(a)* the 430-Series vehicles, *(b)* CVR(T) and *(c)* Saxon; and when these vehicles will be replaced by the Future Rapid Effect System. [130413]

Mr. Ingram: The average age of the British Army fleet for the FV430, CVR(T) and Saxon Light Armoured Vehicles is detailed in the table:

Vehicle	*Average age (years)*
FV430 series	38
CVR(T)	31
Saxon	14

An endorsed in-service date for the Future Rapid Effect System (FRES), and the numbers and types of vehicles to be procured as part of the FRES programme, will not be determined until the assessment phase of the programme has been completed. We are therefore currently unable to confirm which in-service vehicles will be replaced by FRES vehicles or when that might occur.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when and why his Department stopped funding work on FRES Assessment Phase Planning; how much had already been spent on the work; and how it can be used in the further development of the FRES project; [130465]

(2) what estimate he has made of the overall value of the FRES contract when it is let; how many jobs it can be expected to sustain or generate; and how many jobs would be lost in the UK if the contract were to be awarded overseas. [130466]

Mr. Ingram: The project to introduce a Future Rapid Effect System is currently in its concept phase. Acquisition costs are yet to be established but could be in the region of £6 billion.

Industry has undertaken some background planning work, under an Assessment Phase Planning contract valued at approximately £4 million, to develop initial estimates of programme schedule and cost. This work is now complete. The Department is considering procurement options and will have regard to all relevant factors, including industrial issues, in determining the way forward.

Mr. Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment has been made of the Future Rapid Effects System project in relation to *(a)* security of supply, *(b)* export potential and *(c)* industrial capabilities; [130705]

(2) how much has been spent on the Future Rapid Effects System; [130706]

(3) whether overseas companies will be invited to bid for a lead role in the Future Rapid Effects System project; [130707]

(4) whether there has been a change in the projected in-service date of the Future Rapid Effects System; [130708]

(5) what estimate has been made of the number of United Kingdom jobs that will be *(a)* created and *(b)* secured by the Future Rapid Effects System project. [130709]

Mr. Ingram: The total value of work done to date in support of concept and planning work on a Future Rapid Effects System (FRES) is approximately £7 million; this includes £4 million for Assessment Phase Planning work carried out by Alvis Vickers Ltd. to develop initial estimates of programme schedule and cost. The Department is now considering procurement options. No decision has yet been reached with regard to commercial arrangements for future phases. All relevant factors will be taken into account in determining the way forward. The ISD for FRES will not be endorsed until the main investment decision, but on current plans, the intention is to introduce early variants into service around the end of the decade.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when he expects a decision to be made on the awarding of the contract for the Future Rapid Effect System; [130789]

(2) whether he intends to have the assessment phase of the Future Rapid Effect System conducted by an independent body. [130784]

Mr. Ingram: The Future Rapid Effect System project is in the Concept Phase. We are currently reviewing procurement options and no decision has yet been made on how to take the programme forward. An announcement on the way ahead will be made later in the year.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made with the Future Rapid Effects System; what armoured vehicles will be produced; what roles they will fulfil; and whether the in-service date has changed. [129192]

Mr. Ingram: The project to introduce a Future Rapid Effect System is currently in its concept phase. As part of this phase the Department has been undertaking background planning work in order to inform decisions on how to take the programme forward. The Department is now considering procurement options.

Studies planned for the next phase of the programme will determine the make up of the FRES fleet. Only when these studies have been completed will we know what armoured vehicles will be produced and what role they will fulfil in the rapid intervention force.

The ISD for FRES will not be endorsed until the main investment decision, but on current plans, the intention is to introduce early variants into service around the end of the decade.

Gurkhas

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many and what percentage of the total Ghurkha forces in the years 1997 to 2003, leaving the armed forces before 15 years maximum service, *(a)* left voluntarily, *(b)* were made redundant, *(c)* had their employment terminated for other operational reasons, *(d)* were invalided out and *(e)* left for other reasons. [130360]

Mr. Caplin: All data in the tables are taken from the soldiers' Record of Service.

Data given are for Ghurkha other ranks only as there are no officers that fall into the categories described in the question.

Number of Ghurkha soldiers who left the service with less than 15 years service[1]

Reason	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Left voluntarily	0	0	0	0	0	0
Redundant	140	*	0	0	0	0
Discipline/misconduct	*	*	*	0	0	0
Invalided	*	*	0	0	0	0
Completed service	20	10	20	*	*	0
Death	*	*	*	0	*	*

[1] Note that all numbers in the data table are rounded to the nearest 10, numbers less than five are represented with a "*" to preserve confidentiality.

Percentage of Ghurkha soldiers who left the service with less than 15 years service

Reason	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Left voluntarily	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Redundant	4.2	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Discipline/misconduct	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Invalided	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Completed Service	0.5	0.2	0.7	0.1	0.1	0.0
Death	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0

The 140 personnel shown as redundant in the years 1997–98 reflect the drawdown of the Brigade of Ghurkhas at the time of the handover of Hong Kong in 1997. The Army Personnel Centre have confirmed that they are all in receipt of a service pension.

Of the 50 shown as having completed service before 15 years in years 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000, inquiries through the Army Personnel Centre have revealed several individuals were actually made redundant and are therefore in receipt of a pension as a

result of the drawdown. Virtually all of the remaining individuals are in receipt of a pension either because they received condonation of service to increase their reckonable service to 15 years or are in receipt of other types of pension as appropriate (Liberalised Family Pension or Ordinary Family Pension).

Hercules

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to buy back some of the C-130K Hercules aircraft sold to Lockheed Martin for onward sale. [112687]

Mr. Ingram: As part of the agreement signed in March 1995 to acquire C-130J aircraft, 24 C-130K Hercules aircraft were returned to Lockheed Martin Aero between November 2000 and July 2002 in part exchange. There are no plans for the Department to re-acquire any of these.

ITAR Waiver

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what effects the EU proposals on the *(a)* harmonisation of European rules on procurement, *(b)* the simplified licence system to facilitate the circulation of components and defence equipment between EU countries and *(c)* the co-ordination of European research and development in defence industries will have on (i) UK defence industrial relations with the US and (ii) the proposed ITAR waiver. [130786]

Mr. Ingram: In all of these considerations our overriding aim is to maintain effective relations on both sides of the Atlantic. At the same time, based on the Government's open and transparent defence industrial policy, we will continue to press for increased market access for United Kingdom defence companies in both the United States and Europe.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what effects developments in the US Congress and Buy American proposals are having on the UK's negotiations with the US Government to secure an ITAR waiver. [130787]

Mr. Ingram: The Government continues to do all it can to support the United States Administration in its scrutiny of the waiver for the United Kingdom from the US International Traffic in Arms Regulations. An amendment to the State Department Authorizations Bill, to support a waiver for the UK, is to be discussed in the autumn in Conference between the Senate and House of Representatives. It goes without saying that the Government would very much regret any attempt by Congress to impose damaging restrictions on the ability of UK companies to access the US defence market, which could only be detrimental to our mutual interests.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects negotiations with the US Government on an ITAR waiver for the UK to be concluded. [130788]

Mr. Ingram: Negotiations were completed with the US Administration in May 2003 on the text of an unclassified waiver for the UK from the US International Traffic in Arms Regulations.

Licences (EU Harmonisation)

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with European partners on the simplified licence system to facilitate the circulation of components and defence equipment between EU countries; and when he expects such a licence system to come into effect. [130794]

Nigel Griffiths: I have been asked to reply.

There is already in place the Letter of Intent (LOI) arrangements that provide a simplified licensing system to facilitate the transfer of defence equipment for joint projects involving the LOI Partners that the UK supports. In addition, the European Commission in its Communication, "Towards an EU Defence Equipment Policy" (COM 2003 113 final of 11 March 2003), has proposed an impact analysis to establish the value of any Community-level legislative initiative to simplify intra-community transfers of defence-related goods. Work on this will start at the end of 2004.

Low Flying

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many low flying sorties by military jet aircraft of the *(a)* NATO air forces and *(b)* RAF were carried out last year within the UK flying system. [129197]

Mr. Caplin: The information is not held in the form requested. The amount of military low flying that takes place in the United Kingdom is expressed in hours rather than by number of sorties, which can vary significantly from minutes to several hours. A statement on the Pattern of Low Flying Across the UK is published annually, with copies placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The statement for the training year 2002–03 records that foreign-based aircraft were booked into the UK Low Flying System for some 174 hours (this figure covers all foreign aircraft with the exception of United States Air Forces in Europe (USAFE) aircraft which are based in the UK). The total amount of booked low flying by all military aircraft was some 47,058 hours.

The statement for the training year 2002–03 records the amount of booked low flying in Low Flying Area 7 (an area that broadly equates to the land area of Wales, except for a small area of northeast Powys) was some 7,635 hours.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many low flying military sorties were undertaken within Low Flying Area 7 of the UK low flying system in 2002. [129198]

Mr. Caplin: The information is not held in the form requested. The amount of military low flying that takes place in the United Kingdom is better expressed in hours rather than by number of sorties, which can vary significantly from minutes to several hours. On this basis, a statement on the Pattern of Low Flying Across the UK is published annually, with copies placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The statement for the training year 2002–03 records that the amount of booked low flying in Low Flying Area 7 (an area that broadly equates to the land area of Wales, except for a small area of northeast Powys) was approximately 7,635 hours.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) in which military conflicts of the past decade low flying tactics have been used by the RAF; [129202]

(2) how many sorties have been flown by UK RAF pilots at a level of 100 ft during *(a)* military conflicts over the past six years and *(b)* the recent war in Iraq. [129216]

Mr. Caplin: Low flying tactics have been used in military conflicts in the Balkans, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and Iraq. Although fast jet low flying has not been employed in all of these conflicts, I can confirm that a number of fast jet sorties were flown at low level during the recent operation in Iraq. The heights at which operational sorties are undertaken vary according to the assessed threat at the time. Details of the number of sorties and the heights at which they were flown are not held centrally.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements govern the training of foreign nationals in low flying military exercises by the RAF. [129203]

Mr. Caplin: Low flying in the United Kingdom by non UK-based foreign air forces, whether in RAF-led exercises or any other training, is closely controlled and generally only permitted on a reciprocal basis. Foreign aircrew are bound by the same restrictions as those that apply to UK aircrew, but additionally are not generally permitted to operate under more favourable conditions than those applied to our forces in the country concerned. All foreign aircrew receive a face to face brief from an appropriately qualified member of British forces before they can operate in the UK Low Flying System.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what percentage of low flying military aircraft exercises conducted in the United Kingdom in each of the past 10 years were undertaken by foreign nationals; [129204]

(2) how many foreign pilots have been involved in low flying military training exercises in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Wales in each of the last 10 years. [129206]

Mr. Caplin: Low flying military exercises are not generally conducted by foreign air forces alone. The number of pilots involved in low flying is not recorded centrally. The amount of low flying by foreign military aircraft is typically less than 1 per cent. of all the low flying training that takes place in the United Kingdom.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many accidents involving low flying military aircraft in the United Kingdom have been reported in each of the past 10 years. [129205]

Mr. Caplin: The number of accidents recorded to aircraft in the United Kingdom Low Flying System in the last 10 training years is:

April to March	*Accidents*
1994–95	3
1995–96	3
1996–97	0
1997–98	1
1998–99	2
1999–2000	5
2000–01	3
2001–02	0
2002–03	2
April 2003–Present	2

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints his Department received with regard to military low flying aircraft in each parliamentary constituency in each of the last 10 years. [129208]

Mr. Caplin: The information is not held in the form requested. The number of individual complaints recorded for each county (based on the information supplied by the complainants) over the last three years is given in the following table. Detailed records are only retained for a three-year period.

	Complaints per training year		
County	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
No county provided	11	13	11
Aberdeenshire	46	48	45
Angus	13	16	35
Argyll and Bute	23	12	19
Avon	26	20	17
Ayrshire	14	14	7
Bedfordshire	42	38	19
Berkshire	31	39	62
Berwickshire	27	22	15
Borders	61	73	56
Buckinghamshire	29	40	27
Cambridgeshire	99	122	109
Carmarthenshire	78	73	63
Central	17	14	8
Ceredigion	30	31	22
Cheshire	15	25	22
Cleveland	6	6	2
Clwyd	16	14	22
Cornwall	91	108	72
Cumbria	138	165	218
Denbighshire	2	3	1
Derbyshire	13	20	18
Devon	178	211	197
Dorset	59	120	102
Dumfries and Galloway	159	165	130
Durham	9	15	26
Dyfed	141	114	109
East Sussex	33	33	29
East Yorkshire	18	15	12
Essex	56	63	78
Fife	22	26	44
Glamorgan	11	12	13
Gloucestershire	96	120	102
Grampian	16	12	42
Greater Manchester	0	0	3
Gwent	11	15	35
Gwynedd	94	26	76
Hampshire	249	243	225
Hereford and Worcester	106	117	150
Hertfordshire	18	15	22
Highlands	124	86	131
Humberside	27	15	16
Isle of Man	0	1	1
Isle of Wight	1	0	0
Kent	61	63	59
Lanarkshire	5	9	14
Lancashire	28	17	107
Leicestershire	22	15	28
Lincolnshire	143	150	110

County	Complaints per training year 2000–01	2001–02	2002–03
London	15	13	18
Lothian	59	47	57
Manchester	1	1	0
Merseyside	2	1	8
Middlesex	1	3	6
Monmouthshire	6	12	4
Moray	10	14	14
Norfolk	276	275	246
North Yorkshire	168	143	171
Northamptonshire	39	57	56
Northumberland	119	60	85
Nottinghamshire	36	53	33
Orkney	13	14	18
Oxfordshire	88	73	88
Pembrokeshire	20	71	47
Perthshire	21	29	48
Powys	87	83	96
Ross-Shire	16	25	51
Rutland	1	1	0
Shropshire	52	67	67
Somerset	196	224	226
South Yorkshire	22	9	13
Staffordshire	33	31	31
Strathclyde	48	24	41
Suffolk	148	138	110
Surrey	26	21	44
Tayside	65	34	44
Tyne and Wear	2	2	7
Warwickshire	25	20	20
West Midlands	4	0	2
West Sussex	43	64	67
West Yorkshire	14	31	14
Western Isles	0	3	12
Wiltshire	87	108	97
Yorkshire	11	4	7
Total	4,270	4,350	4,520

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many and what percentage of military low-flying services over the Welsh Military Tactical Training Area, this year was undertaken by foreign nationals. [129194]

Mr. Caplin: Foreign air forces are not permitted to operate in any of the three Tactical Training Areas including the one that exists over mid-Wales.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF low-flying sorties have been within three miles of *(a)* Kirkcudbright and *(b)* Gatehouse-of-Fleet in the last year. [130457]

Mr. Caplin: The hon. Member will be aware that Kirkcudbright and Gatehouse-of-Fleet lie within Low Flying Area (LFA) 16 and Tactical Training Area (TTA) 20T. In the last training year LFA 16 had a total of 3,535 hours of low flying activity booked of which 188 hours and 18 minutes were Operational Low Flying (OLF) activity which is carried out within the TTA boundary. These are the only figures available.

Manning Control Review

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers subject to Manning Control have made official complaints of harassment and bullying of them or their family during the MCP process in the last six years; and what steps are used to punish individuals who are proven to have bullied or harassed soldiers. [130008]

Mr. Caplin: The data requested are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The Ministry of Defence has a policy of zero tolerance towards all forms of bullying and harassment. Appropriate disciplinary or administrative action will be taken against any individual(s) found guilty of practising or condoning such behaviour.

Military Equipment

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with European partners on interoperability of military equipment with that of the United States of America. [130797]

Mr. Ingram: Regular discussions are held with our European partners on equipment capability issues. An important aspect is interoperability of equipment with Allies including the United States of America.

Ministry of Defence Police

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes there have been in procurement funding for the Ministry of Defence Police in the last five years. [130803]

Mr. Caplin: The bulk of the Ministry of Defence Police budget is taken up with the staff costs relating to pay and allowance. However, that part of the budget that is allocated to the procurement of capital items was, for the previous four years:

£

	Capital investment
1998–99	4,829,000
1999–2000	2,649,000
2000–01	1,851,000
2001–02	1,746,000
2002–03	1,460,000

A budget of £2.045 million has been set for the present year 2003–04.

Missile Defence

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to ensure that the activities undertaken at RAF Fylingdales are in the national interest of the United Kingdom. [131281]

Mr. Ingram: RAF Fylingdales has operated as a ballistic missile early warning station for some 40 years, and provides an essential component of United Kingdom defences. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence told the House on 15 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 698, we are satisfied that the upgrade of the radar at RAF Fylingdales for missile defence purposes will also be in the national interest. The Ministry of Defence is negotiating an annex to the recently signed Ballistic Missile Defence Memorandum of Understanding with the United States to cover the upgrade, and is discussing with the US the operational arrangements for its use in missile defence. These agreements will ensure that UK interests are protected.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the silos at RAF Molesworth were last inspected under the terms of the INF Treaty 1987. [131282]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 28 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 739W.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations where he has permitted the X-band system to be based. [131283]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) on 7 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 1257W. The position remains that the United States has not asked us to site an X-Band radar in the UK, nor are we aware of any plans to do so.

MOD Deployments

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the deployments of *(a)* Ministry of Defence Guard Service and *(b)* Ministry of Defence Police officers abroad. [130776]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence Police are currently deployed in Kosovo (67 officers), Pitcairn Island (two officers) arid Bosnia Herzegovina (two officers). In addition, there are currently two officers in Iraq assessing conditions and training requirements.

Ministry of Defence Guard Service personnel are not deployed overseas.

Smuggling (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of the armed forces in combating smuggling in Northern Ireland. [131231]

Mr. Ingram: HM Customs and Excise have the lead responsibility for combating smuggling. Under long-standing arrangements the armed forces can provide support when requested by the civil power. In addition if, during the course of their normal duties, the armed forces discover instances of suspected smuggling this information is passed to the civilian authorities.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will answer Question 120316, tabled by the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South on 18 June. [129801]

Mr. Caplin: I replied on 11 September 2003.

Pilot Training

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the average monthly flying training time of trainee pilots in the RAF were in the last seven years. [130790]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Trainee pilots in the Royal Air Force undertake a minimum of 62 hours Elementary Flying Training (EFT) during their first year, before being streamed for fast jet, rotary wing or multi-engine pilot training. Flying hours will then depend on which aircraft type their training has undertaken. For example, fast jet trainees normally undertake 130 hours Basic Fast Jet Training, 70 hours Advanced Flying Training and 52 hours Tactical Weapons Training following completion of EFT, over a further two-year period. All students undertake relevant ground school training prior to each flying phase.

Procurement (EU Harmonisation)

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with European partners on the harmonisation of European rules on procurement; and when he expects the harmonisation of European rules on procurement to be completed. [130793]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has not had any direct discussions with European partners on harmonisation of European rules on procurement. It does, of course, contribute when invited to do so to the overall UK response to proposals for changes to the existing EC Public Procurement Regulations.

RAF Lyneham

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies he has commissioned into possible aerospace commercial use that could be made of RAF Lyneham. [130872]

Mr. Ingram: A study was commissioned by the Royal Air Force into the potential for commercial development at RAF Lyneham, which reported in March 2002. This included investigation into the potential for both passenger and freight services. It revealed minimal potential for the site mainly due to the vicinity of other airports and the need for considerable investment for a likely minimal return.

Research and Development (EU Harmonisation)

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with European partners on the co-ordination of European research and development in defence industries and the effect of co-ordination on research and development projects involving the United States of America. [130795]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Defence, has not held any recent discussions on the co-ordination of research and development in defence industries, nor has he any immediate plans to do so. However, officials have regular contact with their European and US counterparts.

The Ministry of Defence collaborates on research with those nations who can significantly contribute to our capability requirements. Our aim is to generate technology that both United Kingdom and partner foreign industries can access. We seek to do this on both transatlantic and European axes.

RNAS Yeovilton

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on Lynx replacement at RNAS Yeovilton. [131232]

Mr. Ingram: The Surface Combatant Maritime Rotorcraft, which is planned to fulfil the role currently undertaken by Lynx HMA Mk3 and Lynx HMA Mk8 based at RNAS Yeovilton, is provisionally planned to enter service later this decade. The project is presently in the assessment phase, in which the capability offered by the Westland Helicopters Ltd. Future Lynx proposal is being evaluated. The outcome of this assessment will result in a decision on the procurement of a replacement for Lynx early in 2004.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on site security at RNAS Yeovilton. [131233]

Mr. Ingram: All aspects of security at RNAS Yeovilton are maintained and administered in accordance with the requirements of the current Joint Service Publication (JSP) 440—The Defence Manual of Security. Security arrangements throughout the Royal Navy Estate, including RNAS Yeovilton, are subject to a programme of regular audit inspections by the Director of Naval Security's Integrated Contingency Planning Area Teams.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the sites of special scientific interest in the ownership of his Department and its agencies. [129342]

Mr. Caplin: A list of sites will be placed in the Library of the House.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Abattoirs

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many approved abattoirs operated within England for each year from 1991. [129266]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

Abattoirs producing meat for sale for human consumption must be licensed in order to operate. The number of licensed abattoirs in England from 1991 to date is shown in the table.

Year	*Red meat abattoirs*	*White meat abattoirs*
1991	593	98
1992	542	93
1993	434	98
1994	424	137
1995	402	144
1996	384	144
1997	375	131
1998	360	131
1999	339	119
2000	316	111
2001	300	117
2002	297	109
August 2003	286	109

Abstractions

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what factors underlay the proposal of the Environment Agency to reduce the number of abstractions in the south east; what assessment she has made of the effect on water supplies in the south east as a result of this proposal; and if she will make a statement. [130471]

Mr. Morley: Proposals to reduce abstraction in the south east are aimed at improving the environment at important wildlife sites that are presently being damaged or are threatened with being damaged by abstraction.

Water companies have been given the proposed list of sites and have been asked to identify the solutions that they would have to implement to make these environmental improvements.

The Office of Water Services and the Environment Agency are scrutinising the companies' plans and I have asked them to report to me in November. From their reports I will identify the environmental improvement schemes that should be included in companies' final business plans for 2005–10, due in April 2004. Throughout this process, security of water supply to customers is paramount and the timing of any changes to abstraction will be arranged so that there is no risk to public water supply.

Aggregates Levy

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much funding has been paid to the sustainability fund in each region of the UK from the aggregates levy since the levy was introduced. [127213]

Mr. Morley: The following amounts have been allocated and spent under the Aggregate Levy Sustainability Fund:

£ million

Region of the UK	*Aggregate levy sustainability fund allocation*	*Aggregate levy sustainability fund spend*
England	58.6	20
Wales	3.4	2
Scotland	6	2
Northern Ireland	1.9	Figure unavailable

Note:
The reason for the Northern Ireland spend figure being unavailable, is due to the fact that their fund was never ring fenced. Therefore there is uncertainty about the exact amount spent on the Fund.

Agricultural Assistance

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate what percentage of agricultural assistance goes to *(a)* the largest and *(b)* the smallest 10 per cent. of farms in the United Kingdom. [131375]

Mr. Bradshaw: Data from the Farm Business Survey have been used to assess the level of agricultural assistance going to farms of different sizes. The sample for the Farm Business Survey covers only those farm businesses that are over a minimum size threshold,

representing around 70,000 out of a total of around 180,000 holdings in England. Within the sample there were 1,570 farm businesses in the survey in receipt of subsidy payments in 2001–02.

Agricultural assistance has been defined as all crop and livestock subsidy payments and agri-environment scheme payments. Farm size is defined in European Size Units, an economic measure of farm size in terms of the value added to variable inputs. The analysis shows that around a third of these subsidy payments are received by the largest 10 per cent. of farms and around 2 per cent. is received by the smallest 10 per cent. of farms covered by the FBS in England. Estimates for the other UK countries are a matter for the Devolved Authorities.

Air Pollution

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's policy to reduce air pollution by 2005. [131088]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government's policies on improving air quality are set out in detail in the Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, published in January 2000 and its Addendum published in February 2003. The Strategy sets standards for the pollutants of main concern and target dates for their achievement between 2003 and 2010. It also explains the measures that are in place to reduce emissions of harmful pollutants from all sectors. Copies are available via the Department's website at www.defra.gov.uk/environment/airquality.

We are on course or have already met the targets for five of the nine pollutants in England, namely benzene, 1,3-butadiene, carbon monoxide, lead and sulphur dioxide. Significant progress has been made towards meeting the air quality objectives for nitrogen dioxide, particles, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and ozone. This is as a result of the measures that have been implemented to reduce emissions of these pollutants, and their precursors, particularly from road transport and industry.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the level of air pollution was in the UK in 2002; and what the levels were in other EU countries. [131089]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Air Quality Headline Indicator for Sustainable development published on 8 May 2003 summarised UK air pollution in 2002. The statistical release is available at www.defra.gov.uk/news/2003/030508a.htm.

In urban areas in 2002, air pollution was recorded as moderate or higher on 20 days on average per monitoring site, compared with 25 days in 2001, and 59 days in 1993. There has been a long term decline in the number of air pollution days, largely because of a reduction in particles and sulphur dioxide, but fluctuations from one year to the next can occur because of differences in weather conditions.

In rural areas, the figure for 2002 was 30 days on average per site, compared with 34 in 2001. The number of days has fluctuated between 21 days in 1987 and 50 days in 1990. The series can be volatile from one year to the next, and there is no clear trend. This reflects the variability in levels of ozone, the main cause of pollution in rural areas.

Comprehensive information on all UK air quality monitoring data is available on the Air Quality Archive at www.airquality.co.uk.

The European Environment Agency (EEA) collates and publishes air pollution information for all European Union member states. Its AirBase database is at http://etc-acc.eionet.eu.int/databases/airbase.html. Air pollution data for 2002 are not yet available.

The EEA's report "Europe's Environment, the third assessment report", published in May 2003, includes a summary of air pollution trends in Europe from1990 to 2000. The report is at http://reports.eea.eu.int/environmental_assessment_report_2003_10/en

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on levels of air pollution in Romford, in each year since 1997. [131277]

Mr. Bradshaw: Defra does not conduct any air quality monitoring in Romford. The levels have been assessed using air quality information for the closest three national automatic monitoring stations at Thurrock, Southend-on-Sea and London Bexley. These sites are generally representative of public exposure. The sites monitor nitrogen dioxide, particulate matter, sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide and ozone. The number of days of *(a)* moderate, *(b)* high and *(c)* very high air pollution recorded in each year since 1997 are given in the table. The levels of particulate matter and ozone are the main drivers for the number of days of moderate and above air pollution.

	Number of days			
	Moderate	*High*	*Very high*	*Total*
1997	53	9	1	63
1998	33	1	0	34
1999	60	4	0	64
2000	36	0	0	36
2001	57	1	2	60
2002	47	5	1	53

Animal Welfare

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to seek amendments to draft EU legislation on the welfare of livestock during travel to allow the United Kingdom to continue its effective ban on the export for food of horses, ponies and donkeys. [129234]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 11 September 2003]:* I am currently considering the best way to protect British ponies in the light of domestic and European Legislation.

Asbestos

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been spent by her Department and its agencies on *(a)* asbestos surveys and *(b)* the management and

removal of asbestos since 1 January 2001; and what budget is available to (i) commission asbestos surveys and (ii) manage and remove asbestos from buildings in (A) 2003 and (B) 2004. [130922]

Alun Michael: Defra expenditure on asbestos related works within its own buildings and agencies has been as follows:

(a) Surveys

	£
2001–02	Minimal
2002–03	242,000
2003–04	[1]200,000

[1] Is a 'best estimate' based on current commitments.

(b) Management and removal

	£
2001–02	Minimal
2002–03	420,345
2003–04	[1]260,000

[1] Is a 'best estimate' based on current commitments.

No budget for 2004–05 has been approved at the present time.

CAP Reform

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what further proposals she has to reform the Common Agricultural Policy. [129064]

Mr. Bradshaw: On 26 June EU Agriculture Ministers agreed a radical reform of most elements of the Common Agricultural Policy. The UK Government is pressing for similar radical reform of the remaining sectors, which include the sugar, olive oil, cotton and tobacco regimes and we are pleased that the European Commission intends to bring forward proposals in the next few months.

We are consulting on how we should implement the reforms already agreed so that we can introduce the new scheme from 1 January 2005, the earliest date permitted.

Carbon Trust

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* debt equity deals and *(b)* interest free energy action loans the Carbon Trust has approved since it was established. [128033]

Mr. Morley: I understand that the Carbon Trust has received 84 proposals for equity investment. Of these, 31 are in progress, and three investments have been made totalling £1.7 million (leveraging in a further £16 million).

The Carbon Trust are also seeking opportunities to support embryonic low carbon technology companies through both the offer of incubator services and through the future creation of incubator funds.

The Carbon Trust's loan scheme has approved over £1 million worth of loans to SMEs since it started in January 2003. The Trust currently receive over 60 inquiries per month. On September 1 there were 149 applications under consideration, 32 formal offers had been made and 15 loans had been paid with a total value of £440,000.

Community Composting

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on community composting; and what plans she has to expand its take-up. [130592]

Mr. Morley: The Government recognise the valuable role that community composting groups can play in delivering more sustainable waste management.

We are taking various measures (that do not relate to community groups alone) to increase the amount of waste that is composted. For example, we have set targets to increase the level of recycling and composting of household waste to 17 per cent. by 2003–04 and 25 per cent. by 2005–06. We are primarily looking to local authorities, as the statutory waste collection and disposal authorities, to deliver these targets. Some authorities are working with community groups to do this and the Government encourage this partnership-working.

We are also supporting the Composting Association with a grant of £272,000 over three years to raise awareness and increase the understanding of composting and uses of composts.

In addition, funding of £35.2 million is available until September 2006 specifically for community waste schemes in England under the New Opportunities Fund's Community Recycling and Economic Development Programme.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research projects are being supported by her Department in the area of community composting; and what discussions she has had with representatives of the waste industry on the subject of community composting. [130593]

Mr. Morley: I am not aware of any research projects currently being funded by Defra specifically concerning community composting. However, Defra does fund some community composting projects through the Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund. Under the category of community initiatives, the fund is supporting two projects with composting elements.

Defra is also providing funds of £12.2 million over the next three years to the Waste and Resource Action Programme to stimulate markets for composted products. A proportion of these funds will be used for research projects, some of which may be of relevance to community composting groups.

The Government hold regular discussions on a number of topics with representatives of the waste industry.

Consultancy Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many consultancies were commissioned by her Department in the last two years for which figures are available; and what the cost of those contracts was. [130888]

Alun Michael: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Costs

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost was to her Department for *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers, *(b)* taxis, *(c)* train travel, *(d)* the use of helicopters, *(e)* airline tickets and *(f)* chartered aeroplanes in each year since 1997. [123081]

Margaret Beckett: With regard to the costs for ministerial cars and drivers, I refer to the answer given by the Cabinet Office and the letter from the Chief Executive of the Government Car and Despatch Agency to the hon. Gentleman, dated 17 September 2003.

The costs to the Department for taxis, train travel and airline tickets, use of helicopters and chartered planes since 8 June 2001, when Defra was formed, are as follows:

Year end 31 March	*Train travel (£)*	*Public transport travel (£)*
2001–02 (part year)	1,487,983	636,681
2002–03	1,631,848	620,267
2003–04 (to 31 July)	688,191	201,403

The figures for 2001–02 and 2002–03 include travel expenses incurred as a result of foot and mouth disease.

All the figures for 'Travel by Public Transport' includes the use of helicopters, chartered planes, airline tickets, taxis, bus, underground and pedal cycle expenses, and can be broken down further only at disproportionate cost.

End of Life Vehicles Directive

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the costs to local authorities of implementing *(a)* the End of Life Vehicles Directive and *(b)* the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive. [129402]

Margaret Beckett: *(a)* The ELV Directive contains no provision which applies directly to local authorities. However, under the New Burdens arrangements, DTI have transferred to local authorities £25 million for 2003–04 to meet any additional costs they may incur in relation to abandoned vehicles as a result of the directive's implementation. It is proposed to transfer similar sums in respect of financial years 2004–05 and 2005–06.

(b) The Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Directive does not place direct responsibilities on local authorities for the collection and disposal of WEEE, but on producers and distributors. Future implementation options will take full account of the costs for all stakeholders and will be subject to full consultation.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to enforce greater energy saving practices in homes; and what timescale has been drawn up for homes to improve their energy saving practices. [130532]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 18 September 2003]:* The Energy White Paper details the steps being taken to encourage greater energy efficiency in the UK, and sets out an ambitious strategy for energy efficiency up to 2010 and beyond. Energy efficiency is expected to deliver about half the carbon savings needed to meet our goals for 2020. This will mean roughly doubling the rate of energy efficiency improvement of recent decades.

Households account for around 5MtC of the expected savings by 2010. The Energy White Paper sets out measures which have the potential to deliver 3.5MtC by 2010, in addition to the savings of 1.5MtC from measures already in place. It is estimated that by 2020, a further 4–6MtC of annual savings can be realised in the household sector.

Key measures proposed in the White Paper that would provide a statutory basis for improvements in energy efficiency in households include extension of the Energy Efficiency Commitment beyond 2005 at possibly twice its current level of activity; improvements in building standards through revisions to the Building Regulations, which we aim to bring into effect in 2005; and faster improvements in the standards of new household appliances.

The Government intend to publish an Energy Efficiency Implementation Plan within a year of the White Paper's publication, which will provide further detail on all of these policies.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps are being taken to increase the UK's energy efficiency. [131078]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Energy White Paper details the steps being taken to encourage greater energy efficiency in the UK, and sets out an ambitious strategy for energy efficiency up to 2010 and beyond. Energy efficiency is expected to deliver about half the carbon savings needed to meet our goals for 2020. This will mean roughly doubling the rate of energy efficiency improvement of recent decades.

Key measures proposed in the White Paper include extension of the Energy Efficiency Commitment beyond 2005 at possibly twice its current level of activity; improvements in building standards through further revisions to the Building Regulations; faster improvements in the standards of new household appliances; and consultation on economic instruments to improve household energy efficiency.

Already established are a wide range of policies and measures to encourage energy efficiency across the economy. These include:

Climate Change Agreements, where companies can gain an 80 per cent. discount from the Climate Change Levy for eligible processes by entering into Agreements and meeting energy efficiency targets;

the work of the Carbon Trust, which takes the lead on energy efficiency for business and the public sector, and supports the development of a low carbon economy in the UK. The Trust was launched in April 2001 as part of the CCL "package";

the UK Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS), which will generate significant emissions reductions and is the first economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions trading scheme in the world. The UK Government is also working towards implementing the European ETS, due to start on 1 January 2005.

funding for the Energy Saving Trust to run a number of programmes to promote the sustainable and efficient use of energy in homes. The Trust also facilitates the Energy Efficiency Partnership for Homes, which brings together key stakeholders to support and promote domestic energy efficiency.

encouraging improvements in product standards so that energy-using appliances operate more efficiently;

the Building Regulations, updated in 2002, which are already delivering significant energy efficiency improvements in new and existing buildings.

The Government intend to publish an Energy Efficiency Implementation Plan within a year of the White Paper's publication, which will provide further detail on all of these policies.

Enhanced Capital Allowance Scheme

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many businesses are taking part in the Enhanced Capital Allowance Scheme through *(a)* the Carbon Trust, *(b)* her Department and *(c)* the Inland Revenue. [128032]

Mr. Morley: The Department has joint policy lead for the energy efficiency Enhanced Capital Allowance scheme with Inland Revenue and Treasury. In August 2002 the Carbon Trust took over the administration and promotion of this scheme.

On 5 August 2003 a Treasury Order came into effect revising the qualifying technologies eligible for the energy efficiency EGA. As of 1 September 2003 the number of companies with qualifying products (manufacturers and distributors) stands at 289, while individual products numbered 5255.

Environment Agency

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library a copy of the results of the Environment Agency's May 2003 survey of public opinion. [129340]

Margaret Beckett: I am happy to place a copy of the results of the Environment Agency survey in the Library.

Food Expenditure

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was spent on food by her Department and by each of the agencies for which it is responsible in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03; what proportion of that food by value was produced; what guidance she has issued to encourage the procurement of home-produced food; and if she will make a statement. [129372]

Margaret Beckett: Expenditure on food in Defra is generally limited to official hospitality provided by Defra and canteen subsidies. Records of spend on food provided at some external conferences and like events are not kept centrally and so will not be included.

In 2001–02 Defra recorded expenditure of £139,984 on hospitality and £395,277 on canteen subsidies. The figures for 2002–03 were £202,029 and £409,179 respectively.

Information made available by canteen service providers indicates that on average 67 per cent. of the food they procured was produced in the UK. Therefore, the monetary value of UK produced food supplied to Defra as official hospitality and indirectly through subsidies is estimated to be £357,509 in 2002–02 and £408,287 in 2002–03.

Defra has published a "Guidance and action Sheet for buyers and their internal customers" that includes guidance on local sourcing and in particular how to remove obstacles to tendering faced by local and UK suppliers. It can be seen on our website at: http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/sustain/procurement/index.htm. Defra has also produced a model food procurement action plan with guidance for completion that includes an objective concerned with opening up opportunities for local providers to compete for business. The guidance takes account of the Government's policy of achieving value for money in public procurement, and its commitment under the EC rules to ensure that public procurement is fair, transparent and non-discriminatory. We are also taking a number of other steps to integrate sustainable development into the public procurement of food and catering services. We have had bilateral meetings at Ministerial and senior management level (including with representatives of local government) and have published a number of case studies. A national conference on 26 November will raise awareness still further and that will be followed by regional workshops next year. Within Defra we are discussing with our catering service providers the scope they have for purchasing local and UK produce.

Fruit and Vegetable Imports

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the purpose is of the import duties charged by the EU for the import of fruit and vegetables, with particular reference to *(a)* peas, *(b)* pineapples, *(c)* honeydew melons, *(d)* apricots, *(e)* strawberries, *(f)* raspberries and *(g)* sugar; what criteria were used for setting the level of import duty in each case; and if she will make a statement. [131040]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 18 September 2003]:* The purpose of import duties on fruit and vegetables is to prevent or counteract adverse effects on the market in the Community which may result from imports of these products. The duty rates applied are those set out in the Common Customs Tariff and are reviewed from time to time as a consequence of international negotiations. Variations in the amount of duty paid reflect seasonal factors and the declared or standard value of the produce.

GM Crops

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how often her Department's Ministers have met *(a)* Doug Parr of Greenpeace, *(b)* Patrick Holden of the Soil Association and *(c)* scientists working on GM crops in the last 12 months. [128698]

Margaret Beckett: Defra Ministers have met either Douglas Parr of Greenpeace, Patrick Holden of the Soil Association or scientists working on GM crops a total of six times in the last 12 months as follows:

Date	*Minister*	*Who met*
18 September 2002	Michael Meacher	Patrick Holden—Soil Association
24 September 2002	Michael Meacher	Greenpeace Scientists
17 December 2002	Margaret Beckett	Scientists
03 March 2003	Michael Meacher	Patrick Holden—Soil Association
10 June 2003	Margaret Beckett	Scientists
01 July 2003	Margaret Beckett	Scientists

Landfill Sites

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many landfill sites in each Environment Agency region are licensed to accept hazardous waste; how many sites in each such region will be licensed to accept hazardous waste after July 2004; and if she will make a statement. [129352]

Margaret Beckett: Information from the Environment Agency's conditioning plan exercise carried out in July 2002, covering England and Wales, indicated the following:

Region	*Hazardous (post 2002)*	*Hazardous (post 2004)*
Anglian	47	9
Midlands	42	4
North East	39	11
North West	27	8
South West	16	1
Southern	13	1
Thames	19	0
Wales	15	3
Total	218	37

Given that July 2004 is still some time away, the actual number may well change before then. Also, there will be scope to landfill treated hazardous waste in separate cells in landfills classified as non-hazardous.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what amount of hazardous waste was sent to landfill in each year since 1996. [129353]

Margaret Beckett: The amount of special waste sent to landfill (as notified to the Environment Agency on special waste consignment notes) for the calendar years 1999, 2000 and 2001 is as follows:

	Tonnes
1999	2,092,490
2000	2,054,084
2001	2,332,000

Information in respect of earlier years is not held centrally. Data for 2002 are not yet available.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the amount of hazardous waste that will be sent to landfill in *(a)* 2004, *(b)* 2005 and *(c)* 2006. [129354]

Margaret Beckett: In 2001, 2,332,000 tonnes of hazardous waste were disposed to landfill in England and Wales. Projections for future years are affected by a range of factors, including the likely increase in costs of treatment and disposal as a result of requirements in the Landfill Directive, and the impact of these changes in costs on producers efforts to minimise waste. Changes to the hazardous waste list are likely to increase the amount of hazardous waste to be consigned. These and other factors are currently being investigated in support of work on possible scenarios for the hazardous waste forum, which is due to report in the autumn.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the likely change in costs of sending hazardous waste to landfill after implementation of the ban on co-disposal in July 2004. [129355]

Margaret Beckett: A Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) of the Landfill Directive in England and Wales was published with the Second Consultation Paper on Implementation of Council Directive (1999/31/EC) on the Landfill of Waste. This is available on the Defra website (www.defra.gov.uk). The RIA points out that increasing disposal costs will provide greater impetus to minimise, recycle and re-use waste and hence move the management of waste up the waste hierarchy. This outcome is a major objective of the Government's environmental policy and is supported by business, non-Government organisations and Select Committees of this House.

The RIA indicates that at the extreme, waste producers will face an additional cost in the range of £97 million to £696 million. Part of this increased cost relates to landfilling hazardous waste; this fell into the range of £15 million to £87 million.

The RIA recognises that many of the potential benefits cannot be quantified but believes that a number will be of local significance where they result in a reduced impact of existing landfills. These benefits relate principally to reducing health and environmental risks and by promoting more sustainable options as set out above. The RIA also draws attention to benefits from investment in treatment technologies and rising landfill standards that could result in new opportunities for business.

Light Pollution

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent guidance she has issued to local authorities and other relevant bodies on light pollution. [131236]

Mr. Bradshaw: In 1997 the Government issued "Lighting in the Countryside: Towards Good Practice". This document continues to be a valuable guide for local authorities, highway engineers and members of the public. It demonstrates what can be done to lessen the adverse effects of external lighting, including security lights and street lighting. The advice within it is applicable in towns as well as the countryside. Copies may be obtained from: www.odpm.gov.uk

Defra considered the control of nuisance caused by security lighting in its recent consultation, "Living Places: Powers, Rights, Responsibilities". A summary

of the comments received to this consultation exercise has now been published. A copy of this document may be obtained from: www.defra.gov.uk/environment/consult/pubspace/index.htm. Most of the respondents who mentioned the document, "Lighting in the Countryside: Towards Good Practice", considered it very useful, but felt it needed updating with more examples of good practice.

The Government will consider what additional guidance on light pollution may be needed, taking into consideration any recommendations emerging from Defra's consultation exercise and from the House of Commons Select Committee's recent inquiry into light pollution and astronomy that was recently completed.

Local Wildlife Sites

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many local wildlife sites there are. [129361]

Margaret Beckett: I understand from the Wildlife Trusts' publication "Status of UK Wildlife Site Systems 2002" that there are at least 37,045 local wildlife sites in the United Kingdom.

Loss Insurance

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with interested parties regarding loss insurance in the event of a disease outbreak in *(a)* animals and *(b)* crops. [131325]

Mr. Bradshaw: The purpose of discussions about loss insurance for disease outbreaks is to explore ways to reduce the cost to taxpayers of such outbreaks. For animal diseases a working group which Defra set up with representatives of the insurance and livestock sectors met several times last year. The group has completed its initial task and we are now working on proposals for the livestock sector to bear a greater share of the cost of animal diseases. While there is no cost to taxpayers from crop diseases, wider discussions on crop insurance generally were held last year by a joint Defra/HM Treasury working group on farm risk management, with representatives from the finance and arable sectors.

Media Training

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost was to her Department of media and voice training for Ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [123127]

Margaret Beckett: To the best of my knowledge, none. However, officials can attend the courses run by the Corporate Development Group under its CMPS banner. Four specifically cover media and voice training. These are Top Management Programme; Creating Personal Impact; Developing Style and Presence; Media Skills. The details requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Microsoft

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was paid to Microsoft in licensing fees by her Department and its agencies in each of the last three years; and how much has been budgeted for *(a)* 2003–04 and *(b)* 2004–05. [130678]

Alun Michael: Defra was established as a new Department in 2001. Defra and its executive agencies paid Microsoft £1,004,963 for software licences for financial year 2001–02, £913,575 for 2002–03 and £528,853 for 2003–04 to date.

Budget provision for Microsoft licensing for 2003–04 is £773,162 and for 2004–05 is £969,690.

These figures exclude the cost of licences for Windows operating systems on new personal computers and laptops, which are provided and paid for by the manufacturers under separate arrangements.

All sums are inclusive of VAT; financial years start 1 April.

Ministerial Meetings

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how often she met her counterparts in the devolved Administrations in the last 12 months; and if she will make a statement. [126520]

Margaret Beckett: I have met my counterparts in the devolved Administrations on 7 occasions over the past 12 months in regular arranged meetings in London. However, I have also met with them on a number of occasions whenever they have attended Agriculture Council in Brussels and Luxembourg.

Ministerial Visits

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the *(a)* foreign visits and *(b)* visits within the United Kingdom she has made since 1 April; whom she met; what the cost was to public funds of each trip; and what gifts were received. [126934]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 8 September 2003]:* The Government publishes the overall costs of all ministerial overseas travel and a list of all visits by Cabinet Ministers costing in excess of £500 on an annual basis. The list for the period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003 was published by the Prime Minister on 16 July, *Official Report*, column 482W. The next list for the period 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004 will be published at the end of the financial year.

In respect of gifts received, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, on 14 March, *Official Report*, column 482W.

Since 1 April, I have undertaken one visit in the UK; to the Royal Agricultural Show in Stoneleigh, Warwickshire. The cost of this visit was over £500. No gifts were received.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost was to her Department of mobile phones supplied to Ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [123150]

Margaret Beckett: The cost to my Department of mobile phones supplied to Ministers and officials since 8 June 2001 (when Defra was formed) were as follows:

£

Year end 31 March	*Secretariat*	*Defra*
2001–02[1]	13,311	2,517,693
2002–03	13,895	625,467
2003–04[2]	1,537	115,018

[1] Part year
[2] To 31 July 2003

The Defra mobile phone expenditure includes £1,970,611 in 2002 and £148,098 incurred in respect of Foot and Mouth Disease.

Airport Development (South-East)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what studies her Department has commissioned to assess the impact of proposed new airport developments at *(a)* Heathrow, *(b)* Gatwick, *(c)* Stansted and *(d)* Cliffe on the extent of human exposure to nitrogen dioxide. [129400]

Margaret Beckett: We have not commissioned any air quality studies to assess the impacts of the proposed new airport developments at Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted or Cliffe.

"The Future Development of Air Transport in the UK: South East" consultation document issued by DfT in February 2003, sets out the environmental impacts, including the extent of human exposure to nitrogen dioxide levels, of the proposed new airport developments at each of the airports in the south-east. My officials have been in contact with DfT officials about the results presented in the consultation document, and they have informed them about the results from our national modelling of air quality, including around airports and the current results from the local air quality management system. My officials will also be working closely with DfT and officials in other Government Departments in drawing up the Air Transport White Paper.

Peat Extraction

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the peat extraction sites in the UK *(a)* which are operational and *(b)* where active permissions remain valid. [129265]

Mr. Bradshaw: This information is not available in the format requested. However a survey of land for mineral workings in England in 2000 commissioned by the former Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions indicated that nationally, approximately 5,200 hectares is permitted for peat production at about 180 sites, of which approximately 300 hectares remains to be worked but where the permissions remain valid. The raw data came from Mineral Planning Authorities but two of the largest authorities were unable to produce accurate survey data and assumptions were made based on previous information.

Phytophthora Ramorum

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what study her Department has made into the incidence of Phytophthora ramorum in wild-growing Rhododendron ponticum. [130852]

Margaret Beckett: In collaboration with the Forestry Commission, English Nature, and the Countryside Commission for Wales, Defra is currently undertaking a survey of a sample of areas of wild-growing Rhododendron ponticum in order to establish the extent of the presence of Phytophthora ramorum and the likely impact on our native flora. To date 56 such sites have been inspected for the presence of the organism but it has been found on only two sites, both of which are in the area of an existing confirmed outbreak.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library a list of gardens open to the public that have been served with enforcement notices in respect of Phytophthora ramorum during 2003. [130853]

Margaret Beckett: The Government believe the public should have as much information as possible about this disease and is happy to meet all reasonable requests for information. However, the information obtained specifically in relation to individual premises has been gathered in pursuance of the Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate's statutory powers and on the basis of this information, where necessary, enforcement notices are issued to ensure compliance. In the absence of a statutory obligation to publish details identifying individual premises, to publish such details without consent could seriously jeopardise our ability to work with business in relation to the reporting and control of Phytophthora ramorum.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many gardens and nurseries have been visited by her Department's staff during 2003 in order to take samples to test for Phytophthora ramorum; what the time scale is for the testing programme; how many staff are employed on the testing programme; and if she will make a statement. [130854]

Margaret Beckett: Since 1 January 2003, staff from Defra's Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate, the Horticultural Marketing Inspectorate and the Central Science Laboratory have visited 2,961 parks, gardens, nurseries and other retail outlets in order to take samples to test for Phytophthora ramorum. Up to 14 scientific staff from the Central Science Laboratory are directly involved in the process of testing for this disease and each routine test can take up to seven days.

Defra has committed resources to continue the visits and the testing programme at least until the end of March 2004.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research she has commissioned to discover for how long Phytophthora ramorum has been present in rhododendrons and related plants in this country. [130855]

Margaret Beckett: It is unlikely that we will be able to determine exactly how long Phytophthora ramorum has been present in rhododendrons and related plants in this country. However, surveys are currently being conducted to establish how widespread the disease is and this may give an indication of how long it has been present.

In addition, the literature has been reviewed for records of Phytophthora species on rhododendrons in the UK. The established authority "Pathogens of Trees and Shrubs" by Pearce, published in 1963, states that at that time there was no evidence of any Phytophthora on rhododendrons. The first record of a Phytophthora species on this host was in 1968. Phytophthora ramorum was first described as a new species in October 2001 and first found in the UK in April 2002.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many samples have been tested for Phytophthora ramorum during 2003; what proportion of samples have proven positive; and if she will make a statement. [130856]

Margaret Beckett: Since 1 January 2003, 3883 individual laboratory tests have been carried out on samples of plant material suspected of being infected with Phytophthora ramorum fungus in the United Kingdom. 15.9 per cent. of these samples were confirmed as being infected with this pathogen.

Defra and the devolved authorities continue to survey for the disease and to take eradication action against any findings.

Habitats Directive

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the 96 Habitats Directive sites identified by the Environment Agency in its Composite Plan, page 8, as most at risk of being damaged, including in each case the nature and source of the damage. [129347]

Margaret Beckett: The Habitats Directive sites identified on page 8 of the Environment Agency's Corporate Plan for England have been placed in the Library of the House; the responsibility for Wales rests with the National Assembly for Wales.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library a copy of the results and conclusions of the Environment Agency's Habitats Directive benefits assessment of 2003. [129348]

Margaret Beckett: I am happy to place a copy of the conclusions of the Environment Agency's benefits assessment of 2003 in the Library. It should be noted that the addendum (item (iii) in para. 1.3 of the covering paper) is the result of further work done after consideration of the initial paper, and the figures therefore replace those shown in para. 4.1 and Appendix 1 of that paper.

Pollution

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* serious (category 1) and *(b)* significant (category 2) pollution incidents there have been in each year since 1996. [129349]

Margaret Beckett: The number of Category 1 and 2 incidents affecting water for each year from 1996 is shown in the table, together with the number of Category 1 and 2 incidents affecting all media (air, land and water) from 1999. Statistics relating to air and land were not reported to the Environment Agency prior to 1999.

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Category 1 incidents affecting water	156	194	128	90	77	118	79
Category 2 incidents affecting water	1,510	1,354	1,238	863	758	860	760
Category 1 affecting all media (air, land and water) from 1999	—	—	—	131	99	147	109
Category 2 affecting all media (air, land and water) from 1999	—	—	—	1,387	1,198	1,707	1,357

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many current applications for pollution prevention and control permits have been pending for four months or longer. [129351]

Margaret Beckett: Schedule 1 to the PPC Regulations categorises installations subject to integrated pollution prevention and control into Part A(1) and Part A(2). If the installation is categorised as a Part A(1) installation then the permit application must be made to the Environment Agency. The Part A(1) installations are generally larger or more complex than Part A(2) installations, which are regulated by the relevant local authority.

If a regulator requires more information before it can reach a final decision on an application, it can issue a notice to an operator requesting the information under Schedule 4 of the PPC Regulations. This inevitably delays the process significantly.

Currently 160 permit applications made to the Environment Agency have been under determination for four months or longer. Local authority data are collected annually and information for this the first major year of operation will not be available until autumn 2004.

Poultry Industry

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has for ensuring that the UK poultry industry is able to remain competitive; and if she will make a statement. [130207]

Mr. Bradshaw: From the industry's perspective, the principal need is for Government to avoid unnecessary burdens or obstacles, while ensuring that standards (including those related to the environment and animal health and welfare) meet public requirements.

Our priorities in this sector are to continue to act where there is clear evidence of illegal competition from third countries; within overall government policy, to work to achieve a satisfactory WTO agreement; domestically and internationally, to strike an appropriate balance between need for regulation and overburdening industry; in line with the Government's wider Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy, to encourage industry to look increasingly towards value added/premium products; to support poultry industry participation in Defra's sustainability forum; and to continue to participate fully in EU negotiations on animal welfare issues affecting the poultry industry.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the suppliers of poultry meat whose consignments have been found to contain nitrofurans, indicating in each case the date of detection and the subsequent period of time during which imports from that source were stopped. [129406]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

Poultry meat consignments (from Thailand and Brazil) are required to be tested for nitrofurans before they are allowed into the food chain. Any consignments containing nitrofurans above the reporting limit are destroyed. The results are also reported to the European Commission (EC) through the rapid alert system for food and feed (RASFF). The EC has made it clear that supplier details contained in these rapid alerts are confidential.

Records of United Kingdom raised RASFFs show that nitrofurans residues were detected in the following consignments of poultry sampled on the dates shown in the table.

Dates of sampling for nitrofuran positive poultry samples (UK)

2002		*2003*
25 March (3 samples)	22 July	1 February
26 March	24 July	19 February
29 March	31 October	25 March
30 March	1 November	—
5 April	19 November	—
23 April	21 November	—
4 May	2 December	—
10 July	—	—

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to make representations to the European Commission to delist third country plants that have been found to have exported poultry meat containing nitrofurans into the European Union. [129407]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

Representation has been made to the European Commission (EC) to delist third country plants exporting products of animal origin containing illegal veterinary residues, for example, nitrofurans and chloramphenicol. The EC is responsible for pursuing this issue with the third countries concerned to ensure that plants for which repeated failures are reported are delisted.

Private Office Costs

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what have been the running costs of Ministers' private offices in her Department in each year since 1997. [123100]

Margaret Beckett: The running costs of Ministers' private offices in my Department since 8 June 2001 (when Defra was formed) were as follows:

Year end 31 March	*£*
2001–02[1]	943,101
2002–03	1,194,162
2003–04[2]	269,367

[1] Part year
[2] To 31 July 2003

Radioactive Material

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what quantity of radioactive material has been incorporated into consumer goods pursuant to EU Directive 96/29. [129252]

Mr. Morley: This is a matter for my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

"Refreshing the Rural White Paper"

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the re-appraisal document, "Refreshing the Rural White Paper", and its conclusions on whether affordable housing in small villages is sustainable. [131377]

Alun Michael: The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs announced a review of the Rural White Paper last November. The review is nearing completion and will be published in due course.

As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Housing and Planning announced on 17 July, *Official Report*, column 53WS, the Government are consulting on an update of the existing nationwide guidance on planning for affordable housing, and the public consultation period runs until October 31. The update will be supported by practice advice. The update addresses a number of matters including the provision of affordable housing in rural areas. The proposed changes give greater flexibility to local authorities to seek affordable housing on smaller sites where this is justified. It is also envisaged that in rural areas affordable housing provision may be supported by allocating sites solely for affordable housing, on land within or adjoining existing villages, which would not otherwise be released for housing and where this would contribute to the attainment of mixed communities.

Retail Banks

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how often she has met the head of the agricultural departments of retail banks in the last six months. [129497]

Margaret Beckett: I have not done so in the last six months.

Sea Temperature

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what records she maintains of sea temperature around the various sectors of the British Isles; and what movements in temperature have taken place over the last 20 years. [130366]

Mr. Bradshaw: Sea temperature data collected for the waters around the British Isles are collated by such national and international bodies as the British Oceanographic Data Centre and the Hydrographic Service of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES).

The ICES Working Group on Oceanic Hydrography produces an Annual Ocean Climate Status Summary of the North Atlantic Region, and include long time series from the seas around the British Isles.

Other relevant publications include:

Alcock, G. and Rickards, L. (2001) Climate of UK waters at the millennium: Status and trends. Inter-Agency Committee on Marine Science and Technology, IACMST Information Document, 9, 48 pp.

Clark, R. A., Fox, C. J., Ben-Hamadou, R. and Planque, B. (2001) A directory of hydrographic and atmospheric datasets for the north east Atlantic and UK shelf seas. CEFAS, Science Series Technical Report, 113, 43 pp.

Round Britain most surface temperature series show a warming trend at a rate of between 0.5°C and 1°C per decade since the 1960s. This warming has largely been driven by a strongly positive phase of the fluctuating atmospheric pattern called the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO).

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the sea temperature bands required by each main species of fish in waters surrounding the British Isles. [130367]

Mr. Bradshaw: The table shows the estimated temperature range associated with several important commercial species:

Common name	*Scientific name*	*Temperature (°C) Range*
Cod	Gadus morhua	0–20
Haddock	Melanogrammus aeglefinus	4–10
Saithe	Pollachius virens	Temperate
Ling	Molva molva	Temperate
Whiting	Merlangius merlangus	Temperate
Monkfish	Lophius piscatorius	Temperate
Salmon	Salmo salar	2–9
Bass	Dicentrarchus labrax	8–24
Dogfish	Scyliorhinus canicula	Sub-tropical
Plaice	Pleuronectes platessa	2–15
Lemon sole	Microstomus kitt	Temperate
Sole	Solea solea	8–24
Herring	Clupea harengus	1–18
Mackerel	Scomber scombrus	4–14
Sprat	Sprattus sprattus	Temperate
Pilchard	Sardina pilchardus	Sub-tropical
Sandeel	Ammodytidae	Temperate

Note:
References to temperate and sub-tropical in the table indicate that a specified range is not available in the scientific literature.

While a change in sea temperature could affect stock distribution, spawning, migratory patterns and survival of very young fish, the effect of long term temperature trends on fish stocks is not easy to predict. Increased sea temperature has been linked to reduced recruitment (the numbers of young fish entering the population) in cold-water species such as cod, and improved recruitment in other species such as bass, but the factors influencing the survival of fish are complex and in many cases still poorly understood. For heavily fished species, fishing pressure remains the primary control on stock size but recruitment success also has a significant impact.

Secondments

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her Department's policy is on employing secondees from the private sector; how many secondees from the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sectors her Department employed in each year since 1997; from which companies and organisations they were seconded; at what level they were employed; and if she will make a statement. [127064]

Alun Michael: Secondments into and out of Defra are vital in meeting our commitment to develop a modern, flexible, outward focused Civil Service that works in partnership with all sectors of society. Defra promotes and encourages the interchange of personnel between the Department and a range of organisations, in the private sector, the public sector and the voluntary and community sector.

Since the creation of Defra in June 2001 the Department has seconded personnel from the following organisations all at middle to senior management level:

	Organisation
From June 2001 to March 2002	
Private	BBC
	British Petroleum
	GlaxoKlineSmith
	Greater London Enterprise
Total	4
Public	Countryside Agency (2)
	English Nature
	Environment Agency
	Imperial College
	Local Government Association
	New Zealand Government
	Warwick University
	Natural Environment Research Council
Total	9
Voluntary and Community	World Wildlife Fund
	Year in Industry
Total	2
April 2002 to March 2003	
Private	Chemical Industrial Association
	Envirowise
	TXU Warm Front
Total	3
Public	Countryside Agency (2)
	English Nature
	Environment Agency (4)
	Forum for the Future
	Global to Local
	Gloucestershire CC
	Energy Action Grants Agency (EAGA)
Total	11
Voluntary and Community	Environmental Campaigns
	Groundwork
	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) (2)
	World Wildlife Fund
Total	5

From June 2001 to March 2002	*Organisation*
April 2003-to date	
Private	Powergen CPH Ltd.
Total	1
Public	Cambridgeshire CC
	English Nature
	Environment Agency (2)
	SW Regional Development Agency
Total	5
Voluntary and Community	Environmental Campaigns
Total	1

Letter from Professor Mike Roberts to Ms Annabelle Ewing, dated July 2003:

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has asked me to reply, with respect to the Central Science Laboratory, to your question concerning secondees from the private and public sectors since 1997.

The purpose of inward secondments from the private sector is to allow CSL to seek specialist expertise which cannot be provided by existing staff and for which recruitment to permanent posts is not appropriate. Modified rules on fair and open competition apply. CSL would ensure that the best candidate has been selected and the candidate's qualifications and experience qualify them to undertake the duties required. The secondee would continue to be paid and formally employed by the organisation that seconds them and the organisation invoices CSL for the salary costs.

A posting from another Government Department is classed as a loan and can be for up to 2–3 years. Payment of salary is taken over by the importing department.

CSL have not had any inward secondments from the private sector since 1997. There has been one loan in 2002 from VLA, a consultant in Veterinary Parasitology.

Sheep

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what compensation is available for farmers whose sheep may be affected by bluetongue. [130729]

Mr. Bradshaw: The 1981 Animal Health Act provides for compensation in the event of sheep slaughtered following an outbreak of bluetongue. However, slaughter would not be the primary method of control. A Compensation Order would need to be made in relation to bluetongue to reflect Government policy on compensation at the time of the outbreak.

The Government would not pay for sheep to be treated following infection with Bluetongue.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place a copy of her Department's contingency plan for bluetongue in the Library. [130730]

Mr. Bradshaw: Copies of the Bluetongue contingency plan have been placed in the House of Commons and House of Lords Libraries and a copy is in the main Defra library.

In addition, the plan is available on the Defra website: http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/notifiable/disease/bluecontin.PDF

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many live sheep have been imported into the United Kingdom to date in 2003 for *(a)* slaughter, *(b)* further fattening and *(c)* breeding; and how many of the sheep in each of these categories were imported from each country of origin; [129918]

(2) how many live sheep were imported into the United Kingdom through Dover on 3 September; whether the sheep were imported for *(a)* slaughter, *(b)* further fattening and *(c)* breeding; and what the addresses were of the places of (i) departure and (ii) final destination given on the route plan for each of the consignments. [129919]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our records show that the number of live sheep that were imported into the UK for *(a)* slaughter, *(b)* further fattening and *(c)* breeding between 1 January 2003 and 11 September 2003 is 31,993. The following table shows the breakdown by country:

Country	*Slaughter*	*Further fattening*	*Breeding*
Belgium	—	—	238
France	666	410	11
The Netherlands	132	—	393
The Republic of Ireland	27,257	1,675	353
Spain	680	—	—
New Zealand	—	—	24
Poland	—	154	—

Our records show that 328 sheep were imported through Dover on 3 September, all of them for slaughter. Details of the places of departure and final destination given on the route plan are treated as commercially confidential information.

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many live sheep were exported from Dover to continental Europe on 3 September; when and where health certification was carried out in respect of the sheep; how many of the sheep were rejected as unfit for the intended journey *(a)* during inspection for heath certification purposes and *(b)* at Dover docks; to where those sheep were taken; and what the address of the final destination given on the route plan was for each of the consignments. [129920]

Mr. Bradshaw: The information requested is as follows:

	As at 3 September 2003
Total animals	2,516
Where consignments were certified	England and Scotland
Animals rejected at certification	[1]22
Animals rejected at Dover docks	0
Destination	Netherlands

[1] Additionally four sheep were rejected after certification and before loading onto the lorry. The sheep rejected for export remained in Great Britain.

The sheep for the consignment were certified within 24 hours prior to export. The consignment was for sheep for further fattening which were transported to a single holding.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of sites of special scientific interest owned by the Environment Agency are assessed as in a favourable condition. [129341]

Margaret Beckett: Scientific assessment by English Nature shows that 76.1 per cent. of the area covered by its sites of special scientific interest is either in favourable or recovering from unfavourable condition. The remaining 23.9 per cent. is not in favourable condition and the agency is drawing up plans to remedy the situation.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the sites of special scientific interest in the ownership of her Department and its agencies. [129343]

Margaret Beckett: There is one site, Boxworth Experimental Husbandry Farm, Boxworth, Cambridge that includes land designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Sustainable Energy

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps are being taken to promote sustainable energy. [131080]

Mr. Timms: I have been asked to reply.

Sustainable forms of energy are at the heart of the Government's energy policy—as set out in this year's White Paper, "Our Energy Future: Creating a Low Carbon Economy". This encompasses renewable energy, cleaner coal technologies, and fuel cells.

To take forward the commitments made in the White Paper, we have established the Sustainable Energy Policy Network (SEPN) of departmental policy units, regulators, Devolved Administrations and delivery organisations that are involved in delivering the White Paper's commitments. The network is overseen by a Ministerial Group chaired jointly by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The Ministerial Group will be provided with independent advice by the creation of a Sustainable Energy Policy Advisory Board (SEPAB), made up of senior independent experts.

For renewable energy, we have already been working hard to create a comprehensive framework to meet our target that 10 per cent. of electricity should be sourced from renewables by 2010, and our aspiration that this should be doubled by 2020. Licensed electricity suppliers in England, Scotland and Wales are subject to the Renewables Obligation—requiring them to supply a specified and growing amount of their sales from electricity generated from a range of eligible renewable sources. The Obligation is backed up by a package of funding worth nearly £350 million. This is divided between: capital grants, which are available to help kickstart a range of new and emerging technologies, for example, offshore wind, wave and tidal power and solar photovoltaics; and the New & Renewable R&D programme.

Waste Disposal/Management

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's policy on the implementation of European legislation on the treatment and disposal of liquid dredgings from waterways. [129399]

Margaret Beckett: The regulatory and technical provisions of the 1999 EU Landfill Directive, including those on the treatment and disposal of liquid dredgings, were implemented in England and Wales by the Landfill (England and Wales) Regulations 2002. The Government recognise that some organisations responsible for the management of waterways in England may encounter difficulties in disposing of liquid dredged material, particularly when the ban on landfilling of liquid wastes comes fully into force. (The decision on when the ban will start will be taken following consultation with interested parties). The Department is currently working with waterways' representatives to identify a way forward that meets the needs of all parties.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the cost to industry of a requirement to recover 60 per cent. of packaging waste by 2008. [129401]

Margaret Beckett: An assessment of the likely costs to industry was included in the draft Regulatory Impact Assessment which forms part of the Consultation Paper on Changes to the Packaging Regulations issued by the Department on 21 July 2003. A copy of the RIA will be laid in the Library of the House when finalised towards the end of the year.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidance she offers to farmers wishing to dispose of *(a)* farm plastics and *(b)* silage wrap. [129267]

Mr. Morley: Current guidance to farmers wishing to dispose of *(a)* farm plastics and *(b)* silage wrap is contained in the Codes of Good Agricultural Practice.

However, we will shortly be consulting on Regulations to apply the controls necessary under the Waste Framework Directive to agricultural waste. The Regulations will prohibit the burial and uncontrolled burning of agricultural waste. Until these Regulations come into force we can only encourage farmers to dispose of their waste in ways that are not harmful to the environment and human health.

Within the consultation exercise, we will also be seeking comments on the options for a scheme to collect and recycle farm plastics.

The consultation will be issued in late 2003.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on progress in distributing to local authorities the 2003–04 financial allocation for the Waste Implementation Programme. [129403]

Margaret Beckett: As announced on 4 July, £24 million of the funds available to the Waste Implementation Programme in this Financial Year will be allocated to local authorities through the Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund. £3.6 million was

allocated to London, and Defra has announced the 19 schemes we propose to support elsewhere in the country. Funds will be distributed in response to valid claims sent by the relevant local authorities.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what criteria she intends to use to determine the allocation of money to local authorities under the Waste Management Performance Fund. [129404]

Margaret Beckett: No decisions have yet been taken on the criteria to be used for making awards from the Performance Reward Grant, which will be introduced in 2005–06. The Government will consult interested parties on the design of the Grant towards the end of this year.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether it is her policy that local authorities should be allowed to carry forward into the next financial year money allocated through the Waste Implementation Programme. [129405]

Margaret Beckett: As announced on 4 July, £24 million of the funds available to the Waste Implementation Programme in this financial year will be allocated to local authorities through the Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund. The current Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund is a discrete year fund and as such there is no automatic right to end of year flexibility for local authorities. If there are valid reasons that local authorities will not be able to complete their capital spend the Department can seek end-year flexibility.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much household waste was collected in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 2002. [131107]

Mr. Morley: Results from the Municipal Waste Management Survey show that the amount of waste collected from households in England were 22,549 thousand tonnes in 1996–97 and 25,592 thousand tonnes in 2001–02. Results for 2002–03 are not yet available.

Wildlife Trusts

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what meetings have been held by Ministers and her officials in the last year with representatives of the wildlife trusts. [130594]

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Environment met Dr. Simon Lyster and John Everitt of the Wildlife Trusts on 2 December 2002. In addition, representatives of the Wildlife Trusts regularly meet with Defra officials on matters of mutual interest, and have attended numerous functions where Defra Ministers have been present.

Zoo Animals

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the number of llamas and alpacas kept *(a)* in zoos and *(b)* outside zoos in the United Kingdom. [129338]

Margaret Beckett: As the licensing of zoos is a function for local authorities, there are no central records for the numbers of different species kept in zoos. The British Llama and Alpaca Association's own figures indicate that there are in the region of 2,700 llamas and 4,500–5,500 alpacas in private ownership in the UK.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to provide a general exemption for keepers of llamas and alpacas from the requirement to hold a zoo licence. [129339]

Margaret Beckett: The advice received from the Zoos Forum is that New World Camelids such as llamas and alpacas have not been kept in this country in sufficient numbers for sufficient time for them to be considered "normally domesticated in Great Britain" and they therefore fall within the scope of zoo licensing legislation.

Keepers of llamas and alpacas wishing to exhibit their animals to the public for seven days or more in any period of 12 consecutive months are therefore required to apply for a zoo licence. However, establishments displaying small numbers of llamas and alpacas may be eligible for a full exemption from the Act or for dispensations from the full inspection regime. I consider each case on its own merits.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Fraud

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the impact of credit card fraud on British businesses' operating costs. [130813]

Ms Blears: The Government do not collect figures on the cost of credit card fraud but the Association for Payment Clearing Services (APACS) estimates the cost of all plastic card fraud in the year to August 2002 to be £424.6 million. A majority of these costs will be borne by businesses. As with all expenses the costs of card fraud will have an impact on business's operating costs.

APACS figures up to July 2003, which have not yet been published, suggest a year on year decline in card fraud of around 5 per cent. This follows a number of initiatives both within government and in partnership with the private sector to combat this type of fraud.

In April 2002, the Government launched a two-year pilot of a unique policing unit (the Dedicated Cheque and Plastic Crime Unit—DCPCU) based in London, which works closely with the banking industry to reduce organised card and cheque fraud, using intelligence largely provided by the card industry. DCPCU has had significant success in its first year including recovery of more than 4,000 cards and 524 cheques, resulting in 59 arrests and six convictions with potential savings of £13.35 million.

The Government are actively supporting the introduction of 'Chip and PIN', a major finance and retail industry initiative to reduce card fraud. This involves the introduction of microchips into payment

cards to help authentication, combined with the use of PIN codes in place of signatures. The banking industry anticipates that by 2005 the new Chip and PIN technology will eliminate over half of the predicted level of plastic card fraud in the UK.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the cost of fraud in the UK's financial services industry on the UK economy. [131384]

Caroline Flint: A Home Office study, the Economic and Social Costs of Crime, published in July 2000 estimated that the total economic cost of fraud in Britain was up to £13.8 billion in 2000, equivalent to £230 per head. The Home Office does not collate separate figures on the costs of fraud in the United Kingdom's financial services industry.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with *(a)* credit card companies, *(b)* representatives of the retail sector and *(c)* law enforcement agencies on the level of credit card fraud in the United Kingdom. [131387]

Ms Blears: The Home Office is actively supporting the finance and retail industry's 'Chip and PIN' initiative and maintains regular contact with the Association for Payment Clearing Services and the British Retail Consortium (BRC). 'Chip and PIN' involves the introduction of microchips into payment cards to help authentication combined with the introduction of PIN codes in place of signatures. The banking industry anticipates that by 2005, the new Chip and PIN technology will eliminate over half of the predicted level of plastic card fraud in the UK.

Since my appointment to the Home Office in June I have provided forewords for the two reports on the public trial of 'Chip and PIN' which took place in Northampton between May and August this year. I shall shortly be meeting with APACS and the BRC to receive a progress report on the 'Chip and PIN' project. My right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) also discussed the 'Chip and PIN' initiative with the BRC and APACS.

The Home Office has frequent and regular contact with law enforcement agencies. In addition, in April 2002 the Government launched a two-year pilot of a unique policing unit (the Dedicated Cheque and Plastic Crime Unit—DCPCU), which is funded jointly by the Home Office and the card industry. The DCPCU is based in London and works closely with the banking industry to reduce organised card and cheque fraud, using intelligence largely provided by the card industry. DCPCU has had significant success in its first year including recovery of more than 4,000 cards and 524 cheques, resulting in 59 arrests and six convictions with potential savings of £13.35million.

Accommodation Centres

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what Government policy was on abiding by the outcome of a public inquiry on accommodation centres on 5 November 2002; what the policy is now; and when and for what reason it changed. [131392]

Beverley Hughes: The Government's policy has not changed. We will abide by the planning process and the outcome of the public inquiry which is a part of it. The outcome of the public inquiry is my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister's decision.

Annual Crime Survey

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with representatives of the British Retail Consortium on its latest Annual Crime Survey. [130581]

Ms Blears: I have not held any discussions with representatives of the British Retail Consortium (BRC) about its latest Annual Crime Survey. I am, however, aware of the regular information that the survey provides. The Home Office has also recently undertaken a Crime against Business survey, covering the retail and manufacturing sectors, in conjunction with Her Majesty's Treasury, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Neighbourhood Renewal Unit and the Small Business Service (an agency of the Department for Trade and Industry). The British Retail Consortium, British Chambers of Commerce, and the Confederation of British Industry have been consulted and closely involved in the survey.

The Government take the issue of retail crime very seriously and it is one of the main workstreams on business crime that is being progressed by the Business Crime Section in the Home Office. We have provided £15 million over three years to improve the security of small retailers in deprived areas and 12,500 individual businesses will have benefited by the end of this year. We are supporting the development of retail crime partnerships in major town and shopping centres. Home Office officials are also working closely with the BRC and other members of the retail industry in the Retail Strategy Group, set up by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, to address crime problems facing the retail industry in a strategic way.

Anti-social Behaviour

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the links between anti-social behaviour and social exclusion; and if he will make a statement. [130205]

Ms Blears: The links between anti-social behaviour (ASB) and social exclusion can be examined on two separate levels: (1) links between experience or perceptions of ASB in local areas and social exclusion and (2) links between engaging in ASB and social exclusion.

In terms of the links between experience or perception of ASB and social exclusion the British Crime Survey (BCS) provides data on people's experience (as a victim) and perception of anti-social behaviour according to respondents' neighbourhood and their current status in terms of employment, skills, income and housing.

Ellis, C. and Fletcher, G. (2003) 'Antisocial behaviour and disorder'. In C. Flood-Page and J. Taylor (Eds.) Crime in England and Wales 2001/2002: Supplementary Volume. Home Office Statistical Bulletin 01/03.

London: Home Office—deposited in the Library. The report indicates that people living in council estates and low-income areas are most likely to perceive local problems of disorder and that the economically inactive, those on low income, the unskilled and social renters are most likely to say that disorder has a great impact on their lives.

In terms of the links between engaging in ASB and social exclusion see Campbell S. (2002). A review of Anti-social Behaviour Orders. Home Office Research Study No. 236. London: Home Office—deposited in the Library. The review found that where case file information was available, a high proportion of people placed on Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) during the evaluation period had some sort of mitigating factor, e.g. had been evicted from their home or had been excluded from school, which appeared to have contributed to their behaviour. Additional work which has been commissioned and which will examine the link between engaging in ASB and social exclusion:

A forthcoming evaluation based on research of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts in Islington will look at the social background of families involved in ASB. A new Home Office survey of the general population currently in the field will provide information on offending, anti-social behaviour and victimisation. It will be possible to use England and Wales 2001/2002: Supplementary Volume. Home Office Statistical Bulletin 01/03. London: Home Office—deposited in the Library. The report indicates that people living in council estates and low-income areas are most likely to perceive local problems of disorder and that the economically inactive, those on low income, the unskilled and social renters are most likely to say that disorder has a great impact on their lives. In terms of the links between engaging in ASB and social exclusion see Campbell S. (2002). A review of Anti-social Behaviour Orders. Home Office Research Study No. 236. London: Home Office—deposited in the Library. The review found that where case file information was available, a high proportion of people placed on Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) during the evaluation period had some sort of mitigating factor, e.g. had been evicted from their home or had been excluded from school, which appeared to have contributed to their behaviour. Additional work which has been commissioned and which will examine the link between engaging in ASB and social exclusion:

A forthcoming evaluation based on research of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts in Islington will look at the social background of families involved in ASB.

A new Home Office survey of the general population currently in the field will provide information on offending, anti-social behaviour and victimisation. It will be possible to use the survey data to identify links between problems associated with social exclusion and anti-social behaviour.

Research has been commissioned to determine the predictive indicators of antisocial behaviour at eight age using data from the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC). The work will determine whether certain factors associated with social exclusion, e.g. family income, place children at increased risk of engaging in antisocial behaviour.

Anti-terrorism Measures

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will hold an inquiry into how anti-terrorism legislation is performing, with specific reference to the monitoring of police use of that legislation. [130579]

Mr. Blunkett: All current anti-terrorism legislation—the Terrorism Act 2000 and the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001—is subject to independent review.

The Terrorism Act 2000 is reviewed annually by an independent reviewer who is currently Lord Carlile of Berriew QC. This is a statutory requirement and a report of his review will be laid before both Houses.

The powers contained within the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 are currently being reviewed by a committee of nine Privy Counsellors chaired by Lord Newton of Braintree. This is also a statutory requirement and is scheduled to be completed by 13 December this year.

Both reports will be comprehensive reviews of the operation of the powers under the legislation.

In addition, where specific concerns arise, I have sought reviews from the relevant force and they in turn have taken appropriate steps to review their own operational procedures.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps have been taken to establish a closer working relationship between the CPS and the *(a)* National Crime Squad and *(b)* Anti-Terrorist Branch of the Metropolitan Police on (i) terrorism and (ii) other international, serious organised crime. [128864]

Mr. Blunkett: The already close working between the three organisations is continually being reviewed with a view to improvement. For example, the Crown Prosecution Service's (CPS) Central Casework Unit now becomes involved at the earliest stage of an investigation and provides pre-charge advice to the Anti-Terrorist Branch.

A more recent development is the completion of a pilot scheme between the National Crime Squad's (NCS) Special Casework Division and the CPS in the preparation of cases concerned with serious and organised crime.

I understand that this scheme has proved successful for all parties and will be extended further.

The working arrangements between the CPS, NCS and police and other law enforcement agencies dealing with serious organised crime will be significantly enhanced as a result of the recent establishment by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at a Cabinet Committee on organised crime chaired by myself.

Asset Recovery Agency

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the work of the Asset Recovery Agency. [130496]

Caroline Flint: The Agency is already making an effective contribution towards recovering criminal proceeds. Since the Agency became operational on 24 February 2003, the total value of assets under its investigation exceeds £17million in 33 cases, of which some £10 million is currently frozen under court orders in nine cases, pending hearings for recovery orders. In addition, one tax assessment has been issued under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 for tax in excess of 250,000. The Agency has also provided assistance to law enforcement agencies in 11 confiscation order cases raised under the previous legislation with a total value of £3.25 million.

The Centre of Excellence in the Assets Recovery Agency has delivered training in the Proceeds of Crime Act to over 1,400 financial investigators in law enforcement agencies. This year it plans to provide enhanced training and accreditation in financial investigation to an additional 350 staff from law enforcement agencies and to 50 staff from other agencies. The Agency has also successfully raised awareness of the new powers in the Act by hosting a series of conferences and presentations; and by the issue of a monthly newsletter which publicises successes in recovering the proceeds of crime.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money Havering borough council was given to deal with asylum seekers in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 2002 and *(c)* 2003. [128729]

Beverley Hughes: The information is not available in the exact format requested. The Home Office assumed responsibility for the budget for adult asylum seekers and their dependants in April 1999 and for unaccompanied asylum seeking children in April 2000. Between 1996–97 and 1998–99 the Department of Health was responsible for special grant payments to local authorities to meet the direct costs of providing support. Total spending by the Department of Health for 1996–97 was £10 million for adults and families and £2 million for children. The total figures for 1997–98 are £68 million for adults and families and £2 million for children.

The figures for the grant paid to Havering borough council for the financial years ending 31 March 2002 and 31 March 2003 are as follows:

£

Year to 31 March	*Adults and families*	*Unaccompanied asylum seeking children*
2002	[1]2,347,950	[1]875,095
2003	[2]1,693,289	[2]493,136

[1] Audited
[2] Subject to audit.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many asylum applications from people residing in Romford were declined in each year since 1995; [128730]

(2) how many asylum seekers were sent to live in Havering in each year from 1995 to 2002; [128731]

(3) how many registered asylum seekers are residing in the Romford constituency; [128732]

(4) how many claims for asylum were made from people whose address was in Romford during 2002. [128733]

Beverley Hughes: The information is not available in the form requested.

The availability of information on the location of asylum seekers in the UK is currently linked to the support the asylum seeker receives. Asylum seekers in the UK either receive support from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), local authorities or the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), or are supporting themselves.

Figures in respect of persons in receipt of accommodation support from NASS (those who have been dispersed or are disbenefited[1] cases) are available by local authority as at the end of each Quarter since December 2002. Figures for Havering show that for the quarters ending December 2002, March 2003 and June 2003 only one or two people were in receipt of NASS accommodation support.

Information in respect of the number of asylum seekers by constituency area, number of asylum applications by area of residence and refusals of asylum by area of residence are not currently published.

[1] Disbenefited cases are cases which were previously supported under the main UK benefits system and have been moved onto NASS support. Some of these cases have remained in the original social services accommodation.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have been *(a)* found guilty of committing crimes carrying a custodial sentence, *(b)* released and given leave to remain in the country and *(c)* deported after release in each year since 1997. [129107]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested on the number of asylum applicants found guilty of crimes subject to a custodial sentence, and for those who were granted leave to remain or who were deported after release from such sentences, is not available.

We take very seriously any criminal or anti-social acts committed by asylum seekers. Although there is no evidence to suggest that asylum seekers are disproportionately likely to commit crime, we have taken powers in the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 to prevent serious criminals using the protection of the 1951 Refugee Convention. We will seek to remove such criminals from the United Kingdom wherever possible.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum applications had been awaiting an initial decision for more than *(a)* six months and *(b)* 12 months at the latest date for which figures are available. [129469]

Beverley Hughes: As at the end of June 2003 (the latest date for which published figures are available), the estimated number of asylum applications awaiting an initial decision for more than six months was 22,900. Of

these an estimated 15,700 cases had been awaiting an initial decision for more than 12 months. These figures include cases that are currently under consideration.

Provisional data show that 74 per cent. of applications (excluding withdrawals and third country cases) received in 2002–03 were decided and served within two months. This exceeded the Government's target of 65 per cent. for 2002–03, and was a significant increase on the corresponding figure of 61 per cent. for 2001–02.

Information on the number of asylum applications outstanding and the timeliness of initial decisions is published quarterly on the Home Office website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his Department's latest estimate is of the number of asylum applicants in the UK without any official financial support. [129913]

Beverley Hughes: The requested information is not available.

It is estimated that during 2002, around 73 per cent. of asylum seekers eligible for National Asylum Support Service (NASS) support chose to apply, with the remainder supporting themselves.

Statistics on the number of asylum seekers who are supported by NASS are available on the Home Office's Immigration and Asylum Statistics website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of asylum applications in each of the last six years was decided within two months. [130480]

Beverley Hughes: Provisional data show that 74 per cent. of substantive applications (excluding withdrawals and 3rd country cases[1]) received in 2002–03 were decided and served within two months. This exceeded the Government's target of 65 per cent. for 2002–03, and was a significant increase on the corresponding figure of 61 per cent. for 2001–02 which was achieved against the then target of 60 per cent. Corresponding data for previous years is not available and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Information on the timeliness of initial decisions is published quarterly on the Home Office website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

[1] Cases which may be the responsibility of other EU member states under the Dublin Convention.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether a decision has been made on the asylum application of Dr. Boris Berezovsky; and if he will make a statement. [130865]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 18 September 2003]:* Dr. Berezovsky was granted asylum in the United Kingdom on 10 September 2003. It would be inappropriate to make any further statement on this matter.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on asylum applications lodged by an individual after extradition proceedings have begun against that individual. [130867]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 18 September 2003]:* An asylum application made by an individual who is the subject of extradition proceedings initiated by the authorities in their country of origin would be considered in accordance with the standard criteria for assessing such applications. This would include consideration of whether information contained in the extradition request provided grounds for excluding the individual from the protection of the Refugee Convention. A decision would be taken as quickly as possible. We would not return to a state requesting extradition an individual who has an outstanding asylum application against return to that state.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Mr. G. Qosja, reference Q1006624, will receive confirmation of the result of his appeal hearing in October 2002; and what the reasons are for the delay. [131039]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 18 September 2003]:* I wrote to the hon. Member on 24 September 2003.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have been issued with application registration cards since October 2001. [131056]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 18 September 2003]:* Up to the end of August 2003, approximately 150,000 Application Registration Cards had been issued. The Application Registration Card (ARC) was first issued on 31 January 2002.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when a standard acknowledgement letter was last issued to an asylum applicant. [131057]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 18 September 2003]:* The Government are committed to ensuring that all asylum seekers and dependants are issued with Application Registration Cards. Consequently, there are on-going measures to ensure that Standard Acknowledgement Letters, which have been issued to asylum seekers, are replaced with Application Registration Cards.

No statistics are held showing when Standard Acknowledgement Letters have been issued.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the report on the provision of policing in the event of the Daedalus site at Lee-on-the-Solent being used as an accommodation centre for asylum seekers. [131269]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Office has not commissioned any such report.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the application by Nataliya Peacock, reference P1062430, for indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom made on 13 December 2002, will be decided; and what the reasons are for the delay. [131390]

Beverley Hughes: Mrs. Peacock will receive a decision within four weeks.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the total number of failed asylum seekers was represented by those removed in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [130479]

Beverley Hughes: Including dependants, there were 11,600 asylum removals in 2001–02 and a record 14,400 asylum removals in 2002–03. The numbers of asylum removals continued to rise in April-June (Q2) 2003 to a record quarterly total of 4,280. These figures include removals relating to applications made in earlier years.

The information requested is not readily available and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Business Insurance Premiums

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the estimated financial cost in terms of higher insurance premiums for businesses was in each of the last three years as a result of crime. [130473]

Ms Blears: The Government does not make any estimates of the increase in insurance premia for business as a result of crime. The Association of British Insurers (ABI) publishes annual information in their "Insurance Statistics Yearbook" on trends in total premium income but this does not identify the overall impact of crime on insurance premiums.

The Home Office has published estimates of the economic and social costs of crime (Home Office Research Study 217). This study includes the cost of "insurance administration", that is the resources used in administering and processing premiums and claims, based on information in the ABI "Yearbook". The study estimates the total cost to society of insurance administration in England and Wales in 1999–2000 was £200 million for crime against the commercial and public sectors.

CCTV

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on the installation by private individuals on their property of CCTV cameras to monitor public areas. [129245]

Ms Blears: While the Home Office supports the installation by private individuals of CCTV cameras, and other appropriate security measures, to protect their property, we do not support the installation by private individuals of cameras that monitor or overlook public areas.

Chemical Agents

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which chemical agents are deployed for law enforcement and riot control purposes in the UK; what delivery devices are used; how much of each agent has been deployed in the last 12 months; and which institutions have received the agents. [128867]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 September 2003]*: CS is currently the only chemical irritant authorised for use by police forces in the UK. The CS is available in a number of different delivery systems.

The Police Service retains a tactical option to use CS agents to disperse a riotous assembly in life-threatening situations; subject to prior authorisation by the relevant chief officer. The CS is pyrotechnically discharged in the form of a cloud of smoke from a hand-thrown or weapon-launched grenade. The option has only been used once in a public disorder situation in Toxteth, Liverpool, in 1981. A small stock of such devices is retained by some forces.

CS in the form of an incapacitant spray is also issued to individual officers by the majority of police forces in the UK as a piece of personal defensive equipment for routine carriage. The method of delivery of CS in this case is by a discriminate aerosol spray with a range of up to four metres. Recording of the use of the spray is the responsibility of each individual force.

CS is also available to police forces in the form of 'barricade penetrating rounds' fired from a shotgun. These rounds rapidly disperse micronised CS in a cloud form within enclosed premises; the tactic is used, in extremis, to create a distraction or to encourage individuals to leave the premises. The rounds are only deployed on the authority of a senior officer for use by specially trained firearms officers in firearms/siege type situations.

Child Abuse

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to tackle child pornography on the internet. [127791]

Paul Goggins: The Government are committed to tackling child pornography on the internet. We are determined to ensure that there are effective measures to combat this exploitation of children. In January 2001, we raised the maximum penalties for taking, making, distributing or showing indecent photographs or pseudo-photographs of children to 10 years (from three years), and the maximum penalty for simple possession of such material to five years (from six months). There are proposals in the Sexual Offences Bill currently before Parliament that these offences should apply to photographs and pseudo-photographs of children up to the age of 18.

We have made substantial investment in law enforcement to enhance the capability of the police to investigate serious and organised crime committed via computers or computer networks, such as the internet. In April 2001, the National Hi-Tech Crime Unit was established, within the National Crime Squad, to investigate or support the investigation of such serious criminal activity, including the production and distribution of child pornography.

In March 2001, the then Home Secretary established a Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet. The Task Force includes representatives from internet service and communication providers, PC and software retailers and manufacturers, child welfare organisations, the main opposition parties, law enforcement agencies and academics. The Task Force has brought forward proposals for legislation to tackle paedophile 'grooming' activity on and off-line. In addition, sub-groups of the Task Force are looking at a

range of issues including the evaluation of rating and filtering systems, and the impact of 3G mobile telephones.

Officials and members of the Taskforce have also produced a single document covering separate models of good practice relating to chat services, instant messaging and web services, which was published on 6 January 2003. We consider that these models are a significant step forward in making the internet a safer place for children. We will be reviewing the models and their impact in the near future.

Internationally, the Government actively support efforts within the European Union, and more widely, to combat child pornography on the internet. In November 2001, we signed April 2001, the National Hi-Tech Crime Unit was established, within the National Crime Squad, to investigate or support the investigation of such serious criminal activity, including the production and distribution of child pornography.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has given to law enforcement agencies on combating child prostitution. [127785]

Paul Goggins: It is a tragedy for any child to become involved in prostitution. Children involved in prostitution are primarily victims of abuse and adults who take advantage of them, whether by exploiting them as pimps or by buying sexual services from them, are child abusers.

The Government issued guidance for law enforcement agencies and other agencies working with children entitled "Safeguarding Children in Prostitution" in May 2000. This was followed by "The National Plan for Safeguarding Children from Commercial Sexual Exploitation", which was published in September 2001.

The key message of both documents is that those under 18 who engage in prostitution are almost invariably victims and must be treated as such. A further key message is that wherever possible criminal justice action should be pursued against those who abuse children through prostitution or seek to exploit them as prostitutes.

The Sexual Offences Bill currently before Parliament proposes new offences to tackle the sexual exploitation of children, which will carry severe penalties. The proposals cover the exploitative and abusive activities associated with child prostitution and the involvement of children in pornography.

The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 introduces a new offence of trafficking persons to control them in prostitution. This offence carries a maximum penalty of 14 years in prison. The Sexual Offences Bill includes more comprehensive trafficking legislation to re-enact and replace these provisions, again carrying a maximum penalties of 14 years imprisonment. We have also developed and published a 'toolkit' on victims of trafficking, which is a guide for immigration officers, police and others potentially dealing with trafficking victims. We hope that the toolkit will raise awareness of the difference between trafficking and smuggling, and help them to treat trafficking victims fairly.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans his Department has to criminalise all forms of child trafficking in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [129085]

Beverley Hughes: The UK is committed to tackling the trafficking of children for sexual exploitation. Our strategy on trafficking is set out in the White Paper Secure Border Safe Haven and focuses on strengthening the law through new offences covering trafficking; providing appropriate support to victims of trafficking in the UK; tackling the criminals through intelligence and enforcement operations through the Reflex taskforce; EU co-operation and prevention in source and transit countries in partnership with Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Department for International Development (DFID).

The new Sexual Offences Bill sets out new wide-ranging offences covering trafficking for sexual exploitation to replace the stop-gap offence of trafficking for the purpose of prostitution, introduced in the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. The offence of trafficking for sexual exploitation carries a tough maximum penalty of 14 years. In addition to this, the Bill also introduces a new offence of commercial sexual exploitation of a child, which will protect children up to 18. It covers a range of offences, including buying the sexual services of a child, (for which the penalty ranges from seven years to life depending on the age of the child); and causing, facilitating or controlling the commercial sexual exploitation of a child in prostitution or pornography, for which the maximum penalty will be 14 years imprisonment.

Citizenship Applications

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for UK citizenship have been determined in the last 12 months; and what the mean average time taken from receipt of the application until its determination was. [130467]

Beverley Hughes: 129,535 applications for UK citizenship were determined in the United Kingdom in 2002, of which 120,145 applications were granted and 9,385 were refused. This is the latest information available and figures are rounded to the nearest five.

There are no data published on actual decision times to determine applications for British citizenship. Information on expected waiting times for citizenship applications are available on the Immigration and Nationality Directorate website; www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk and is periodically updated. As at July 2003 the expected average processing times were:

	Months
Naturalisation	8.8
Adult registrations	3.5
Minor registrations	8
Other registrations	2.3

However, this time may be significantly reduced if all relevant documents are sent with the application form.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the application for UK citizenship from Mr. Grieve of Fordingbridge was first received by his Department; when the application will be determined; and if he will make a statement. [130468]

Beverley Hughes: The application was received on 18 May 2000. The application has necessitated extensive inquiries which we expect to finalise shortly.

Civil Service

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many jobs under the remit of his Department in *(a)* the core Department, *(b)* non-departmental public bodies, *(c)* executive agencies and *(d)* independent statutory bodies, organisations and bodies financially sponsored by his Department and other such organisations, are located in (i) Scotland, (ii) England, excluding Greater London, (iii) Greater London, (iv) Wales, (v) Northern Ireland and (vi) overseas, broken down by (A) whole-time equivalent jobs and (B) the percentage per individual Department, body or organisation; and with respect to core Department jobs, if he will provide a breakdown of the number of jobs in terms of responsibilities which apply to *(a)* England only, *(b)* England and Wales and *(c)* the United Kingdom as a whole. [127311]

Fiona Mactaggart: The figures received in respect of the bodies under *(b)* and *(d)* are in the table which has been placed in the Library. Table D of the annual publication "Civil Service Statistics" contains the information requested in *(a)* and *(c)*. The latest edition was based on April 2002 data and was published on 24 July 2003; alternatively, this information is available at the following address on the Cabinet Office website: http://www.civil-service.gov.uk/statistics/css.htm.

Class A Drugs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of people under the age of 25 years reported the use of Class A drugs in each of the last six years. [130482]

Caroline Flint: The British Crime Survey estimates last year use of Class A drugs by 16 to 24-year-olds since 1996 as being:

	Percentage
1996	9
1998	9
2000	10
2001–02	9

Note:
From 2001–02, the BCS reporting period moved to financial years

However, none of these changes are statistically significant. Class A drug use has therefore been stable between 1996 and 2001–02. Data for 2002–03 will be published later in the year.

The 'Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England in 2002' survey estimates last year Class A drug use among 11 to 15-year-olds since 1998 as being:

	Percentage
1998	3
1999	2
2000	4
2001	4
2002	4

A revised method for measuring the prevalence of drug use was introduced in 2001. Therefore, estimates used in 2001 and 2002 are not strictly comparable with results from previous sweeps.

Commercial Confidentiality

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on the application of the principle of commercial confidentiality in relation to the disclosure of information to inquiries which he has instigated. [129679]

Mr. Blunkett: My Department's policy in relation to the disclosure of information is to adhere to the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information and the principles of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which becomes fully applicable from January 2005.

My Department is committed to the principles of open government and information will be disclosed in the public interest unless there are overriding commercial reasons (or legal constraints) not to disclose as allowed for under the exemptions described in the Code.

Community Support Officers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many community support officers *(a)* there were in 2002–03 and *(b)* there are in 2003–04 in each police authority in England and Wales. [130472]

Ms Blears: Home Office funding enabled 27 police forces to recruit a total of 1,222 Community Support Officers (CSOs) by the end of 2002–03. There was a second opportunity to bid for funds earlier this year and the allocation from this will enable 36 forces to recruit a further 1,234 CSOs in 2003–04. The numbers recruited and deployed in the first year and allocated to forces in this year are as follows:

Police force	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Avon and Somerset	12	30
Bedfordshire	0	12
Cambridgeshire	6	40
Cheshire	6	15
Cleveland	40	20
Devon and Cornwall	20	35
Dorset	7	0
Durham	10	25
Dyfed-Powys	0	5
Essex	10	45
Gloucestershire	0	30
Greater Manchester	160	25
Gwent	30	20

Police force	2002–03	2003–04
Hertfordshire	14	24
Kent	18	45
Lancashire	72	35
Leicestershire	28	17
Lincolnshire	32	10
Merseyside	40	60
Metropolitan police	499	250
Norfolk	12	18
Northamptonshire	12	0
North Wales	0	8
North Yorkshire	0	30
Northumbria	0	45
Nottinghamshire	10	35
South Wales	0	50
South Yorkshire	14	28
Staffordshire	0	10
Suffolk	0	15
Surrey	52	11
Sussex	22	40
Thames Valley	0	8
Warwickshire	11	13
West Mercia	10	30
West Midlands	0	40
West Yorkshire	60	100
Wiltshire	15	10
	1,222	1,234

128 of the CSOs allocated in round 2 are already trained and deployed and a further 77 are under training. In addition there are 174 non Home Office funded CSOs on the streets making a total of 1,601 CSOs in England and Wales.

Confiscated Assets

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals have been the subject of confiscation orders under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. [127971]

Caroline Flint: The confiscation powers in the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 are triggered by offences committed after the provisions were brought into force on 24 March 2003, so it will be some time before confiscation cases are dealt with by the Crown Court in numbers. To date, two convicted offenders have been made the subject of confiscation orders under the Act in England and Wales with a total value of £53,000.

Coroners

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when it is expected that there will be further action on the recommendations of the Home Office Review of Coroners and Death Certification. [129671]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* We are considering the recommendations of the Report of a Fundamental Review 2003—Death Certification and Investigation in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, published on 4 June, alongside those in the Third Report of the Shipman Inquiry on death certification and death investigation, which was published on 14 July. As I announced on 4 June, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has asked the Chair of the Review, Mr. Tom Luce, to undertake some further work to link the Review's recommendations to the relevant findings of the Shipman Inquiry. We expect this work to be completed later in the autumn.

Corporate Manslaughter

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received since 1 March in support of the introduction of a corporate manslaughter charge; and if he will make a statement. [129477]

Paul Goggins: We have received in excess of 50 letters on corporate killing since 1 March 2003. The vast majority of these supported the introduction of new measures to reform the law on corporate manslaughter.

I also refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) on 23 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 596W. These organisations are also supportive of our proposal to reform the law in this area. Officials will be holding a number of meetings with key external stakeholders to inform the development of proposals for legislation on corporate killing. As announced on 20 May 2003, these will be published before the end of the year.

Correspondence

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the hon. Member for Bolton South-East to the letter on behalf of Befriending Refugees and Asylum Seekers of 28 February. [129893]

Beverley Hughes: My hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) wrote to my hon. Friend on 9 September 2003.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the ARDG Central Allocation Team of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Totnes of 14 July regarding Mrs. John Lewis of Dartmouth, South Devon; and what the reasons are for the delay in replying. [130991]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 18 September 2003]:* I wrote to the hon. Member on 29 September 2003.

Clare Short: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter of 27 May 2003 from the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood regarding Singobile Lunga, H.O. Ref L1047295, a constituent. [131159]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 23 September 2003.

Crime Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the estimated cost of crime, in money terms, in each of the last six years was. [130487]

Ms Blears: The Home Office made estimates of the economic and social cost of crime in England and Wales in 1999–2000. Estimates were published in Home Office Research Study 217 (HORS 217), "The economic and social costs of crime". This study estimated that, in England and Wales in 1999–2000, the cost of crimes against individuals was £32.2 billion, against businesses

and public sector was £9.1 billion, of fraud and forgery was £13.8 billion, and of traffic and other non-notifiable offences was £4.8 billion. Figures for other years are not currently available.

Crime Statistics

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the differences are in the criteria by which an offence is considered to be *(a)* cleared up and *(b)* brought to justice. [109586]

Ms Blears: The term cleared up is used when an individual has been charged, cautioned, reprimanded, or received a final warning for a notifiable offence or offences in relation to a crime, or when such an offence has been accepted for consideration in court. A crime may also be counted as cleared up when no further action is taken on an offence for one of the following reasons:

the offender, victim or an essential witness is dead or too ill;

the victim refuses or is unable to give evidence;

the offender is under the age of criminal responsibility;

the Police or Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) decide that no useful purpose would be served by proceeding; or

the time limit of six months for commencing prosecution, where applicable, has been exceeded.

A notifiable offence is considered to have been brought to justice if the outcome is a conviction, caution, Penalty Notice for Disorder, or it is taken into consideration at court.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many shoplifting offences were committed in Romford in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* each of the last 10 years. [128375]

Paul Goggins: The available information is contained in the table:

Persons[1] aged 10–17 and 18–20 convicted in the Petty Sessional Area of Havering[2], 1992–2001

	Persons aged 10–17	*Persons aged 18–20*	*All young offenders*
1992	178	505	683
1993	171	609	780
1994	156	480	636
1995	N/a	N/a	N/a
1996	201	518	719
1997	252	481	733
1998	292	409	701
1999	269	473	742
2000	222	466	688
2001	286	481	767

[1] A person convicted on more than one occasion during a year will be counted separately on each occasion.
[2] Court sits at Romford. Figures include those convicted at the Crown Court, having been committed for trial from Havering PSA.

Statistics for 2002 will be available in December.

Juvenile Offenders

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 8 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 724W, on juvenile prisoners, what plans he has to move all 17-year-old females out of Prison Service custody. [125889]

Paul Goggins: We are determined to minimise the number of juvenile girls mixing with adult prisoners. We are currently setting up a new, separate juvenile unit at Downview, to end placements in Holloway. Given the numbers and geographical spread, complete separation across England and Wales is not simple, but we are looking at how further improvements can be made.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with the Metropolitan Police Force in the London borough of Havering with regard to young offenders. [128373]

Ms Blears: I have regular bilateral meetings with the Commissioner which cover the whole of the Metropolitan police area. The Youth Offending Team (YOT) in Havering was the first in London to be managed by a serving officer from the Metropolitan police and is one of the best performing YOTs in London, according to the tables of performance compiled by the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales.

It forms part of a consortium of YOTs which run the East London Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme for persistent young offenders. With support from the Children's Fund, Havering is also developing a Youth Inclusion and Support Programme which will aim to identify young people at risk of offending and provide a series of early intervention measures to address this risk.

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much the CCRC received in Grant Aid in the year ending 31 March 2003. [128886]

Paul Goggins: In the year ending 31 March 2003, the Commission received £7 million in Grant Aid.

Criminal Enterprises

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional steps he is taking to ensure that the target to disrupt 10 per cent. more organised criminal enterprises by 2004 is met. [130486]

Ms Blears: The target of disrupting 10 per cent. more organised criminal groups by 2004 set against a 2000–01 baseline was met in 2001–02. In 2002–03 there was a 3.4 per cent. increase in disruptions on 2001–02.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are employed by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority. [130510]

Paul Goggins: The Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority has a complement of 554 posts. At the end of July 2003, 496.5 of these posts were filled by staff on secondment from the Authority's sponsoring organisations, the Home Office and the Scottish Executive. A further 37 posts were filled by agency and casual staff.

Criminal Justice Boards (Targets)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the proposed timelines and targets set by each local Criminal Justice Board for the reduction of the time from arrest to sentence. [130483]

Paul Goggins: All Local Criminal Justice Boards are expected to continue to work towards meeting and maintaining the Government's objective to halve the average time from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders in England and Wales from 142 days (1996) to 71 days. The average time from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders in England and Wales was 64 days for the second quarter of 2003—the eighth consecutive quarter at or below the 71 day target. Current Persistent Young Offenders (PYO) performance for each Local Criminal Justice Board is set out in the table (Table A) and further details are available at www.youth-justice-board.gov.uk/PractitionersPostal/PracticeAndPerformance/Performance.

Locally, since April 2003 when the Boards were formally established, each Board has set itself individual adult and youth targets for improving general timeliness in the magistrates courts, with separate Crown court targets for different types of cases. These have been set in the context of the overall delivery of the Criminal Justice Systems (CJS's) Public Service Agreements and in the magistrates courts are expressed in terms of charge to completion. Targets for each area are set out in the table (Table B). Performance data from April-June 2003, is due to be published in October 2003.

Table A

Force	*AS*	*April–June 2003 Number of cases*
National	64	6,296
Avon and Somerset	61	108
Bedfordshire	44	27
Cambridgeshire	43	82
Cheshire	55	95
Cleveland	57	88
Cumbria	53	93
Derbyshire	91	90
Devon and Cornwall	48	120
Dorset	76	58
Durham	60	102
Dyfed-Powys	31	51
Essex	79	94
Gloucestershire	40	41
Greater Manchester	67	474
Gwent	64	78
Hampshire	65	314
Hertfordshire	49	58
Humberside	89	130
Kent	67	189
Lancashire	52	240
Leicestershire	66	106
Lincolnshire	79	78
Merseyside	89	257
Metropolitan	75	453
Norfolk	70	72
North Wales	43	110
North Yorkshire	76	79
Northamptonshire	68	71
Northumbria	70	384
Nottinghamshire	59	150
South Wales	63	259
South Yorkshire	73	164
Staffordshire	46	147
Suffolk	40	91
Surrey	74	48
Sussex	55	121
Thames Valley	64	147
Warwickshire	43	41
West Mercia	59	129
West Midlands	51	436
West Yorkshire	65	331
Wiltshire	68	36
British Transport Police	75	54

Note:
This table shows the latest available PYO arrest-to-sentence figures for each Criminal Justice Area.

Table B

		Magistrates court						*Crown court*			
		Adult			*Youth*						
TARGETS 2003/04	*PYO*	*Initial Guilty Plea*	*Trials*	*Committals*	*Initial Guilty Plea*	*Trials*	*Committals*	*Committal for trial (%)*	*Sent for trial (%)*	*Committal for sentence (%)*	*Sent for appeal (%)*
England and Wales	71										
Avon and Somerset	71	57	142	84	54	121	95	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Bedfordshire	71	36	175	86	49	121	85	78	78	78	78
Cambridgeshire	71	49	145	86	49	119	85	78	78	78	78
Cheshire	71	46	123	98	41	108	98	78	78	78	78
Cleveland	71	50	141	86	49	99	85	80	80	80	80
Cumbria	71	42	112	84	42	98	70	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Derbyshire	71	54	130	102	56	140	98	82	85	92	93
Devon and Cornwall	71	40	128	76	46	121	92	78	78	78	78
Dorset	71	48	182	86	46	112	68	78	78	78	78
Durham	71	37	111	90	24	85	55	78	78	78	78
Dyfed Powys	71	38	126	72	44	78	85	78	78	78	78
Essex	71	50	127	86	40	106	76	78	78	78	78
Gloucestershire	71	50	140	85	45	110	80	80	85	90	90
Greater Manchester	71	42	136	84	49	121	85	62	72	80	85
Gwent	71	[1]	[1]	[1]	49	121	85	78	78	78	78
Hampshire	71	35	148	69	42	115	83	78	78	78	78
Hertfordshire	71	45	145	86	44	121	62	78	78	78	78
Humberside	71	50	150	85	49	120	85	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Kent	71	40	140	80	40	115	80	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Lancashire	71	50	145	86	49	121	85	70	78	80	85
Leicestershire	71	41	130	84	47	108	69	78	78	78	78
Lincolnshire	71	47	145	86	49	121	58	78	78	78	78
London	71	47	145	65	49	121	77	78	78	78	78

Table B

		Magistrates court						Crown court			
		Adult			Youth						
TARGETS 2003/04	*PYO*	*Initial Guilty Plea*	*Trials*	*Committals*	*Initial Guilty Plea*	*Trials*	*Committals*	*Committal for trial (%)*	*Sent for trial (%)*	*Committal for sentence (%)*	*Sent for appeal (%)*
Merseyside	71	52	140	80	40	110	80	81	83	91	96
Norfolk	71	38	110	62	37	98	70	78	78	78	78
Northamptonshire	71	50	145	86	49	121	62	78	78	78	78
Northumbria	71	28	112	84	28	112	70	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
North Wales	71	36	104	90	45	102	67	90	92	90	93
North Yorkshire	71	42	130	86	42	90	72	78	78	78	78
Nottinghamshire	71	49	144	69	48	114	84	78	78	78	78
South Wales	71	50	128	84	42	92	60	78	78	78	78
South Yorkshire	71	54	138	98	57	117	102	78	78	78	78
Staffordshire	71	50	129	86	44	90	85	78	78	78	78
Suffolk	71	50	142	71	49	101	78	78	78	78	78
Surrey	71	45	140	86	44	100	45	78	78	78	78
Sussex	71	50	145	86	41	121	82	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Thames Valley	71	50	145	86	46	109	85	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Warwickshire	71	50	117	85	46	99	85	78	78	78	78
West Mercia	71	42	155	125	45	118	85	78	78	78	78
West Midlands	71	42	112	70	42	112	70	78	78	78	78
West Yorkshire	71	48	128	84	45	116	84	78	78	78	78
Wiltshire	71	47	120	108	42	98	0	78	78	78	78

[1] denotes no area target set

Notes:

Persistent Young Offenders—Targets are based on average time in days from arrest to sentence

Timeliness in Magistrates courts—Targets are based on 80 per cent. of defendants charged with crime to be dealt within the number of days shown from charge to disposal.

Timeliness in Crown courts—Targets are the percentage of defendants to be dealt with within National Targets from committal to first hearing

Crown Court National targets are: Committals for trial, 16 weeks; Sent for trial cases, 26 weeks; Committals for sentence, 10 weeks; Appeals, 14 weeks

These figures have been updated recently and may differ slightly from previously published figures

Awaiting clarification from Gwent on Adult timeliness targets

Criminal Justice System

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons the proportion of victims very or fairly satisfied with their treatment by the criminal justice system changed between 2000 and 2002. [130484]

Paul Goggins: The proportion of victims satisfied with their treatment by the criminal justice system has remained at around 58 per cent. since 2000, although this year's figure has shown a small rise, to 59 per cent.

We recognise that there is more to do to improve support and services for victims, and to ensure that their interests are fully taken into account at every stage of the criminal justice process. We detailed our plans in the national strategy for victims and witnesses, published in July. Among the proposals highlighted in the strategy was new legislation, to be brought forward as soon as Parliamentary time allows, which will include the first statutory Code of Practice for victims. The Code will list the minimum services which criminal justice agencies should deliver, and give victims the right of complaint to the Parliamentary Ombudsman if they are not received.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many criminal records checks have been carried out on staff employed by a *(a)* domiciliary care agency and *(b)* nursing agency, which have resulted in a criminal records certificate not being issued since the introduction of Criminal Records Bureau checks; [130530]

(2) how many criminal records checks have been carried out on staff employed by a *(a)* domiciliary care agency and *(b)* nurses agency who seek work in care homes since the introduction of Criminal Records Bureau checks; [130531]

(3) what the average time taken is to process a criminal record check on a *(a)* domiciliary care agency employee and *(b)* nursing agency employee in cases (i) when a criminal records certificate is issued with no further investigation or problems arising, (ii) when further investigations are necessary before a criminal records certificate can be issued and (iii) when further investigations were necessary and it was consequently determined that a criminal records certificate would not be issued. [130661]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 17 September 2003]:* The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) issues a Disclosure against all applications received, regardless of the information contained in it, except where the application has been withdrawn at the request of the registered body or applicant. I am unable to provide data on the average time taken to process CRB checks, broken down by category of worker or when further investigation has been required as there are no information technology procedures at present to extract these data from the CRB database.

However, I can confirm that the average turnaround times for Standard and Enhanced Disclosures across all business sectors is 24 days. Service turnaround times for Standard and Enhanced continue to exceed the CRB target of 90 per cent. of Standard Disclosures within two weeks and 90 per cent. of Enhanced Disclosures within four weeks. The CRB expects to process the checks for new care home workers within this service standard. In

July 2003, the average turnaround was 93.1 per cent. for Standard Disclosures and 93.5 per cent. for Enhanced Disclosures. Over the last four weeks output has exceeded intake: 142,932 applications have been received and 145,117 have been issued. Since 11 March 2002 the Criminal Records Bureau has issued over 2,364,312 Disclosures.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the total costs imposed on the voluntary sector in 2003–04 by *(a)* Criminal Records Bureau changes in respect of volunteers, *(b)* registration fees imposed under the Care Standards Act 2000 and *(c)* medical checks required by legislation. [130700]

Paul Goggins: The information is as follows:

(a) My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced in February 2001 that criminal record checks for volunteers would be conducted free of charge by the Criminal Records Bureau. There has been no change to that policy and checks remain free for volunteers.

(b) The Department of Health consulted the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC), which is the independent regulator of care services. The NCSC does not identify the voluntary sector payments separate from payments made by the statutory and private providers of care services. It is therefore not possible to provide separate figures for the voluntary sector.

(c) The Department of Health has informed us that as far as they are aware, there are no medical checks, as such, required by legislation. There are requirements in the various care regulations that providers, managers and staff must be physically and mentally fit for the purpose of the work they are to do. However, the regulations do not specify how these people are to prove they are fit. It is for the NCSC to decide whether the evidence of fitness is satisfactory.

Detained Persons

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the time needed to conclude the investigative process and charge a detained person. [130430]

Ms Blears: The Report of the joint Cabinet Office/ Home Office Review of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs/pacereview2002.pdf) published in November 2002 recommended that the existing maximum detention period of 24 hours without charge for an arrestable offence was insufficient and should be extended to 36 hours. The police provided the Review with supporting evidence on difficulties associated with the 24-hour detention period. The extended period would enable investigations being completed more effectively and avoid the investigative process to be rushed to the detriment of either the suspect or the criminal justice system or both. The provision is included at Clause 5 to the Criminal Justice Bill currently before Parliament.

DNA Database

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the size of the DNA database in each of the last five years. [130494]

Ms Blears: The DNA Database consists of records of both subject sample (offenders) profiles and profiles obtained from crime scene stains. In addition records are removed from the database. It is not possible toprovide information about the size of the database in each of the last five years as information about the number of deleted records has not been collected annually.

As at 31 August 2003 the database held 2,148,611 records.

Domestic Burglary

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional steps he is taking to ensure that the target to reduce domestic burglary by 25 per cent. by 2005 is met. [130488]

Ms Blears: We have already made significant progress towards meeting our target of reducing domestic burglary by 25 per cent. between 1999 and 2005. Figures published in the most recent British Crime Survey (BCS) show that there has been a 23 per cent. reduction in burglary since 1999.

We recognise the importance of driving down burglary still further, and a wide range of work is in progress to this end. Some initiatives are continuing from previous years. For example:

All police authorities have agreed targets for reducing domestic burglary by 2005. The Police Standards Unit is working with police forces to help them meet these targets and is offering specific support to those forces at greatest risk of not meeting their burglary targets.

Minimum sentences of three years have been introduced for those convicted of burglary on a third separate occasion.

Targets for reducing burglary are included in over 80 per cent. of the strategies developed by the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships.

"Stretched" burglary targets have been included in over one third of Local Public Service Agreements (LPSAs) between local authorities and central Government.

Work is continuing with universities, student unions, the police and other relevant agencies to reduce crime against students.

We are working with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) on an Approved Code of Practice for landlords, which will promote better standards of security in Houses in Multiple Occupancy (HIMOS) and improve landlord management practices.

Initiatives taken forward for the first time during 2003 include:

Developing a targeted publicity campaign in conjunction with brand partners to reinforce burglary prevention messages targeted at specific at-risk groups such as holidaymakers and home-movers.

Developing a strategy for reducing the market for stolen goods.

Through the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Burglary Working Group, producing a "Good Practice and Tactical Options Guide".

In addition, several other programmes of work are under way that will impact on a range of crimes, including burglary. Such programmes include Narrowing the Justice Gap, reducing re-offending and our anti-drugs strategy.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice and assistance he gives to local authorities to help them deal with cases of domestic violence. [127280]

Ms Blears: The Crime Reduction Programme (CRP) Violence against Women Initiative (VAWI) is an evidence-based programme to find out which approaches and practices are effective in supporting victims of domestic violence. In July 2000, some 34 multi-agency victims focused projects were commissioned and independently evaluated. The main findings are due to be published in early 2004. In addition, a series of concise reports, which will be aimed at promoting good practice to a range of practitioners, will start to become available from the end of 2003. These guides will help local authorities and others improve the way in which they deal with domestic violence cases.

In addition, a significant portion of the £14 million funding package announced in February this year will go towards assisting Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, in which local authorities are a key partner, to improve their performance in tackling domestic violence over the next three years. Another portion of that funding is being used to fund a three-year project by the Local Government Association aimed at supporting local authorities in tackling domestic violence.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to improve the collection of data on domestic violence. [127282]

Ms Blears: There is a Crime Reduction Programme (CRP) Violence Against Women project looking at data collection and we will be producing guidance on data collection arising out of the evaluation of that project.

The Policing Performance Assessment Framework, which is currently being developed, will examine the police's current data collection in its work to develop meaningful indicators to measure police performance.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will institute a national policy to ensure consistency in the way that police forces deal with the perpetrators of domestic violence; and if he will make a statement. [130204]

Ms Blears: Home Office circular 19/2000 gives guidance on police handling cases of domestic violence.

The National Centre for Policing Excellence (NCPE) is currently developing updated guidelines for police handling of domestic violence cases.

Drug Rape

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police forces are equipped with readily available test kits to secure samples in the event of a complaint of drug rape. [129615]

Caroline Flint: Twenty six police forces have ordered the Early Evidence Kit produced by the Forensic Science Service Scenesafe Unit. Scenesafe are the only suppliers of Early Evidence Kits approved by the Association of Chief Police Officers.

Another supplier, Tetra, sell separate modules and some forces use Tetra's urine and mouth modules to make up their own kit. It is not known how many forces have done this, but the Forensic Science Service estimate that most forces have access to one or other kit.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training in the specific handling of cases of drug rape is available to police forces; how many forces have taken up such training; and for what level of officer. [129616]

Ms Blears: Training for investigators in the handling of allegations of drug induced rape is contained within the Initial Crime Investigators Development Programme (ICIDP). This is a national programme, launched in February 2003 and endorsed by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). The training includes a knowledge of the various drugs that may be used and their effects; evidential and forensic considerations; and issues concerning victim care and evidence.

The training of uniformed officers who deal with sexual offence investigation (variously known as SOIT, SOLO or chaperones) is not currently delivered to a national programme. However, forces deliver a range of appropriate local training, including sexual offence training and drug induced rape issues. Numbers of forces providing such training are not currently known, but it features in a wide range of force training programmes.

Training for those officers, to agreed national standards, is currently being developed within the Sexual Offences Training Project at the Centre for Investigative Skills, National Specialist Law Enforcement Centre (NCPE). This is part of the response to the Home Office Action Plan to implement the recommendations of the HMCPSI/HMIC joint investigation into the investigation and prosecution of cases involving allegations of rape.

'Early Evidence Kits', developed by the Forensic Science Service in conjunction with the Police Service, have been available since 2002.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to ensure that early support is available to the victims of drug rape who do not intend to report the matter to the police. [129625]

Caroline Flint: Victims of drug rape currently have access to all the support services available to victims of any type of sexual offence. These include local GP and hospital services, Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs), Victim Support and NHS Direct, all of which will support victims of any sexual crime, whether or not they intend to report the matter to the police. In addition, there are local rape crisis centres in some parts of the country providing services for women only or which are geared towards the needs of particular groups, such as people with disabilities.

In July, the Home Office published a new national strategy, 'A new deal for victims and witnesses', which sets out our plans for ensuring that victims and witnesses of crime—including victims of sexual offences—get a better deal in future. One of the issues identified in the strategy is the need to ensure that there is better support for victims of sexual offences, including increased access to Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) and rape crisis centres.

As well as supporting the further roll out of Sexual Assault Referral Centres and improving access to other forms of support, the Home Office also intends to set up a national helpline for victims of sexual offences.

Drug Treatment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to page 38 of the 2003 Departmental Report, how many of the 5,500 probationers who entered drug treatment completed that treatment. [130504]

Paul Goggins: Government funding for drug treatment has more than doubled since 2000 to over £500 million pounds in 2003–04 and will rise further to £573 million by 2005–06. The number of problematic drug misusers entering treatment has also steadily increased over the last five years as treatment services have improved and become more widely available. The Drug Treatment and Testing Order (DTTO) is the main criminal justice disposal for drug addicts who commit crime and require treatment. The order can last between six months and three years and currently over 53 per cent. of DTTO offenders have either successfully completed their order or are still engaging positively with their treatment. Last year 6,140 DTTOs were made.

Dungavel Detention Centre

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who has responsibility for the education of children detained at the Dungavel Detention Centre; and under what legislation this responsibility is given. [130417]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* Under sections 148 and 149 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 the management and operation of Dungavel Immigration Removal Centre has been contracted out to Premier Detention Services. Premier Detention Services is therefore responsible for the provision of all services at the centre including the education provision for both adults and children.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letters of *(a)* 7 August and *(b)* 18 August from the hon. Member for Perth regarding the Dungavel Detention Centre. [130418]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* My hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) replied to the hon. Member's letter of 7 August on 9 September. The hon. Member's letter of 18 August was not received in this Department. A copy has been obtained from the hon. Member's office and there will be a reply as soon as possible.

Foreign Nationals (Deportation)

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign nationals held in prison service custody who have been served with a deportation notice are currently awaiting a decision from him on a parole application. [130535]

Beverley Hughes: Information on the number of people held in Prison Service establishments who have been served with notice of intention to deport is not available except by examination of individual case-files at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign nationals in prison service custody who have completed their sentence *(a)* are awaiting deportation, *(b)* have been awaiting deportation for between one and three months, *(c)* have been awaiting deportation for between three and six months, *(d)* have been awaiting deportation for between six and 12 months and *(e)* have been awaiting deportation for more than a year. [130536]

Beverley Hughes: Information on the number of people held in Prison Service establishments under the Immigration Act (2002) after completion of a custodial sentence is not available except by examination of individual case-files at disproportionate cost.

Forensic Science Service

Colin Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what profit/loss has been returned by the Forensic Science Service in each year since 1992. [130271]

Ms Blears: Figures relating to the profit/loss returned by the Forensic Science Service in each year since 1992 are set out in the table:

	£000
1991–92	-1,113
1992–93	1,193
1993–94	-1,930
1994–95	769
1995–96	628
1996–97	-1,457
1997–98	3,035
1998–99	239
1999–2000	157
2000–01	3,695
2001–02	4,891
2002–03	10,232

Colin Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were employed by the Forensic Science Service *(a)* in total and *(b)* at its Wetherby site in each year since 1992. [130272]

Ms Blears: Information is currently available only for 1996–97 to 2002–03. The number of employees (permanent staff, counted as full-time equivalents) at 31 March of each of those years is as follows.

Year	FSS total[1]	Wetherby
1997	1,167	115
1998	1,276	126
1999	1,677	183
2000	1,811	170
2001	2,230	222
2002	2,488	258
2003	2,603	273

[1] Forensic Science Service

Colin Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the police authorities in England and Wales used the services of the Forensic Science Service in each year since 1992. [130273]

Ms Blears: The Forensic Science Service has provided a service to all police authorities in each year since 1992 to the current year.

Colin Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost was of redundancy payments met by the Forensic Science Service in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003. [130274]

Ms Blears: There were no redundancies in 2001–02 or 2002–03. The current estimate of redundancy cost of 2003–04 is £6 million.

Colin Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the procedure is for the appointment of members to the Executive Board of the Forensic Science Service; and how many people serve on the Board. [130275]

Ms Blears: Appointments are made by the executive board after scrutiny by the Development and Remuneration Committee, and approval by the main board.

The Development and Remuneration Committee consists solely of independent members and the majority of members of the main board are non-executive directors.

Colin Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent on research and development by the Forensic Science Service in each year since 1992. [130276]

Ms Blears: The value of research and development by the Forensic Science Service in each year since 1992 is set out in the table.

	£000
1991–92	2,506
1992–93	2,295
1993–94	1,671
1994–95	1,582
1995–96	1,656
1996–97	2,109
1997–98	2,235
1998–99	2,771
1999–2000	3,187
2000–01	3,173
2001–02	3,670
2002–03	3,417

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are employed by the Forensic Science Service. [130478]

Ms Blears: The number of people employees (permanent staff, counted as full-time equivalents) on 31 July 2003 was 2,649.

Graffiti

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the level of graffiti; and what plans he has to reduce it. [125371]

Ms Blears: The British Crime Survey records that, in 2002–03 survey year, over a third of respondents perceived graffiti vandalism and other deliberate damage to property as being a very or fairly big problem.

Graffiti spoils our enjoyment of public places, increases fear of crime and produces an environment where crime and anti-social behaviour can thrive. That is why we are taking action to tackle it in both the Anti-Social Behaviour Bill and the Criminal Justice Bill. We are banning the sale of spray paints to under 18s. We are closing the loophole which prevents the police from searching for items which they suspect may be intended for causing criminal damage, such as spray paints. We are also giving local authorities powers to issue fixed penalty notices for graffiti and to clean graffiti from certain types of property now owned by them.

The Anti-Social Behaviour Unit is also looking at practical ways to reduce further anti-social behaviour, including graffiti.

Gun Control

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what studies he has commissioned of gun control policies in other nations, with particular reference to *(a)* the United States and *(b)* other EU member states; and what conclusions he has drawn. [130051]

Caroline Flint: I have not received recent studies. In developing our approach to gun control we pay broad regard to aspects of controls in other countries and to our European Union and international obligations. But ultimately United Kingdom legislation has to be framed in the context of domestic requirements. We have one of the toughest frameworks of control in the world, and we consider it right that we should. However, although controlling legal firearms is important in helping to prevent guns falling into the wrong hands, it does not obviate the need for other measures to deal with armed crime. This needs to be addressed in the context of all violent crime and other activities such as drug dealing, as well as the emergence of a gang culture in some areas, and in the light of what we can learn from police best practice, both here and abroad. The experience of the police in Boston, for example, is already being taken into account by police forces in the United Kingdom.

Gurkhas

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the basis is for the policy that wives of Gurkha soldiers who hold British overseas passports are refused visas to join their husbands in this country where the soldiers have six months or less to serve. [130179]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* British overseas citizens do not have right of abode in the United Kingdom and are subject to immigration control. There is no provision within the immigration rules for dependants of members of the armed forces to enter or remain in the United Kingdom. Under a concession outside the rules dependants are normally granted leave for the duration of the principal member's posting, up to a maximum of three years, on conditions permitting employment.

Gurkhas are discharged in Nepal and Gurkhas often return to Nepal, with their personal possessions, six months prior to their official discharge in order to undertake pre-retirement courses and take leave. During this time, the basis of any leave in the United Kingdom granted to the dependant wife of such a Gurkha no longer exists, as the Gurkha is no longer in the United Kingdom, and she may be refused entry.

An application for a visa to enter the United Kingdom may also be refused for the same reason.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made with the review into policy governing the right of Gurkhas to return to this country after completion of service; and when he expects to report on its findings. [130180]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* Officials from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate met with officials from the Ministry of Defence on Friday 12 September as part of their review of immigration issues affecting Gurkhas and other foreign and commonwealth personnel in the armed forces. Their discussion included access to settlement, work permits, naturalisation and welfare issues, including those affecting dependants. They are aiming to conclude their review and report their findings by Christmas.

Hearsay

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what safeguards exist to deal with the risks of hearsay evidence of an unrecorded cell confession; and if he will make a statement. [130432]

Paul Goggins: The Government set out its position on these issues in its response, published in March 2003 this year, to the 2nd Report of the Home Affairs Committee (Session 2002–2003) Criminal Justice Bill:

> In relation to the admissibility in criminal proceedings of confessions made to third parties, judges already have discretion to exclude evidence if it appears to the court that the admission of the evidence would have such an adverse effect on the fairness of the proceedings that the court ought not to admit it. When considering exercising this discretion the court would have regard for all the circumstances of the case, including the circumstances in which the evidence was obtained. [Ref: Section 78 Police & Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE)].
>
> Judges also have the discretion to exclude evidence where its prejudicial effect would outweigh any probative value. [Ref: Section 82(3) of PACE].

More specifically, where evidence is obtained in circumstances such as confessions made in custody cells, it is also open to the judge to draw the attention of the jury to these circumstances in his summing up.

The Royal Commission on Criminal Justice considered this issue in 1993 and made no recommendation for change. It was considered again by the Law Commission as part of its review of the hearsay laws in 1997. It concluded that confessions should continue to be admissible against their makers, subject to the discretions in PACE and in common law to exclude them. This view was supported on consultation.

Home Security

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact of the security improvements for homes in high crime areas. [130512]

Ms Blears: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the Locks for Pensioners scheme, a two-year programme funded under the Crime Reduction Programme to provide home security upgrades for low income pensioners in areas with burglary rates above the national average. The scheme ran from July 2000 to June 2002 in conjunction with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA's) Warm Front scheme.

The scheme is being evaluated and the report of the evaluation, covering both processes and outcomes, is expected to be published early in 2004.

Immigration

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what extra resources have been provided in the last three years to police authorities to enable them to deal with the policing of immigrants. [131264]

Ms Blears: Expenditure on policing supported by Government has increased by 25 per cent. in the past three years. It is a matter for each police authority to match resources to local policing requirements.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statistics are maintained on the criminal activities of *(a)* illegal immigrants and *(b)* seekers of political asylum. [131265]

Beverley Hughes: The statistics referred to are not available from existing data collection systems and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Details of the nationality and immigration status of suspects or of those convicted of crimes are not collated centrally as part of the recorded crime statistics and are not necessarily recorded by individual police forces.

Information on asylum applications is published quarterly on the Home Office website at: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html. The next publication will be available from the end of November and will cover the third quarter of 2003.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases in each of the last 12 months have been *(a)* sent to the Appeals Processing Centre and *(b)* despatched to the Immigration Appellate Authority. [130611]

Beverley Hughes: The available information is shown in the table.

Number of cases (principal applicants)

Month	Asylum appeals received by the Home Office[1]	Asylum Appeals received by the IAA[1,2]
July 2002	4,565	4,500
August 2002	3,960	4,510
September 2002	3,905	9,635
October 2002	4,965	4,475
November 2002	3,740	6,080
December 2002	3,575	6,110
January 2003	[3]3,400	6,015
February 2003	[3]4,000	6,025
March 2003	[3]5,200	6,045
April 2003	[3]3,700	5,825
May 2003	[3]3,400	6,025
June 2003	[3]3,600	5,985

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest five, and are provisional.
[2] Based on information supplied by the Department for Constitutional Affairs.
[3] Figures rounded to the nearest 100, and subject to later revision.

Information on the number of asylum appeals received by the Home Office, and the number of appeals received by the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA), is published quarterly on the Home Office website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Incapacitating Drugs

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress is being made with the design of a device to test for a broad spectrum of incapacitating drugs in alcoholic drinks. [129617]

Caroline Flint: The Department of Trade and Industry commissioned research to look at the viability of a potential drug detecting device, such as a "swizzle stick", that could be unobtrusively used by people in pubs and clubs to detect drugs in drinks. Unfortunately, the prohibitive costs involved, and the difficulty of producing a satisfactory device, led to the project's discontinuance.

In general, we would urge people to exercise care with any product that claims to provide a complete solution to this problem, not least because of the reported widespread use of alcohol itself as a substance to facilitate the overpowering of a victim. Any device that provides only a partial screen is potentially dangerous to the extent that it may offer false reassurance.

Internet Grooming

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research he has analysed into which age group is the most targeted for internet grooming. [126939]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 8 September 2003]*. We know of no research which would directly answer the question. Rachel O'Connell's published research ("Young Peoples' use of chatrooms: implications for policy strategies and programmes of education", 2002) explores the use of chatrooms by children of different ages but did not purport to identify the age group most at risk of grooming. The position is that a child of any age might be a target and so all should be cautious.

Interpretation/Translation Services

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department why the Immigration Research and Statistics Service commissioned a consultant to conduct a mapping exercise of the Immigration Research and Statistics Service research into the use of interpreters by Government Departments and other public services; if he will make a statement on the conclusions reached regarding how public services provide interpretation and translation services, where they are adequate and where they are not; what they cost; and what best practice has been identified. [130724]

Beverley Hughes: The Immigration Research and Statistics Service recently commissioned a research study to map the provision of interpretation and translation across five geographical regions and across eight public sector services. The research was carried out by the Health for Asylum Seekers and Refugees Portal (HARP) group at East London University. Its main aims were to identify the range of interpretation and translation services available in the United Kingdom, to identify the main service providers and public sector users of these services and to identify the role of community groups in this provision. The project also aimed to examine the costs of this provision and to identify good practice in providing interpretation and translation services.

This research project has not yet been completed.

Lawful Protests (RAF Fairford)

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the use of powers provided by the Terrorism Act 2000 to prevent lawful protests by anti-war protestors at RAF Fairford during the recent conflict in Iraq; [130339]

(2) what powers provided by the Terrorism Act 2000 were used to police anti-war protests at RAF Fairford during the recent conflict in Iraq; [130341]

(3) if he will make a statement on the issuing of section 44 notices under the terms of the Terrorism Act 2000, to anti-war protesters at RAF Fairford during the recent Iraq conflict. [130343]

Mr. Blunkett: Lawful protests were not prevented at RAF Fairford during the recent conflict in Iraq as a result of use of the Terrorism Act 2000.

The use of the stop and search powers under section 44 was authorised and confirmed according to statutory procedure for a designated area which included Fairford. They were therefore available to officers during the policing of the protests. Such powers are confirmed solely to enable officers to search for articles that could be used in connection with terrorism.

The issuing of individual stop and search notices was an operational matter for the police.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the policing tactics used during anti-war protests at RAF Fairford during the recent conflict in Iraq. [130340]

Ms Blears: Gloucestershire constabulary co-ordinated a joint operation with the Ministry of Defence police who were responsible for policing on the base. In

a complex operation, Gloucestershire constabulary deployed a significant number of police officers and operational tactics designed to facilitate peaceful protest and prevent terrorist activity or public disorder while maintaining the integrity of the outer perimeter of the base.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the total policing costs at the anti-war protests at RAF Fairford during the recent conflict in Iraq. [130342]

Ms Blears: The Chief Constable of Gloucestershire constabulary informs me that the latest estimate of costs for the policing operation at RAF Fairford is of the order of £6.9 million.

The revised projection is a significant increase on previous estimates of around £3.3 million to £3.6 million.

Earlier this year my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary agreed to support the police authority with special grant towards the costs of the operation.

We are now considering the revised estimate with the police authority and the constabulary.

Metropolitan Police

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funding per head of population the Metropolitan police received in each year since 1993 from *(a)* Government and *(b)* precept; and if he will make a statement. [128757]

Ms Blears: The information is set out in the table.

£

	Funding per head of population	*Precept per head of population*
1993–94	172.8	50.9
1994–95	174.6	53.7
1995–96	209.6	20.7
1996–97	206.5	20.3
1997–98	211.8	24.3
1998–99	209.1	28.9
1999–2000	209.2	31.0
2000–01	220.8	33.5
2001–02	250.2	45.3
2002–03	262.6	49.0
2003–04	279.1	60.2

Funding includes Home Office police grant and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) revenue support grant and national non-domestic rates and Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) reduction grant, Crime Fighting Fund, Airwave, Street Crime Initiative, DNA Expansion programme, London Allowance, free travel, Basic Command Unit (BCU) funding, special priority payments, counter-terrorism funding, capital grant, C3i, Premises Improvement Fund and special grant.

Source for population data (and police grant in 1993–94 and 1994–95) is the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy police statistics (Actuals to 2001–02 and Estimates for 2002–03). Figures for 2003–04 are not yet available so the estimated population figure for 2002–03 has been used.

Source for precept information is the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Microsoft

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was paid to Microsoft in licensing fees by his Department and its agencies in each of the last three years; and how much has been budgeted for *(a)* 2003–04 and *(b)* 2004–05. [130686]

Fiona Mactaggart: The cost of Microsoft Licensing fees are inclusive of enterprise and select agreements and monies paid under software assurance but are exclusive of spend on customisation, often classified as professional services and software licences procured by IT service providers.

		July 2000 to March 2001	*April 2001 to March 2002*	*April 2002 to March 2003*	*Total*
Home Office	Home Office	53	5,726	17	5,796
	Includes: National Probation Service Criminal Justice IT Immigration & Nationality Dir	—	—	—	—
Home Office Total	—	53	5,726	17	5,796
Home Office Agencies	Forensic Science Service	263	391	450	1,104
	UK Passport Office	0	0	11	11
—	Prison Service (costs incurred locally by prisons)	52	433	2,029	2,514
Home Office Agencies Total	—	315	824	2,490	3,629

Note:
Figures shown above are £000s

Budgets:

The Forensic Science Service retain the management of their IT infrastructure in-house and therefore allocate a budget to the annual costs of Microsoft Licensing (2003–04 £227,000; 2004–05 £227,000 est).

Neither the Home Department nor the Prison Service and United Kingdom Passport Agency are able to provide budgeting information as requested.

Labour Party Conference

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much funding will be paid to Dorset police authority in respect of the costs of policing the Labour Party Conference in Bournemouth; and what percentage of the cost of policing the conference this represents. [130647]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 16 September 2003]*: The Chief Constable has estimated that the additional

costs of policing the conference this year will be £2.276 million. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has agreed a special grant to cover this sum. He has also agreed to contribute £0.204 million (48 per cent.) towards the cost of permanent equipment for security.

Migrants

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information his Department holds on the deaths of migrants to Europe and the Mediterranean in the last 12 months; and what discussions his Department has held with relevant officials in *(a)* Spain, *(b)* Italy and *(c)* Greece. [129912]

Beverley Hughes: Statistical information on the deaths of migrants to Europe and the Mediterranean is not collated centrally in the UK. Such incidents are appalling, and we know that a significant number of those that have died have had their journeys facilitated by organised criminal gangs. The Government are committed to working with our EU partners to combat this exploitative trade by targeting people smugglers and traffickers through joint operations across Europe. During the last 12 months, officials in the Home Office have held discussions with their counterparts across the EU, including Spain, Italy and Greece, to ensure that such operations are appropriately targeted and rigorous action is taken to combat people smuggling and its inherent risks to life.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the amount paid in taxes by migrants to the UK in each of the last five years. [130497]

Beverley Hughes: Information does not exist on the precise amounts paid in taxes by migrants to the UK each year. However, a Home Office research study, published in 2002 (RDS Occasional Paper 77 "The migrant population in the UK: fiscal effects"), estimated that for the fiscal year 1999–2000 migrants paid £31.2 billion in taxes. By comparison they received an estimated £28.8 billion in public expenditure and services—making a net fiscal contribution to the UK of £2.5 billion.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the new detection technology used in the management of migration to the UK. [130498]

Beverley Hughes: The deployment of people detection technology is one of the many initiatives the Government have taken to significantly reduce the number of unfounded asylum claimants arriving in the United Kingdom.

We have deployed people detection technology at ports in France, Belgium, Holland, Germany and Ireland.

In France, we have deployed technology in Calais and Coquelles and negotiations on deployment are at an advanced stage with the ports of Dunkirk, Cherbourg, Le Havre and Caen, and preliminary scoping visits have been made to Dieppe, Roscoff and St. Malo. At Calais there is the capability to screen 100 per cent. of embarking freight vehicles. Following the tightening of security at Calais, we are taking steps to deploy at other continental ports vulnerable to the displacement of clandestine activity.

In Belgium, operations have commenced at Ostend where United Kingdom provided technology screens on embarking freight. Initial operations have commenced at Zeebrugge and deployment continues at other terminals within the port. A gamma scanner has been trialed in a joint operation with the Belgian authorities since August 2003.

In the Netherlands, deployment has now commenced at the port of Vlissingen and negotiations continue with other Dutch ports.

In Germany, technology has been operational on the German border with Poland and the Czech Republic since late August.

In Ireland, technology has been deployed since late July.

Motor Salvage

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact of the Motor Salvage Operations Regulations. [130511]

Ms Blears: The provisions of the Vehicles (Crime) Act 2001 and accompanying regulations regulating the motor salvage industry took effect on 21 October 2002. They have been welcomed by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) who believe they will be effective in driving criminals out of the motor salvage industry. Information about registrations of motor salvage operators, inspections of premises and prosecutions and convictions under the 2001 Act is not available centrally at present. We are in touch with ACPO and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister about how this information can be collected without unnecessarily increasing the bureaucratic burden on police forces and local authorities.

National Crime Squad

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are employed by the National Crime Squad; and what its total salary costs in 2002–03 were. [130475]

Ms Blears: The total workforce of the National Crime Squad (NCS) for 2002–03 was 1,769.

The total salary costs for NCS in 2002–03 were £83,255,000.

National Criminal Intelligence Service

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are employed by the National Criminal Intelligence Service; and what its total salary costs in 2002–03 were. [130476]

Ms Blears: In 2002–03, the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) workforce was 956 staff.

This included an average of 71 members of staff attached to NCIS who were paid for by their parent employer.

NCIS total salary costs for 2002–03 were £39,526,000.

Operation Magician

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the final cost was of Operation Magician in 2000. [131228]

Caroline Flint: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the approximate additional cost for this operation was £300,000.

Operation Ore

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes are planned to the Operation Ore Child Protection Unit operated by the Metropolitan police. [129330]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 September 2003]:* The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis advises me that the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) does not have a specific 'Operation Ore Child Protection Unit'. The MPS Child Protection Group manages all child abuse investigations including all Operation Ore subjects. The Group is led by a Detective Chief Superintendent and has an establishment of 418 specialist police officers and 150 civilian support staff.

The MPS Child Protection Group's health and safety strategy has required that a small number of officers who have served a long time within the Paedophile Unit be rotated to other duties. This has been misreported in the media as the disbanding of the Paedophile Unit. However the unit is in fact being expanded and made ready for the new legislation, including the Sexual Offences Bill, currently passing through Parliament.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been spent on Operation Ore since it was set up. [129331]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 11 September 2003]:* Investigations concerning Operation Ore are carried out by paedophile units, child protection or investigation teams within police forces, assisted by computer crime units. The decision as to the level of funding that should be allocated to this type of work, and this specific investigation is the responsibility of individual chief police officers.

There is no central record held of the sums allocated to these units or the amount spent on individual operations.

Ordnance Safety Board

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what account police forces in England and Wales take of the views of the Ordnance Safety Board in determining which weapons to recommend for police use. [130696]

Ms Blears: Decisions regarding the choice of weapons for police use are a matter for chief officers. Information on the sources of advice they receive is not available centrally.

Overseas Students

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received on the level of charges for leave to remain for overseas students. [131366]

Beverley Hughes: The fees are set under Treasury rules to recover the full administrative cost entailed in considering applications and no more. This is calculated by taking the overall costs of processing applications divided by the number of decisions we expect to make.

A number of letters have been received from groups representing the education sector such as UKCOSA, Universities UK, and various universities to which I have already responded.

A number of letters, phone calls and emails have also been received from members of the public, including students with regard to both the introduction of charging and the level of the fee. Officials continue to deal with these.

Paedophiles

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce minimum sentences for those guilty of paedophile offences; and if he will make a statement. [128987]

Paul Goggins: The Government have no plans to introduce a minimum sentence for those found guilty of sexual offences against children. The offences cover a wide range of behaviour and in some cases the offender may himself be a child.

However, the Criminal Justice Bill currently before Parliament will establish a Sentencing Guidelines Council, chaired by the Lord Chief Justice. The Council will be responsible for setting guidelines for the full range of criminal offences, including sexual offences against children. It will be required to consult Parliament before publishing a guideline and will commission advice from the Sentencing Advisory Panel which will consult widely.

The guidelines should ensure that there is an agreed starting point for sentences and agreed aggravating and mitigating factors. In each individual case, the judge or magistrate will continue to make a decision as to sentence as they see fit, but will be required to operate within the Council's guidelines or explain why they do not apply to the case in question.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce legislation to increase the maximum sentence for those guilty of paedophile offences; and if he will make a statement on judicial leniency in such cases. [128988]

Paul Goggins: The new Sexual Offences Bill includes a range of child sexual offences that will cover not only unlawful sexual intercourse but also other forms of sexual touching involving a child under 16. The offences are underpinned by maximum penalties. Many of these represent significant increases on the maximum penalties available for the comparable offending at present.

The Criminal Justice Bill currently before Parliament will establish a Sentencing Guidelines Council, chaired by the Lord Chief Justice. The Council will be

responsible for setting guidelines for the full range of criminal offences, including sexual offences against children. It is proposed that Parliament will also be consulted as a guideline is developed. In each individual case, the judge or magistrate will continue to make a decision as to sentence as they see fit, but will be required to operate within the Council's guidelines or explain why they do not apply to the case in question.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the funding for the Special Paedophile Unit; and if he will make a statement on its role. [128989]

Paul Goggins: The Paedophilia On Line Investigation Team (POLIT) is a unit of the National Crime Squad (NCS) which administers online paedophile investigations on a national basis.

The unit is responsible for directing key investigations on behalf of forces and providing a national single point of contact for international enquiries in relation to online child sex abuse. The unit is particularly well known for the vital role it has assumed in the co-ordination of Operation Ore.

The funding of this unit is currently being considered as part of the wider funding provision for the National Crime Squad for the years 2004-05 and beyond.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures are in place to test whether a convicted paedophile is ready for release; and what plans he has to change these procedures. [128990]

Paul Goggins: Where release of a prisoner is discretionary, a variety of reports from a number of different sources are produced to assess a prisoner's suitability for release, and to inform the decision making process. These may include specific assessments designed for sex offenders. The assessment process is kept under review.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many questions directed to him remain unanswered. [130763]

Fiona Mactaggart: The current number of parliamentary questions directed to the Secretary of State for the Home Department yet to be answered is 320.

Passports

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to deny visa-waived entrance to EU passport holders who carry passports without modern security features. [128661]

Beverley Hughes: Under EC law, EU nationals must be admitted to the United Kingdom if they produce, on arrival, a valid passport or national identity card issued by an EU State, regardless of the security features contained in those documents. Therefore there are no plans to introduce visa requirements for EU passport or identity card holders.

The European Community currently has a general power that would enable it to agree provisions on security features on identity cards, residence permits and passports on the basis of unanimity. This will be reinforced under the draft Constitutional Treaty which will provide a specific unanimity legal base and will raise the profile of EU competency in this area.

This will allow the European Community to actively press for improved levels of security and quality in all member states' identity documents.

Peaceful Demonstrations

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the use of powers under the Terrorism Act 2000 in relation to peaceful demonstrations. [130221]

Mr. Blunkett: Powers under the Terrorism Act 2000 are available to police to prevent acts of terrorism, and to aid investigation into terrorist activities. The use of such powers at any demonstration should be only for these purposes.

Where specific concerns arise, I have sought reviews from the relevant force and they in turn have taken appropriate steps to review their own operational procedures.

Performance Targets (Criminal Justice System)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the SR2002 public service agreement targets are for the criminal justice system with effect from April 2003. [128875]

Paul Goggins: The Home Office's public service agreement targets, with effect from April 2003, were agreed with Her Majesty's Treasury as part of the 2002 Spending Review. They were laid before the House, on 15 July 2002, in the White paper '2002 Spending Review: Public Service Agreements' (Cm 5571), a copy of which was placed in the Library.

These targets are shared with the Department for Constitutional Affairs and the Crown Prosecution Service.

Details of the public service agreement targets from SR2002 are also available on the Her Majesty's Treasury website www.hm-treasury.gov.uk.

Police

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were licensed to carry firearms in each year since 1997. [129940]

Ms Blears: The number of authorised firearms officers (AFOs) in police forces in England and Wales for years 1997-2002 are shown in the table.

	Number of authorised firearms officers (AFOs)
1996-97	6,738
1997-98	6,585
1998-99	6,308
1999-2000	6,262
2000-01	6,064
2001-02	5,776

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the more flexible working practices in the Police Service are that are referred to on page 46 of the 2003 Departmental Report. [130505]

Ms Blears: A number of more flexible working practices were implemented in April 2003, as part of the reforms to police pay and conditions agreed by the Police Negotiating Board in May 2002. They are:

A national target of a 15 per cent. reduction in overtime expenditure by 2005–06, designed to give officers a healthier work life balance;

A change from annual rosters to three-month rosters;

Removal of the 16-hour a week minimum requirement for part-time working;

Removal of the requirement for job-sharing in middle and senior ranks; and

Rationalisation of the system of allowances.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the work of the Police Standards Unit in assisting forces which are having difficulty meeting volume crime targets. [130491]

Ms Blears: The Police Standards Unit's (PSU) work with police forces to address performance issues is initiated where there are gaps in performance across a range of indicators, including key volume crime indicators. The full range of indicators were set out in the National Policing Plan 2003–06. The PSU is also leading the development of the Policing Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF) which aims to provide a broader balanced score approach to performance assessment.

While each PSU project is subject to scrutiny and review, no formal assessment has been made to quantify the impact of this work on meeting specific volume crime targets in forces. PSU is making, and will continue to make, a significant impact in assisting forces to improve their performance.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made by police forces in England and Wales in emulating the best practice highlighted by the National Centre for Policing Excellence. [130506]

Ms Blears: The National Centre for Policing Excellence was launched in April 2003 to increase the professional capacity of the police by identifying and disseminating evidence-based best practice. In 2002–03, it produced a knowledge map on street robbery which has been available to all forces on the Criminal Justice Extranet. It is too early, however, to judge how effective this good practice guidance has been in improving the professional capability of the Police Service.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which police forces in England and Wales have signed up to the best practice standards in the use of the National Intelligence Model. [130507]

Ms Blears: The National Policing Plan commits all forces in England and Wales to be National Intelligence Model (NIM) compliant by April 2004. Implementation is supported by Home Office funding. Regular assessments of progress are taking place and development plans are in place within forces where appropriate.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what appraisals of the safety and reliability records of different types of pistols are being undertaken in relation to weapons recommended for police use. [130697]

Ms Blears: All forces are required to notify the Police Scientific Development Branch (who are part of the Home Office) of any failures or defects in weapons or ammunition in order that an assessment can be made as to whether there is a need for further investigation and potential circulation of information to all forces.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the manufacturers of pistols used by UK police forces; and if he will indicate for each manufacturer which other Western European police forces use weapons of that manufacture. [130698]

Ms Blears: Decisions on the make of pistols used by UK police forces would be a matter for chief officers. Information on the weapons used by other European police forces is not available.

Prisons

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what research his Department has commissioned into the effect of prison overcrowding on prisoners, what his evaluation is of this research; and if he will make a statement; [124597]

(2) what research his Department has commissioned on the effect of prison overcrowding on *(a)* prison staff morale and *(b)* safety in prisons; and if he will make a statement. [124598]

Paul Goggins: Prison overcrowding is carefully managed within agreed operating capacities at each establishment. Operating capacities are the total number of prisoners that an establishment can hold taking into account control, security and the proper operation of the planned regime. Prison Service area managers determine such capacities on the basis of operational judgement and experience.

No specific research projects have been undertaken into the effects of overcrowding on prisoners. However, we do keep under careful review the impact of population pressures, including overcrowding, on prisoners and staff in all prisons. There are a number of measures that can be used to assess the effects, for example, by the monitoring of regime performance, we know that population pressures are not yet significantly affecting the provision of rehabilitative schemes in prisons. It is inevitable though that at times of high population pressures, such provision may become disrupted.

The Prison Service is taking steps to ensure the safety of prisoners and to mitigate against the effect of overcrowding.

For example, The Prison Service is in the final year of a three-year safer custody programme to develop policies and practices to reduce prisoner suicide and self-harm in prisons. The programme includes a series of

inter-related projects to improve pre-reception, reception and induction arrangements; inter-agency information exchange; prisoner care; detoxification; prisoner peer support, and the learning from investigations into deaths in custody. Over the next few months the outcome of this programme will be reviewed taking into account an evaluation of these projects and emerging research findings.

The Prison Service also keeps under review the distance between where prisoners are accommodated and their home areas. The Prison Service aims to hold prisoners in establishments that provide the degree of security they require; are suitable to their gender, age and legal status; provide special facilities appropriate to prisoner needs or are near to their homes or the courts dealing with their cases. High population levels throughout the prison estate can lead to prisoners being transferred from their home area to establishments where there are vacancies. However, evidence shows that over the last two years there has been little change in the proportion of prisoners held either under or more than 50 miles from their home area.

There is, however, no evidence to suggest that population pressures compromise public security. Since 1992–93, the number of escapes from prison has significantly fallen from 232 in 1992–93 to five in 2002–03. This is despite an increase of around 50 per cent. in the average prison population over the same period.

The number of assaults across the Prison Service fell in 2001–02 in comparison to figures for 2000–01. There was an increase in assaults in 2002–03, but early indications are that there may be a slight decrease in the number of such incidents for 2003–04. Minimising the number of incidents is essential to the safe custody of prisoners and to the protection of prisoners and staff. While it is expected that the number of incidents will increase as the prison population rises, it should be recognised that the majority of incidents other than escapes, assaults and deaths are quickly and safely resolved through the use of good contingency planning and incident resolution procedures.

While there has been no research into effects of overcrowding on Prison Service staff, an annual staff survey asks staff, as part of a range of questions, and as an indication of motivation about job satisfaction, whether they feel safe in their working environment. 67 per cent. of staff that responded to the 2002 survey said that they felt safe in their working environment. The survey itself does not directly research the effects of overcrowding on staff attitudes and morale. It cannot, therefore, identify whether the reasons for this response rate can be directly attributed to overcrowding.

A copy of the surveys and their outcomes are held in the Library.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign citizens were in prison in England and Wales in each year between 1992 and 2002; and if he will make a statement. [128607]

Paul Goggins: The numbers of foreign nationals in prisons in England and Wales on 30 June of each year between 1993 and 2002 are given in the table. Information for 1992 is not available.

Year	*Number*
1993	3,503
1994	3,781
1995	4,089
1996	4,259
1997	4,677
1998	5,133
1999	5,388
2000	5,587
2001	6,926
2002	7,718

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 6 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 1243W, on prisons, on the basis of which scenario term projections set out in the Home Office Prison Population Brief, England and Wales: March 2003 (27/08/03) the forecast average population for 1995–2006 is calculated; and if he will make a statement. [129219]

Paul Goggins: The projected prison population for 2003–2006 in the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Hilary Benn) on 6 March 2003, *Official Report*, Column 1244W, was scenario C published in Home Office Statistical Bulletin 14/02 in December 2002. It assumes that custody rates increase by 1.25 per cent. per year for males and 2.5 per cent. for females to 2005, with the increase halving thereafter.

The legislative and other changes that are included in the projection are given as follows.

'Narrowing the Justice Gap'—one of the delivery targets for the Criminal Justice System.

Crime (Sentences) Act 1997—automatic life sentences for serious repeat offenders; minimum custodial sentences of three years for thire-time domestic burglars.

Crime and Disorder Act 1997— the recall of short sentence prisoners released on licence; the extension of secure remands.

Early release from Detention and Taining Orders (DTOs).

Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programmes (ISSPs).

Added days—effect of a decision by the European Court of Human Rights.

The number of Immigration Act detainees

Extension of Home Detention Curfew (HDC)—the maximum period of HDC to be increased to 90 days for those prisoners eligible from 16 December 2002.

An updated set of prison population projections was released on Tuesday 9 September in the April 2003 monthly brief. The projections take into account recent policy changes, such as the extension to HDC in July, and sentencing trends.

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to ensure that staff in private prisons receive adequate training to enable them to deal with sophisticated prisoners. [129421]

Paul Goggins: The contracts for the operation of private sector prisons already require that staff are provided with adequate and appropriate training. Prisoner Custody Officers (PCOs) must therefore undertake an ongoing training programme, which is equivalent to that of public sector prison officers and is monitored by the on-site Correctional Services

controller. Issues such as manipulation and conditioning by prisoners are covered in regular security awareness training courses.

Probation Service

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the National Probation Directorate has further to outsource probation service functions. [124965]

Paul Goggins: There is a long history of providing probation services in partnership with the voluntary and private sector. The Criminal Justice Bill indicates a significant increase in the use of community penalties and further outsourcing will be considered in order to ensure that qualified and experienced probation staff are used where they will have greatest impact. At present there are no firm plans as to how this might be done. Where competition and collaboration are able to help improve performance and increase capacity this will be given serious consideration.

Project Reflex

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the agencies involved in Project Reflex; and the resources allocated to each. [130501]

Beverley Hughes: Reflex is chaired by the Director General of the National Crime Squad and includes similar representatives from INDIS (Immigration and Nationality Directorate Intelligence Service), NCIS (National Criminal Intelligence Service), Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the Home Office, Europol, Kent Police, ACPO (Association of Chief Police Officers), Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), Cabinet Office and the Intelligence Services.

Other UK regional police forces (eg Merseyside and South Yorkshire) have received support from Reflex operations against organised immigration crime.

In the SR2000 spending review, Reflex received £22.5 million over three years. A breakdown is set out in the table.

Agency	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
NCS[1]	3.4	4.0	4.8
NCIS	0.8	1.3	1.4
IND	1.5	1.7	1.9
Security and Intelligence agencies	0.6	0.5	0.6
Total	6.3	7.5	8.7

[1] CS figure includes additional project fund used to support operations by other agencies.

An additional £20 million is being made available to support Reflex activities in 2003–04.

Public Lavatories (Sexual Activity)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy on sexual activity in public lavatories. [130431]

Paul Goggins: The Government believe that no-one should have to witness sexual activity in public lavatories. While the Government believe that current legislation does cover such activity, it is sympathetic to the aim of ensuring that there is no doubt that sexual activity in public toilets is unlawful. It has, therefore, tabled, during the Committee Stage in the House of Commons, amendments to Clause 67 of the Sexual Offences Bill, which proposes a new offence of "sexual activity in a public lavatory", to make explicit that such behaviour is unlawful and to ensure that the offence will be workable in practice.

Rape

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether reports of drug rape since 2001 have involved the presence of a drug which had not before been known as a drug rape drug. [129668]

Caroline Flint *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* A large number of sedative drugs (controlled and medicinal) could potentially be used to facilitate rape. The Forensic Science Service say that no new drug is being regularly detected in cases of drug rape reported to them over the last two years.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether forensic medical examiners are in receipt of specific training about the symptoms and effects of drugs which have been used in rape cases. [129672]

Caroline Flint *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* The Forensic Science Service (FSS) is developing a Toxicology Awareness module to be incorporated into Forensic Medical Examiner training, which is currently supplied by FSS. The aims of the module are to discuss case results specific to the police force concerned and compare these with national results, thereby raising general awareness.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of forensic nurses in supporting rape complainants. [129781]

Caroline Flint: The Violence against Women Initiative under the Crime Reduction Programme has funded projects to provide support to victims of rape and sexual assault, and to find out what works in reducing attrition within the criminal justice system. One of these projects, St. Mary's Sexual Assault Referral Centre in Manchester, has trained a female nurse to conduct forensic examinations and provide evidence in court. The findings from the evaluation of this project are expected to be published at the end of this year.

Refugees

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether in the last six months refugee status has been granted to persons in respect of whom extradition proceedings had begun; and if he will make a statement. [130866]

Caroline Flint *[holding answer 18 September 2003]:* Refugee status has been granted on one occasion in the last six months to a person who was the subject of extradition proceedings.

Removal Centre (Haslar)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans there are for the development of the removal centre at Haslar. [131266]

Beverley Hughes: There are no plans at present to develop the removal centre at Haslar.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions have been held with Gosport borough council about the development of the removal centre at Haslar. [131267]

Beverley Hughes: No meetings have taken place with Gosport borough council about the development of the removal centre at Haslar. There are currently no plans to extend or develop Haslar.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what planning procedure and public consultation the Government propose to undertake with regard to development of the removal centre at Haslar. [131268]

Beverley Hughes: If we planned any development of the removal centre at Haslar, we would consult with the council and other interested parties at a very early stage. There are however no plans for any development or expansion at Haslar.

Reoffending

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders who have been placed on an Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme have re-offended during the course of the programme. [129180]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 11 September 2003]:* The Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme was launched in 2001 to provide the courts with a tough community based programme designed to tackle persistent young offenders. It currently provides for approximately 3,500 young offenders a year at an annual cost of £21.5million. Additional funding of £2 million has been made available for national roll-out, providing for a total of 4,200 persistent young offenders annually from January 2004. The programme is being fully evaluated by Oxford University; the final report with an analysis of reconvictions is due in March 2004. It is not possible at present to provide a comprehensive answer to my hon. Friend's question.

Repeat Offending (Drugs)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of repeat offending among problem drug-misusing offenders there have been in each of the last six years. [130481]

Caroline Flint: Data are not collected in this way. But the New English and Welsh Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (NEW-ADAM) research programme, which involved interviewing and drug testing a sample of those arrested by the police in 1999–2000, reported that 15 per cent. of arrestees were classed as drug misusing repeat offenders (defined as arrestees who reported using heroin and/or cocaine or crack at least once a week who reported two or more income-generating offences per month).

New nationally-representative measures of drug-related crime are being developed, including a new Arrestee Survey able to provide national estimates of drug-related crime, which commenced in September 2003 and replaces the NEW-ADAM research programme.

Road Safety

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many deaths there have been on roads in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002 as a result of people using a mobile telephone whilst driving. [130751]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not available as the official road casualty statistics which are collected by the police and reported to the Department using the STATS 19 accident report format does not currently include information on mobile phones.

Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the number of participants in the Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Scheme. [130499]

Beverley Hughes: The quota for the Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Scheme for 2003 is 25,000. We expect most of those places to be filled.

Security Industry Authority

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were employed by the Security Industry Authority on *(a)* 1 April and *(b)* 1 July. [130474]

Ms Blears: The Security Industry Authority had 33 staff on 1 April 2003 and 35 staff on 1 July 2003. In each case the figures include 13 staff on secondment from government departments, mainly the Home Office.

Sentencing Powers (Juveniles)

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what circumstances courts can impose *(a)* a detention and training order and *(b)* any other custody-based sentence on juveniles aged under 15, who have been found guilty of breaching an anti-social behaviour order. [129115]

Paul Goggins: Where a juvenile aged 15 or more but under 18 breachesan anti-social behaviour order (ASBO), the youth court can impose any sentence up to and including a Detention and Training Order (DTO). No other custodial sentence is available for such cases. It is for the court to decide which sentence is appropriate, in the light of the young person's background, home surroundings and family circumstances.

Sexual Offences

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002 were proceeded against in the UK for outraging public decency where this was the principal offence; and how many of these were found to be guilty; [128637]

(2) what the conviction rate was for persons proceeded against in the UK for outraging public decency where this was the principal offence, in each of the last five years. [128638]

Paul Goggins: The information requested, for England and Wales, is contained in the table.

Figures for Scotland are a matter for the Scottish Office and those for Northern Ireland for the Northern Ireland Office.

Statistics for 2002 will be published in December.

Number of persons[1] proceeded against at magistrates' courts, found guilty at all courts and the conviction rate for the Common Law offence of "Outraging public decency", England and Wales 1997 and 2001

Year	Proceeded against	Found guilty	Conviction rate[2] (percentage)
1997	47	13	28
1998	42	28	67
1999	86	26	30
2000[3]	121	31	26
2001	164	34	21

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.
[2] Persons found guilty at all courts as a percentage of persons proceeded against at magistrates' courts—as notified to the Home Office.
[3] Staffordshire Police were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted at magistrates' courts in 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robus enough at a detailed level and have been excluded from the table.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received on the effectiveness of the Sex Offenders Registry. [127839]

Paul Goggins: The purpose of the notification requirements of Part 1 of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 (commonly known as the Sex Offenders' Register) is that the police know the names and addresses of the most serious sex offenders living in their area. This is one of a number of tools which enable them to protect the public more effectively.

We have received no specific representations on the effectiveness of the register. However, we receive a large number of letters on the Sex Offenders Act, which sometimes raise, among other issues, the effectiveness of the register as it applies in individual cases.

The most useful measure of effectiveness for the 'register' itself is the level of compliance with the notification requirements. We estimate that nationally around 97 per cent. of offenders currently on the 'register' are complying fully with the notification requirements.

Shop Workers (Violence)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers on its campaign to try to prevent violence against shop workers. [130580]

Ms Blears: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has accepted an invitation from the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW) to attend the launch of their "National Respect for Shop Workers" day which took place on 17 September 2003. Separate meetings are being held by Home Office Ministers with USDAW representatives.

The Government are very grateful to USDAW for the work it has undertaken to raise awareness of this issue. We fully understand the detrimental effect crime against business has throughout the community and the damaging effect on people's lives, their businesses and their families. Any form of violence is totally unacceptable and should not be tolerated.

Somali Community

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what organisations representing the Somali community he has met in development of his Department's multi-ethnic policies. [129742]

Fiona Mactaggart *[holding answer 15 September 2003]:* A number of organisation representing the Somali community have met officials at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate or participated in Home Office research projects relating to asylum seekers and refugee integration.

Stewart Report

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what account he took of the recommendation of the Stewart Report that amplitude modulation around 16 Hz should be avoided in the commissioning of the new police TETRA telecommunications systems; and what assessment he has made of the implications of the information available on potential health problems arising from this system for the continued use of the system. [129765]

Ms Blears: The Stewart report stated that "as a precautionary measure, amplitude modulation around 16 Hz should be avoided, if possible, in future developments in signal coding". TETRA technology was already well established at the time the Stewart report was published.

Expert advice was sought from the National Radiological Protection Board's independent Advisory Group on Non-ionising Radiation (AGNIR). The AGNIR experts concluded that it was unlikely that the special features of TETRA technology could pose a risk to health.

In addition, as recommended by AGNIR, the Home Office has set up an extensive research programme on the potential health effects of TETRA. All results to date confirm that TETRA technology is safe. Further information is available on the Home Office website (www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs/tetra.html).

Street Crime Courts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effect of the establishment of designated street crime courts. [130513]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

The Street Crime Initiative (SCI) was a co-ordinated inter-departmental and inter-agency response to escalating robbery figures early in 2002. The 70 designated courts were part of the contribution which the Court Service provided to the SCI.

The 26 Crown Courts and 44 magistrates courts have been collecting and providing data to the Department on a monthly basis and the monitoring of the throughput of cases continues. Street crime cases are not fast tracked but special attention is given to them to avoid unnecessary delay. The latest data presented to the Prime Minster's Street Crime Action Group Meeting in July revealed that street crime cases were disposed of, on average, within 135 days, compared to 178 days in respect of non-street crime cases proceeding in the same courts. All courts were well within the Department for Constitutional Affairs' target for the Crown Court, which is that 78 per cent. of cases sent to them should be listed within 182 days.

Vehicle Crime

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress in meeting his target to reduce vehicle crime by 30 per cent. by 2004. [130489]

Ms Blears: We have made significant progress towards meeting our target of reducing vehicle crime by 30 per cent. between 1999 and 2004. British Crime Survey estimates based on interviews in the year ended March 2003 (published in July 2003) show 2,366,000 vehicle crimes. This is a reduction of 576,000 offences (20 per cent.) against the 1999 baseline of 2,942,000 offences (published as British Crime Survey 2000).

We recognise the importance of driving down vehicle crime still further, and a wide range of work is in progress to this end.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effect of the national publicity campaign to highlight how to avoid becoming a victim of vehicle crime. [130508]

Ms Blears: The campaign, which is now in its fourth year, continues to achieve its objectives of successfully getting across to motorists key car crime prevention messages and engaging "brand partners" (that is, private companies and other organisations) to amplify those messages to their customers and staff.

Research shows that 84 per cent. of those sampled recognised the vehicle crime prevention advertising when prompted and, of these, 88 per cent. claimed they made sure that nothing was left on view when they parked in a public place. These are very high rates. In addition, 19 "brand partners" have joined the campaign, undertaking marketing activity to a value of over £3.2 million and extending the reach of the campaign to an equivalent audience of 35 million people.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evaluation has been made of the impact of the pilot exercises, using the DVLA database to communicate car crime prevention measures. [130509]

Ms Blears: The initiative was piloted in parts of Bristol, Coventry and Middlesbrough local authority areas for 12 weeks from 28 October 2002. Vehicle crime figures for the precise areas covered by the pilots are not available. But figures for larger areas covering central Bristol and Middlesbrough showed reductions of 22 per cent. and 23 per cent. respectively in the period November 2002-January 2003 when the pilots were running. Coventry's vehicle crime figures showed no change.

Recipients of car crime prevention advice in the pilots were sent questionnaires seeking their views on the exercise. A total of 627 recipients responded and 95 per cent. of the responses were supportive. The Association of Chief Police Officers, the Local Government Association and the three local authorities involved all thought the initiative was worthwhile and should be expanded.

Voluntary Community Activities

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of *(a)* the number of people engaged in voluntary community activities and *(b)* the total number of man hours of voluntary community service delivered in each of the last seven years. [130702]

Fiona Mactaggart: The information is as follows:

(a) The 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey, published on 16 September 2003, provides the following information on "voluntary and community activities", which include civic participation, informal volunteering, and formal volunteering. In the last 12 months 38 per cent. of people aged 16 and over in England and Wales engaged in civic participation (e.g. signing a petition, contacting public officials or elected representatives, attending a public meeting or rally or taking part in a public meeting or protest). This is equivalent to 15.9 million people. In the last 12 months 67 per cent. of people aged 16 and over in England and Wales volunteered informally (as individuals) at least once. This is equivalent to approximately 27.8 million people. In the last 12 months 39 per cent. of people aged 16 and over in England and Wales volunteered formally (through groups, clubs and organisations) at least once. This is equivalent to approximately 16.2 million people.

(b) The 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey shows that in 2001 the contribution of people aged 16 and over who volunteered informally at least once in the last 12 months in England and Wales totalled approximately 1.8 billion hours. The contribution of people aged 16 and over who volunteered formally at least once in the last 12 months in England and Wales totalled approximately 1.7 billion hours.

These data are only available for 2001. Results from the 2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey will be available during 2004. Separate data, collected as part of the 1997 National Survey of Volunteering is not directly comparable to the findings of the 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey.

West Mercia Constabulary

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what total funding for West Mercia police was per head of population in each year since 1997 from *(a)* Government grant and *(b)* precept. [127586]

Ms Blears: The funding of the police authority net budget per head of population in each year since 1997 from *(a)* Government grant and *(b)* precept was as follows:

£

	Total funding per head of population from	
	(a) Government grant	*(b) Precept*
1996–97	79.88	15.38
1997–98	81.53	17.45
1998–99	81.49	18.57
1999–2000	85.48	20.52
2000–01	91.09	26.13
2001–02	94.09	27.62
2002–03	97.42	37.50
2003–04	100.79	42.88

Note:

Funding includes Home Office police grant and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) revenue support grant and national non domestic rates and Standard Standing Assessment (SSA) reduction grant, Crime Fighting Fund, Rural Grant, Airwave, Basic Command Unit (BCD) funding, Community Support Officer funding, special priority payments, DMA Expansion programme and capital grant.

Sources:

1. For population data (and police grant in 1993–94 and 1994–95) is the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy police statistics (Actuals to 2001–02 and Estimates 2002–03). Figures for 2003–04 are not yet available so the estimated population figure for 2002–03 has been used.

2. For precept information is the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* community support officers, *(b)* street wardens and *(c)* neighbourhood wardens there are in (i) West Mercia constabulary and (ii) The Wrekin. [127830]

Ms Blears: West Mercia Constabulary has recruited 10 Community Support Officers (CSOs) to date which are fully funded by the Home Office. By the end of this financial year, they will have recruited a further 45 CSOs, of which 30 are part-funded by the Home Office.

The Wrekin is to be allocated 21 of the new CSOs of which six will be fully funded by Wrekin council and two by Wrekin Housing Trust.

In the area covered by West Mercia Constabulary there are two Street Warden schemes with seven wardens between them and one Neighbourhood Warden scheme with two wardens. Of these nine wardens, two are deployed as Street Wardens in the Wrekin.

Vulnerable Witnesses

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 on the experience of vulnerable witnesses. [128648]

Paul Goggins: The Home Office has commissioned a consortium of researchers to conduct an evaluation of special measures for vulnerable and intimidated witnesses (VIWs). The aims of the research are: (1) to evaluate how well the special measures have been implemented throughout the criminal justice system (CJS); and (2) to examine the experience of VIWs before and after the implementation of special measures in Crown Courts. The latter was addressed using pre and post-implementation surveys. The pre-implementation survey was conducted in 2000 and published in 2001 (Home Office Research Findings 147). This report can be found on the Home Office website at: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/r147.pdf

The post-implementation survey was conducted in 2003 and is currently being written-up. The survey work will help determine: whether the introduction of special measures has been accompanied by an increase in VIWs' satisfaction with the CJS, to what extent provisions for VIWs have changed with the implementation of special measures; and VIWs attitudes to the special measures. Home Office Research and Development Statistics expect to publish a full report next year.

Yarlswood

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the contracts made between his Department and all contractors relating to the *(a)* construction, *(b)* administration and operation and *(c)* insurance of the Yarlswood removal centre. [129680]

Beverley Hughes: The contract to design build and operate the Yarlswood Immigration Removal Centre was awarded to Group 4 Amey Immigration Ltd. (GAIL) following a competitive tender. Each contract has to be considered individually and a range of tests applied to ascertain if its disclosure would adversely affect the parties involved. At present, the contract is being amended to enable the refurbishment and revised operation of the centre. Once these amendments are finalised, I will ensure that a copy of the contract is placed in the Library in due course, provided that it meets the test above.

Youth Justice Board

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are employed by the Youth Justice Board; and what has been the percentage staff turnover in each of the last six years. [130477]

Paul Goggins: The Youth Justice Board currently employs 138 permanent staff. The percentage staff turnover in the five years since the Board was established, as calculated from September to September using the total staff numbers in post at the end of each 12-month period, has been 1998–99 (0 per cent.), 1999–2000 (3.7 per cent.), 2000–01 (15.5 per cent.), 2001–02 (17 per cent.) and 2002–03 (5.1 per cent.).

HEALTH

Abortions

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on psychological services provided to women who have had abortions. [129046]

Miss Melanie Johnson: It is for primary care trusts, which commission abortion services, to consider whether psychological services should be available for women who have had an abortion. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists' evidence-based guideline, "The Care of Women Requesting Induced Abortion (2000)", considered the mental health implications of termination and concluded only a small minority of women experience any long term, adverse psychological consequences after abortion and that referral for further counselling should be available for those women.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has assessed into possible links between abortions and breast cancer. [129047]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department funded the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists' evidence-based guideline "The Care of Women Requesting Induced Abortion (2000)". This stated that the available evidence on an association between induced abortion and breast cancer is inconclusive. Cancer Research UK is undertaking a study, which is considering the full range of potential risk factors for breast cancer. This is an important and complex international research project. We understand that Cancer Research UK intends to publish the work when it is available.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when the next review of targets in Accident and Emergency departments is scheduled to take place; [127643]

(2) whether he plans to change the guidelines on the four-hour access targets for accident and emergency departments. [130167]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) on 17 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 838W.

Acupuncture

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to propose statutory regulation of the acupuncture profession. [130317]

Mr. Hutton: A working group has been established by the Department and the Prince of Wales's foundation for integrated health to develop recommendations for the statutory regulation of acupuncture. The working group is currently finalising its recommendations and is due to report shortly. A parallel working group is also finalising recommendations for the statutory regulation of herbal medicine. Following the publication of the working groups' reports, the Department will carry out a full public consultation on the statutory regulation of acupuncture and herbal medicine.

"Agenda for Change"

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department is planning to start implementing "Agenda for Change" nationwide. [130163]

Mr. Hutton: The United Kingdom Health Departments, staff representative organisations and the national health service confederation agreed earlier this year that the new NHS pay system should be introduced in a number of "early implementer" sites from June 2003, with a view to implementing the new system nationally from October 2004 subject to any appropriate action that is needed to address any concerns arising from the "early implementer" phase.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which trusts have been chosen to pilot "Agenda for Change"; and when the pilots are due to begin. [130164]

Mr. Hutton: The following national health service trusts and primary care trusts were selected as 'early implementer' sites for the new NHS pay system. They began the process of implementation in June 2003:

James Paget Healthcare NHS Trust

Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospital NHS Trust

City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust

Papworth Hospital NHS Trust

Aintree Hospitals NHS Trust

Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust

South West London and St. George's Mental Health NHS Trust

West Kent NHS and Social Care Trust

Herefordshire NHS Primary Care Trust

Central Cheshire Primary Care Trust

North East Ambulance Service NHS Trust

East Anglian NHS Trust

Alcohol (Health Warnings)

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with regard to the displaying of health warnings on alcohol beverages. [129209]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government are committed to ensuring that everyone has a right to know how much alcohol they are drinking and what the safe limits for consumption are. As part of the work to develop a national alcohol harm reduction strategy, the strategy unit is working closely with other Government Departments and will be looking at the most effective way of achieving this. The strategy is due to be published towards the end of 2003 and implemented from 2004.

Food Packaging

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the use of the phrase 'may contain nuts' on food packaging. [130091]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I am advised that the Food Standards Agency (FSA) wish to see this type of phrase used responsibly on food labels—only being used when strictly necessary and being worded in a manner that allows consumers with food allergies to make informed choices about what they eat. The FSA has held discussions with a wide range of interested parties and will shortly seek comments on an alternative phrase and guidance to industry.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he plans to amend the regulations on allergy-related labelling on food. [130092]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been advised by the Food Standards Agency that a new European Directive on allergen labelling of food is in the process of being finalised in Brussels. This will strengthen existing labelling legislation, helping to ensure that consumers are provided with comprehensive information about the ingredients of foods and that those with food allergies are able to identify products they may wish to avoid.

Alzheimer's Disease

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many Alzheimer's patients are in *(a)* private and *(b)* NHS care homes in the United Kingdom; [129514]

(2) how many Alzheimer's patients entered *(a)* private and *(b)* NHS care homes in the United Kingdom in each of the last three years; [129515]

(3) what the average care home costs were to the NHS for each Alzheimer's patient in each of the last three years; [129516]

(4) how much was spent by the NHS on care home costs for Alzheimer's disease patients in each of the last three years; [129517]

(5) how many *(a)* moderate and *(b)* severe Alzheimer's disease patients were diagnosed in the United Kingdom in each of the last three years. [129518]

Dr. Ladyman: Data are not collected on the number of people with Alzheimer's disease, in the population generally or in care homes in particular, or about the care home costs of people with Alzheimer's.

Research evidence shows that about five per cent. of the population who are aged over 65 have dementia. This represents about 600,000 people in the United Kingdom. Alzheimer's disease causes up to 60 per cent. of cases of dementia.

While data are not available specifically about care home costs for people with Alzheimer's, the average weekly fee for residential care in England at March 2003 was £336.50.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent by the NHS on drug treatments for *(a)* moderate and *(b)* severe Alzheimer's disease patients in each of the last three years. [129519]

Dr. Ladyman: The table shows how much was spent, over the last three years, on drug treatments for mild to moderate and moderate to severe Alzheimer's disease. This data cover all prescription items that were dispensed in the community in England. This includes drugs that were prescribed in hospitals or clinics, which are dispensed in the community. However, the data do not include drugs that are dispensed in hospitals/clinics or private prescriptions.

Number of prescription items (thousand) and net ingredient cost (£000) of drugs used for dementia that are dispensed in the community in England, 2000–02

	2000		2001		2002	
Drugs for dementia	*Prescription items (thousand)*	*Net ingredient cost (£000)*	*Prescription items (thousand)*	*Net ingredient cost (£000)*	*Prescription items (thousand)*	*Net ingredient cost (£000)*
Drugs used for mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease						
Donepezil Hydrochloride	43.6	4,178.2	91.2	8,815.3	169.3	16,078.3
Galantamine	0.2	13.6	11.3	880.2	31.1	2,469.9
Rivastigmine	9.9	681.0	19.7	1,309.2	30.5	1,997.9
Drugs used for moderate to severe Alzheimer's disease						
Memantine Hydrochloride	—	—	—	—	0.3	21.1
All drugs for dementia	53.8	4,872.8	122.1	11,004.6	231.3	20,567.1

Notes:

1. The prescription information was obtained from the Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) system and is based on a full analysis of all prescriptions dispensed in the community, ie by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors, and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered in England. Total prescriptions include not only prescriptions originating from general medical practitioners in England but also from hospital doctors, nurses, and dentists, provided they were dispensed in the community. Also included are prescriptions written in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man but dispensed in England. The data do not cover drugs dispensed in hospital or private prescriptions.
2. Drugs used for dementia are those defined in the British National Formulary (BNF) section 4.11 "Drugs for dementia". Drugs used for dementia have been grouped into those used for mild to moderate and moderate to severe Alzheimer's disease in line with the NICE guidance on drugs for Alzheimers disease. Please refer to the NICE website at www.nice.org.uk for more details.
3. Doctors, dentists or nurses write prescriptions on a prescription form. Each single item written on the form is counted as a prescription item.
4. Net ingredient cost refers to the basic cost (which the dispenser is reimbursed) of the drug before discounts and does not include any dispensing costs or fees.

Data Source:

Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) data from the Prescription Pricing Authority (PPA).

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what instructions have been offered to PCTs regarding drug prescribing practices for Alzheimer's disease patients. [129520]

Dr. Ladyman: In January 2001, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommended that donepezil (Aricept), rivastigmine (Exelon) and galantamine (Reminyl) should be made available on the national health service as one component of the management of those people with mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease.

Directions have been issued obliging health authorities and primary care trusts to provide appropriate funding for treatments recommended by NICE. The directions came into effect on 1 January 2002.

Anaesthetists

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* consultant and *(b)* other anaesthetists there were in England in each of the last five years. [129601]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

The number of consultants in anaesthetics (including intensive care) increased by 33.5 per cent., between September 1998 and March 2003.

The total number of doctors in anaesthetics (including intensive care) increased by 21 per cent., between September 1998 and September 2002.

Hospital, Public Health Medicine and Community Health Services (HCHS): Anaesthetists (including intensive care) by grade; September 1998 to March 2003

England[1] *Numbers (headcount)*

	1998	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*March 2003*
All staff	6,817	7,010	7,264	7,680	8,233	n/a
Consultant	2,978	3,168	3,322	3,595	3,874	3,977
Associate Specialist/Staff Grade	625	681	754	817	885	n/a
Registrar Group	1,629	1,621	1,646	1,686	1,758	n/a
Senior House Officer	1,274	1,248	1,288	1,378	1,498	n/a
House Officer	1	13	21	14	31	n/a
Hospital Practitioner/Clinical Assistant	309	278	233	188	179	n/a
Other Hospital grades	1	1	0	0	0	n/a
Other CHS grades	0	0	0	2	8	n/a

[1] As at 30 September each year except for 2003, which is as at 31 March.
n/a—not available
Source:
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census.

Ancillary Services

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the rate of pay per hour is for *(a)* cleaners and *(b)* porters in each acute trust; and which of these trusts have contracted out (i) cleaning and (ii) portering services. [129688]

Dr. Ladyman: Rates of pay for cleaners and porters are not identified separately in the national health service staff earnings survey. Cleaners and porters directly employed by trusts are paid in accordance with national agreements reached by the ancillary staffs' Whitley Council or in accordance with agreements reached locally. The current Whitley rates of pay are set out in advance letter (ASC) 1/2003, a copy of which is available in the Library.

On the subject of trusts where these services have been contracted out, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her today.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which companies have contracts with NHS acute trusts for carrying out *(a)* cleaning and *(b)* portering services; which trusts have contracts with each company; what the commencement date of each contract was; and what the duration of the contract is in each case. [129689]

Dr. Ladyman: A number of companies have contracts with national health service acute trusts for the provision of domestic services.

Information requested relating to each contract—including the specific services provided and the duration—is not collected centrally.

Anti-TNF Therapy

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason anti-TNF therapy is not available to patients in the Leicester area. [131094]

Dr. Ladyman: Tumour necrosis factor (TNF) therapy has been available to patients in the Leicestershire area since 2002, in line with the National Institute for Clinical Excellence timescale for implementation. It is provided by the University Hospitals of Leicester National Health Service Trust for those patients who meet the criteria which has been agreed by the Trust and the primary care trusts in the area.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many requests for anti-TNF treatment he has received in the last 12 months. [131095]

Dr. Ladyman: We estimate that there has been around 170 letters from right hon. and hon. Members and the public on this subject. There have also been several Parliamentary Questions on anti-TNF therapy and there was an adjournment debate on the care and treatment of rheumatoid arthritis in July.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the cost of providing anti-TNF treatment per patient. [131096]

Dr. Ladyman: In their appraisal of these drugs, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence estimated the costs per patient using the Monthly Index of Medical Specialities, September 2001. Updated costs from the September 2003 edition show that Etanercept costs £178.75 per week when administered at a dose of 25 mg. twice weekly, equivalent to £9,295 per annum. Infliximab costs £451.20 per vial, equivalent to £12,182 in the first year and an average of £8,798 in subsequent years.

Antibiotic-resistant Infections

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many reports there were of antibiotic resistant *E. coli* in the NHS in *(a)* England, *(b)* each region and *(c)* each strategic health authority in each of the last six years. [128921]

Dr. Ladyman: Under a voluntary reporting scheme, the Health Protection Agency receives reports of *E. coli* blood stream infections with their susceptibility to antibiotics from microbiology laboratories in England and Wales. Gentamicin resistance is monitored because it is used to treat the more serious *E. coli* infections.

Table 1 shows data on gentamicin resistance for England and Wales from 1997 to 1999. Data on gentamicin resistance in England, broken down by region, is available only from 2000. This is shown in table 2. Data by strategic health authority is not available.

Table 1: Escherichia coli blood stream infections resistant to gentamicin: England and Wales, 1997 to 1999

	Number resistant
1997	132
1998	161
1999	175

Table 2: Escherichia coli blood stream infections resistant to gentamicin: England by region, 2000 to 2002

	Number resistant		
Region	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Northern and Yorkshire[1]	12	28	—
North East	—	—	8
Northern and Humberside	—	—	45
East Midlands	21	6	24
Eastern	24	48	58
London	45	30	67
South East	37	54	64
South West	17	20	31
West Midlands	12	15	108
North West	13	17	36
Total	181	218	441

[1] Northern and Yorkshire was divided into two regions—North East and Yorkshire and Humberside—in 2002.

Source:

Health Protection Agency—Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many reports of MRSA outside hospitals there were in *(a)* England, *(b)* each region and *(c)* each strategic health authority in each of the last six years. [128922]

Dr. Ladyman: A new national mandatory surveillance system for healthcare associated infection started with reporting of methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) blood stream infections (bacteraemias), in April 2001. All acute trusts in England now collect this information and results for the first year of this scheme (April 2001 to March 2002) were published by individual trust in the *Communicable Disease Report Weekly* on 20 June 2002. They are available at www.phls.co.uk/publications/cdr/PDFfiles/2002/cdr2502.pdf.

Information for 2002–03 will be published shortly.

The data do not include information on where the infection was acquired (hospital or elsewhere). However, the majority of cases are acquired in hospital.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of urinary tract infections resistant to antibiotics were recorded in the NHS in *(a)* England, *(b)* each region and *(c)* each strategic health authority in each of the last six years. [128920]

Miss Melanie Johnson: This information is not held centrally.

Antibiotics

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many antibiotic and antimicrobial drugs were bought by the NHS in each of the last six years; and what the expenditure was on these drugs in each year. [128902]

Dr. Ladyman: There is currently no comprehensive national data available on the costs of antibiotic and antimicrobial drugs in the national health service.

The number of prescription items and the associated net ingredient cost for anti-bacterial drugs (antibiotics), dispensed in the community in England from 1997 to 2002 is shown in the table.

£ million

	Prescription items	*Net ingredient cost*
1997	46.4	172.0
1998	42.6	163.0
1999	38.6	177.1
2000	36.9	172.2
2001	37.9	162.8
2002	37.0	164.4

Notes:

1. The prescription information was obtained from the Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) system and is based on a full analysis of all prescriptions dispensed in the community, i.e. by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors, and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered in England. Total prescriptions include not only prescriptions originating from general medical practitioners in England but also from hospital doctors, nurses, and dentists, provided they were dispensed in the community. Also included are prescriptions written in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man but dispensed in England. The data do not cover drugs dispensed in hospital or private prescriptions.
2. Antibacterial drugs are those defined in the British National Formulary (BNF) section 5.1, "Antibacterial drugs".

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies he has assessed of a possible correlation between GP antibiotic prescribing levels and antibiotic resistance. [128924]

Dr. Ladyman: Prescribing of antimicrobials by general practitioners in England decreased by 16 per cent. between 1996 and 2002, but there is currently no system in place to link prescribing levels to antibiotic resistance.

The Department is currently funding three research projects, which are investigating to link antimicrobial prescribing data to diagnosis and clinical outcome.

Ashford (Middlesex) Hospital

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what new buildings will be provided for the new treatment centre at Ashford (Middlesex) Hospital. [130934]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 18 September 2003]:* It is proposed that existing facilities at Ashford Hospital be refurbished to provide an operating theatre and in-patient beds.

Asian Health Indicators

Mrs. Ann Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the health indicators specific to the *(a)* Indian, *(b)* Bangladeshi and *(c)* Pakistani communities. [131007]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The public assessment of the national health service through indicators is the responsibility of the Commission for Health Improvement the independent regulator of NHS performance.

The Department's strategy for meeting the needs of minority ethnic communities is to set action on race equality within the overall framework for planning and delivering the Department's priorities. The Department has a detailed programme of work under way to take forward our race equality commitments and has strengthened the arrangements for supporting and accounting for progress on race equality.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many individuals have been diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. [130262]

Dr. Ladyman: This information is not collected centrally. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence appraisal of the use of methylphenidate in treating attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) estimated the prevalence of all types of ADHD at around 5 per cent. of school-aged children, approximately 345,000 of six to 16-year-olds in England.

Autistic Spectrum Disorders

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of using coloured spectacle lenses in the treatment of children with autistic spectrum disorders. [128701]

Dr. Ladyman *[holding answer 9 September 2003]:* There is currently little evidence in this area and we are not aware of any widely accepted benefits to specific groups such as children on the autistic spectrum. We will, however, continue to consider the issue as evidence becomes available.

Batten's Disease

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what funding has been given to research of Batten's Disease; and how many children he estimates have the condition; [131240]

(2) what steps his Department has taken to increase the awareness among *(a)* general practitioners and *(b)* other health professionals of Batten's Disease. [131241]

Dr. Ladyman: The main agency through which the Government support medical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council (MRC). The MRC has large current portfolios on neurological disorders and genetics. However, none of this research is specifically into Batten's disease. Nevertheless, this work includes a considerable amount of underpinning research that may be of relevance. The MRC has funded some research on Batten's disease in the past and currently carries out work on the main symptoms of the disease.

Information on the number of children with Batten's disease is not collected centrally.

The Department has for many years provided section 64 funding to Climb (Children Living with Inherited Metabolic Diseases), a voluntary organisation which provides information, advice and support to children suffering from metabolic diseases, including Batten's disease, and their families, as well as educating health care professionals. Climb is currently in receipt of a project grant for £63,220 over the period from 2002–03 to 2005–06.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his Answer of 1 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 926W, on breast cancer, how many patients aged 85 years and over underwent surgery in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2002. [129715]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The number of finished consultant episodes (FCEs) for breast cancer surgery for patients aged 85 and over in national health service hospitals in England is shown in the table.

	Number of finished consultant episodes
1999–2000	895
2000–01	1,045
2001–02	1,012

Source:
Hospitals Episode Statistics Department of Health

Bureaucracy

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many clinically-trained *(a)* nurses and *(b)* midwives are working in an administrative position within the NHS. [129595]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Cancelled Operations

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many operations were cancelled at Willesden Community Hospital, London, in the last

quarter for which figures are available; what percentage of the cancelled operations were consequently carried out within four weeks; and if he will make a statement; [128761]

(2) how many operations were cancelled at *(a)* Darent Valley Hospital, Dartford and *(b)* West Middlesex Hospital, London in the last quarter for which figures are available; what percentage of the cancelled operations were subsequently carried out within four weeks; and if he will make a statement. [128775]

Mr. Hutton: The Department collects quarterly data on 'last minute' cancelled operations for non-clinical reasons at Trust level (i.e. patients cancelled on the day of admission, after admission, or on the day of surgery). Figures for the first quarter of 2003–04 were published on 11 September 2003. Data by individual hospital sites are not collected.

The percentage of cancelled operations that were consequently carried out within four weeks cannot be calculated from the data available. However, data are available for the number of patients who were not treated within four weeks of a last minute cancellation as part of the central data collection arrangements for the NHS Plan cancelled operations guarantee. These data are shown in the table for the respective NHS Trusts for Darent Valley Hospital, Dartford; West Middlesex Hospital, London; and Willesden Community Hospital, London.

	Quarter 1, 2003–04	
	Number of last minute cancellations for non-acute clinical reasons	*Number of patients not admitted within 28 days of a last minute cancellation*
Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust	37	0
West Middlesex University NHS Trust	20	1
North West London Hospitals NHS Trust	178	0

Note:
The NHS Plan stated that "From 2002, when a patient's operation is cancelled by the hospital on the day of surgery for non clinical reasons, the hospital will have to offer another binding date within a maximum of the next 28 days or fund the patient's treatment at the time and hospital of the patient's choice." From April 2003, the cancelled operations guarantee was extended to apply to cancellations that occur on or after the day of admission.

Cancer Care

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what targets have been set for patients with cancer having pre-planned and pre-booked care; what the baseline is for the target; in which document the target was published; and what progress has been made towards the target. [128911]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The NHS Cancer Plan, published in September 2000, said that the cancer services collaborative would make booking of cancer services a priority, so that by 2004 every patient diagnosed with cancer will benefit from pre-planned and pre-booked care. The NHS Modernisation Agency's cancer services collaborative and the national booked admissions programme are working with national health service trusts to establish booking systems across the NHS by 2005 and to develop systems for monitoring the booking of cancer patients by 2004 within this wider target.

Care Homes

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many care home beds were available in *(a)* the public sector and *(b)* the independent sector in each year since 1997. [130209]

Dr. Ladyman: The latest information available on the number of care home places available in the public sector and the independent sector is shown in the table for 1997 to 2001. Figures for later years have been collected by the National Care Standards Commission; it plans to publish them this autumn.

Number of care home places by type of home, England 1997 to 2001

Rounded numbers

As at 31 March	*Total all homes*[1]	*Local authority staffed*	*Independent*[1,2]
1997	534,410	65,820	468,590
1998	553,490	63,980	489,510
1999	546,190	59,030	487,160
2000	539,240	55,460	483,780
2001	528,000	50,860	477,150

[1] Includes dual registered homes.
[2] Includes voluntary, private and small residential homes, all nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics.
Source:
RA form A and RH(N) 1998–2001 (KO36 1997).

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* domiciliary care agency employees, *(b)* nursing agency employees and *(c)* care home owners and managers have been convicted of an offence against an elderly resident in a care home in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [130660]

Dr. Ladyman *[holding answer 17 September 2003]:* The Department does not hold information on the number of domiciliary care agency employees, nursing agency employees and care home owners or managers who have been convicted of an offence against older residents in care homes.

Under the Care Standards Act 2000, rigorous checks are required on providers, managers and staff of care establishments and agencies, to ensure their suitability to work with vulnerable people and protect these people from neglect or abuse. Regulations made under the Act included requirements for staff to undergo criminal record checks through the Criminal Records Bureau.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Department has for further regulation of the long-term care sector. [130841]

Dr. Ladyman: We announced on 9 September that certain regulations would be amended from 1 October 2003, requiring Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks for new domiciliary care staff or nurses agency staff.

The regulations will require existing domiciliary care staff to complete their enhanced CRB checks by 31 October 2004.

Regulations to require checks for existing nursing staff will be introduced once the CRB has made good progress with completing the checks on existing domiciliary and existing care home staff.

We are proposing to regulate adult placement schemes rather than adult placement carers. We will be consulting later this year on our proposals.

This Government has made it clear in the past that the care homes regulations would be continuously monitored and it has always been our intention that these regulations would be reviewed by April 2005.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps his Department is taking in conjunction with the Department for Work and Pensions to reduce the number of job vacancies within the care home sector; [130842]

(2) what plans the Department has to assist care homes in *(a)* maintaining staffing levels and *(b)* undertaking Criminal Records Bureau checks prior to employment. [130843]

Dr. Ladyman: The Department is aiming to reduce vacancy rates and encourage new entrants into the workforce through a national social care recruitment campaign. The campaign is raising awareness of the social care work force and there will be further media and television advertising in January 2004.

The Department is working closely with Job Centre Plus to raise awareness of the diversity of roles within social care and the training available. Job Centre Plus is represented on the Department's stakeholder group, which has responsibility for the recruitment campaign and wider social care workforce issues.

To meet the regulatory requirements on appropriate staffing levels and skill mix in care homes, providers must take into account the assessed needs of their residents. They must also ensure that staff are of integrity and good character by carrying out a number of rigorous pre-employment checks including a Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) check.

The National Care Standards Commission, as the independent regulator has stated clearly that it will continue to exercise its powers wisely and where CRB clearances are not in place will continue to apply its discretion on the use of its enforcement powers on a case-by-case basis.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has commissioned into *(a)* the cost of temporary agency nurses and care assistants for the care home sector in comparison with the cost of direct employment and *(b)* the consequences for the care homes sector of any difference in cost. [130844]

Dr. Ladyman: The Department has not commissioned research into the costs of temporary agency nurses and care assistants for the care home sector.

Staffing levels are a matter for care home providers. To meet the regulatory requirements on staffing levels and skill mix in care homes, providers take into account the assessed needs of their residents and recruit accordingly. Providers are required to ensure that all their staff are of integrity and good character by carrying out a number of rigorous pre-employment checks including a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check.

The National Care Standards Commission as the independent regulator has the responsibility to ensure care homes meet all their statutory requirements. They have stated clearly that they will continue to exercise their powers wisely and where CRB clearances are not in place will apply their discretion on the use of their enforcement powers on a case by case basis.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations his Department has received from care home owners concerning the impact of the reintroduction of the requirement for new staff to have a Criminal Records Bureau check; and what response he has made. [130924]

Dr. Ladyman *[holding answer 18 September 2003]:* The Department has received 40 letters from right hon. and hon. Members and three letters from care homes' umbrella organisations about the withdrawal of the National Care Standards Commission's (NCSC) interim guidance. Officials have discussed the issue with organisations representing care homes. Since 1 April 2002, all new staff in care homes have been required to obtain a satisfactory Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check as part of their pre-employment checks. However, initial difficulties experienced by the CRB in dealing with the level of demand for checks led to delays. In response to this, in June 2003, the NCSC issued interim guidance on how to deal with recruitment of care home staff while steps were taken to improve the CRB's performance.

Following significant improvements made at the CRB the NCSC rightly decided to look again at its guidance. However, I should emphasise that the NCSC has stated that it will continue to exercise its powers wisely and, where CRB clearances are not in place, will continue to apply its discretion on the use of its enforcement powers on a case by case basis.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the reasons why the National Care Standards Commission has decided to enforce the regulations empowering Criminal Records Bureau checks on new staff working in the long term care sector as from 1 October 2003; on what basis the period of time given to phase in this change was selected; and what assessment he has made of the impact the introduction of checks will have on care homes. [129841]

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what study his Department has conducted concerning the practical implications for the private care homes sector of the planned enforcement from 1 October 2003 of regulations requiring staff working in care homes to have a Criminal Records Bureau check completed before starting work; and if he will make a statement. [129513]

Dr. Ladyman *[holding answer 15 September 2003]:* From 1 April 2002, when the Care Homes Regulations came into force, care home providers have been required to undertake a number of pre-employment checks, including a Disclosure from the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB), before new staff can take up their position.

Following significant improvements made at the CRB since last summer, the CRB is now processing 90 per cent. of applications within four weeks. The National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) rightly decided to look again at its guidance because there will now be fewer circumstances in which it will need to make allowance for delayed checks.

As the independent regulator, the NCSC has the responsibility to ensure care homes meet all their statutory requirements. It has stated clearly that it will continue to exercise its powers wisely and where CRB clearances are not in place, it will apply their discretion on the use of its enforcement powers on a case-by-case basis.

The NCSC issued a press release on 22 September 2003 setting out its approach to CRB checks for care home staff. A copy is available on the NCSC's website at: www.carestandards.org.uk

Catheter-associated Infection

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the impact on the NHS of catheter-associated infection in relation to vancomycin resistant enterocci. [130619]

Miss Melanie Johnson: This information is not available centrally.

Voluntary surveillance data[1] show that almost two-thirds of blood stream infections of known origin were associated with an intravascular device or device-related infections, such as a catheter-associated urinary tract infection.

The second phase of the mandatory surveillance scheme for healthcare associated infection was recently introduced. From 1 September 2003, trusts will report blood stream infections due to glycopeptide resistant enterococci (including vancomycin resistant enterocci) and serious untoward incidents associated with infection.

[1] Public Health Laboratory Service. Nosocomial Infection National Surveillance Service. Surveillance of hospital acquired bacteraemia in English hospitals. 1997–2002.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance the NHS has issued to ensure that clinicians are fully informed in how to deal with patients presenting with chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalomyelitis. [130713]

Dr. Ladyman *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* We have issued no guidance to the National Health Service on the treatment of patients with cronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalomyelitis (CFS/ME).

We are, however, taking steps to improve services for patients with this condition. On 12 May, we announced funding of £8.5 million that will be used to develop services for people with CFS/ME. In July, health organisations were invited to bid for development funds to set up centres of expertise to develop clinical care, support clinical research and expand education and training programmes for health care professionals and to establish satellite community multidisciplinary teams. The first phase of development will start in April 2004.

Chronic Pain

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the cost to public funds of *(a)* treatment, *(b)* sickness absence and *(c)* lost production relating to chronic pain in England. [131200]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has not estimated the cost to public funds of treatment, absence, or lost productivity because of chronic pain and has no plans to carry out such a study.

Clatterbridge Hospital

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on proton therapy facilities at Clatterbridge Hospital. [131230]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Clatterbridge Centre for Oncology (CCO) currently has access to the Douglas Cyclotron Facility, which produces protons of 62MeV. This particular piece of equipment was developed by the Medical Research Council in 1984 to undertake studies into neutron therapy but was later modified in association with the Imperial Cancer Research Fund to provide proton therapy of eye tumours.

The CCO became responsible for this facility in 1991. It provides ocular oncology services in association with four national referring centres, the main one of which is the Royal Liverpool University Hospital, in addition to centres in London, Glasgow and Sheffield.

Consultancies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultancies were commissioned by his Department in the last two years for which figures are available; and what the cost of those contracts was. [130893]

Dr. Ladyman: The Department does not hold centrally a record of individual contracts. However, our financial records show the following figures as the payments made to consultancies for the last two complete financial years.

Financial year	*£ million*
2000–01	6.53
2001–02	6.8

Contact Lenses

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what action he is taking to warn children of the dangers associated with swapping contact lenses; [128137]

(2) what assessment he has made of the General Optical Council proposals to restrict sale of contact lenses to registered opticians and doctors; [128138]

(3) what action he is taking to encourage contact lens users to seek proper advice before purchase and to attend regular check-ups thereafter; [128139]

(4) what action he is taking to *(a)* encourage and *(b)* compel organisations that sell non-prescription contact lenses to (i) advise purchasers of their suitability for lenses and (ii) provide them with adequate information on care and hygiene; [128140]

(5) what assessment he has made of the link between *(a)* microbial keratitis, *(b)* acanthamoeba, *(c)* poor colour perception, *(d)* reduced binocular vision and *(e)* damage to the surface of the cornea and the use of non-prescription contact lenses; [128148]

(6) what action he is taking to ensure that the sale of non-prescription contact lenses is effectively monitored; [128151]

(7) what assessment he has made of the long-term effects on eye health of using non-prescription contact lenses; [128152]

(8) what plans he has to reclassify contact lenses as medical devices. [128153]

Ms Rosie Winterton: We plan to regulate the sale of non-prescription cosmetic contact lenses to ensure that outlets selling them have professional optical supervisory arrangements to ensure that advice is available to purchasers, whether adults or children, on use of these lenses. A public consultation is due to take place this year as part of the parliamentary process. Detailed rules for the professional optical supervisory arrangements will be developed to implement the regulations.

Although the Department has made no specific assessment of the links between certain eye conditions and the use of non-prescription contact lenses, it is widely recognised that prescription contact lens wearers are more at risk of eye infections if they over-wear their lenses, adopt poor hygiene or smoke. It is reasonable to assume that similar risks apply to people wearing non-prescription lenses and that the lack of professionally supervised advice may put them at greater risk.

For prescription contact lenses, the Contact Lens Rules 1988 require that they be provided by General Optical Council registered opticians who also provide the necessary instruction and information to the person fitted on the care, wearing, treatment, cleaning and maintenance of such lenses and also provide the clinical management and adjustment of the fitting of the lenses for a period of six months from the date of first fitting.

Powered contact lenses are classified as medical devices but plano lenses have no corrective function or medical purpose and are not considered to be a medical device. There are no plans to reclassify them as such.

Coronary Disease

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government has to research possible links between malfunctioning LOX-1 genes and cardiac arrest. [130060]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Medical Research Council (MRC) supports a range of research into cardiac arrest including ways of targeting genes in vascular disease, but does not have any projects targeting LOX-1 at the present time. The MRC always welcomes high quality applications for support into any aspect of human health and these are judged in open competition with other demands on funding.

The Department and the Department of Trade and Industry are investing around £15 million to support the development of five genetics knowledge parks over five years. The knowledge parks will carry out research into the genetic components of major diseases, including cardiovascular disease.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research the Government have undertaken into the link between tooth loss and subclinical atherosclerosis. [130108]

Miss Melanie Johnson: To date, the Government have not commissioned any research into the links between tooth loss and subclinical atherosclerosis, although we are aware of some recent research on this topic.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what health advice his Department has issued for people at risk of coronary heart disease. [130109]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department attaches great importance to preventing coronary heart disease.

The priorities and planning framework for 2003–06 includes targets for reducing the incidence of coronary heart disease. One of these requires practice-based registers for patients with coronary heart disease and diabetes, with systematic treatment regimes, including advice on diet physical activity and smoking. This covers the majority of patients at high risk of coronary heart disease, particularly those with hypertension, diabetes and a body mass index greater than 30.

Programmes are also in place to tackle the risk factors for coronary heart disease in the general population. These take a life-course approach and focus on improvements to diet and nutrition, reducing excess weight and obesity, increasing physical activity and reducing the prevalence of smoking.

Cosmetic Surgery

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to conduct a review of cosmetic surgery practice in England and Wales. [130161]

Mr. Hutton: We announced in early 2002 that there would be a review of the effectiveness of the national minimum standards for the qualifications of cosmetic surgeons in England who were not on the specialist register of the General Medical Council and had been in practice before 1 April 2002.

The National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) submitted a report to the Chief Medical Officer in July of this year on the findings from inspections carried out in its first year of operation of establishments where such surgeons worked. This report can be found on the NCSC website at www.carestandards.org.uk.

A further more comprehensive report on inspections so far is scheduled for this autumn.

Decorative Greenery

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent on decorative greenery in the Department of Health in each of the past three financial years. [131020]

Dr. Ladyman: Within the Department's administrative estate, the provision of decorative greenery comes within the contract for cleaning services.

The cost of providing decorative greenery within the past three financial years has been:

	£
2000–01	18,471.49
2001–02	16,179.57
2002–03	12,168.37

Deep Vein Thrombosis

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the percentage of people diagnosed with deep vein thrombosis who had taken a long haul flight in the preceding week in each year since 1997; [129794]

(2) what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on travel-related deep vein thrombosis, with particular reference to the use of compression hosiery as a preventative measure; and if he will make a statement; [129795]

(3) what guidance his Department has given to long haul air travellers on deep vein thrombosis. [129796]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Hospital episodes statistics can provide data on numbers of admissions with a primary diagnosis relating to deep vein thrombosis (DVT). However, no information is available to assess how many of these were for patients who had undertaken a long haul flight within the preceding week.

DVT is linked to older age, cancer, trauma, surgery, long periods of immobilisation, oral contraception, pregnancy and a number of conditions related to hyperactive blood clotting.

The Department has not commissioned any specific research on the use of compression hosiery as a preventative measure for DVT, although we are aware of existing research in this area.

In 2001 the Department of Health issued information and advice to the airlines and the public about minimising the risk of DVT during long journeys. This included practical advice for air passengers on long haul flights. It also identified certain groups which may be at a higher risk of DVT and advised them to seek medical advice before travelling and described simple in-seat exercises that should be recommended to all air passengers.

To maximise access for the public to this information and advice it is available through health services, on the internet at http://www.doh.gov.uk/dvtA from the airlines and from NHS Direct. It will be kept under review in the light of new research information.

Dementia

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) of 8 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 179W, on dementia, if he will start a routine collection of information at local level. [131198]

Dr. Ladyman: There are no plans to start a routine data collection.

Dental Students

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many students were in dental school in *(a)* 1983, *(b)* 1987, *(c)* 1992, *(d)* 1997 and the latest year for which figures are available. [131280]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information on the intake of pre-clinical dental students from 1990–91 up to 2002–03, the latest year for which figures are available, is shown in the table.

	Intake
1992–93	631
1997–98	668
2002–03	696

We are currently undertaking a review of the dental workforce, including the number of undergraduate places in dental schools. The review will be published by the end of this year.

Dentistry

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the number of *(a)* children and *(b)* adults waiting to register with an NHS dentist in Shrewsbury and Atcham. [129638]

Dr. Ladyman: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children received NHS dental treatment in Shrewsbury and Atcham in each year since 1997. [129640]

Dr. Ladyman: For the general dental service (CDS) the available information is for children's registrations, which cover children aged under 18 years seen by a dentist within the past 15 months. This information is at health authority level between 1998 and 2002 and primary care trust (PCT) level for 2002 and 2003.

The first table shows the number of children's registrations in Shropshire Health Authority and the Shropshire County PCT and Telford and Wrekin PCT areas between 1998 and 2003.

In addition, children were also seen for treatment in the community and personal dental services. The numbers are shown in the second table.

General Dental Service: Number of children's registrations in Shropshire health authority area and PCT area between 1998 and 2003

Number of patients registered (thousand)

	Shropshire County PCT	*Shropshire HA*	*Telford and Wrekin PCT*
30 September			
1998		66.5	
1999		67.4	
2000		67.4	
2001		65.8	
At 31 August			
2002		66.9	
At 30 September			
2002	39.9		26.8
At 30 June			
2003	39.4		27.0

	Number seen/treated
1998–99	4,200
1999–2000	3,200
2000–01	3,500
2001–02	3,100
2002–03	1,200

Source:
Dental Practice Board

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the availability of NHS dentistry on the Wirral. [128604]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested in shown in the table.

Strategic Health Authority/ Primary Care Trust	*England*	*Cheshire and Merseyside SHA*	*Bebington and West Wirral PCT*	*Birkenhead and Wallasey PCT*	*Total of the two PCTs*
Number of registrations					
Adults	[1]168	[2]915.3	[2]54.2	[2]88.4	[2]142.6
Children	[1]6.7	[2]332.6	[2]16.3	[2]31.1	[2]47.4
Total	[1]23.5	[2]1,247.9	[2]70.5	[2]119.5	[2]190.0
Number of GDS dentists3					
All dentists	18,335	837	35	82	128
Principals	16,401	765	44	70	114
Assistants	1,347	42	1	4	5
Vocational Dental Practitioners	587	30	1	8	9
Number of persons per dentist[4]	2,682	2,799	2,586	2,357	2,439
Number of registrations per dentist	1,283	1,491	1,532	1,457	1,484
Registration rate[4] (%)	48.0	53.3	59.2	61.8	60.8

[1] Millions
[2] Thousands
[3] Some dentists have contracts in more than one Primary Care Trust. These dentists have been counted only once in the PCT in which they hold their main contract.
[4] For population, mid year ONS population estimates based on the 2001 census have been used for England. Mid-year 2001 resident relevant population estimates based on GP patients registration data and constrained by ONS census based population for 2001 have been used for SHA and PCTs
Source:
Dental Practice Board

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's strategy is for *(a)* maintaining and *(b)* increasing participation levels of dentists in the NHS. [128605]

Ms Rosie Winterton: A national health service support team is being set up to support those primary care trusts (PCTs) and practices which are under greatest pressure. The team will provide advice and guidance on best practice in increasing access and modernising dentistry locally, backed by £3 million support funds in 2003–04 and £6 million in 2004–05 to tackle particularly acute or longstanding bottlenecks.

The Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill, currently before Parliament, proposes new duties for PCTs to secure the provision of primary dental services and the financial resources to do so. The proposals in this Bill will underpin a modernised high-quality primary dental service provided through contracts between PCTs and dental practices properly integrated with the rest of the NHS.

Diabetes

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of diabetics were offered screening for diabetic retinopathy in the last year for which figures are available. [130326]

Ms Rosie Winterton: These data were not collected prior to April 2003. Since this date, information on screening for diabetic retinopathy is being collected from the national health service. Annual figures will not be available until May 2004.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the NHS is taking to develop support and promote the management of insulin-dependent diabetics by means of dose adjustment for normal eating. [130469]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Dose adjustment for normal eating (DAFNE) is an educational programme aimed at people with type 1 diabetes to enable them to take better control of their diabetes and to teach them how to adjust their insulin injections to fit their life and food rather than the other way around. The Department provided £500,000 to support the development of the DAFNE programme in the financial year 2002–03. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence has recommended that

structured education be offered to all people with diabetes at the time of diagnosis and then, as required, based on a formal, regular assessment of need. They also considered that the DAFNE programme may be a suitable option for individuals with type 1 diabetes, being one means of enabling people to self-manage this condition.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average intervals were between follow-up appointments at diabetic clinics in each primary care trust in the last year for which figures are available. [131032]

Ms Rosie Winterton: This information is not collected or recorded centrally.

Diagnostic and Treatment Centres

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what basis certain geographical areas were selected to participate in the procurement programme for diagnostic and treatment centres. [129591]

Mr. Hutton: In autumn 2002, the national health service undertook a national capacity planning process lead by local NHS commissioners. This identified a range of capacity gaps that needed to be met for the NHS to meet the waiting time target set for 2005. Where the NHS was not able to demonstrate robust plans to meet this demand, the residual activity was tested with the independent sector.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what role Augmentis has played in the process of developing diagnostic and treatment centres. [129592]

Mr. Hutton: To facilitate the procurement process for independent sector treatment centres, the Department has offered central project management and commercial support to local national health service sponsors to help them in this new and innovative programme.

Augmentis was one of the companies that was successful in the competitive tendering process that was run to identify suitable project support.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's estimates were of the savings from operations carried out at NHS diagnostic and treatment centres; and how far these have been borne out by experience. [130649]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* The purpose of National Health Service treatment centres is to provide additional capacity to treat more patients more quickly, in a modern streamlined environment. Treatment centres were not set up with the express aim of saving money, although evidence from other countries shows that they are likely to be a cost-effective and safe way of undertaking many operations. They have, however, already begun to make an important contribution to cutting waiting times for treatment.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements have been made to provide residential accommodation for staff from overseas who are to work in private sector diagnostic and treatment centres. [131050]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 18 September 2003]:* Additional overseas staff working in independent sector treatment centres will be employed by the independent sector providers running these new units. They will be responsible for providing residential accommodation for these staff should that be necessary.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the number of professional staff who will be employed in private sector diagnostic and treatment centres; and how many of them will be on secondment from the NHS. [131052]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 18 September 2003]:* The precise number of professional staff working in these new units will be finalised in the next stage of negotiations leading to contract close.

Diet

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many five-a-day co-ordinators are employed in each NHS trust; [127372]

(2) how many five-a-day project co-ordinators have been appointed in each primary care trust. [130365]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Sixty-six primary care trusts (PCTs) are part of a programme being funded by the lottery-funded new opportunities fund to lead five-a-day initiatives in their communities to employ a local co-ordinator. By 15 September, 46 of these 66 co-ordinators had been appointed; the other 20 PCTs expect to appoint by the end of the year. In addition one PCT receives a grant from the new opportunities fund to employ seven full-time and three part-time regional co-ordinators and one part-time supra-regional co-ordinator.

All PCTs lead in their communities on public health issues, including healthy eating projects to increase fruit and vegetable consumption supported by local five-a-day co-ordinators.

Information is not collected centrally on such projects or support staff.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the population *(a)* in total and *(b)* under the age of 18, broken down by social class, has been classified as obese in each of the past 10 years. [130057]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Information is not available in the form requested. Available information on adult obesity by social class is shown in the table. Figures are from the health survey for England and cover years 1994, 1996, 1998, and 2001.

Prevalence of adult obesity by survey year and social class, aged 16 and over with a valid height and weight measurement

	Social class of Head of Household						
Survey year	I %	II %	IIIN %	IIIM %	IV %	V %	Total %
Men							
1994	9.9	13.7	13.8	15.1	15.0	14.0	13.8
1996	11.8	16.6	16.3	18.9	14.7	18.2	16.4
1998	11.9	16.5	16.5	20.5	16.1	17.9	17.3
2001	14.5	20.8	18.9	23.5	23.4	19.0	21.0
Women							
1994	11.5	14.4	15.0	19.7	21.9	22.5	17.3
1996	13.2	15.2	16.0	21.3	22.1	27.1	18.4
1998	15.1	18.4	18.9	24.4	24.9	27.5	21.2
2001	14.1	19.7	21.5	27.0	30.5	28.5	23.5

Trend information on children's obesity by social class is not available. Young people aged 16–18 are classified as adults. The following analyses therefore cover children under age 16. Social class comparisons of the percentage of children in BMI quintiles were published in the Health Survey for England—The Health of Young People 95–97 table 3.15, a copy of which is available in the Library. Overall trends show that obesity in children is rising. Although there is no generally accepted consensus on the definition of obesity in childhood, all recent studies, no matter which definition is used, have shown that the prevalence of obesity is increasing in children in England.

Health survery of England: obesity prevalence trends among English children aged 6–15

	1996	*2001*
Percentage obese[1]	12.1	15.6

[1] Equal to or greater than 95 BMI centile (Cole TJ, Freeman JV, and Preece MA. Body mass index reference curves for the UK, 1990. Arch. Dis. Child. 1995; 73: 25–29).

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the percentage of food advertising that is broadcast during children's television viewing times on *(a)* terrestrial television and *(b)* cable and satellite children's television channels; and what assessment he has made of the percentage of food advertising broadcast during children's television viewing times on (i) terrestrial and (ii) cable and satellite children's television channels that is promoting high calorie, low nutrient foods. [130083]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Food Standards Agency have funded an independent expert review of the evidence regarding the effect of promotional activity on children's eating behaviour, which covers television advertising and will identify research papers on a range of relevant topics.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take powers to restrict the use of free toys and well-known children's film and television characters in the promotion of fast food to children. [130084]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Food Standards Agency is currently considering the issue of the promotion of food to children. They have funded an independent expert review of the evidence regarding the effect of promotional activity on children's eating behaviour, which will be published this autumn.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what booklets the Food Standards Agency published on healthy eating in *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03. [130093]

Miss Melanie Johnson: In 2000–01, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) re-branded booklets it inherited from the Health Education Authority and the Department on healthy eating.

In 2001–02, the FSA published the following life stage leaflets on healthy eating entitled: "While you are pregnant"; "Thinking of having a baby"; "Breastfeeding"; "Feeding your baby"; "Feeding your toddler"; "Feeding your growing child"; "Eating for later in life"; and "Men and food".

In 2002–03, the FSA published a series of leaflets: "Healthy Eating Sugars"; "Healthy Eating Salt"; "Healthy Eating Fats"; and "Labelling claims".

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what foods the chemical acrylamide is present in; and what research has been done into the effects of acrylamide on health. [130094]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that acrylamide has been found to occur in a wide range of home-cooked and processed foods. These include chips, crisps, bread and breakfast cereals. It has not been found in uncooked or boiled foods, and appears to be formed during cooking by methods such as frying, roasting and baking, which involve higher temperatures.

Acrylamide has been shown to cause various types of cancer in laboratory animals. It is considered to have the potential to cause cancer in humans. Research into the effects of acrylamide on health is being conducted nationally and internationally.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the additives permitted in *(a)* conventional food and *(b)* organic food. [130100]

Miss Melanie Johnson: A list of all European Union permitted food additives has been created by the Food Standards Agency. This list can be accessed by using the following link to the Food Standards Agency website: http://www.food.gov.uk/safereating/additivesbranch/enumberlist

Food additives in organic foods are limited to those listed in Section A of Annex VI of Regulation (EEQ2092/91, which governs organic production in the EU. A list of these can be found on page 66 of the UKROFS standards at http://www.defra.qov.uk/farm/orqanic/ukrofs/standard.pdf.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to change the number of additives allowed in food. [130101]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that food additives legislation is harmonised throughout the European Union. All additives permitted in food have been rigorously assessed for safety by the independent scientific committees that advise the European Commission and the UK Government on food safety issues. Any changes to the number of additives allowed in food would be on the basis of advice from these expert committees.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government has to try and reverse the decline in minerals in food. [130103]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The evidence on whether there has been a decline in the mineral content of foods generally is unclear. This is due to differences over time in study methodologies and because mineral levels naturally occurring in foods can vary widely due to a range of factors.

The overall balance of the diet is more important than the nutrient content of individual foods. It is for this reason that Government activity has concentrated on promoting the uptake of a healthy balanced diet.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to make independent testing of food additives an automatic requirement. [130117]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Safety data on additives, whether provided by manufacturers or from independent sources, are thoroughly assessed by the independent expert committees that advise the Government or the European Commission before authorisation is granted. Data that are submitted for evaluation by committees must satisfy good laboratory practice requirements and also comply with any guidelines laid down by the expert committee.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research the Government has undertaken into the health consequences that might occur when several food additives are combined in a single product. [130118]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is currently funding a research project entitled "Development of methods for the assessment of the health effects from mixtures of food additives". This study is investigating four additives, chosen because they have a similar mode of action and is due to be completed in 2005. The FSA has also recently established a new research programme on mixtures of chemicals. The main focus is on residues of pesticides and veterinary medicines, but the results will provide more general information on possible effects of mixtures of chemicals in food including additives.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to remove a star from trusts where the percentage of obese people increases. [130159]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Commission for Health Improvement is the independent regulator of national health service performance and is responsible for developing indicators and publishing NHS performance ratings. Ministers will continue to agree key targets and the priority areas to be covered in the ratings, but are not responsible for their calculation.

The prevention and management of obesity is at the heart of many of the Government's priority areas, as set out in the NHS Plan, the cross-cutting review on health inequalities, national service frameworks and the priorities and planning framework.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the European Commission regarding the proposal to ban health claims made about food products. [130174]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that the European Commission has adopted a proposal that seeks to better regulate health claims on foods, allowing them only when evidence to substantiate the claim has been accepted by the European Food Safety Authority. This proposal is currently under negotiation in Brussels.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will respond to the recent proposals of the Obesity Awareness and Solutions Trust in relation to Toast House. [130393]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department is aware of the work of the obesity awareness and solutions trust (TOAST).

The Department provided funding for TOAST through a Section 64 grant in 2002. The funding finished in March 2003. TOAST have updated the Department on their proposals in relation to TOAST house, which may complement the Department's work to tackle overweight and obesity.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ban the food additives *(a)* tartrazine, *(b)* quinoline yellow, *(c)* sunset yellow FCF, *(d)* cochineal, *(e)* carmoisine, *(f)* amaranth, *(g)* poncean 4R, *(h)* erythrosine, *(i)* indigo carmine, *(j)* caramel, *(k)* black PN, *(l)* annatto, *(m)* benzoic acid, *(n)* sodium benzoate, *(o)* sulphur dioxide, *(p)* sodium nitrate, *(q)* sodium nitrate, *(r)* butylated hydroxyanisole and *(s)* butylated hydroxytoluene; and if he will undertake further research to identify additives that may exacerbate hyperactivity in children. [130401]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I am advised by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) that there are no plans to ban these additives. Legislation on food additives is harmonised throughout the European Union and all additives permitted for use in food, including those listed, have been rigorously assessed for safety by the independent scientific committees that advise the European Commission and the United Kingdom Government. Any ban on the use of these additives would be on the basis of advice from these expert committees.

In May this year the FSA put out a research call inviting new proposals to examine whether there are any links between certain food additives and behaviour in children. Proposals have now been received and are currently being appraised by an independent panel of experts.

Direct Payments

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in each of the last five years were *(a)* eligible for and *(b)* in receipt of direct payments, broken down by client group. [130873]

Dr. Ladyman: The number of people eligible for direct payments is not available. Prior to April 2003 whether individuals were offered direct payments was a choice for each council so eligibility differed between areas. Since April 2003, it has been made a "duty" for each council to offer a direct payment, but eligibility will depend on a number of factors, including the person's ability to manage a direct payment. The number of people in receipt of direct payments between the years 1997–2000 is also not available. However, the number of adults aged 18 or over and in receipt of direct payments for the years 2000–01 and 2001–02, broken down by client group, is available and shown in the table.

Number of clients receiving direct payments (England)

Rounded figures

Primary client type	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
All client groups	5,000	6,300
Physical and sensory disability/frailty	3,600	5,300
of which:		
physical disability	2,800	3,600
hearing	[1]	
visual	100	100
dual		
frailty	300	400
Learning disability	200	500
Mental health	100	200
of which:		
dementia	[1]	[1]
Substance abuse	[1]	60
Other vulnerable people	1,000	200
of which:		
asylum seekers	900	60
welfare benefits	0	0

[1] Figures less than 50.

Note:

2000–01 figures are based on 133 P2f forms.

2001–02 figures are based on 140 P2F forms.

Doctor-Patient Ratios

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average ratio of family doctors to patients was in each year since 1997 in *(a)* England, *(b)* each NHS region and *(c)* each strategic health authority. [128918]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Domestic Violence

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what role he envisages primary care trusts taking in dealing with domestic violence. [129622]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government are firmly committed to tackling domestic violence, a serious and abhorrent crime, and we recently published our strategy to co-ordinate concerted action on this issue in the consultation paper, "Safety and Justice". Within this framework, the national health service has a particular contribution to make in identifying and responding to domestic violence, which has a profound impact on the health and well-being of the individuals concerned and their children.

The Department of Health's publication, "Domestic Violence: A Resource Manual for Health Care Professionals (March 2000)", provides a solid foundation for local multi-agency work and supports health care professionals and managers across all sectors of the NHS, including those working in primary care trusts (PCTs), in developing their domestic violence policies, protocols and services to ensure victims receive the care and support they need in whatever health setting they present.

The Department is working closely with the NHS Modernisation Agency to facilitate sharing of good practice domestic violence strategies by PCTs, particularly those who have developed effective partnership working arrangements with other key local agencies, through the national primary and care trust development programme.

Drugs

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase the number of GPs recognised as having a special interest in the treatment of drug addiction. [129141]

Mr. Hutton: We are committed to expanding the numbers and the role of general practitioners with a special interest (GPwSIs) and have already met the NHS Plan commitment to have 1,000 such GPs. These GPs will help expand the range of services offered by primary care in settings more convenient for patients than hospital-based care. It is important, however, that the services offered by these GPs address local priorities and needs. The decisions on which specialties to develop locally are therefore for primary care trusts.

We are supporting the GPwSIs' development with guidelines which we have commissioned from the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) on a range of specialities. Drug misuse is among these and we are funding a RCGP training programme on this. In the first year, 440 GPs attended the training and there were over a 100 on the waiting list.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 1 September 2003 the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden), *Official Report*, column 3W, on adverse reactions to drugs (children), what the equivalent information is for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01. [129724]

Mr. Hutton: The following table provides data from hospital episode statistics of admissions to hospital of children under 16 years due to adverse effects from drugs, medicines and biological substances in therapeutic use in national health service hospitals in England.

	Number of admissions of children under 16 (ungrossed data)
1997–98	2,437
1998–99	2,608
1999–2000	2,986
2000–01	2,819

These data include adverse effects from all medicines, whether prescribed or taken without prescription. It is important to note that these figures do not represent the number of patients as a person may have more than one admission episode of hospital care within the year.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 9 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 694W, on unused drugs, if he will commission independent research to assess ways of reducing this wastage; and what assessment he has made of whether smaller packs of drugs could reduce wastage. [129807]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department is concerned about the wastage of unused medicines and has introduced a number of measures to address this.

These include the medicines management collaborative, which involves primary care trusts (PCTs), general practitioners (GPs) and pharmacies in schemes that demonstrate innovation and good practice in medicines management. Reducing the volume of unwanted medicines is one of the local objectives being pursued by some of the PCTs participating in the programme.

Repeat dispensing makes it possible for patients to get their repeat medicines for up to a year without having to contact their GP's surgery. At each repeat dispensing episode, the pharmacist checks that the medicines are still needed and being used appropriately by the patient. The first wave of pathfinder sites is now under way and I announced the second wave of 40 sites at the British Pharmaceutical Conference on 17 September 2003. We remain committed to repeat dispensing schemes nationwide until the end of 2004. Evidence from previous pilot studies has shown that repeat dispensing helps reduce waste.

Modernising hospital pharmacy services, where patients can now continue to use their medicines when admitted to hospital, together with dispensing for discharge, has also been shown to reduce waste.

Given all these initiatives we do not propose to commission further research.

Patients have different requirements according to their clinical condition. Pharmaceutical companies therefore have to decide what pack sizes will suit the majority of patients and provide pack sizes to meet these needs.

E.coli

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many recorded *(a)* E-coli infections and *(b)* E-coli 0157 infections there were in each year since 1997 which were linked to camping or visiting open farms; and if he will make a statement. [128928]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The table shows the number of laboratory confirmed cases of Escherichia coli 0157 (E.coli) infection in England, Wales and Scotland from 1983 to 2002.

The first case of infection with a Vero-cytotoxin producing strain of Escherichia coli (VTEC) was diagnosed in 1982. Virtually all cases of Vero-cytotoxin producing strains of E.coli infection are caused by E.coli 0157. All cases of E.coli infection associated with camping or visits to open farms have been due to the 0157 strain.

Data on sporadic cases are not included because it is not possible to link individual sporadic cases to a particular route of transmission.

Report year	*E.coli 0157*	*E.coli 0157 associated with camping or open farms*
1983	0	—
1984	6	—
1985	53	—
1986	80	—
1987	101	—
1988	88	—
1989	206	—
1990	415	—
1991	563	—
1992	585	—
1993	504	—
1994	653	5
1995	1,039	0
1996	1,166	0
1997	1,513	30
1998	1,107	11
1999	1,378	21
2000	1,093	33
2001	1,003	23
2002	824	5

This table does not include outbreaks associated with camping or visiting open farms in which infection was acquired from contaminated food or water. The figures for 2002 are provisional.

Emergency Planning

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 16 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 412W, on emergency planning, if he will publish the review of major incident planning capacity. [129125]

Mr. Hutton: There are no plans to publish the detailed findings of the review. The review has helped ensure that national health service major incident planning is continuously reviewed and improved. Revised guidance will be issued to the NHS later this year. Our approach was described in the Treasury minute responding to the Public Accounts Committee report "Facing the Challenge: NHS Emergency Planning in England", which was published on 17 March. Copies of the minute have been placed in the Library.

Energy Use Targets

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the voluntary targets for energy use in NHS capital schemes have been made mandatory; what progress his Department has made in revising the NHS carbon dioxide standard of heat insulation; and whether it is his intention to bring the revised NHS carbon dioxide standard into line with the current British Standard for heat insulation. [129150]

Miss Melanie Johnson: In April 2001 the then Minister of State for Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), set mandatory energy targets for the national health service in England.

NHS Estates is currently undertaking a comprehensive review of its healthcare engineering guidance which includes Model Engineering Specification CO_2 Thermal Insulation (MES CO_2). It is NHS Estates' intention to harmonise MES CO_2 with the revised British Standard.

Fluoride

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what methods other than fluoridation of public water supplies safe levels of fluoride can be delivered to the population. [130429]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Trials are underway of offering fluoridated milk in schools and, in some parts of Europe, fluoridated salt is on sale. We have introduced the brushing for life scheme whereby free fluoridated toothpaste is given to families with young children in areas of high tooth decay. Findings to date suggest that none of these measures yields benefits equivalent to those derived from water fluoridation.

Food

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent by the NHS on food in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03; how much food was wasted in each of those years; and if he will make a statement. [129364]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not routinely collected.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent on food by his Department and by each agency for which it is responsible in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03; what proportion of that food by value was produced in the United Kingdom; what guidance he has issued to encourage the procurement of home-grown food; and if he will make a statement. [129377]

Mr. Hutton: Expenditure on food relates to hospitality, working lunches and refreshments supplied at meetings. Available information from the Department of Health and its Agencies is shown in the table.

	2001-02	*2002-03*
Department of Health	348,000	173,000
The Medicines and Health Care Products Regulatory Agency (total expenditure in the formerly separate Medicines Control Agency and Medical Devices Agency)	264,819	185,683
NHS Purchasing and Supplies Agency	8,148	9,714
NHS Pensions Agency	63,892	81,726
NHS Estates	132,798	66,569

Catering services are contracted out and no detailed information is available on the proportion of food that is produced in the United Kingdom.

The main Department of Health contractor has a policy to purchase food products sourced in the UK wherever it is available and commercially viable to do so. 92 per cent. of purchases are products produced within the UK.

The Department's procurement policy requires prospective catering suppliers to demonstrate within their tenders their approach to purchasing local products and those produced within the UK.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government has to introduce central enforcement of breaches of food legislation. [130121]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Local and central Government are responsible for different aspects of food law enforcement. However, most enforcement work is undertaken by local authority environmental health and trading standards departments. I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that there are no plans to change these arrangements.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the bacterial infections which caused death from food poisoning in each year since 1997, indicating the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage in each category. [127344]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Public Health Laboratory Service, now the Health Protection Agency, carried out a detailed study of all statistics on foodborne disease in order to calculate reliable estimates of the true burden of indigenously acquired foodborne disease and deaths. These estimates exclude foodborne infections acquired abroad and infections acquired by other routes such as person to person. Annual data for 1997 to 2000 are shown in the table. Data for 2001 onwards are not yet available.

Estimated number of deaths due to indigenous foodborne infection in England and Wales 1997 to 2000

Bacterial pathogen	*1997*	*Percentage*	*1998*	*Percentage*	*1999*	*Percentage*	*2000*	*Percentage*
Non typhoidal Salmonellas	304	34.5	208	30.2	146	28.0	119	24.8
Clostridium perfringens	260	29.5	189	27.5	89	17.0	89	18.5
Campylobacter spp.	79	9.0	88	12.8	84	16.1	86	17.9
Listeria monocytogenes	87	9.9	76	11.0	76	14.6	68	14.2
Escherichia coli 0157	27	3.1	22	3.2	27	5.2	22	4.6
Other E.coli	6	0.7	6	0.9	6	1.1	6	1.3
Verocytotoxigenic E.coli (Non 0157)	3	0.3	2	0.3	3	0.6	2	0.4
Vibrio spp.	2	0.2	2	0.3	2	0.4	2	0.4
Yersinia spp.	5	0.6	3	0.4	2	0.4	1	0.2
Parasites & Viruses[1]	21	2.3	19	2.8	20	3.8	20	4.2
Unknown Agents[2]	88	10.0	73	10.6	67	12.8	65	13.5
Total deaths[3]	882	100	688	100	522	100	480	100

[1] Information on parasites and viruses is provided for comparison.

[2] Unknown agents may include some bacterial infections.

[3] Figures shown are for all agents.

Source (raw data):

Gastrointestinal Diseases Division, Health Protection Agency

Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre. 23/7/03

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of the target to reduce foodborne disease is made up of food poisoning caused by *(a)* salmonella, *(b)* campylobacter, *(c)* clostridium perfringens, *(d)* E.coli 0157 and *(e)* listeria; [130069]

(2) how many deaths were caused by *(a)* salmonella, *(b)* campylobacter and *(c)* clostridium perfringens food poisoning in each year since 1997–98; [130070]

(3) how many cases of campylobacter food poisoning there were in each year since 1997–98; and what steps the Government is taking to reduce the cases of campylobacter food poisoning; [130081]

(4) what progress his Department is making towards the target to reduce foodborne disease by 20 per cent. by 2006; and by what percentage foodborne disease was reduced in 2001–02. [130176]

Miss Melanie Johnson: In the baseline year, 2000, the percentage of the target accounted for by each organism was:

	percentage
Salmonella	20
Campylobacter	78
Clostridium perfringens	0.3
E.coli 0157	2
Listeria monocytogenes	0.2

A study of foodborne disease statistics carried out by the Health Protection Agency (HPA) was used to provide the following estimated number of deaths due to indigenous foodborne infection in England and Wales between 1997–2000:

	Number of deaths per year			
Bacterial Pathogen	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Salmonellas (non typhoidal)	304	208	146	119
Clostridium perfringens	260	189	89	89
Campylobacter spp.	79	88	84	86

Source:
(Raw data): Gastrointestinal Diseases Division, Health Protection Agency, Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre. 23/07/03.

Routine data on causes of death, collected by the Office of National Statistics, do not provide a breakdown for individual organisms. The most recent HPA data currently available are for the year 2000.

The number of laboratory-confirmed cases of Campylobacter spp. in the United Kingdom in each year since 1997–98 is shown in the table. Not all of these infections will have been transmitted by food. Note that due to under-reporting the actual numbers of cases will be higher. On the basis of a large study of intestinal infectious disease in England, funded by the Department, the true number is estimated to be eight to ten times greater.

	England and Wales	*Northern Ireland*	*Scotland*	*UK total*
1997	50,177	778	5,533	56,488
1998	58,059	775	6,381	65,215
1999	54,987	862	5,865	61,714
2000	55,887	1,001	6,482	63,370
2001	56,592	885	5,435	62,912
2002[1]	47,231	817	5,121	53,169

[1] based on provisional data sets.
Source:
HPA (PHLS) laboratory reports to the CDSC, CDSC (NI) and laboratory reports to the SCEIH

Measures to reduce cases of Campylobacter are set out in paragraphs 55–60 of the Food Standards Agency (FSA) strategy for reducing cases of foodborne illness by 20 per cent, by April 2006. This is available on the FSA's website at http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/fdscg-strategy-revised.pdf

A detailed strategy, which aims to reduce the presence of Campylobacter in United Kingdom-produced chicken on retail sale significantly, was published for consultation in June 2003. This can be found on the FSA's website at http://www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/consultations/completed consultationscompleteduk/campylobacterstrategycons

As part of a nation-wide food hygiene campaign, the FSA is currently developing material to promote awareness of Campylobacter among poultry farmers. Earlier phases of this campaign have been targeted largely at raising awareness and promoting good hygiene practice in the catering industry. Messages about thorough cooking and the avoidance of cross-contamination are particularly relevant to prevention of Campylobacter infection. Further high-profile activity to increase awareness of cross-contamination in the kitchen is planned for early 2004.

Good progress is being made towards reducing foodborne disease by 20 per cent. Provisional data for 2002 suggest there has been just over a 13 per cent. reduction in the number of cases of foodborne illness due to the target organisms, compared with the baseline figure for 2000.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions his Department has had with other countries *(a)* in the EU and *(b)* outside the EU on food safety. [130071]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is responsible for food safety issues. It frequently discusses many aspects of food safety, on the basis of European Commission proposals and in scientific exchanges, with all other European Union member states. In addition, FSA officials have met counterparts from the 10 countries which are preparing to join the EU on 1 May next year as well as from many other countries. The discussions, at various levels, have ranged over many items of mutual interest, including: development of food safety and consumer-related policies; risk management and current legislative programmes; communication of risk; building relationships between food authorities; methods of scientific analysis; research and development; and inspection and food law enforcement.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Government is taking to ensure that salmonella in eggs is strictly controlled. [130074]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The key intervention is the statutory on-farm control programme for breeding flocks. All layer breeding flocks must be monitored at regular intervals for the presence of Salmonella. Any flock infected with Salmonella Enteriditis or Salmonella Typhimurium is compulsorily slaughtered. Ministers at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) are responsible for these controls. The Government will also be supporting new European Union proposals aimed at controlling salmonella pathogens of public health significance in poultry and other farm animals, including egg layer flocks.

Statutory measures are complemented by voluntary codes of practice published by DEFRA, which industry has incorporated into their own salmonella controls.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has issued advice to caterers and consumers on the safe handling, storage and consumption of eggs. This advice is published on the FSA's website at http://www.food.gov.uk/safereating/foodadvice/eggs2002advice

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what systems are required to be in place to ensure that the risk of contamination from food-borne micro-organisms is minimised during slaughter. [130075]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Current European Union meat hygiene rules contain detailed requirements for the structure and operation of slaughterhouses and require all slaughterhouse operators to implement and maintain hazard analysis critical control point-based programmes to prevent, eliminate or reduce hazards to acceptable levels. Red meat slaughterhouse operators are required to carry out microbiological testing of carcasses to verify that their controls are working. The legislation is enforced in Great Britain by the Meat Hygiene Service, an executive agency of the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and in Northern Ireland by the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development veterinary service on behalf of the FSA.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to ensure that staff working with food are aware of the need to wash their hands after visiting the lavatory; and what further steps his Department is planning to take to ensure the highest levels of personal hygiene are maintained by staff working for organisations involved with the handling of food. [130076]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Staff working with food must, by law, maintain high standards of personal hygiene and be supervised to ensure that they work hygienically. These requirements are enforced by local food authorities.

Effective hand washing is important in preventing contamination of food and the spread of food poisoning bacteria in catering premises and in the domestic setting. To help reinforce this message, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) has run a high profile nationwide campaign targeting the catering industry with material stressing the importance of staff working with food washing their hands after visiting the lavatory. Further advice on how to clean and dry hands, is available on the FSA website at www.foodstandards.gov.uk

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will set out the main criteria of the hazard analysis and critical control point system; [130072]

(2) when he expects the hazard analysis and critical control point system to be extended to all food businesses under EU legislation; and whether his Department has evaluated the effects of implementing the HACCP system to other food businesses not currently included. [130073]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Hazard analysis critical control point (HACCP) is a risk-based system designed to control food safety hazards inherent in food production. The main criteria of the HACCP system are set out in the Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) which consider the effects of the proposed new legislation.

The date of implementation of the consolidated European Union food hygiene legislation is not yet decided. Negotiations under the co-decision procedure are continuing, however, the Council has agreed a formula under which the new legislation would apply from 1 January 2006, or 18 months after coming into force, whichever is the later.

The latest versions of these can be found on the Food Standards Agency website at:
www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/regulation/europeleg/eufoodhygieneleg/six

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Government are taking to ensure that food manufacturers provide information that is not misleading. [130175]

Miss Melanie Johnson: It is an offence under current legislation for anyone to label food in a manner that could be misleading. In support of this legislation, the Food Standards Agency has produced guidance for manufacturers on a number of aspects of labelling, such as country of origin and the use of terms such as 'fresh', 'pure' and 'natural'. In addition, proposed legislation on the use of nutrition and health claims on food labels is currently being discussed in Brussels.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many food samples were submitted for testing by local authorities in England in 1996. [130963]

Miss Melanie Johnson: A total of 175,096 food samples were taken for testing by local authorities in England in 1996.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the costs are for the testing of a food sample by *(a)* a local authority public analyst, *(b)* a private sector public analyst and *(c)* the Food Standards Agency's laboratory at York. [130965]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Costs for the analysis of food samples vary greatly depending on the food type and the analyses being carried out. As such, an average cost is not available.

Food Standards Agency

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who the committee members for the Food Standards Agency's Consumer Committee are; and how they were chosen. [130095]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The twelve members of the consumer committee are chosen in two ways, six through open competition and six nominated by the main consumer organisations. The current membership is as follows:

Appointees from Open Competition

Nancy Robson (Chair)

Alison Childs (Deputy Chair)

Marvelle Brown

John Godfrey

Appointees nominated by Consumer Organisations

Sue Dibb (National Consumer Council)

Emma Copeland (Consumers' Association)

Sinead Furey (General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland)

Lucy Gillie (Scottish Consumer Council)

Jeanette Longfield (Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming)

Claire Whyley (Welsh Consumer Council)

The two vacancies are currently being filled though open competition.

Foundation Hospitals

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what method each candidate trust for Foundation Hospital status has adopted to carry out public consultation about their plans; when those consultations will be completed; and what the total cost is to each trust of the consultation exercises. [129748]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* Individual applicants are developing their own plans for consultation to reflect how best to engage with key stakeholders locally. These consultations may involve a balance of staff and public meetings, written documents and presentations to key stakeholders depending on what fits best locally to allow the public, staff and other stakeholders to provide their views. Evidence of consultation and a summary of comments received is a requirement for the material submitted for consideration by the Secretary of State on 12 December as part of the next stage of the applications process. Consultation will need to conclude therefore in time to allow this. Costs will differ depending on the exact method of consultation chosen; we do not hold centrally information on these individual costs.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the auditor for a foundation hospital will be appointed. [130105]

Mr. Hutton: It will be up to the board of governors of each national health service foundation trust to appoint the auditor, subject to provisions in Schedule 1, paragraph 21, of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on plans to develop a bond market to allow foundation trusts to raise capital. [130394]

Mr. Hutton: Initial consultations with financial institutions support the Government's view that bond finance may offer medium term opportunities for national health service foundation trusts to raise capital under certain circumstances. In the near term, bonds are not the preferred source of finance for NHS foundation trusts.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with financial institutions to develop a bond market to allow foundation trusts to raise capital. [130398]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has undertaken wide ranging consultations with financial institutions in order to establish a sustainable financial regime for national health service foundation trusts. A variety of bonds were part of a range of financial instruments discussed during this consultation process.

Free NHS Care

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what advice his Department gives to those embarking on gap years abroad on the effect that their absence from the UK will have on their entitlement to claim free NHS care on return to the UK, [130187]

(2) what discussions his Department has had with *(a)* student organisations and *(b)* representatives of the travel industry about advice offered to gap year students on the availability of free NHS provision when students return from an extended trip outside the UK. [130188]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* Students who choose to spend some time abroad before starting a university degree course remain fully entitled to free National Health Service treatment as soon as they return to take up permanent residence in the United Kingdom. This advice is given to anyone who enquires on the subject, but there have been no specific discussions with the bodies mentioned.

Gateway Controls

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many departmentally-approved targets have been introduced since the introduction of Gateway controls. [129587]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan set out a 10-year programme of reform. The targets that the national health service is required to deliver over the next three years as part of the programme were set out in "Improvement, Expansion and Reform: The next 3 years, Priorities & Planning Framework 2003–2006", published on 1 April 2003. No other targets have been created for the NHS.

Genito-urinary Medicine

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent on genito-urinary medicine services in *(a)* each of the past three financial years and *(b)* 1997–98. [131019]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Hospital and community health services expenditure on genito-urinary medicine services for each of the past three financial years and 1997–98 are shown in the table[1].

£ million

	Expenditure
2001–02	182.13
2000–01[2]	157.138
1999–2000	171.593
1997–98	137.367

[1] In 1999–2000, one NHS trust recorded expenditure on HIV/AIDS within the speciality genito-urinary medicine. However, in 2000–01 the trust reclassified this expenditure and recorded it within the speciality infectious diseases.
[2] Following further validation of the data, this is a revised figure for 2000–01.
Sources:
Annual financial returns of NHS trusts, 1997–98 and 1999–2000 to 2001–02.
Annual financial returns of primary care trusts, 2000–01 to 2001–02.

GM Foods

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department *(a)* has undertaken and *(b)* plans to undertake in 2003–04 into the health risks of GM foods. [130152]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Food Standards Agency (FSA) funds two extensive research programmes on the safety of genetically modified food. The first underpins the current safety assessment to ensure the most up to date knowledge is used. The second is a three-year programme that started in 2001. This investigates new and emerging scientific techniques (such as gene arrays, metabolomics and proteomics) and explores how they might be used to refine the current safety assessment.

This research is undertaken by independent research scientists and is peer reviewed before final reports are made publicly available through the FSA's library. Details of the research programme are published in the FSA's research and surveys programmes annual report and are available on the FSA website at www.foodstandards.gov.uk.

General Practitioners

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the GPs' contract includes recognition of the number of drug addicts treated beyond capitation alone. [129136]

Mr. Hutton: Under the new general medical service contract, most patient services will be funded by weighted capitation.

With effect from 1 April 2004, there will be a national enhanced service for the treatment of patients with specialised drug and alcohol misuse problems. This will be based on national specifications and there will be additional funding.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what constitutes an improvement to a GP's premises, as referred to in the Department of Health Public Service Agreements from 1998. [128908]

Mr. Hutton: Improvements are building works that lead to a substantive change to the premises from which a primary care team provides services, which in the view of the primary care trust, or its predecessor health authority, improve patient access to services or enhance the working environment for the primary care team.

Green Transport Policies

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the NHS hospital trusts which have implemented green transport policies at the request of their local planning authorities. [129642]

Mr. Hutton: Data on national health service trust transport plans implemented at the request of local authorities are not collected centrally.

Health and Social Services (Merseyside)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of health and social services in Merseyside. [129063]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The publication of the 2003 national health service performance ratings was undertaken by the Commission for Health Improvement, on behalf of the Department. The performance ratings contain full star ratings for acute/specialist and ambulance trusts and for the first time, mental health and primary care trusts.

Information on all the star ratings awarded in 2003 for the Cheshire and Merseyside region can be found at http://www.nhs.uk/root/StarRatings/StrategicHealthAuthority.asp/SHACode=Q15

The Department's social services inspectorate produces for each council social services department an annual performance report. This includes information about the standard of service over the preceding year and the capacity for improvement for the coming year and beyond. Star ratings are awarded each November to every social services department.

The star ratings awarded to the Merseyside councils in 2002 are shown as follows:

2 star
Cheshire
Knowsley
Sefton
Warrington

1 star
Halton
Liverpool
St. Helens
Wirral

Information on star ratings for all council social services departments can be found in the social service inspectorate's 2002–03 annual report. A copy of the report can be found at http://www.doh.uk/ssi/ciann-12.htm

Health Care (Buckinghamshire)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were cancelled in hospitals in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire in the last quarter for which figures are available; what percentage of the cancelled operations were subsequently carried out in four weeks; and if he will make a statement. [130595]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department collects quarterly data on last minute cancelled operations for non-clinical reasons at trust level (that is, patients cancelled on the day of admission, after admission, or on the day of surgery). Figures for the first quarter of 2003–04 were published on 11 September 2003. Data by individual hospital sites are not collected.

The percentage of cancelled operations that were consequently carried out within four weeks can not be calculated from the data available. However, data are available for the number of patients who were not treated within four weeks of a last minute cancellation as part of the central data collection arrangements for the NHS Plan cancelled operations guarantee. These data are shown in the table for Buckinghamshire Hospitals NHS Trust, Heatherwood and Wexham Park Hospitals NHS Trust, and Milton Keynes General Hospital NHS Trust.

Quarter 1, 2003–04

	Number of last minute cancellations for non-acute clinical reasons	*Number of patients not admitted within 28 days of a last minute cancellation*
Buckinghamshire Hospitals NHS Trust	129	13
Heatherwood and Wexham Park Hospitals NHS Trust	73	0
Milton Keynes General Hospital NHS Trust	47	0

Note:
The NHS Plan stated: "From 2002, when a patient's operation is cancelled by the hospital on the day of surgery for non clinical reasons, the hospital will have to offer another binding date within a maximum of the next 28 days or fund the patient's treatment at the time and hospital of the patient's choice". From April 2003, the cancelled operations guarantee was extended to apply to cancellations that occur on or after the day of admission.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been waiting to be registered by NHS dentists in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire in each year since 1 January 1996. [130597]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to increase the number of dental practices taking NHS patients in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire. [130599]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Subject to the will of Parliament, the Health & Social Care (Community Health & Standards) Bill would enable primary care trusts (PCTs) to provide assistance and support to dental practices with which they contract. To enable PCTs to provide such assistance in advance of 2005, the general dental services incentive schemes directions 2003 have been published, together with guidance to PCTs.

To support the change programme, a £10 million package of investment was announced on 12 August. A National Health Service team, backed by £9 million, will support PCTs where access is most challenging, providing advice and guidance on best practice in increasing access and modernising dentistry locally to tackle longstanding bottlenecks where it is hard to find a NHS dentist. The remaining £1 million will assist PCTs, local dental committees and dentists in preparing for the change.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* general practitioners and *(b)* vacancies for general practitioners there are in (i) Chesham and Amersham and (ii) Buckinghamshire. [130600]

Dr. Ladyman: The number of general practitioners for the Buckinghamshire area is shown in the table.

Unrestricted Principals and Equivalents (UPEs)[1] for Primary Care Trusts in the Buckinghamshire area, June 2003

Numbers (headcount)

	All practitioners	*UPEs*[1]
June 2003	*of which:*	
Milton Keynes PCT	123	117
Vale of Aylesbury PCT	136	112
Chiltern and South Bucks PCT	109	96
Wycombe PCT	93	81

[1] UPEs include General Medical Services Unrestricted Principals, Personal Medical Services, Contracted GPs and PMS Salaried GPs.
Data as at 3Q June 2003
Source:
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.

With regard to the number of general practitioner vacancies, the Department carries out an annual survey of GP recruitment and retention of which the latest published data are for 2001–02. The information available for Buckinghamshire covers all vacancies outstanding at any time in the 12 month period between the 1 March 2001 and 28 February 2002. This information relates to Buckinghamshire health authority (HA), which had 27 GP vacancies, which were outstanding at some time in the 12 month period. For this survey, it is not possible to break the information down below HA level.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the funding he announced to support the hospice movement has been allocated to *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire; and if he will make a statement. [130601]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The additional £50 million per annum has been made available to support specialist care, including hospices, for three years beginning 2003–04. This extra £50 million is to help tackle inequalities in access to specialist palliative care in a range of settings, including hospices and to enable the national health service to increase their contribution to the cost hospices incur in providing agreed levels of service. The level of funding agreed for hospices, both from the additional £50 million and from local resources, is a matter for local discussion and decision.

Networks were asked to submit their proposed investment plan for the use of their allocation from the £50 million to the National Partnership Group (a joint NHS/voluntary sector group). Their plans have been approved and funding allocated for specialist palliative care services.

The Thames Valley Cancer Network, in which Chesham, Amersham and Buckinghamshire sit, received £1.844 million from the central allocation. The use of the funds will be monitored against plans.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with health organisations in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire during the last 12 months. [130602]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There have been no recent discussions with health organisations in Buckinghamshire.

Thames Valley Strategic Health Authority, which, since 'Shifting the Balance of Power', now performance manages National Health Service health services in the Buckinghamshire area, regularly meets with the management of the trusts in Buckinghamshire. The Department and Ministers will continue to work with the local NHS to review the progress of the local economy.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding Buckinghamshire Health Authority received from the Government in *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04; and how much it is expected that it will receive in 2004–05. [130604]

Ms Rosie Winterton: 2003–04 was the first year of direct allocations to primary care trusts. Prior to that, allocations were made to health authorities.

Revenue allocations to Buckinghamshire Health Authority and its successor primary care trusts for the time periods requested are shown in the table.

£ thousands

	Allocation		
Health authority/Primary care trust	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*2004–05*
Buckinghamshire HA	493,959	N/A	N/A
Chiltern and South Bucks PCT	N/A	117,675	128,126
Milton Keynes PCT	N/A	167,638	183,498
Vale of Aylesbury PCT	N/A	143,593	157,179
Wycombe PCT	N/A	107,852	117,956

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to assess the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue requirements of hospitals within (i) Chesham and Amersham and (ii) Buckinghamshire; and if he will make a statement; [130605]

(2) what decisions have been taken within the last 12 months to make extra *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue money available to hospitals within (i) Chesham and Amersham and (ii) Buckinghamshire; if he will list the (A) projects, (B) sums of money involved and (C) start dates; and if he will make a statement. [130606]

Dr. Ladyman: It is for primary care trusts in partnership with strategic health authorities and other local stakeholders to determine how best to use their revenue funds to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling health inequalities and modernising services.

Revenue funding is allocated to primary care trusts on the basis of the relative needs of their populations. A weighted capitation formula is used to determine each primary care trust's target share of available resources. National health service trusts as providers of services receive the bulk of their revenue funding from commissioning by primary care trusts.

Operational capital is allocated to all NHS trusts and PCTs primarily for minor capital investments and equipment replacement, and is distributed using a formula based on the size of the current asset base. Strategic capital is allocated directly to strategic health authorities to fund larger capital developments to facilitate strategic change, and is distributed using a population based formula. Strategic health authorities then prioritise allocations from the strategic capital to NHS trusts and PCTs in their patch.

It is for the local health economy to decide the most appropriate use of this capital funding in order to meet national and local priorities.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) of 13 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 234W, on target funding allocations, how much of the additional allocation became available to *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire. [130607]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Cash increases to Buckinghamshire primary care trusts are shown in the table.

	2003–04 cash increase		*2004–05 cash increase*		*2005–06 cash increase*		*Three year cash increase*	
Primary Care Trust	*£000*	*%*	*£000*	*%*	*£000*	*%*	*£000*	*%*
Chiltern and South Bucks	9,850	9.14	10,451	8.88	11,183	8.73	31,484	29.20
Milton Keynes	14,803	9.69	15,860	9.46	17,181	9.36	47,844	31.30
Vale of Aylesbury	12,684	9.69	13,586	9.46	14,720	9.37	40,990	31.31
Wycombe	9,433	9.58	10,104	9.37	10,969	9.30	30,506	31.00

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of residential care homes in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire have been inspected by the National Care Standards Commission since 1 April 2002. [130608]

Dr. Ladyman: All of the residential care homes in Chesham and Amersham, and in Buckinghamshire have been inspected by the National Care Standards Commission since 1 April 2002.

Health Care (North Cheshire)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to ensure that the North Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust meets the outpatient targets set by the Government; and if he will make a statement. [129928]

Miss Melanie Johnson: North Cheshire Hospitals National Health Service Trust is making every effort to meet the Government's target of 21 weeks for a first outpatient appointment. This includes regular discussions between clinicians and managers about

clinical capacity and modernising out-patient processes. The Cheshire and Merseyside Strategic Health Authority continually monitors the progress of all partner organisations, including North Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust, against Government targets.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to improve access to general practitioners in Warrington; and what discussions have taken place with the Warrington Primary Care Trust to ensure that the targets for access are met. [129929]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Steps being taken to improve access to general practitioners in Warrington include Warrington Primary Care Trust (PCT) employing an access facilitator, who is working with eight GP practices to redesign services in order to improve access. The PCT board has in addition approved the recruitment of additional salaried GPs and nurse practitioners. Individual practices are also being supported in reviewing their appointment management processes.

The Cheshire and Merseyside Strategic Health Authority has established performance monitoring processes to gauge PCTs' progress on meeting GP access targets.

Health Care Assistants

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many health care assistants have been seconded to train as nurses in each acute trust, in each year since the scheme was introduced; [130045]

(2) what records are kept of the number of health care assistants who apply for secondments to train as nurses and are refused such secondments; [130046]

(3) how many NHS trusts are refusing all secondment applications from health care assistants who wish to train as nurses; and which of these trusts have decided to ban all secondments, whatever training is involved. [130047]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 17 September 2003]:* The number of health care assistants seconded to train as nurses is a matter for local determination. Records of numbers accepted by trusts, refused applications for secondments and trusts not offering secondments are not collected centrally.

In the current financial year, workforce development confederations plan to support 6,966 secondments. The Department is substantially increasing the amount of funding available in the years 2004–05 and 2005–06.

For the current financial year, central funding has been provided for up to 15 per cent. of the nurses in training to be on secondments.

Health Protection Agency

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what stocks of vital materiel the Health Protection Agency is procuring to prepare for an attack by nuclear, biological, radiological or chemical weapons. [128666]

Mr. Hutton: The Health Protection Agency (HPA) is not procuring any stocks of vital material in preparation for an attack using chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) weapons. The procurement of health-related CBRN countermeasures is the responsibility of the Department and, in undertaking this role, the Department seeks scientific and technical advice from the HPA as required.

Health Staff (Performance)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Government is taking to identify poorly performing *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses. [130155]

Mr. Hutton: The Government established the National Clinical Assessment Authority in April 2001. The key functions of the Authority include helping local organisations manage problems quickly and effectively; promoting effective local and national procedures for preventing, identifying and resolving performance problems; and providing individual assessments that recommend practical ways in which individual performance can be improved.

At present the National Clinical Assessment Authority applies only to doctors and dentists. The Government will consider the case for whether a similar approach would be appropriate for the other health professions.

Health Visiting Services

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the implications for effective early intervention in cases of potential child abuse of the reduction in health visiting services in South Worcestershire. [129312]

Dr. Ladyman: It is for local organisations to determine the health visiting workforce required to deliver local and national health priorities including child health.

The proposals which have been put forward by South Worcestershire Primary Care Trust are based upon the commitment to provide a family-centred health visiting service which will work with individuals, families and communities to improve child health and tackle health inequalities. The review process for health visiting also took into account public health deprivation indices, the number of children aged up to four years registered with a general practitioner and the number of children currently on the child protection register. All families with children under five years will continue to have access to a named health visitor attached to their general practitioner's practice for advice on health and parenting issues.

The Department is currently funding a range of initiatives to support primary care trusts in promoting recruitment, retention and return to practice within the primary care nursing and health visiting workforce.

High Security Hospital Patients

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons he intends to move 400 patients from high security hospitals to prison settings by 2004. [130328]

Dr. Ladyman: Paragraph 14.35 of the NHS Plan said that by 2004 up to 400 patients should have moved from the high security hospitals to more appropriate accommodation. A programme is under way aimed at moving up to 400 patients from high security hospitals to more appropriate accommodation by 2004.

It is intended that the patients concerned should move to less secure hospitals or other suitable settings rather than to prisons. The programme has been initiated to address the problem of patients remaining in high security hospitals for longer than safety and security considerations dictate, which is an infringement of human rights and wasteful of scarce resources. The movement out of inappropriately placed patients will also facilitate the admission of people who do need high security care and treatment, including prisoners requiring transfer.

Histopathology

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will assess the impact on patients of the availability of histopathology consultants working in the NHS. [129110]

Miss Melanie Johnson: It is for cancer networks to work in partnership with workforce development confederations and strategic health authorities to put in place a sustainable process to assess, plan and review their work force needs and the education and training of all staff linked to local and national priorities for cancer.

To meet NHS Plan and Cancer Plan commitments to get the staff that the national health service needs to deliver high quality care to patients, the Department is taking steps to increase the overall number of histopathologists. Three histopathology training schools were piloted in Leeds, Leicester and Southampton. The schools trained 18 senior house officers a year to be able to apply for specialist registrar posts. Building on their early success, we are increasing funding to the existing schools to enrol 24 trainees each year. We are also increasing the number of schools from three to 12 and raising the annual intake from 18 to 96 by 2005–06.

We have also set up an intensive training programme at Southampton for exceptional overseas graduates with at least two years previous experience in pathology. The aim of the programme is to provide support and targeted training and to assess competence and educational needs in three months, rather than in one year, resulting in an extra eight histopathologists a year being eligible to apply for specialist registrar posts in histopathology.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to train histopathology consultants. [129112]

Mr. Hutton: In line with the commitment in "The NHS Cancer Plan", in 2000–01 the Department set up three histopathology training schools in Leeds, Leicester and Southampton. These schools initially trained an extra 18 senior house officers a year, to be eligible to apply for specialist registrar (SpR) posts in histopathology. Building on early success, we are increasing funding to the schools to take on 24 trainees each year. We are also pleased to expand the initiative nationally, increasing the number of schools from three to 12 and raising the annual intake from 18 to 96 by 2005–06.

We have also set up an intensive training programme at Southampton for exceptional graduates with at least two years overseas experience in pathology. The aim of the programme is to provide support and targeted training and to assess competence and educational needs in three months, rather than in one year, resulting in an extra eight histopathologists a year being eligible to apply for SpR posts in histopathology.

HIV

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Sefton are infected with HIV. [127667]

Miss Melanie Johnson: In 2002, 29,044 HIV-infected individuals were reported to be resident in England. Of these, 38 were resident in Sefton.

Hospices

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the £50 million he announced to support the hospice movement has *(a)* been allocated and *(b)* been spent; and if he will list the recipients of the funds. [128954]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 11 September 2003]:* The additional £50 million per annum has been made available to support specialist care, including hospices, for three years beginning 2003–04. This extra £50 million is to help tackle inequalities in access to specialist palliative care in a range of settings, including hospices and to enable the national health service to increase their contribution to the cost hospices incur in providing agreed levels of service. The level of funding agreed for hospices, both from the additional £50 million and from local resources, is a matter for local discussion and decision.

All 34 cancer networks were asked to submit their proposed investment plan for the use of their allocation from the £50 million to the National Partnership Group for palliative care. The National Partnership Group—a joint NHS/voluntary sector group—has assessed all the investment plans and 32 cancer network plans have now been approved and funding allocated for specialist palliative care services. The use of funds will be monitored against plans. It is anticipated that information will be available on the first year's funding during 2004.

Hospital Acquired Infections

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 8 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 6W, on healthcare-associated infections, what the longer term strategy is; and what measures he will use to evaluate the contribution made by each of the targeted action plans. [129714]

Miss Melanie Johnson: On 9 June 2003 the Chief Medical Officer announced that he would be spearheading a new Government drive to tackle healthcare associated infections and in particular hospital acquired infections. Alongside action to target

problem areas and step up monitoring of infections, he will look at evidence from other countries to see what we can learn from them, and an action plan for the longer term will be published later this year.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the incidence of hospital-acquired infections since March. [129484]

Dr. Ladyman: The number of reported incidents of hospital acquired infections is not available. Comprehensive data on hospital infections are currently only available for methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) blood stream infections.

A new national mandatory surveillance system for healthcare associated infection started with reporting of methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) blood stream infections (bacteraemias), in April 2001. All acute trusts in England now collect this information and results for the first year of this scheme (April 2001 to March 2002) were published by individual trusts in the *Communicable Disease Report Weekly* on 20 June 2002. They are available at www.phls.co.uk/publications/cdr/PDFfiles/2002/cdr2502.pdf.

National data on MRSA blood stream infections are published quarterly in the *Communicable Disease Report Weekly*. Data for the last quarter (1 April to 30 June 2003) will be published shortly.

Hospital Viruses

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nosocomial cases of small round-structured viruses there were in *(a)* England and *(b)* each strategic health authority in each month in (i) 2002 and (ii) 2003 up to the latest date for which figures are available. [128901]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Health Protection Agency has a voluntary reporting system for outbreaks of gastroenteritis, including those caused by norovirus (formerly known as small round structured virus, norwalk or norwalk-like virus). From 1 January 2002 to 31 March 2003, in England, there were there were 369[1] outbreaks affecting 10,975 patients and staff.

The number of cases by strategic health authority and by each month is not available. The table shows a regional breakdown of cases of norovirus infection in outbreaks in hospitals reported to the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre of the Health Protection Agency from 1 January 2002 to 31 March 2003 in England.

[1] Outbreaks in England proven or suspected of being associated with norovirus.

Region[1]	*Total cases in norovirus outbreaks*[2]
Anglia and Oxford	2,265
North and West	1,247
North Thames	1,454
Northern and Yorkshire	2,550
South and West	1,481
South Thames	294
Trent	341
West Midlands	1,343
Total	10,975

[1] PHLS/NHS region.
[2] Patients and staff.

Hospital Waiting Lists/Times

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to reduce the number of patients in the Cheshire and Merseyside Strategic Health Authority area who have waited over nine months for in-patient treatment. [130925]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 18 September 2003]:* All national health service trusts in Cheshire and Merseyside have agreed plans with primary care trusts (PCTs) and the strategic health authority (SHA)7 that deliver the maximum nine month wait target by 31 March 2004.

Most NHS trusts are planning to achieve this target earlier than the specified date.

The Cheshire and Merseyside SHA and PCTs monitor the waiting time target on a weekly basis. The service improvement managers assist wherever problems are experienced.

HRT

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to restrict the use of hormone replacement therapy. [130106]

Dr. Ladyman: Following careful review of the recent findings from a number of studies that provide important new information on the safety of hormone replacement therapy (HRT), the committee on safety of medicines (CSM) and its expert working group on HRT have issued clear advice to prescribers and women.

The CSM has advised that, for short-term use of HRT for the relief of menopausal symptoms, the benefits outweigh the risks for many women. However, for longer-term use of HRT, prescribers are advised that each decision to start HRT should be made on an individual basis and that women should be made aware of the increased risk of the adverse effects, including cancer and cardiovascular disease. Each treatment decision should take into consideration the known risks and benefits of HRT, the contraindications for use and each woman's individual circumstances. In addition, the need to continue HRT treatment should be reappraised at least once yearly.

Product information is being updated to reflect fully the new information and will additionally advise prescribers that, for the treatment of post-menopausal symptoms, the lowest effective dose of HRT should be used and that treatment should only be continued as long as the benefit in alleviating severe symptoms outweighs the risks.

As with all licensed medicines, the CSM keeps the safety of HRT under close review, and would take appropriate action if further evidence relating to its safe use became available.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many responses have been received by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority on the sixth edition of their code of practice; and how many were from *(a)* individual patients, *(b)* clinics and *(c)* professional bodies; [131310]

(2) when the sixth edition of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's code of practice will be implemented. [131311]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) has informed me that 59 responses were received to the consultation exercise on the sixth edition of its code of practice. Of these, three were from the public including patients, 22 were from clinics and 24 from professional and patient bodies.

The HFEA is aiming to publish the new edition before the end of the year. It will be implemented immediately on publication.

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many human embryos have been created specifically for the purposes of research since the passage of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990; and how many such human embryos have been created by *(a)* fertilisation and *(b)* other processes. [129026]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority has informed me that since August 1991, when the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 came in to force, approximately 311 human embryos have been created for use in licensed research projects—257 between 1991 and 1997 and 54 since 1998. All of the embryos were created by fertilisation.

Illegal Meat

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the cost of the specialist training in illegal meat for local authority enforcement officers; whether the 30 candidates being appointed as regional advisers following the specialist training will be in addition to the current levels of local authority enforcement officers; who has been appointed to run the training and under what procedure they were chosen; and whether the funding for the training is to be taken from *(a)* the Food Standards Agency funding and *(b)* his Department's central funding. [130085]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The cost of the specialist training in illegal meat for 26 United Kingdom local authority officers and four officers from the Republic of Ireland, including accommodation, venue hire and travel and subsistence, was £40,000. The training of the UK officers was funded by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and provided by Mallard Consultancy Ltd., following a competitive tendering process. The 26 candidates appointed as regional advisers in the UK will act in this capacity for 10 working days per year for the FSA. They will continue to be employed by their local authorities and, when not working on behalf of the FSA, will continue their normal work for their authorities. They are not additional staff for the local authorities. The FSA will reimburse the authorities for the cost of their time in carrying out work for the FSA.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the candidates undertaking specialist training in illegal meat for local authority enforcement officers completed their training. [130087]

Miss Melanie Johnson: All 30 candidates who undertook the specialist training in illegal meat investigation and enforcement arranged by the Food Standards Agency completed their training.

Immigration

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the Department of Health's contribution to the Cabinet Office's review of immigration and infectious diseases. [131016]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Cabinet Office review of imported infections and immigration, which involves the Department and other Government Departments, is on-going and no decisions have been taken.

Immunisation

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of children were immunised by their 2nd birthday in England in 2001–02 for *(a)* diphtheria, *(b)* tetanus, *(c)* polio, *(d)* pertussis, *(e)* Hib and *(f)* MMR. [127523]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Information about uptake rates for routine childhood immunisations by their second birthday for diphtheria, tetanus, polio, tetanus, Hib and measles/mumps/rubella are shown in the following table:

Completed primary courses at two years of age England 2001–02
Immunised by 2nd birthday in 2001–02 *Per cent.*

Diptheria	*Polio*	*Tetanus*	*Whooping cough*	*Hib*	*Measles/ mumps/ rubella*
93.8	93.7	93.8	93	93.3	84.1

Infectious Patients

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 24 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 721W, on infectious patients, what information was collected centrally from the local risk assessments; and if he will publish such information. [129123]

Miss Melanie Johnson: These risk assessments were not collected centrally.

Information Management

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS trusts are experiencing problems with the compatibility of the computer systems used to record data. [130156]

Mr. Hutton: Problems with compatibility are the responsibility of local trusts to resolve with their suppliers. No data are currently collected and no reports are routinely made to the Department on any such problems. The collection of such data is not a part of core reporting requirements for the National Health Service and it would not be economically viable or appropriate on business grounds to add this requirement.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to improve standards of information management in the NHS. [130157]

Mr. Hutton: Two key initiatives which aim to improve the standards of information management in the national health service focus on the better recording and exchange of information to national standards and the development of health informatics skills.

All national standards for the recording and transfer of information across the NHS now have to be approved by the independent NHS information standards board. This ensures that data are collected using agreed common standards so that NHS information can be used consistently across the NHS. When approved, these standards are included within the NHS data dictionary which provides the core reference manual on information standards for the NHS. Part of the approval process of the information standards board is to ensure compatibility with the design authority of the national programme for information technology. This Design Authority is responsible for the design of the future NHS IT infrastructure through which much patient-related information will be collected in future.

The management of information to support the delivery of patient care and healthcare service planning and performance is undertaken by a range of people within the NHS. This includes clinicians, managers and specialist information analysts working in a range of local and national NHS organisations. For effective use of information, skills in health informatics are vital to ensure that information is not misinterpreted or misunderstood. The National Health Informatics Development Programme run by the NHS Information Authority is developing a range of products and services which aim to improve these across the NHS, so that the analysis and interpretation of information is undertaken to clear professional standards.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department gives to health authorities to ensure they comply with the Freedom of Information Act 2000. [130158]

Dr. Ladyman: The Department set up a high level steering group in 2001 to oversee implementation of the Freedom of Information Act in the Department itself and in the National Health Service.

In line with the Government's policy of empowering front-line staff, the steering group commissioned a project, led by South East London Strategic Health Authority, to develop an implementation plan and provide guidance on Freedom of Information for the NHS. NHS staff from trusts and strategic health authorities have collaborated to develop the plan and guidance.

Working closely with the Information Commissioner's office, the project has produced model publication schemes, which have been adopted by trusts, strategic health authorities and independent practitioners. Guidance on other aspects of Freedom of Information has been made available by the project through a national awareness programme.

Within the Department, a Freedom of Information Unit (also set up in 2001), supports the steering group and provides support as needed by the NHS project team. This unit has prepared a departmental implementation plan and begun conducting awareness events for all staff.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the progress of the NHS national information technology programme. [130395]

Mr. Hutton: The national programme for information technology in the national health service is continuing to make good progress on schedule. The previously published milestones have all been met, in particular for:

E-booking—three bidders were shortlisted on time, best and final offer proposals were received at the end of August 2003 and the project received a successful gateway 3 review.

The new NHS network—six responses to the preliminary invitation to negotiate were received on time, three bidders were shortlisted on schedule and we are looking to an accelerated procurement timetable to select a winner by the end of 2003.

Electronic transfer of prescriptions—the target remains as 50 per cent. of transactions by the end of 2005 and 100 per cent. by the end of 2007. Scope and objectives have been agreed by the programme board.

Integrated care records service (National Patient Record Spine)— four bidders' proposals received on time on 30 June 2003. Two shortlisted companies are bidding. Contract award planned for 31 October 2003.

Integrated care records service (local service providers)—10 shortlisted bidders against five clusters of NHS strategic health authorities are continuing in the procurement competition.

Intermediate Care Beds

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many new intermediate care beds there have been in the last two years; [127565]

(2) where new NHS intermediate care bed capacity has been introduced in the last two years. [127566]

Dr. Ladyman: Data are not available to assess the growth of intermediate care (IC) beds in the last two years. Between the 1999–2000 baseline for growth in IC beds and the end of June 2003, 3,600 additional beds have been established. New capacity has been established in all strategic health authorities but, because of restructuring within the national health service, precise data for each authority are not available.

Junior Doctors

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many junior doctors were in training in the NHS in England on *(a)* a headcount and *(b)* a whole-time-equivalent basis, in each year since 1990. [128931]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the tables.

Hospital, public health medicine and community health services (HCHS) and general medical practitioners: doctors in training by grade; 1990–2002. England, as at 30 September

Numbers

	All training grades		*Of which HCHS training grades*	
	Hc	*Wte*	*Hc*	*Wte*
1990	26,015	25,255.7	24,453	23,709.7
1991	26,874	26,151.6	25,235	24,529.8
1992	27,353	26,531.0	25,740	24,933.6
1993	28,057	27,236.3	26,528	25,731.7
1994	28,295	27,558.9	26,850	26,138.7
1995	29,510	28,739.7	28,106	27,364.5
1996	30,173	29,343.2	28,868	28,065.0
1997	31,656	30,887.6	30,313	29,586.6
1998	32,294	31,483.7	30,848	30,090.9
1999	33,047	31,974.1	31,527	30,499.3
2000	33,581	32,801.9	31,922	31,204.5
2001	34,675	33,815.8	32,792	32,004.8
2002	36,895	35,839.3	34,915	33,932.1

(Hc) Headcount
(Wte) Whole time equivalents

Numbers

	Registrar Group		*Senior House Officer*		*House Officer*		*GP Registrars*	
	Hc	*Wte*	*Hc*	*Wte*	*Hc*	*Wte*	*Hc*	*Wte*
1990	10,345	9,700.4	11,165	11,056.2	3,126	3,120.7	1,562	1,546.0
1991	10,541	9,926.6	11,549	11,460.6	3,163	3,159.0	1,639	1,621.8
1992	10,732	10,076.8	11,865	11,717.8	3,143	3,138.9	1,613	1,597.4
1993	11,049	10,357.2	12,299	12,198.9	3,180	3,175.5	1,529	1,504.6
1994	11,213	10,592.3	12,541	12,459.3	3,096	3,087.1	1,445	1,420.2
1995	11,466	10,841.9	13,342	13,238.5	3,298	3,284.2	1,404	1,375.2
1996	11,385	10,716.8	14,213	14,084.3	3,270	3,263.9	1,305	1,278.2
1997	11,909	11,335.9	15,006	14,860.1	3,398	3,390.6	1,343	1,301.0
1998	12,131	11,559.2	15,221	15,042.2	3,496	3,489.5	1,446	1,392.8
1999	12,682	12,085.3	15,239	14,865.9	3,606	3,548.0	1,520	1,474.8
2000	12,730	12,198.9	15,501	15,322.4	3,691	3,683.2	1,659	1,597.4
2001	13,220	12,629.1	15,830	15,642.5	3,742	3,733.2	1,883	1,811.0
2002	13,770	13,031.1	17,135	16,912.0	4,010	3,989.0	1,980	1,907.2

(He) Headcount
(Wte) Whole time equivalents
Source:
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census.

Local Exercise Action Pilots

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health where the Local Exercise Action Pilots are to take place; how his Department will measure the effectiveness of the LEAP pilots; and who will be eligible to participate in the LEAP pilots. [130113]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Local Exercise Action Pilots (LEAP) will test out different community approaches to increasing levels of and access to physical activity. They will help to establish the evidence base on what works, and support the delivery of milestones in the national service frameworks and priorities and planning framework. The on-going results will inform and lead action on physical activity across the national health service.

The LEAP pilots are based in based in primary care trusts (PCT) at:

Durham Dales PCT;

Hastings and St. Leonards PCT;

Great Yarmouth PCT;

North Kirklees PCT;

Wandsworth PCT;

Dudley Beacon and Castle PCT;

Ashton, Leigh and Wigan PCT;

Nottingham City PCT; and

West of Cornwall PCT.

Eligibility to participate in the pilots depends on the specific groups to be targeted by each pilot. All pilot sites are in neighbourhood renewal areas and up to three are also in sport action zones. The pilots focus on high risk and disadvantaged groups.

We will be measuring both the effectiveness of the direct interventions in the pilots and the extent to which the physical activity messages in those pilots that are community wide have impacted at a community level.

Low Flying

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessments have been undertaken by the Department of the effect of military low flying exercises on *(a)* blood pressure, *(b)* hearing and *(c)* cardio-vascular state. [129193]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department has not funded research on the effect of military low flying exercises on blood pressure, hearing or cardio-vascular state in the civilian population.

Lincolnshire NHS Partnership Trust

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* psychiatric doctors, *(b)* psychiatric nurses, *(c)* agency nurses and *(d)* new category primary care mental health workers were employed in Lincolnshire NHS Trust in 2003. [129286]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information is shown in the tables.

Hospital, public health medicine and community health services (HCHS): Doctors in Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Trust (RP7) with a specialty in psychiatric medicine

Numbers (headcount)

	September 2002		March 2003	
England	*All staff*	*Consultants*	*All staff*	*Consultants*
Psychiatry group total	60	28	[1]—	30
Child and adolescent psychiatry	6	4	[1]—	5
General Psychiatry	42	16	[1]—	17
Learning disabilities	6	4	[1]—	3
Old age psychiatry	5	3	[1]—	4
Psychotherapy	1	1	[1]—	1

[1] Date not available

Note:

Data as at 30 September or as at 31 March

Source:

Department of Health medical and dental workforce census

NHS hospital and community services qualified psychiatric nurses in the Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Trust as at 30 September 2002

	Headcount
Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Trust	464

Source:

Department of Health Non-medical Workforce Census

Figures for the numbers of agency nurses and new category primary care mental health workers are not held centrally.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* assertive outreach teams, *(b)* early intervention teams and *(c)* crisis resolution teams work in the area of Lincolnshire NHS Trust; and how many of each offer 24 hour cover. [129287]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Lincolnshire Partnership National Health Service Trust has three assertive outreach teams and one pilot early intervention team available during office hours. There is also one crisis resolution team, which offers 24-hour cover.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what facilities exist offering female service users access to a women-only day centre in Lincolnshire NHS Trust. [129288]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Lincolnshire Partnership National Health Service Trust does not currently provide a women-only day centre.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanisms are in place in Lincolnshire NHS Trust which allow carers to take respite breaks. [129289]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Lincolnshire Partnership National Health Service Trust is working with the mental health charity Rethink to provide comprehensive services for carers across Lincolnshire.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the number of patients using mental health services has changed over the last two years in the Lincolnshire NHS Trust. [129290]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Lincolnshire Partnership National Health Service Trust was established in June 2002. Data on changes in the number of patients using the trust's mental health services over the last two years are therefore not available.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what special arrangements have been made in the Lincolnshire NHS Trust for *(a)* homeless people, *(b)* minority ethnic people and *(c)* asylum seekers needing mental health services. [129291]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Lincolnshire Partnership National Health Service Trust funds the mental health charity Rethink to provide a homeless persons' officer in Lincoln. It is working with the social services department to develop a race equality scheme for service users. The Trust does not have any special arrangements for asylum seekers needing mental health services.

Maternity Services (Shropshire)

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the additional investment given to maternity units from May 2001 has gone to Oswestry's maternity services. [130224]

Dr. Ladyman: The extra £100 million announced in May 2001 was invested over two years, 2001–02 and 2002–03, to modernise and refurbish maternity units. Over 200 maternity units in the country are benefiting from this new investment. Local services decided on the top local priorities for investment.

The Royal Shrewsbury Hospital NHS Trust received £896,000, which was spent on modernisation of the Shrewsbury consultant-led unit including sleeping facilities for fathers and a transitional care ward. These facilities benefit mothers from the Oswestry area who give birth at Shrewsbury.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average number of babies born per bed per day was in labour wards in *(a)* England and *(b)* Shropshire in each year since 1997. [130225]

Dr. Ladyman: This information is not available in the form requested. Information about maternities and maternity beds in England is shown in the table. This information is not available for Shropshire.

Number of maternities and available maternity beds, England, 1997–98 to 2001–02

	Maternities	*Available maternity beds*	*Maternities per bed per day*
1997–98	585,000	10,781	0.15
1998–99	577,500	10,398	0.15
1999–2000	565,300	10,203	0.15
2000–01	549,600	9,767	0.15
2001–02	541,700	9,812	0.15

Source:

Maternities—DH/SD3G

Available beds—DH/hospital activity statistics

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many full-time equivalent midwives were employed by the NHS in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [130228]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is in the following table.

	Number of full-time equivalent midwives
1998	18,168
1999	17,876
2000	17,662
2001	18,048
2002	18,119

Note:
Data as at 30 September
Source:
Department of Health NHS Hospital and Community Health Services
Non-Medical Workforce Census

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps were made to recruit midwives to cover maternity leave before the decision was made to close the maternity unit at the Robert James and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital. [130229]

Dr. Ladyman: Posts held by staff on maternity leave are not available to be offered permanently to new staff. However the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital NHS Trust (which is responsible for the maternity unit at the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital) has been involved in a number of initiatives to help address the current situation. These include: advertising in the nursing press; and midwifery recruitment stands at the national health service careers fair in Telford and at the Shrewsbury flower show.

In addition, all midwifery bank shifts available in Shropshire have been used and part-time staff have been asked to work extra shifts. The Trust has also approached two agencies in the area.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the closure of the maternity unit at the Robert James and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital will be temporary. [130230]

Dr. Ladyman: The maternity unit at Oswestry, which is managed by the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital NHS Trust, is to close temporarily due to a large number of midwives across Shropshire taking maternity leave. The Trust plans to reopen the unit on 1 April 2004. During this period women in the area will still be able to choose to give birth at either: Shrewsbury general practitioners maternity unit; Shrewsbury consultant maternity unit; home; or at one of the maternity units in Wales.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the cost of refurbishing the maternity unit at the Robert James and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital at Gobowen to the latest quality standards with a projected life span of 25 years. [130231]

Dr. Ladyman: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the cost of constructing a maternity unit with eight beds attached to a primary care centre. [130232]

Dr. Ladyman: Any estimate of the cost of construction of a particular unit will obviously be subject to a number of local factors. Without further specific information, there are too many variables to make a realistic estimate of the likely costs involved.

Medical Trainees

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* GPs and *(b)* nurses have been in training in (i) South Tyneside, (ii) the North East and (iii) the UK in each year since 1997. [130740]

Mr. Hutton: The numbers (headcount) of general practitioner registrars in South Tyneside primary care trust (PCT), Northumberland, Tyne and Wear and County Durham and Tees Valley strategic health authorities (SHAs) and England in each year since 1997 are shown in table 1.

Table 1—GP registrars in South Tyneside, the North East and England

Numbers (headcount)

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	June 2003
South Tyneside PCT	[1]—	[1]—	1	1	3	3	4
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear SHA and County Durham and Tees Valley SHA	53	80	77	83	89	110	129
England	1,343	1,446	1,520	1,659	1,883	1,980	2,157

[1] Not available.
Source:
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.

The numbers (whole time equivalent) of pre-registration nurses in training in the Northern England and County Durham and Tees Valley Workforce Development Confederations (WDC) and England in each year since 1997 are shown in Table 2. Information is not available at South Tyneside PCT level.

Table 2—Number of students in pre-registration nursing and midwifery training between 1998–99 and 2002–03

Numbers (whole time equivalent)

	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03
Northern England WDC and County Durham and Tees Valley WDC	1,973	2,480	2,227	2,915	2,826
England	39,319	44,005	48,422	53,299	58,902

Source:
Financial and Workforce Information Return.

Information about GP registrars and nurses in training in Scotland and Wales is the responsibility of the devolved Administrations. Whilst the institutions in Northern Ireland are dissolved, responsibility rests with Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office.

Medicines (Advertisements)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which over the counter medicines are to be freed from the ban on advertising. [130104]

Dr. Ladyman: The Government have recently announced their intention to remove the ban on advertising over the counter (OTC) medicines for certain diseases and conditions. The change will mean that if a product is classified as available for purchase by consumers then they will be able to receive advertising about the medicine.

The change will affect OTC medicines for the treatment, prevention or diagnosis of bone diseases, cardiovascular diseases, diseases of the liver, biliary system and pancreas, endocrine diseases, genetic disorders, joint, rheumatic and collagen diseases, psychiatric diseases, serious disorders of the eye and ear, serious gastrointestinal diseases, serious neurological and muscular diseases, serious renal diseases, serious respiratory diseases and serious skin disorders. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency is not aware of any medicines at present classified as suitable for OTC supply in a number of these categories, including psychiatric diseases, endocrine diseases and genetic diseases.

Examples of OTC products that will be affected by the change include aspirin 75 mg tablets, calcium/vitamin D preparations, fish oils, isphagula, nitrates and theophylline and aminophylline products. To protect public safety, these changes will not come into force until the necessary guidelines for advertisers are in place and information and training for pharmacy staff have been provided.

The ban on advertising any prescription-only medicine to the public will remain.

Mental Health

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* mean and *(b)* median waiting times for (i) initial and (ii) follow-up appointments for accessing respite care for mental health users were in each primary care trust for the most recent three quarters available. [131026]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department does not hold this information centrally.

Mersey Regional Ambulance Service

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to improve the performance of the Mersey Regional Ambulance Service. [130926]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 18 September 2003]:* The Mersey Regional Ambulance Service National Health Service Trust has an action plan with the central commissioning group (CCG), which represents the 15 primary care trusts across Cheshire and Merseyside.

The immediate actions agreed with the CCG include:

additional resources to provide an intermediate patient transport service whereby out-patient transport staff will be provided with additional training and resources in order to assist with the response to emergency demand;

introducing additional solo operated rapid response vehicles;

extending the hours of the existing solo operated rapid response vehicles; and

introduction of a community paramedic.

The Mersey Regional Ambulance Service NHS Trust and the CCG are assessing further action needed to ensure the Trust achieves a headline performance of 80 per cent. from April 2004. The Trust will present these plans by October 2003.

Methylphenidate

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he plans to investigate the extent of Methylphenidate prescribing in the UK. [130259]

Dr. Ladyman: Information is collected on the number of prescription items of all Methylphenidate drugs dispensed in the community. The data include prescriptions prescribed in general practitioner practices, and prescriptions prescribed in hospitals that have been dispensed in the community. Private prescriptions, and prescriptions dispensed in hospitals are not included. Numbers of prescriptions in England for the years 1997 to 2002 are set out in the table.

	Items (Thousand)
1997	92.1
1998	126.6
1999	158.0
2000	186.2
2001	208.5
2002	254.0

In 2000, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) made an appraisal of the use of Methylphenidate in the treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). NICE estimated that approximately 1 per cent. of all school-aged children—about 69,000 of 6 to 16-year-olds in England met the diagnostic criteria for Hyperkinetic Disorder, the more severe type ADHD, of whom some 45,000 might benefit from Methylphenidate were not receiving this treatment. A review of the appraisal is planned for this year.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* short and *(b)* long-term adverse effects are described with Methylphenidate. [130260]

Dr. Ladyman: Methylphenidate (sold in the UK as Ritalin, Equasym and Concerta XL) is licensed for use in children over six years of age as part of a comprehensive treatment programme for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, where remedial measures alone prove insufficient.

The most common short-term adverse effects generally occur at the beginning of treatment, and include central nervous system effects, such as nervousness and insomnia, and gastro-intestinal effects, such as abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting.

The long-term safety and efficacy profiles of methylphenidate are not fully known. This is reflected in the product information of Ritalin provided to prescribers which advises that patients requiring long-term therapy should be carefully monitored. It warns of the risk of moderately reduced weight gain and slight growth retardation with the long-term use of stimulants in children and that careful monitoring of growth is recommended. It also recommends that blood tests should be performed periodically during long-term use.

Microbiology Laboratories

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what systems are in place to ensure that the former Public Health Laboratory Service microbiology laboratories *(a)* maintain their standards of practice under NHS trusts and *(b)* continue to report national data statistics to central Government; [130077]

(2) what safeguards are in place to ensure that food-borne disease is given high priority by the Health Protection Agency when commissioning services from microbiology laboratories; [130078]

(3) what service level agreements are in place for microbiology laboratories. [130079]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Health Protection Agency is in the final stages of putting in place a detailed service level agreement (SLA) with those national health service trusts from which it is commissioning public health services from NHS microbiology laboratories. Reporting of results, submission of samples and food-related public health work are all specified in detail within the SLA, which provides a clear exposition of the range and level of service required.

To improve clinical governance, raise quality standards and improve openness and transparency for patients, the Department recently decided that all NHS pathology laboratories in England should enrol with an appropriate accreditation scheme. Further information will be contained in the Department's document on modernising pathology services, which will be published later this year.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what supporting inspection arrangements are in place for microbiology laboratories. [130080]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department expects to appoint a new inspector of microbiology shortly, with the key aim of ensuring high quality public health and clinical microbiology. His/her functions will include:

ensuring that all microbiology laboratories providing services to the national health service meet their responsibilities for public health surveillance;

promoting standards and ensuring quality in the operation of microbiology services;

identifying significant gaps in specialist and reference microbiological testing that are relevant to public health surveillance;

achieving adherence to standard operating procedures in diagnostic microbiology.

To improve clinical governance, raise quality standards and improve openness and transparency for patients, the Department recently decided that all NHS pathology laboratories in England should enrol with an appropriate accreditation scheme. Further information will be contained in the Department's document on modernising pathology services, which will be published in the autumn.

Midwives

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many midwives were employed in the NHS in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002, broken down by health authority. [130955]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table. The 1997 health authority data has been mapped into strategic health authority (SHA) area. SHAs were introduced in 2001.

SHA	*1997*	*2002*
Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire	715	910
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire	541	605
Essex	596	644
South Yorkshire	664	649
Trent	959	1,053
Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland	632	644
Shropshire and Staffordshire	638	652
Birmingham and The Black Country	1,261	1,234
Coventry, Warwickshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire	720	739
North West London	864	842
North Central London	535	628
North East London	753	724
South East London	721	769
South West London	587	638
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	699	675
County Durham and Tees Valley	513	566
North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire	703	651
West Yorkshire	1,038	1,021
Cumbria and Lancashire	1,008	985
Greater Manchester	1,683	1,572
Cheshire and Merseyside	1,173	1,276
Thames Valley	876	1,004
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	771	730
Kent and Medway	703	660
Surrey and Sussex	728	1,020
Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire	1,126	1,091
South West Peninsula	751	797
Dorset and Somerset	427	470
Special health authorities and other statutory bodies	0	0
England	22,385	23,249

Mixed Sex Wards

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which hospitals under the control of primary care trusts have yet to end the use of mixed sex wards. [131034]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We have no plans to publish the names of trusts which are yet to meet the target.

The majority of national health service trusts were successful in eliminating mixed sex accommodation by the target date. The remainder will comply once current Private Finance Initiatives and other building projects are completed. These works affect just 2 per cent. of 10,000 wards and for the trusts involved, only affect a limited proportion of their wards.

MRI Scanners

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many MRI scanners each NHS trust has; and what the age of each machine is. [129760]

Miss Melanie Johnson: In the national health service in England, 145 NHS trusts have at least one magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scanner installed. In total there are currently 206 MRI scanners installed.

A programme to provide an additional 50 machines was announced on 22 May 2003 as well as funding to support a programme of replacement over the next three years. We anticipate there will be approximately 275 MRI scanners by the end of 2004, and by December 2006, no MRI scanner will be older than 10 years.

The list of MRI scanners currently installed in the NHS in England has been placed in the Library.

MRSA

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many MRSA cases were reported by each acute trust in each year since 1997. [129687]

Miss Melanie Johnson: A new national mandatory surveillance system for healthcare associated infection started with reporting of methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) blood stream infections (bacteraemias), in April 2001. All acute trusts in England now collect this information and results for the first year of this scheme (April 2001 to March 2002) were published by individual trust in the *Communicable Disease Report Weekly* on 20 June 2002. They are available at www.phls.co.uk/publications/cdr/PDFfiles/2002/cdr2502.pdf. Information for 2002–03 will be published later this year.

Trust specific data will be published as part of the Chief Medical Officer's longer-term action plan to tackle healthcare associated infections.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the Answer of 1 September 2003, *Official Report*, columns 943–44W, on MRSA, to the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Tony Lloyd), when each of the research programmes will report; which other projects are included in the wider programme; and what their completion dates are. [129723]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The current research programmes on methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), giving lead researcher, project title and project end date, are shown in the table.

Lead researcher	*Project title*	*Project end date*
Professor Michael R.W. Brown, Department of Pharmacy and Pharmacology, University of Bath	Dormancy, resistance to antimicrobials and environmental survival.	March 2006
Dr. Mark H. Wilcox, Department of Microbiology, Leeds University	What is the size and nature of the current need for single room isolation in hospital and how does success or failure to isolate patients affect the control of MRSA?	May 2005
Dr. Alasdair MacGowan, Department of Medical Microbiology, Southmead Hospital	The development and evaluation of a population-based surveillance programme for antimicrobial resistance.	June 2006
Dr. Lucinda M.C. Hall, Department of Microbiology, Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry	Mechanisms involved in the maintenance of antibiotic resistance.	September 2006
Professor Robert J. Pratt, Richard Wells Research Centre, Faculty of Health and Human Sciences, Thames Valley University	Collaborative research to reduce the incidence of hospital ward-acquired MRSA colonisation/infection using statistical process control (SPC) feedback and structured diagnosis.	February 2006
Dr. Stephanie Dancer, Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health	Environmental organisms from hospital wards with differing antibiotic exposure.	December 2003
Professor Ian Chopra, Department of Microbiology, University of Leeds	Emergence of resistance to linezolid in *Staphylococcus aureus* and evaluation of combination therapies to suppress resistance.	April 2006
Dr. Jennifer A. Roberts, Department of Public Health and Policy, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine	Faster testing for MRSA: models to estimate the cost-effectiveness of faster testing of cases admitted for hip and knee replacement.	November 2004
Dr. Cliodna A.M. McNulty, PHLS Primary Care Unit, Gloucester Royal Hospital	Household face-to-face survey of home held antibiotics and awareness of good antibiotic use.	September 2004
Dr. David M. Livermore, ARMRL, Central Public Health Laboratory	Does hypermutability underlie the rapid clinical emergence of resistant mutant types that are vanishingly rare *in vitro*?	May 2006
Dr. Andrew C. Hayward, UCL Centre for Infectious Disease Epidemiology	Antimicrobial resistance and prescribing (AmRAP): sentinel surveillance using spotter practices—a feasibility study.	March 2005
Dr. Andrew C. Hayward, UCL Centre for Infectious Disease Epidemiology	Routine national surveillance of antibiotic prescribing for common infections using the GPRD and PACT data.	June 2005
Dr. Anthony J. Howard, Department of Medical Microbiology and Public Health Laboratory, University Hospital of Wales	Development of cost-effective surveillance for hospital antibiotic resistance and factors that contribute to its occurrence.	March 2006

NHS Advertisement Costs

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the NHS spent on *(a)* advertising and *(b)* advertising for personnel in each of the last five years. [130226]

Mr. Hutton: Expenditure for the last five years spent on national health service advertising is listed as follows. Advertising for personnel is included in these figures and not available separately.

Advertising costs in the NHS 1997–98 to 2001–02

£

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
NHS trusts	45,717,794	59,545,526	64,666,951	91,733,138	101,541,324
Health authorities	3,092,494	3,878,354	5,038,724	8,942,782	7,633,702
Primary care trusts	—	—	—	1,279,262	9,970,446
Total	48,810,288	63,423,880	69,705,675	101,955,182	119,145,472

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many advertisements were placed to recruit extra midwives to avoid closing the Oswestry maternity unit; and what the cost of the advertisements was. [130227]

Dr. Ladyman: Over the last two years there have been three national advertisements in the nursing press. These have cost a total of about £1,900.

NHS Capital Expenditure

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much capital expenditure has been made by the NHS in *(a)* the North East and *(b)* the UK in (i) 1996, (ii) 2000 and (iii) (projected for) 2003. [130738]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows capital expenditure in England and in the North East. Expenditure figures for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the devolved Administrations. The table shows information for England.

Capital expenditure in England and the North East[1]—1996–97, 2000–01 and 2003–04

£ millions

	1996–97 (outturn)	*2000–01 (outturn)*	*2003–04[5] (plan)*
North East	44[2,3]	174[3,4]	n/a[5]
England[6,7]	1,341	1,246	2,892

Notes:
[1] Assumed to be the area now covered by Northumberland, Tyne and Wear Strategic Health Authority and County Durham and Tees Valley Strategic Health Authority.
[2] Source: 1996–97 Audited Accounts for Health Authorities and the Summarisation Schedules for NHS trusts 1996–97.
[3] Figures include health authority, primary care trust and NHS trust fixed assets (tangible and intangible).
[4] Source: 2000–01 Audited Accounts for Health Authorities and the Summarisation Schedules for NHS trusts for 2000–01.
[5] A comparable figure for 2003–04 is not available.
[6] Figure for 1996–97 is on a cash basis.
Figure for 2000–01 is on a stage 1 Resource Budgeting basis.
Figure for 2003–04 is on a stage 2 Resource Budgeting basis.
[7] Due to the move to Resource Accounting and Budgeting (April 2001) figures for England are not comparable across the three years.

NHS Counter-fraud Team

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many investigations of irregularities are underway in the NHS by the NHS Counter-Fraud Team. [130392]

Mr. Hutton: The counter fraud and security management service currently has 443 investigations under way relating to alleged fraud in the national health service.

NHS Direct

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the locations of NHS Direct sites. [127641]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The location and geographical coverage of the 22 NHS Direct sites are laid out in the table.

NHS Direct site	*Organisational model*	*Geographical coverage*
Anglia	*Planet*—Camdoc (Cambridgeshire). *Satellites (2)*—Sdoc (Suffolk) and Medicom (Norfolk)	Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk
Avon, Gloucester and Wiltshire	*Single call centre*—Bristol	Avon, Gloucester and Wiltshire
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire	*Single call centre*—Bedfordshire	Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire
Birmingham, Black Country and Solihull	*Hub*—Dudley. *Spokes (1 daytime, 2 out of hours)*—(virtual call centres) 9am-5pm—Neptune Health Park, Tipton; out of hours—Walsall, and Selly Oak Birmingham	West Midlands
East Midlands	*Single call centre*—Nottingham	Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire
Essex	*Single call centre*—Essex	Essex, London borough of Barking and Havering
Greater Manchester, Cheshire and Wirral	*Planet*—Bolton (Ladybridge Hall). *Satellite*—Manchester Royal Infirmary, Landsmark House—Bolton, Cheshire, Chester and Nantwich	Cheshire
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	*Single call centre*—Hampshire	Hampshire and Isle of Wight
Kent, Surrey and Sussex	*Hub*—Surrey. *Spoke*—Chatham	Surrey, Kent and Sussex
Midlandshires	*Single call centre*—Stafford	Staffordshire, Shropshire, Herefordshire, Warwickshire and Worcester
North and Central London	*Single call centre*—St Charles' Hospital, London	Barnet, Barking and Havering, Enfield and Haringey, Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster
North East	*Single call centre*—Newcastle	Northumberland, Tyne and Wear
North East London	*Single call centre*—Ilford	East London and City, Redbridge and Waltham Forest
North West Coast	*Hub*—Preston (call handling, health information and nursing). *Spokes (8)*—Mersey (Old Swan, Southport and St. Helen's); Lancashire (Chorley, Blackburn and Blackpool); and Cumbria (Carlisle and Kendal)	Lancashire, Merseyside and Cumbria
South East London	*Single call centre*—Dulwich	Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham
South West London	*Single call centre*—Croydon	Croydon, Kingston and Richmond, Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth
South Yorkshire and Humber	*Call centre*—Sheffield. *Call centre*—Doncaster	South Yorkshire, North Lincolnshire, North East Lincolnshire
Tees, East and North Yorkshire	*Hub*—East Yorkshire (York). *Spokes (3)*—Middlesbrough, Hull and York	East Riding, Cleveland and North Yorkshire

NHS Direct site	*Organisational model*	*Geographical coverage*
Thames Valley and Northamptonshire	*Hub*—Thames Valley and Northamptonshire. No spoke as yet	Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire
West Country	*Hub*—Exeter. *Spokes (4)*—Truro, Plymouth, Taunton (Somerset), St Leonard's (Dorset)	Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and Somerset
West London	*Single call centre*—Middlesex	Hillingdon, Brent and Harrow, Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow
West Yorkshire	*Single call centre*—Wakefield	Calderdale and Kirklees, Leeds Bradford, Wakefield and North Yorkshire

Notes:
1. Hub and Spoke—A spoke is a small call centre environment (approximately up to 10 seats) which relies on technology sited at a remotely connected site. The management team and technology is located at the main "Hub" site.
2. Planet and Satellites—A satellite is a small call centre environment (approximately up to 10 seats) which relies on technology sited at a remotely connected site. The management team and technology is located at the main "Planet" site.
3. Call Centre—A call centre is a structured environment specifically set up to manage incoming/outgoing calls from a single location.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many calls NHS Direct has received in each year since 1998. [130372]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The table shows how many calls have been made to NHS Direct since its launch in March 1998.

Financial Year	*Total calls handled*	*Accumulative total calls*
1998–99	110,000	110,000
1999–2000	1,650,000	1,760,000
2000–01	3,420,000	5,180,000
2001–02	5,213,062	10,393,062
2002–03	6,318,844	16,711,906
2003 to 31 August 2004	2,173,005	18,884,911

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the most recent vacancy rates were for staff at each NHS Direct site. [131035]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information collected centrally on the most recent vacancy rates for call handlers and nurses at each NHS Direct site is shown in the tables.

Funded establishment against staff in post for the period of August 2003 (whole time equivalent)

Nurses	*Funded establishment*	*Staff in post*	*Shortfall (+) Surplus (−)*
Anglia	42	38.8	3.2
Avon	50	46.9	3.1
Beds and Herts	50	43.6	6.4
Birmingham, Black Country and Solihull	50	47.9	2.1
East Midlands	74	67.4	6.6
Essex	52	48.0	4
Manchester, Cheshire and Wirral	80	82.8	-2.8
Hampshire	55	54.5	0.5
KSS	72	62.2	9.8
Midlandshires	58	57.7	0.3
NC London	33	23.1	9.9
North East	60	55.7	4.3
NE London	25	22.4	2.6
NW Coast	70	69.3	0.7
SE London	37	26.4	10.6
SW London	31	23.9	7.1
South Yorkshire and South Humber	42	43.6	-1.6
Tees, East and North Yorkshire	36	33.5	2.5
Thames Valley	54	45.8	8.2
West Country	64.98	61.3	3.68
West London	41	40.0	1
West Yorkshire	60	54.2	5.8

Funded establishment against staff in post for the period of August 2003 (whole time equivalent)

Call Handlers	*Funded establishment*	*Staff in post*	*Shortfall (+) Surplus (−)*
Anglia	15.22	15.22	0
Avon	33	30.41	2.59
Beds and Herts	24	25.17	-1.17
Birmingham, Black Country and Solihull	25	26.79	-1.79
East Midlands	40	32.72	7.28
Essex	27	24	3
Hampshire	20	14.6	5.4
KSS	30	25.94	4.06
Manchester, Cheshire and Wirral	40	37.88	2.12
Midlandshires	32	32.72	-0.72
NC London	16	14.94	1.06
North East	31	27.12	3.88
NE London	18	16.5	1.5
NW Coast	35	22.1	12.9
SE London	22	23.25	-1.25
SW London	15	12.3	2.7
South Yorkshire and South Humber	29	26.6	2.4
Tees East and North Yorkshire	17	16.05	0.95
Thames Valley	18	19.88	-1.88
West Country	30	27.55	2.45
West London	27	21.6	5.4
West Yorkshire	30	26.6	3.4

NHS Doctors

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many additional doctors he estimates will be required in each NHS trust as a consequence of the recent European Court of Justice ruling on the status of rest periods during on-call duties in the application of the Working Time Directive. [131023]

Mr. Hutton: The Department's guidance to the national health service—HSC 2003/001 "Protecting Staff, Delivering Services—Implementing the European Working Time Directive (EWTD) for Doctors in Training" states that while the number of doctors on an individual rota will generally have to increase, trusts should find ways to reduce the number of resident rotas. Thus, the total staffing requirement does not have to increase substantially as a result of the EWTD.

To assist trusts in meeting the EWTD and to support increases in consultant numbers, the Department has significantly increased the number of Specialist Registrar (SpR) training opportunities. Priority is being

given to hospitals facing EWTD challenges when considering the allocation of 1,500 additional locally funded SpR training opportunities available this year.

NHS Finance

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, columns 315–16W, on NHS finance, if he will give a comparable percentage of the total NHS expenditure, in cash terms, which is represented by the resource and capital allocations to health authorities and NHS trusts in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000 and *(e)* 2000–01; and if he will give this as a percentage of the total Department of Health budget for these years and for each year from 2001–02 to 2005–06. [129124]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the tables.

Revenue and capital allocations as a percentage of total net national health service expenditure

	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04	2004–05	2005–06
Health authority/PCT revenue allocations[1,2,3,4]	63.3	62.9	62.5	78.2	77.9	75.4	76.3	73.5	73.1	72.5
Capital Allocations to:	3.6	3.0	2.5	3.0	2.8	2.6	2.7	—	—	—
Regional capital planning total[5]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.1	0.1	0.1
NHS Trusts	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.2	1.2	1.2
Strategic health authorities[6]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.3	1.3	1.3

Revenue and Capital allocations as a percentage of total Net Department of Health expenditure

Percentage of total net Department of Health expenditure[7]

	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04	2004–05	2005–06
Health authority/PCT revenue allocations[1,2,3,4]	61.8	61.8	61.3	76.9	69.2	57.9	64.7	62.8	63.2	63.1
Capital allocations to:	3.5	3.0	2.5	2.9	2.5	2.0	2.3	—	—	—
Regional capital planning total[5]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.1	0.1	0.1
NHS trusts	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.1	1.1	1.1
Strategic Health Authorities[6]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.1	1.1	1.1

[1] Allocations made in 2003 cover the three-year period 2003–04 to 2005–06. For the first time allocations have been made directly to PCTs. Prior to 2003 allocations were made to health authorities.
[2] 1999–2000 was the first year of unified allocations covering HCHS, prescribing and CMS cash limited. These figures are not comparable to those for previous years which cover HCHS only.
[3] The 2000–01 figure includes a further £660 million distributed after main allocations were announced.
[4] The 2001–02 figure includes £140 million extra, distributed after main allocations were announced.
[5] Up to and including 2002–03, capital allocations were made to the Department of Health's regional offices.
[6] For allocation later to PCTs and NHS trusts to fund larger capital projects which required business case approval.
[7] Includes expenditure on personal social services distributed to local authorities.

It is not appropriate to show the total of revenue and capital allocations as a percentage of the national health service budget. This is because NHS trust capital allocations are financed, in part, through primary care trust (PCT) revenue allocations. Adding the two allocations together would mean double counting this element of expenditure.

In addition to PCT revenue allocations, a number of revenue budgets currently held centrally will be issued to PCTs later, for example, for personal medical services pilot schemes. These will mean that PCTs will control more than 75 per cent. of the NHS budget from 2003–04 onwards.

NHS Pay Negotiations

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for the NHS Confederation to take full responsibility for pay negotiations within the NHS. [130166]

Mr. Hutton: Discussions are currently taking place with the national health service confederation. I expect firm proposals to emerge later this year.

NHS Pensions

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on why in figure 3.1 of the Department of Health annual report 2003 the cost of NHS pensions for 2001–02 is almost twice as high as that in any other year; and why it was decided to issue the figures without an explanatory note. [130885]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service pensions figures in figure 3.1 of the Department's annual report 2003 shows the request for resource figure. This resource based expenditure figure comprises primarily of the increase in total scheme liability plus the interest payable on the total liability, less income receivable including employer and employee contributions and transfers into the scheme.

The relatively large increase in 2001–02, is as a result of two factors.

The first was the one-off strengthening of assumptions used by the Government Actuaries Department for calculating the total liability of the NHS pension scheme.

The second was the updating of base data used for the actuarial assessment of total NHS pension liability.

NHS Staff

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many individuals employed by the NHS hold the position of *(a)* chief executive, *(b)* finance director and *(c)* director of public health. [131022]

Mr. Hutton: Chief executives and finance directors are included within the senior managers category of the non medical work force census but are not separately identifiable. As at 30 September 2002, there were 11,859 senior managers working in the national health service. The majority of the 616 NHS organisations (primary care trusts, NHS trusts, strategic health authorities, special health authorities and other statutory bodies) employ both a chief executive and a finance director.

As at 30 June 2003, there were 256 directors of public health.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the total NHS work force *(a)* medical and dental staff and *(b)* administration and estates staff represented in each of the last seven years. [131014]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the tables.

Total employed NHS staff and in the specified staff groups in England as at 30 September in each year

Whole time equivalents and percentages

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Total employed staff	846,128	844,329	853,304	871,533	890,660	929,006	976,573
of which:							
All doctors[1]	79,807	82,789	84,770	86,679	88,678	90,868	95,611
(Percentage)	9.4	9.8	9.9	9.9	10.0	9.8	9.8
All administration and estates[2]	167,426	166,960	167,701	172,765	178,533	188,526	201,777
(Percentage)	19.8	19.8	19.7	19.8	20.0	20.3	20.7
Administration and estates[3] (excluding support to clinical staff)	105,539	104,487	103,737	107,094	109,281	114,494	122,483
(Percentage)	12.5	12.4	12.2	12.3	12.3	12.3	12.5

[1] Consists of GPs (excluding retainers) and hospital and community health services medical and dental staff (excluding locums).
[2] Consists of all managers and senior managers and all clerical and administrative staff employed within all areas of work—central functions, hotel, property and estates, STT support, clinical support and ambulance service support (includes support to clinical staff).
[3] Consists of all managers and senior managers and those clerical and administrative staff and maintenance and works staff within central functions and hotel, property and estates (excludes support to clinical staff).
Sources:
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census.
Department of Health Medical and Dental Workforce Census.
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.

Total employed NHS staff and in the specified staff groups in England as at 30 September in each year

Headcount and percentages

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Total employed staff	1,056,501	1,058,686	1,071,562	1,097,376	1,117,841	1,166,016	1,223,824
of which:							
All doctors[1]	86,584	89,619	91,837	93,981	96,319	99,169	103,350
(Percentage)	8.2	8.5	8.6	8.6	8.6	8.5	8.4
All administration and estates[2]	196,529	196,695	198,540	204,617	212,017	224,033	239,568
(Percentage)	18.6	18.6	18.5	18.6	19.0	19.2	19.6
Administration and estates[3] (excluding support to clinical staff)	117,628	116,833	116,514	120,226	123,275	129,053	138,086
(Percentage)	11.1	11.0	10.9	11.0	11.0	11.1	11.3

[1] Consists of GPs (excluding retainers) and hospital and community health services medical and dental staff (excluding locums).
[2] Consists of all managers and senior managers and all clerical and administrative staff employed within all areas of work—central functions, hotel, property and estates, STT support, clinical support and ambulance service support (includes support to clinical staff).
[3] Consists of all managers and senior managers and those clerical and administrative staff and maintenance and works staff within central functions and hotel, property and estates (excludes support to clinical staff).
Sources:
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census.
Department of Health Medical and Dental Workforce Census.
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the job titles included under support staff in the NHS. [130154]

Mr. Hutton: Job titles of staff within National Health Service organisations are determined at a local level and are not collated centrally. The annual NHS work force census records staff by a system of occupational coding introduced in 1995. Descriptions of the occupational codes that are included in the staff groupings, support to clinical staff and NHS infrastructure support in the publication of the September 2002 non-medical workforce census results have been placed in the Library.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* consultants, *(b)* nurses, *(c)* support staff, *(d)* ambulance staff and *(e)* therapists left the NHS in 2002–03. [130153]

Mr. Hutton: Data collected by the Department record the net change in staff numbers rather than the number of leavers or joiners. As at 30 September 2002, there were 1,288 more consultants, 17,140 more nurses, 18,634 more clinical support staff, 754 more qualified ambulance staff and 2,139 more qualified allied health professionals working in the National Health Service than there were in September 2001.

Nightingale Wards

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the NHS trusts which have yet fully to eliminate Nightingale wards. [130324]

Mr. Hutton: The elimination of Nightingale wards for older people has been included in the planning and priorities framework 2003–06 as one of the Department's key investment priorities. A target has been set for the elimination of Nightingale wards for older people by April 2004. A report will be made at that time.

Notifiable Diseases

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the Answer of 17 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 629W, on notifiable diseases, what the timetable is for the review of the infectious disease law. [128525]

Miss Melanie Johnson: No specific timetable has yet been set for the review, but we intend that it should take account of the new emergency powers which it is planned to provide through the Civil Contingencies Bill.

Nursing

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the training arrangements in NHS trusts to ensure that nursing staff are trained to use existing and new medical equipment. [130874]

Mr. Hutton: "Working Together—Learning Together", the framework for lifelong learning, published in November 2001, specifies national health service trust responsibilities for staff education and development and for ensuring that they have clear local procedures to make sure that all staff are trained to operate new and existing medical equipment in a safe and effective way. It states that, "all NHS employer organisations, supported by Workforce Development Confederations will have in place a clear organisational strategy and annual plan for education, training and development which links explicitly with local modernisation priorities and the delivery of clinical governance".

The proposed introduction of the knowledge and skills framework through pay modernisation will strengthen the identification of the skills and competencies of nurses to undertake certain work. Similarly, the introduction of the NHS University will also strengthen the availability of learning opportunities.

We are investing over £30 million a year in improving continuing professional development infrastructure through workforce development confederations so that health professionals can maintain and improve the standards of care they provide. This will include learning to use new equipment and new techniques as they are introduced.

In addition, our care group workforce teams are reviewing the skills and competencies required to implement our priorities to improve the NHS through the national service frameworks. This work will identify the key skills needed in the NHS.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurse vacancies there are at Southend General Hospital. [130373]

Mr. Hutton: The total number of nurse vacancies at Southend General Hospital is not recorded centrally. However, the number of three-month vacancies for qualified nurses at Southend Hospital National Health Service Trust at 31 March 2003 was 19.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people there are in each of the registered nursing care contribution bands. [130907]

Dr. Ladyman: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the availability of *(a)* defibrillators, *(b)* ECG machines, *(c)* portable oxygen and *(d)* infusion pumps to nursing staff within the NHS. [130876]

Miss Melanie Johnson: No national assessment has been made. All national health service trusts and health authorities in England have access to a national contract for portable oxygen cylinders.

Infusion pumps, electro-cardiogram machines and defibrillators are bought at local level by individual trusts.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the extent to which single use medical equipment is re-used within the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [130877]

Mr. Hutton: The Department is funding a research project to establish whether single use instruments are being re-used and, if so, the scale of reuse. This project will guide the Department, the National Patient Safety Agency and the Medical and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency on whether future guidance is required. Previous research has highlighted the issue of re-using medical devices designated for single use only.

Older People

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the National Service Framework for older people milestones on *(a)* strategic and operational plans to promote healthy ageing and disease prevention in older people, *(b)* local health systems demonstrating improvements and moving towards benchmarked intervention rates, *(c)* skills profile of staff who care for older people in hospital, *(d)* analysis of levels and patterns of key intervention rates to establish best practice benchmarks and *(e)* one-stop dispensing/dispensing for discharge scheme were achieved. [130937]

Dr. Ladyman: Information on such milestones has not been collected centrally. A monitoring exercise conducted at the end of 2002 suggested that 54 per cent., of hospitals have a 'one-stop' dispensing/dispensing for discharge scheme and, where appropriate, self administration schemes for medicines for older people .

Responsibility for monitoring progress with these milestones and ensuring that any shortcomings are addressed rests with strategic health authorities.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department has taken to measure the National Service Framework for older people milestones on *(a)* additional people receiving intermediate care services promoting rehabilitations compared with the 1999–2000 baseline and *(b)* jointly appointed co-ordinators for intermediate care. [131005]

Dr. Ladyman: The specific information requested is not collected centrally. Responsibility for monitoring progress and delivering these services rests with strategic health authorities, who must ensure that milestones are met and, where appropriate, joint working arrangements are developed to ensure delivery.

During a stocktake exercise conducted by the Department in January 2002, 87 per cent. of national service framework local implementation teams reported that an intermediate care co-ordinator was in place.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department has taken to monitor achievement of the National Service Framework for older people milestones that information provided to older people is reviewed and action plans developed to correct shortcomings. [131006]

Dr. Ladyman: Joint responsibility for ensuring that reviews of information take place and shortcomings are addressed rests with strategic health authorities and local authorities, who must ensure that milestones are met and joint working arrangements are developed to ensure delivery.

Councils reported brief progress information to the social services inspectorate (SSI) as part of the in-year monitoring programme for 2002–03. This information is available at www.doh.gov.uk/ssi/ciann-12.htm. More recent and detailed information about progress in 2003–04 is being gathered by SSI from the councils during the autumn and the results will be available in January 2004.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made in meeting the National Service Framework for Older People target of having an additional 5,000 intermediate care beds and 1,700 non-residential intermediate care places in place by March 2004 compared with the 1999–2000 baseline. [131046]

Mr. Paul Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people received intermediate care preventing hospital admission in each region under the National Service Framework for Older People; [124922]

(2) how many people received intermediate care services promoting rehabilitation in each region under the National Service Framework for Older People; [124923]

(3) how many intermediate care beds in each region have been set up under the National Service Framework for Older people. [124925]

Dr. Ladyman *[holding answer 18 September 2003]:* By the end of June 2003, there were approximately 3,600 additional intermediate care beds and approximately 12,800 additional non-residential places compared with the 1999–2000 baseline. During the year 2002–03 approximately 143,200 additional people received intermediate care services, compared with the 1999–2000 baseline. It is not possible to break this down into the categories requested.

It is not possible to make comparisons by region due to restructuring within the National Health Service.

Operation Costs

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the variation in the cost of operations in NHS hospitals and health authorities in the last 12 months. [127481]

Mr. Hutton: Data showing the variation of national health service unit costs are provided through the reference cost index. Since the data are provided at health care resource group (groupings of treatment episodes similar in resource use and clinical response) level, it is not possible to determine the variation in the cost of operations specifically. In addition, reference cost data for the financial year 2002–03 will not be available until the autumn.

The Department's report provides an analysis of 2001–02 reference cost data. This shows that the variation in unit costs across NHS trusts, measured by the standard deviation, fell from 21.2 in 2000–01 to 16.9 in 2001–02.

Ophthalmology

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce tariffs for ophthalmological procedures which take into account the complexity of a case. [129590]

Mr. Hutton: The Department is currently introducing a new way of funding national health service providers for the care that they provide. Under this system, the prices charged to primary care trusts will be based on a national tariff which takes account of the complexity of different cases by using healthcare resource groups.

The first phase of this implementation started this year and includes all additional in-patient and daycase activity for cataract surgery. From 2005–06, all activity within ophthalmology will be undertaken at the national tariff.

Organ Donors

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the effect of using the electoral registration form to increase the number of organ donors; what discussions he has had with *(a)* ministerial colleagues and *(b)* others about this scheme; if he will make it his policy to ensure the scheme continues; what other plans he has to increase the number of organ donors; and if he will make a statement. [128321]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Electoral Commission has issued guidance on including additional non-electoral material on or with electoral registration forms. Circular EC23/2003 can be found at http://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk. The guidance makes clear that the ultimate decision on whether or not

to include any additional material with electoral registration forms rests with individual electoral registration officers.

People are encouraged to join the organ donor register through a number of initiatives, including when they apply for a driving licence, register with a new general practitioner or, apply for a new passport. Additionally, UK Transplant runs publicity campaigns and targets action to raise the profile of organ donation, including specific advertising and information campaigns to increase organ donation from the South Asian and black African and Caribbean populations.

Out-patient Care

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the *(a)* percentage change in elective activity and *(b)* percentage change in out-patient referrals from general practitioners in each of the last five years. [130329]

Mr. Hutton: The tables show national figures for elective admissions and general practitioner referrals for first out-patient appointments over the last five years.

Elective general and acute admissions, England 1996–97 to 2002–03

	Elective admissions (thousand)	*Percentage growth from previous year*	*Percentage growth over five years*
1997–98	4,655	2.0	
1998–99	5,093	9.4	
1999–2000	5,160	1.3	
2000–01	5,277	2.3	
2001–02[1]	5,314	0.7	
2002–03[2]	5,552	4.5	19.3

[1] Earlier figures are from health authorities. With the abolition of health authorities, figures for 2001–02 and 2002–03 are estimated based on growth in NHS trusts.

[2] These are provisional figures for admissions commissioned by the NHS.

Source:

Department of Health, SaFFR

GP and dental practitioner written referrals for first consultant out-patient appointments, England 1997–98 to 2002–03

	Number of referrals	*Percentage growth from previous year*	*Percentage growth over five years*
1997–98	8,991,722		
1998–99	9,139,785	1.6	
1999–2000	9,141,425	0.0	
2000–01	9,362,770	2.4	
2001–02	9,470,342	1.1	
2002–03	9,655,874	2.0	7.4

Note:

These figures are for GP and dental practitioner written referrals received by NHS hospitals "provider based". They will include some private patients, and some patients who live outside England.

Source:

Department of Health form QM08

Overseas Nurses

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it a requirement for all private nurse recruitment agencies, who supply staff to the NHS, to sign up to his Department's code of practice governing the recruitment of overseas nurses. [129117]

Mr. Hutton: Workforce development confederations are working with trusts to ensure they comply with the code of practice and only work with agencies who are compliant.

We strongly recommend trusts to incorporate the code of practice in contracts with agencies.

A list of agencies compliant with the code of practice is available at www.doh.gov.uk/international-recruitment.

PAF PI C33

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital admissions due to falls or hypothermia as recorded in PAF PI C33 were recorded in each of the last five years. [130847]

Dr. Ladyman: The number of admissions due to falls or hypothermia as recorded in PAF PI C33 for the last five years are shown in the table.

	Number of admissions
1997–98	72,416
1998–99	77,854
1999–2000	80,711
2000–01	78,787
2001–02	80,034

The figures have been calculated on the same basis as those used to form the numerator part of the C33 indicator. Data are calculated for patients aged 75 or over and resident in England.

Patient Care

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guarantees of further treatment are given to patients whose operations are cancelled at the last minute. [130316]

Mr. Hutton: Since 1 April 2002, the NHS Plan cancelled operations guarantee has been in place. It states:

> "if a patient's operation is cancelled by the hospital on the day of surgery for non-clinical reasons, the hospital will have to offer another binding date within a maximum of the next 28 days or fund the patient's treatment at the time and hospital of the patient's choice".

Since 1 April 2003, the guarantee covers those patients who are cancelled 'at the last minute', that is, on the day patients are due to arrive or after arrival in hospital or on the day of their operation.

Patient Environment and Action Team Reports

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the most recent reports of the Patient Environment and Action Team inspection units for acute trusts in the Northern and Yorkshire statistical area. [129586]

Mr. Hutton: The results of the Patient Environment Action Team (PEAT) assessments for all hospitals included in the 2003 assessment were published on the NHS Estates' website on 13 August 2003.

There are no plans to publish PEAT reports, although each national health service trust received a copy for each of their hospitals included in the assessment.

Personal Care (Voluntary Organisations)

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of *(a)* the increase in aggregate indemnity insurance costs borne by voluntary organisations involved in the personal care sector between 2000–01 and 2003–04 and *(b)* the resultant impact on activity levels of such voluntary organisations. [130699]

Dr. Ladyman: Information on the level of insurance costs paid by voluntary organisations involved in personal care is not collected centrally. We have consequently no way of relating back any measure of activity relating to the care sector with any change to insurance costs. However, overall activity levels in the care sector have increased over this period: since 1997 the number of older residents supported by local authorities in care homes has increased by 3,000, and the number of households receiving intensive home care, ten hours or more and six plus visits, increased from 72,300 in 2000 to 81,500 in 2002. We cannot, however, determine any relationship between this increase in overall activity to either voluntary sector providers or to any change in liability insurance costs.

Plasma

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to make virally inactivated fresh frozen plasma available to patients requiring blood transfusions. [129995]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Most United Kingdom fresh frozen plasma (FFP) is not virally inactivated. High levels of safety are achieved by using leucodepleted blood from single donors, by screening out potential high risk donors and by testing every unit of donated blood for the presence of infections such as HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C before it is released to hospitals.

The decision taken to import FFP from the United States for young babies and children born after 1 January 1996 will provide additional protection to the most vulnerable group, who will not have been exposed to BSE through the food chain. The National Blood Authority is currently involved in negotiating for supplies of FFP for this group of patients. This FFP will be virally inactivated and its planned availability is later this year. A commercially produced virally inactivated FFP product, sourced from the United States, is also available for the national health service to purchase.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent evidence he has received concerning the risks to patients associated with the transfusion of blood plasma. [129996]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The sixth report (2001–02) on the serious hazards of transfusion was published on 17 July 2003. The report provides an updated analysis of serious transfusion hazards in the United Kingdom. A copy of the report and summary findings is available at http://www.shotuk.org/.

Polypill

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the Under-Secretary of State's letter, PO 1032287, of 13 August, what action he is taking to explore proposals for the polypill. [128267]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Roger Boyle, national director for heart disease, has invited the lead researchers to attend a meeting in October to discuss the "polypill" proposals. Although there are some clear attractions, there are significant clinical, practical and financial implications that need to be explored further.

Post-operative Care

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been carried out into the impact of increasing the number of critical care beds on post-operative death rates. [129600]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has not conducted any research on the impact of increasing the number of critical care beds on post-operative death rates.

The policy research programme has recently been asked to commission research on early warning scoring systems and outreach services for adult critical care; both of which can help improve experience and outcomes for patients with potential or actual need of critical care services.

Post-operative Deaths

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been carried out into comparative post-operative death rates at hospitals in England. [129650]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 September 2003]:* The national health service performance ratings include an assessment of post-operative death rates for English trusts. These allow a survey of trust performance and the overall England figure.

The information is available at: http://www.doh.gov.uk/performanceratings/

This web site gives links to the published rates for:

National health service performance ratings and indicators: July 2002;

Performance ratings: September 2001;

Performance indicators: February 2002; and

Performance indicators: July 2000.

Information on the July 2003 star ratings published by the Commission for Health Improvement is available at: http://www.chi.nhs.uk/eng/ratings/2003/

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list post-operative death rates, by hospital, for each of the last five years. [129652]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 September 2003]*: A continuous series of rates for the last five years is not available, as there have been refinements and improvements in the definitions used form year to year.

However, rates have been previously published. The information is available at: http://www.doh.gov.uk/performanceratings/

This website gives links to the published rates for:

National health service performance ratings and indicators: July 2002;

Performance ratings: September 2001;

Performance indicators: February 2002; and

Performance indicators: July 2000.

Information on the July 2003 star ratings published by the Commission for Health Improvement is available at: http://www.chi.nhs.uk/eng/ratings/2003/ Please note, though, that the definition and coverage of the post-operative mortality rate changes from year to year.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the post-operative death rate cited by the research undertaken by University College, London, and Columbia University for the Queen Alexandra Hospital, Portsmouth, is in line with that for other United Kingdom hospitals. [129654]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 September 2003]*: In the 2003 performance ratings, Portsmouth Hospitals National Health Service Trust had a post-surgical mortality rate that was assessed to be not significantly different from the England average.

Further information is available at: http://www.chi.nhs.uk/eng/ratings/2003/

Prescriptions

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total value of prescriptions for privately prescribed medicines made out to patients eligible for NHS treatment was in the most recent 12 months for which figures are available. [129585]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department does not collect information on private prescriptions.

Primary Care

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the elements of primary care trust funding which are ring fenced for specific purposes for this financial year. [131017]

Mr. Hutton: In 2003–04, the only funding protected by a statutory ring fence is the out of hours development fund.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* deficits and *(b)* underspends for each primary care trust for 2002–03. [131027]

Mr. Hutton: Audited financial information in respect of the 2002–03 year for all primary care trusts is published in their individual annual accounts. This information will not be available centrally until the end of October 2003.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many school nurses per child of school age there were in each primary care trust in the last year for which figures are available. [131028]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Private Health Care Providers

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what contacts at official level there have been between his Department and United Healthcare group over the past three years. [131345]

Dr. Ladyman: Ministers and officials have had a number of discussions and meetings with representatives of United Healthcare Group since summer 2002.

In November 2002, a framework agreement was signed between the Secretary of State for Health and United Healthcare Group. Under this agreement, United Healthcare Group carried out scoping work with ten primary care trusts (PCTs) to produce recommendations on how the 'Evercare' model of care for the at-risk elderly could be implemented by those PCTs. As part of this work, two Departmental officials accompanied representatives from the communities covered by the ten PCTs on a study visit to United Healthcare Group's operations in Minnesota.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which private healthcare companies expressed interest in the pilots contracted to United Healthcare at competitive tender stage. [131346]

Dr. Ladyman: The services provided by United Healthcare Group under the framework agreement with the Secretary of State for Health and under the contracts with 10 individual primary care trusts fall into the category of administrative healthcare services and are not subject to a competitive tendering process under European or domestic procurement law.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his Department's contract with United Healthcare and the Evercare pilots. [131347]

Dr. Ladyman: A framework agreement was signed between the Secretary of State for Health and United Healthcare Group in November 2002. This covered initial scoping work—completed in February 2003—and provided for call-off contracts between United Healthcare Group and individual primary care trusts (PCTs).

Nine PCTs have entered into contracts with United Healthcare Group for support services to help them to implement the 'Evercare' model of care for the at-risk elderly. One PCT has entered into a contract for support services to help them predict demand for health care and to plan services and workforce accordingly.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the areas piloting the United Healthcare Evercare programme; and if he will list for each pilot the percentage change in bed occupancy achieved by the programme. [131348]

Dr. Ladyman: The following primary care trusts are implementing the 'Evercare' model of care for the at-risk elderly: Airedale; Bexley; Bristol North; Bristol South and West; Halton; Luton; South Gloucestershire; Walsall; and Wandsworth.

Implementation began in April 2003 and runs to October 2004. The early stages have involved recruiting general practitioner practices and nurses, identifying the at-risk population and training the nurses. Evaluation and monitoring, including bed occupancy rates, is built into the contracts and will be available at a later stage.

Prostate Cancer

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what efforts are being made to monitor the satisfaction of prostate cancer patients with their NHS treatment; and what the findings are. [130039]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* A national cancer patient survey took place in 2001. Over 65,000 cancer patients discharged between July 1999 and June 2000 responded, including almost 11,000 men with prostate cancer. The outcome of the survey was published in July 2002 and it is available at: http://www.doh.gov.uk/nhspatients/cancersurvey. It provides a baseline measurement of cancer patients' experience of care in the national health service against which improvements can be monitored.

Overall the survey showed patients reporting:

confidence in the doctors responsible for their care;

being treated with dignity and respect;

understanding the explanation of their diagnosis; and

being involved in decision making as much as they wanted.

However it also pointed to areas where improvements needed to be made, for example:

the provision of written information;

being informed about support/self help groups.

The results of the survey were shared with, among others, cancer networks and NHS Trusts who should have studied their local results and taken action to respond to them.

Responsibility for the national survey programme has now moved to the Commission for Health Improvement.

In September 2002, the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) published improving outcomes guidance for urological cancers, including prostate cancer. This guidance included the need for providers to carry out surveys of patients experience to assess the adequacy of each component of patient-centred care. This guidance is informing the development of urological cancer standards for inclusion in the Manual of Cancer Services Standards against which cancer networks will be peer reviewed.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* urologists, *(b)* pathologists, *(c)* radiologists and *(d)* prostate cancer nurses have been working in the NHS on prostate cancer cases in each of the last five years. [130040]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 16 September 2003]:* The total number of urologists, pathologists and radiologists working in the National Health Service in each of the last five years is shown in the table. The data collected by the Department does not specify in which area of care these staff are employed. The Department does not collect the number of prostate nurses working in the NHS.

Doctors in selected specialties, England, by year

As at 30 September each year[1] *Numbers (headcount)*

	1998		*1999*		*2000*		*2001*		*2002*		*March 2003*
	All staff consultant	*of which*	*All staff consultant*	*of which*	*All staff consultant*	*of which*	*All staff consultant*	*of which*	*All staff consultant*	*of which*	*Consultant*
Histopathology[2]	1,100	828	1,129	836	1,199	865	1,291	915	1,374	968	994
Clinical radiology	2,075	1,481	2,164	1,507	2,303	1,585	2,454	1,645	2,538	1,702	1,781
Urology	961	358	1,024	388	1,052	382	1,115	427	1,164	448	466

[1] Except 2003 where data is as at 31 March

[2] Histopathology includes general pathology and neuropathology

Source:

Department of Health medical and dental workforce census

Public Analysts Laboratories

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many public analysts' laboratories there were in England and Wales checking foodstuffs in 1996; and how many there are in 2003. [130961]

Miss Melanie Johnson: There were 26 public analysts' laboratories in England and Wales checking foodstuffs in 1996 and there are currently 23 public analysts' laboratories doing such work.

Public Appointments

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of NHS Trust, Health Authority and Primary Care Trust board members were *(a)* women, *(b)* ethnic minorities and *(c)* disabled in each year since 1997. [128909]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information available for the percentages of appointments to national health service boards in each category is as follows:

Percentage

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*
Women	39	[1]42.3	47.5	48.7	48.5	47.8	47.4
Black and Ethnic Minority	5	[1]7.5	10.6	12.3	12.9	11.5	10.5
Disabled	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	3.2	3.1	4.3

[1] Includes figures for non-departmental public bodies.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* chairmen, *(b)* chief executives and *(c)* other board members have resigned from, or not sought re-appointment to, an NHS Trust Board in each of the last six years. [129013]

Ms Rosie Winterton: This information is not collected, either by the National Health Service Appointments Commission or by the Department.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women have been appointed by the NHS Appointments Commission to the position of *(a)* NHS Trust Chair and *(b)* NHS Trust board member. [129014]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Of those board members appointed by the National Health Service Appointments Commission who are still in post, 84 chairs are women (43.8 per cent.) and 402 non-executives are women (47.2 per cent.).

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been appointed by the NHS Appointments Commission to the position of *(a)* NHS Trust Chief Executive and *(b)* NHS Trust board member, broken down by a declared background in (i) medicine, (ii) nursing and (iii) other professions allied to medicine. [129015]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Chief executives are appointed by the chair and non-executives of National Health Service boards, not by the NHS Appointments Commission. The information requested on the backgrounds of chairs and non-executive directors could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* executive and *(b)* non-executive NHS Trust directors have gone on to become (i) Chairmen and (ii) Chief Executives of an NHS Trust. [129016]

Ms Rosie Winterton: This information is not collected either by the National Health Service Appointments Commission or the Department.

Radiology

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what targets have been set for the electronic transfer of radiology reports; what the baseline is for the target; in which document the target was published; and what progress has been made towards the target. [128913]

Mr. Hutton: The Government's strategy document, "Building the Information Core—Implementing the NHS Plan" published in 2000 set the target of March 2003 for all radiology reports between hospital and general practitioners to be sent electronically. This target was based on the use of messaging technology. Work in this area has been superseded by the national programme for information technology in the national health service and the development of the integrated care records service (ICRS). Electronic transfer of radiology reports forms one element of phase 1 that will be implemented by December 2004.

It was decided to suspend roll out of the message based technology for radiology reports as a more modern, reliable and cost effective set of technology options are available within the development of the online database system, for the ICRS. This will provide a more reliable arrangement with lower unit costs and increased flexibility for clinicians.

Recruitment

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans there are for the NHS to advertise for *(a)* consultants, *(b)* general practitioners, *(c)* nursing and midwifery staff and *(d)* professions allied to medicine in the foreign media; if he will list such campaigns since 1 May 1997; and what the (i) cost of each advertisement and (ii) the total cost was. [128919]

Mr. Hutton: National health service trusts are responsible for their own recruitment and no data on the number and costs of their advertisements in the foreign media are held centrally.

Since 1 May 1997 the following annual costs for advertising in foreign media have been incurred by the Department to recruit healthcare professionals for the NHS.

£

Year	*Consultants and GPs*	*NHS International Fellowships*	*Nurses*	*Allied Health Professionals*	*Total*
2001–02	61,874	12,403	—	—	74,277
2002–03	194,888	188,455	—	—	383,343
2003–04	501.63	36,922.53	12,967.28	7,972.98	58,364
Total					515,984

Further advertising is planned to support the Department-led international recruitment campaigns for consultants, general practitioners, nurses and allied health professionals.

Rural Standards Inspections

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to provide for *(a)* the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection and *(b)* the Commission for Social Care Inspection to monitor rural standards as part of their inspection regime. [129358]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection (CHAI) will monitor the provision of health care and the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) will monitor the provision of social care in all localities, including rural areas as part of their function.

It will be for CHAI and CSCI to decide, as independent bodies, whether they choose to carry out particular work that relates only to rural areas, or a specific geographic area.

SARS

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the letter of 28 May 2003, reference PO 102 7835, what action he has taken since 28 May 2003 to assess the evolving situation of SARS. [126271]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 17 July 2003]:* Our policy with regard to severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) has been kept under continuous review and amended according to the current and anticipated situation in the United Kingdom.

There have been reports of suspected cases of SARS in both Singapore and Hong Kong. The World Health Organisation actively follow up any suspected cases and will issue an alert if confirmed. In the meantime, the Department, along with the Health Protection Agency, is carrying out a number of reviews covering surveillance, national health service guidance and exit screening.

Secondments

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether personnel from his Department have been seconded to offer advice and assistance in Iraq. [129879]

Dr. Ladyman: Since 13 May, there have been 11 personnel from this Department seconded to offer advice and assistance in Iraq. Four personnel have since returned and seven personnel are still in Iraq.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff are on secondment in each acute trust in the North-West region; what the *(a)* job titles and *(b)* grade of such staff are; and what type of training is being undertaken. [130048]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 17 September 2003]:* The information requested is not held centrally.

Sexual Assault Referral Centres

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether it is his policy that foundation hospitals will accommodate sexual assault referral centres; [129623]

(2) if he will make it his policy that in areas where there are no foundation hospitals in the short term sexual assault referral centres should be located at major general hospitals. [129624]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The development and funding of sexual assault referral centres is the responsibility of primary care trusts and the relevant local police force. Currently, a number of different models exist, which include centres located within or attached to hospitals. Encouraging the further roll-out of such centres is a matter for the Ministerial Committee on Sex Offending.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on NHS sexual health clinics, the demand for these services and the ability of these clinics to cater for this demand. [127457]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department recognises that additional investment in sexual health services is required to tackle poor sexual health. This is why we have already invested £15 million to improve access to genito-urinary medicine (GUM) services and reduce waiting times; £9.5 million in chlamydia screening, and £5 million in termination of pregnancy services. In response to concerns expressed by the health committee and others about sexual health services, an additional £11 million will be allocated this year. This will comprise £5 million for GUM services; £5 million to improve chlamydia testing, and £1 million for contraceptive services. In line with the health committee's recommendations, the Department is also actively exploring the introduction of a 48-hour waiting time performance indicator for GUM services.

Smoking

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of the NHS smoking cessation campaign; what plans there are to assist the campaign; and if he will make a statement. [128763]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The current tobacco education campaign was launched in December 1999, following the publication of the White Paper, 'Smoking kills' and is aimed at persuading and helping smokers to give up and non-smokers, particularly children not to start.

A number of different measures are in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the "Don't Give Up Giving Up" advertising campaign. These include prevalence surveys, quarterly tracking research, monitoring calls to the national health service smoking helpline, evaluation of media coverage and helpline referrals to local services.

Headline results from the latest tracking study among 1,275 smokers—which took place in February 2003—are as follows:

59 per cent. spontaneous awareness of advertising campaign;

93 per cent. prompted awareness;

49 per cent. of smokers taking action as result of seeing adverts; and

51 per cent. of smokers more likely to give up as a result of seeing the advertising.

The monitoring of calls to the NHS smoking helpline show that, from June 2000 to 2 September 2003, over 759,000 smokers called the NHS smoking helpline. Over 22,400 of these calls can be attributed to the introduction this year of the new starker health warnings on cigarette packets, one of which gives the NHS helpline number.

The Department is extending its campaign this year by informing people about the risks from second-hand smoke, the risk of less publicised diseases caused by smoking, and through funding charities, starting with Cancer Research UK and the British Heart Foundation, to run hard hitting campaigns.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on further steps which he intends to take to combat smoking and tobacco use. [129485]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We are implementing a comprehensive tobacco programme to help the seven in 10 smokers who want to quit and to prevent people starting to smoke. As well as introducing legislation, we are investing £138 million in national health service 'Stop Smoking' services over the next three years and expanding our information and education campaigns to address second-hand smoke as well as cessation.

We are working with key charities, including the British Heart Foundation and Cancer Research UK, and are providing £15 million over three years to carry out hard-hitting media campaigns.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government has to legislate to prevent tobacco companies placing features with their logos in magazines. [130059]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Act 2002 prohibits the publishing of an advertisement which has the purpose or effect of promoting a tobacco product in the United Kingdom.It would be for a court to decide in each case whether a magazine feature which included a tobacco company logo constituted a tobacco advertisement.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department plans to do to educate the public further into the health risks associated with smoking. [130067]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department is expanding its public information campaign to highlight the dangers of smoking and tobacco smoke through a wider range of media. This includes highlighting diseases caused by smoking not covered in the campaign so far. Cancer Research UK and the British Heart Foundation will also be launching campaigns funded by the Department.

The new warnings on cigarette packs have made a significant impact already in getting health messages to smokers. These will be legally required on all packs from 30 September 2003 and on non-cigarette tobacco products such as cigars from 30 September 2004.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many smoking cessation co-ordinators there are in the NHS; and what the target is for the number of co-ordinators in 2004–05. [130068]

Miss Melanie Johnson: 109 smoking cessation co-ordinators (whole time equivalent) were in post at 31 March 2002 and 66 staff were responsible for co-ordinating services for pregnant women. Shifting the balance of power from central to local decision making means that primary care trusts now have responsibility in negotiating with their respective strategic health authorities for co-ordinator posts. Targets are not set for numbers of co-ordinators.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans there are to extend the use of Zyban *(a)* on prescription-only and *(b)* over the counter. [130168]

Miss Melanie Johnson: No application to extend the use or change the legal status of Zyban has been made to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much it costs per smoker for the NHS to assist someone to give up smoking. [130169]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Data collected from the NHS stop smoking services and published in the Department's Statistical Bulletin—Statistics on smoking cessation services in England, April 2001 to March 2002, tables 8 & 9—show the average cost for the national health service to assist someone to give up smoking in 2001–02 was around £210 (based on self report). Costs including nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) or bupropion (Zyban) are not centrally collected.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidance on the use of NRT and bupropion for smoking cessation, published in March 2002, estimated the cost of life year gained for a smoker using either NRT or bupropion in addition to brief advice would be not more than £1,000. NICE guidance advised that both NRT and bupropion were considered to be among the most cost effective of all healthcare interventions.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to limit by legislation the amount of freebase nicotine in tobacco products. [130171]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Levels of nicotine are currently regulated by the Tobacco Products (Manufacture, Presentation and Sale) (Safety) Regulations 2002. As of 1 January 2004, the maximum permitted yield of nicotine in cigarettes will be one milligram. This is measured in accordance with the International Standards Organisation's methodology. The Regulations implement a European Directive which is due to be reviewed in 2004 in the light of any updated scientific evidence.

However, experimental work for the Department in 2000–01 has indicated that the current International Standards Organisation's methodology used for determining tar and nicotine yields of cigarettes traps over 99 per cent. of nicotine present in cigarette smoke of major brands on the United Kingdom market. Therefore at that time there was no evidence that freebase nicotine posed a problem in UK cigarette brands.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to restrict the amount of *(a)* ammonia and *(b)* urea in cigarettes. [130172]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Ammonium compounds and urea are currently permitted in United Kingdom cigarettes under the terms of a voluntary agreement concluded in 1997. The European Commission is expected to propose a common list of permitted ingredients in tobacco products by the end of 2004. We will consider the status of all permitted additives to tobacco products in the light of this proposal.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to recommend a ban on smoking in *(a)* domestic television programmes and *(b)* films classified as 15 or under. [130173]

Estelle Morris: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have no plans to ban the depiction of smoking in domestic television programmes or films classified as 15 or under. Tobacco products may not be actively promoted by way of sponsorship or product placement in either medium. Beyond that, the depiction of smoking in television programmes is already discouraged and otherwise responsibly regulated by the broadcasting regulatory authorities. Film classification is the responsibility of the British Board of Film Classification whose research into public views on classification has not indicated that the portrayal of smoking is a concern.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many smoking cessation project co-ordinators have been appointed in each primary care trust. [130320]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information is not available centrally in the form requested. One hundred and nine smoking cessation co-ordinators (whole time equivalent) were in post at 31 March 2002 and 66 staff were responsible for co-ordinating services for pregnant women.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received regarding the television advertisement anti-smoking campaign showing children inhaling smoke. [127690]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department has received four letters making representations regarding this television advertisement.

The advertisement, which uses special effects to represent children exhaling smoke, focuses on the risk to children and reminds people to protect children by not making them breathe cigarette smoke.

Unlike adults, young children do not have any choice about whether or not they are exposed to tobacco smoke. In the UK today, it is estimated that 42 per cent. of children—"Towards Smoke-Free Public Places", British Medical Association publication (November 2002)—live in a house where at least one person smokes, and approximately one third of smokers continue to smoke near children: over 4 million people.

Social Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will break down the figure published in paragraph 2.76 of the Chief Inspector of Social Services 12th Annual Report showing for each staff/professional group how many additional whole time equivalent people will need to join the work force; and what the timetable is for this increase. [130908]

Dr. Ladyman: The Government do not hold information that shows the breakdown for each staff/professional group. Increases in different parts of the workforce will be dependent upon service design and skill mix, a process that will be focused on user need and carried out by the individual employers. For similar reasons the timetable for increases will vary by employer and service user group, and according to availability of development funding. The national recruitment campaign is planned to continue to 2006.

Sport and Physical Activity Board

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the membership of the Sport and Physical Activity Board; what its terms of reference are; and what projects it is working on. [130114]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The activity co-ordination team (ACT), formerly the sports and physical activity board, is jointly chaired by my right hon. the Minister of State at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr Caborn) and myself. The membership is drawn from officials from the following Government Departments and other organisations:

Department of Health;

Department for Culture, Media and Sport;

Department for Education and Skills;

Treasury;

The Prime Minister's Office;

Department for Transport;

Home Office;

Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs;

Department for Work and Pensions;

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister;

Health Development Agency;

New Opportunities Fund;

Sport England; and

Local Government Association.

The terms of reference for the ACT are:

to make recommendations to Ministers on interventions to raise mass participation in sport and physical activity, particularly among economically disadvantaged groups, school leavers, women and older people;

to deploy existing funding (for example, local exercise action pilots, sport action zones, new opportunities for physical exercise and sport and new opportunities fund/Sport England partnership fund) and to identify new sources of funding for interventions where there is existing robust evidence of their cost-effectiveness, pilot projects where there is potential to increase participation where the evidence is not yet in place;

to identify and co-ordinate existing work and to classify it as delivery elements of the strategy reporting to and steered by ACT, or as autonomous programmes feeding information into and being informed by ACT as appropriate;

to ensure effective evaluation of the strategy and communication of results from existing and new national, local and regional projects to inform policy and practice;

to make recommendations to Ministers on a methodology to secure better evidence and data on participation and fitness;

to develop and oversee an effective communication strategy, in line with Ministers' wishes and agreed as widely as possible both within Government and with outside bodies such as health charities, Sport England, the national health service, the business community and others; and

to ensure that the programme of work includes quick wins and easily implemented low-cost interventions as well as longer-term solutions.

ACTs work centres on the development of a delivery plan by April 2004, to implement the key recommendation in 'Game Plan':

"to increase significantly levels of physical activity and sport particularly among disadvantaged groups".

Staff Expenses

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of *(a)* staff excess travel and *(b)* removal expenses in the NHS in the last year for which figures are available. [131021]

Mr. Hutton: Information on staff excess travel and removal expenses is not identified separately in the annual financial returns of national health service employers.

Stomach Stapling

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many stomach stapling operations took place in England, broken down by region, in each year between 1995 and 2002; [127702]

(2) what percentage of stomach stapling operations failed due to the patient overeating after the operation in the last 12 months. [127703]

Mr. Hutton: The Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) database provides data on the number of surgical operations and procedures carried out in the National Health Service. Data on stomach stapling are collected under the code for partitioning of stomach. This code includes a number of procedures, and no further breakdown is available to identify stomach stapling procedures separately.

HES data do not record information on the number of failed stomach stapling operations due to patients overeating.

Stroke Care

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the general hospitals caring for people with a stroke which do not have a specialist stroke unit. [130325]

Dr. Ladyman: We do not routinely collect the information requested. The most comprehensive source of information is the national sentinel stroke audit, carried out by the Royal College of Physicians. The audit was commissioned by the national health service in 1998 and was last updated in 2002. The results can be found at http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/pubs/strokeaudit01–02.pdf. The 2002 audit shows that 73 per cent. of trusts who participated had a stroke unit compared to 56 per cent. three years earlier. The audit shows that 80 per cent. of trusts that participated have a consultant physician with specialist knowledge of stroke who is formally recognised as having principal responsibility for stroke services. While it is recognised that some services need to increase their capacity, the audit notes that very significant improvements have already been made.

Our major vehicle for further improving standards for stroke services is through the older people's national service framework which sets specific milestones for improvement by 2004 of stroke services in primary care trusts, specialist services and general hospitals that care for people suffering from a stroke. Our document, "Improvement, Expansion and Reform", which sets for the national health service a priorities and planning framework for 2003–06, makes clear that implementation of the older people's national service framework is a top priority, and that the 2004 milestone around specialist stroke services is a key target.

We monitor progress against the key milestones in the national service framework. From the information gathered so far we know that 83 per cent., of the hospitals who have replied, .now have plans to have a specialist stroke service in place by April 2004.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many stroke patients are treated in specialist stroke units; and how many he estimates will be treated in such units by April 2004; [131045]

(2) how many of the anticipated specialist stroke units in place by April 2004 he estimates will be *(a)* acute, *(b)* rehabilitation and *(c)* both acute and rehabilitation; and what percentage each will represent of the total; [131047]

(3) what progress is being made in introducing stroke registers in GP practices; and what percentage of GP practices he estimates will have a fully operational and resourced register by April 2004. [131048]

Dr. Ladyman *[holding answer 18 September 2003]:* We do not routinely collect information on stroke services at the level of detail requested in these questions. The most comprehensive source of information on stroke is the national sentinel stroke audit, carried out; by the Royal College of Physicians. The audit was commissioned by the National Health Service in 1998 and was last updated in 2002. The results can be found at http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/pubs/strokeaudit01–02.pdf. There will be a further update of these figures next year.

The 2002 audit shows that 73 per cent., of trusts who participated had a stroke unit, compared to 56 per cent. three years earlier. In addition, 83 per cent. of patients receive brain imaging—the highest ever level. The audit shows that 80 per cent. of trusts that participated have a consultant physician with specialist knowledge of stroke who is formally recognised as having principal responsibility for stroke services. While it is recognised that some services need to increase their capacity, the audit notes that very significant improvements have already been made.

The quality framework of the new contract for general practitioners includes an indicator on the practice having a register of stroke patients. However, as the quality framework is voluntary, not all practices may choose to work towards this, although we expect many will do so. The first formal measurement of achievement against this indicator will be March 2005, and practices will be working to develop their stroke registers over the next 18 months.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the most recent occupancy levels for each specialist stroke unit; and what age restrictions are placed on admission at each stroke unit. [131033]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Tobacco Advertising

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations the Government have made to *(a)* the Belgian Government and *(b)* the European Commission regarding the Belgian Government's postponement of a complete ban on tobacco advertising. [130162]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government have not made representations to either the Belgian Government or the European Commission regarding the Belgian Government's postponement of a complete ban on tobacco advertising.

UK Biobank

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1)how much funding the Government has put into the creation of the UK Biobank; who the other funders are; and how much they have put in; [130097]

(2) what the terms of reference are for the United Kingdom Biobank; and for how long the Government intends to fund the United Kingdom Biobank; [130098]

(3) when the independent oversight body for the United Kingdom Biobank will be set up; and who will sit on the body. [130099]

Dr. Ladyman: The UK Biobank is a partnership between the Medical Research Council (MRC), the Department of Health and the Wellcome Trust. Initially, the Department will contribute £5 million and the MRC and the Wellcome Trust will each contribute up to £28 million, making a total of £61 million, of which £33 million is from government sources. In addition the Scottish Executive has offered to contribute £0.5 million to the project.

The UK Biobank is being established as a limited company with charitable status. The memorandum and articles of association have been substantially agreed by the funders and are being reviewed by the Charity Commission. The UK Biobank is a long term project and it is envisaged that information on the health of the participants will be collected for at least ten years after recruitment in order to ensure the UK Biobank reaches its full potential as a research resource. Initial funding is for the piloting and recruitment phases (approximately seven years), but the funders recognise that additional funding (at a lower level) will be required for the follow-up phase.

The independent oversight body is now termed the Ethics and Governance Council on the recommendation of the interim advisory group that has developed the draft ethics and governance framework for the UK Biobank. The framework will be published for consultation later this month and will be discussed at the meeting of the Human Genetics Commission on 25 September 2003. Responses to the consultation will inform the exact timescale for the creation of the council and its composition, but the funders want to establish this body as soon as possible.

Vaccines

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the levels of health risk associated with the use of *(a)* mercury free and *(b)* mercury based preservatives in vaccines for children. [122715]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 30 June 2003]:* The vaccines used in the childhood immunisation programme have been thoroughly assessed for safety prior to being licensed. As with all medicinal products, vaccine safety is continually monitored by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) and the independent expert advisory Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM).

No vaccine or medicinal product is without potential side effects and these are clearly listed in the product information that is available to health professionals and patients. The CSM has reviewed the safety of vaccines containing the preservative thiomersal (which contains ethyl mercury) on a number of occasions. In 2001, the CSM conducted a major review of the available evidence and has considered new data as it has come to light in 2003. A statement was placed on the MHRA website at http://medicines.mhra.gov.uk in February 2003, summarising the latest evidence on this issue.

The advice of the CSM remains that, with the exception of possible hypersensitivity reactions (that typically include skin rashes or local swelling at the site of injection), there is no evidence of harm from thiomersal contained in vaccines and that the benefits of immunisation with thiomersal-containing vaccines outweigh any potential risks of vaccination. This view concurs with that of the World Health Organisation.

Waiting Times

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time was for patients admitted to Southend General Hospital Accident and Emergency Department to see a doctor in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002. [130957]

Dr. Ladyman: Information on average waiting times in accident and emergency departments is not collected centrally.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time was for patients admitted to Southend General Hospital Accident and Emergency Department to be admitted to a ward in each year since 1997. [130958]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested for the period from 2001–02 to the present is shown in the table. Prior to 2001–02, data were collected at health authority level.

Admission from Accident and Emergency Departments, Southend Hospital NHS Trust, 2001–02 to 2003–04

			Number of patients admitted through	Patients placed in bed in a ward within 2 hours of a decision to admit		Patients placed in bed in a ward within 2 to 4 hours of a decision to admit		Patients not placed in bed in a ward within 4 hours of a decision to admit	
	Qtr	Name	major A&E	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
2003–04	1	Southend Hospital NHS Trust	3,674	891	24.3	2,783	75.7	0	0.0
2002–03	4	Southend Health Care NHS Trust	3,549	1,189	33.5	2,357	66.4	3	0.1
2002–03	3	Southend Health Care NHS Trust	2,784	380	13.6	2,395	86.0	9	0.3
2002–03	2	Southend Health Care NHS Trust	2,609	577	22.1	2,031	77.8	1	0.0
2002–03	1	Southend Health Care NHS Trust	2,431	1,386	57.0	1,044	42.9	1	0.0
2001–02	4	Southend Health Care NHS Trust	2,441	984	40.3	1,454	59.6	3	0.1
2001–02	3	Southend Health Care NHS Trust	2,561	1221	47.7	1,334	52.1	6	0.2
2001–02	2	Southend Health Care NHS Trust	2,428	1068	44.0	1,350	55.6	10	0.4
2001–02	1	Southend Health Care NHS Trust	4,192	4,186	99.9	0	0.0	6	0.1

Source:
Department of Health dataset QMAE/AMGN

Weight Reduction Operations

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many surgeons performed weight reduction operations in the last 12 months; [127088]

(2) if he will state for each hospital trust whether it has established a database to monitor surgery undertaken to aid weight loss for patients; [127091]

(3) how many children in the last year have undergone surgery to aid weight reduction. [127092]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 8 September 2003]:* The data collected by Hospital Episode Statistics do not identify individual surgeons, so it is not possible to confirm how many surgeons performed these operations.

The Department does not collect centrally information on whether trusts have developed databases to monitor surgery undertaken to aid weight loss. The decision on whether surgery is the most appropriate option for children to aid weight reduction is for clinical judgement. Hospital Episode Statistics data show that in 2001–02 there were 16 Finished Consultant Episodes for children aged between 0–17 years of age with a primary diagnosis of obesity and which included a main operative procedure.

Whistleblowers

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 4 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 230W, on whistleblowers, who in the Department is responsible for examining such cases. [129336]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 September 2003]:* The Department's policy is that, wherever possible, concerns raised by staff should be dealt with locally in accordance with local policies and procedures on whistleblowing, so that problems can be addressed quickly. However, there have been cases where whistleblowers have considered the local response inadequate, and as a consequence have sought to raise their concerns with the Department. Such cases are examined by the relevant strategic health authorities at the request of the human resources directorate of the Department.

An updated policy pack to support organisations in developing and/or reviewing their whistleblowing policies and procedures was sent by the director of human resources to all National Health Service trusts and health authorities on 25 July 2003. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 12 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 234W, on whistleblowers, what steps he has taken in response to the Prime Minister's letter of 23 October 2002 concerning Mark Heyes. [129335]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 15 September 2003]:* Officials have looked into the matters which Mr. Heyes raised in his letter to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. These were considered to be a reiteration of previous issues, which have already been investigated by the Southport and Ormskirk Hospitals National Health Service Trust.

The Department of Health cannot intervene in individual NHS trust employment issues and Mr. Heyes has been advised to seek independent legal advice.

Young People (Medication)

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many persons aged 18 years and younger are receiving *(a)* antidepressants, *(b)* antipsychotics and *(c)* amphetamines. [130264]

Dr. Ladyman: Information on the numbers of children and young aged 18 and younger receiving antidepressants, antipsychotics and amphetamines is not collected. However an estimate is available on the number of prescriptions dispensed for young people in England aged under 15 and those under 19 in full-time education. This information is in the table.

Estimated number of prescription items (Thousand) of antidepressants, antipsychotics and amphetamines dispensed in the community in England in 2002 for children under 15 and those under 19 in full-time education[1]

	Number of prescription items (Thousand)
Antipsychotics	50
Antidepressants	260
Amphetamines[2]	240

[1] This does not include private prescriptions or prescriptions dispensed in hospitals, for which information is not available.

[2] This is all central nervous system stimulants, as defined by the British National Formulary, which includes amphetamines and related drugs such as methylphenidate.

X-ray Scans

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dual energy x-ray absorptiometry scans per 100,000 population were carried out in *(a)* Birmingham, *(b)* the West Midlands and *(c)* England in the last year for which figures are available. [129769]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We do not collect the information requested centrally.

Ward Housekeepers

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many ward housekeepers are employed in each NHS trust. [130323]

Dr. Ladyman: As of January 2003, around 5,000 housekeepers were reported as providing housekeeping services within 200 national health service trusts and primary care trusts.

The number of housekeepers per trust is varied and reflects local needs and systems.

Xenotransplantation

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to appoint new members to the UK Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority. [129270]

Ms Rosie Winterton: We are currently in the process of appointing two new Members to the United Kingdom Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority. A further recruitment exercise will take place in early 2004.

A press release will be issued in due course.

HOUSE OF COMMONS PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD) ● 2002-03

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INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 410**

SESSION 2002–2003

8th September 2003—6th October 2003

Printed indexes to Hansard

The fortnightly index is one of three printed indexes to Commons Hansard produced from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Indexing Service (POLIS). It contains references to material in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard. The other indexes produced are:

- The volume index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the fortnightly index but references may be different as a result of changes to the text and column numbering in the bound volume.
- The sessional index to Hansard. This contains references to material in the bound volumes for a whole session.

Indexes on the Parliamentary website

Fortnightly, volume and sessional indexes covering material from the beginning of the 1999/2000 session will also appear on the Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk with links to the full text of Hansard.

SCOPE

The indexes include entries covering:

- The content of all material recorded in Hansard, including debates, procedural motions and questions.
- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

ARRANGEMENT

- All headings are in one word-by-word alphabetical sequence, with Members' contribution entries distinguished from other entries by italics.
- Where a Member contributes to Parliamentary business and is the subject of Parliamentary business there are separate contribution and subject entries, the subject entry coming first.
- Entries beginning 'Mac' and 'Mc' are sorted in one sequence as 'Mac'.
- 'St', when abbreviated for Saint, is filed as 'Saint'.
- Numbers are filed as if spelt out, e.g. '10 Downing Street' as if 'Ten Downing Street'.

HEADINGS

Choice of headings

- *Specificity*—Entries summarise the overall content of a debate or question as specifically as the various POLIS thesauruses allow. For example, Education, Higher education, Universities or the name of a particular university is used depending on the breadth of the item.
- *Name headings*—Specific entries are included for the names of people, places, institutions, organisations, committees, programmes, initiatives, publications and legislation when these constitute the overall subject of an item.
- *Organisations and subjects*—Organisation entries are preferred for material about the general performance, administration and staffing of an organisation (for example, United Kingdom Passports Agency, Standards). Subject entries are preferred for what organisations do as part of their duties (for example, Passports, Fees and charges).

Geographical coverage

- *Subject headings*—Subject headings are assumed to refer to the whole of England, Great Britain or the United Kingdom unless otherwise stated.
- *Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales*—Material relating to the whole of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales is indexed under these headings.
- *Places within the UK*—Material about specific towns, areas and institutions is entered under the name of the specific town, area or institution.
- *Foreign countries*—Most material relating to foreign countries is collected under the name of that country. Some additional material may be found under the names of—groups of countries, areas within countries, geographical features, place names associated with particular issues, politicians and heads of state, international bodies, and institutions and companies operating in those countries.
- *EC/EU material*—General material about the European Communities and European institutions as bodies is entered under 'European Communities' and 'EC institutions'. Organisational material about specific communities and institutions is entered under the name of the body, for example 'European Coal and Steel Community' or 'European Parliament'. Material about what the Communities and institutions are doing or propose to do is entered under various subject headings beginning 'EC' such as 'EC environmental policy'.

Parliamentary material and business

- *Material about Parliament*—This is indexed under 'Parliament', the names of the two Houses, the 'Palace of Westminster' and parts of the Parliamentary estate (such as 'Portcullis House').
- *Committees*—Material about committees is indexed under 'Committees', types of committee (such as 'Select committees') and the names of individual committees (such as 'Home Affairs Select Committee').
- *Parliamentary proceedings/procedures*—Material discussing these is indexed under the specific type of proceeding (such as 'Parliamentary questions' or 'Oral questions'), procedure (such as 'Calling of Members') or issue (such as 'Unparliamentary expressions').
- *Legislation*—Entries for Parliamentary proceedings on bills and statutory instruments are entered under their titles. Where the lead word of the bill or statutory instrument does not provide a full or clear indication of the subject there are additional subject entries when the bill or instrument is debated. For example, debates on the 'Child Support Pensions and Social Security Bill' have entries under 'Pensions' and 'Social security benefits' as well as under the title of the Bill.
- *Members' names*—These are given in the form by which the Member prefers to be known.
- *Speaker and Chair*—Contributions by the Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker and deputies'. Contributions from the chair during Committees of the Whole House are brought together under 'Chairman of Committee of the Whole House'. Significant rulings and statements (as opposed to routine comments) are indicated by the sub-heading 'Rulings and statements' in both cases.

Guidance on headings

- *Cross references*—'See' references indicate all the material has been entered under another heading. 'See also' references indicate that additional information may be found under another heading.
- *Concept thesaurus*—A copy of the subject thesaurus to POLIS, listing the concept entries used in the index, is available on the Parliamentary website. A hard copy is available from the Head of the POLIS Unit, House of Commons Library, 1 Derby Gate, London, SW1A 2DG (020 7219 6456).

REFERENCES

- References in the indexes are to columns rather than pages.
- References to debates, but not questions, are accompanied by the date of the item.
- There are separate sequences in Hansard for the material taken on the floor of the House, Westminster Hall sittings, written statements and written questions:
  - References consisting of a number by itself indicate material taken on the floor of the House.
  - References ending in 'wh' indicate Westminster Hall sittings.
  - References ending in 'ws' indicate written statements.
  - References ending in 'w' indicate written questions.
- References under all headings except the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in one numerical sequence irrespective of whether the material is taken on the floor of the House, is discussed at a Westminster Hall sitting, is a written statement or is a written question.
- References under the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in numerical sequence under the following headings:
  - *Chamber Debates* (which includes interventions and points of order as well as significant contributions to debates);
  - *Westminster Hall Debates* (covering all debates held as part of the Westminster Hall sittings);
  - *Written Statements* (consisting of ministerial statements issued in writing); and
  - *Questions* (which includes all written, oral and urgent questions).

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R = First reading
- 2R = Second reading
- Com = Committee stage
- Rep = Report stage
- 3R = Third reading
- res = resolution
- amendt(s) = amendment(s)
- * = matter taken formally without debate or division
- (HL) = Bill starting in House of Lords
- (SP) = Bill in Scottish Parliament.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
- Further information on Parliamentary proceedings and procedures is available from the House of Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272).

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